



# Towards a Sociology of Equivocal Connections

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## Abstract

This article contributes to the need for imagining forms of sociological thinking and doing beyond the univocity of disciplinary knowledge. In order to do so, we demonstrate how connections between different 'sensory worlds' involve equivocal understandings about what the 'social' entails. We begin by considering current anthropological reflections on the equivocal character of social relations as well as the equivocal ways in which western sociology has conceptualized the 'social'. In order to visualize how 'equivocal connections' between different sensory worlds emerge, we build on Mapuche indigenous understandings about how different practices open up different sensory worlds. Through the examination of one of the hunger strikes that has taken place in the conflict between Mapuche people and the Chilean state, we show how such equivocal connections entail ontological, rather than epistemological, differences. Both as ethical and epistemological imperative, these differences must be actively demonstrated in order to reinvigorate the sociological imagination.

## Keywords

anthropology, Chilean state, conflict, connection, equivocation, hunger strike, Mapuche, sensory worlds, sociology

*Yo siento la fatiga del espejo,  
que no descansa en una imagen sola.* (Borges, 1958)<sup>1</sup>

Over a decade ago, Ulrich Beck (2005) reacted to Michel Buroway's optimism regarding the public uses of sociology in discourse and practice. Beck's more cautious position was

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not only based on his sceptic view about the role sociology can play in influencing such public discourses and practices, but more generally, he diagnosed the urgent need to reinvent the discipline in order to avoid sociology being reduced to a 'museum piece'. To some degree, this special issue reiterates this need, albeit in a new vein, as it invites us to imagine sociology while seriously considering ways of being and practices of knowing that exceed western thinking. We surmise that this consideration, however necessary, entails an initial analytical step to re-examine and broaden the sociological engagements of the discipline with its own equivocal western disciplinary past.

Broadly conceived, the social sciences have extensively developed techniques and discourses to reduce the complexity of what Said (1978) defined as 'human density'. In their search to understand the complexities of what are commonly called 'modern societies', social scientists in general, and sociologists in particular, have tended to mobilize univocal categories to analyse the processes of modernization and their concomitant dynamics.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for sociology *qua* sociology, as most of us have been taught at some point in our disciplinary training, the 'social' and 'society' have been conceived as research objects that can be studied precisely because they entail social regularities embedded in the abstract concepts that articulate our theories (from gender to race, nation-states to citizenship, modernity in all its variations and so on). These generic concepts, in turn, have afforded the deployment of theoretical repertoires built upon sociological comparisons, where standard categories are always problematic (either in terms of the Weberian 'ideal type', or the models developed and proposed by the countries in the so-called global North).

One of the premises of this epistemological trend based on comparisons is that sociological theory might serve the purpose of 'mirroring' reality. Yet, paraphrasing Borges, this exercise seems to have reached a moment of theoretical 'exhaustion'. Within sociology, this 'exhaustion' manifests itself through the critical perspectives niched in western academic settings, particularly illustrated by scholars and programmes linked to the de- and post-colonial schools, but also evident in critical views of social movements research.<sup>3</sup>

As our own exercise against this 'exhaustion', and resonating with the theoretical perspective in which socio-material realities emerge in and through situated practices,<sup>4</sup> we reflect in this article on the sociological imagination,<sup>5</sup> building upon an ethnographic account and one case study, both concerning the relationship and conflict between Pewenche-Mapuche people and the Chilean state in southern Chile.<sup>6</sup> This relationship can be described as conflictual due to the mutual exposure of different 'sensory worlds'. With 'conflictual' we refer to those conflicts 'about the distribution of the sensible, conflicts about what is visible, what can be said about it, who is entitled to speak and act about it' (Rancière, 2009a: 121). We intend to show how open-ended and partial ontological differences perform what we call 'equivocal connections', connections between sensory worlds that entail equivocal understanding about what the 'social' is all about.

Through 'equivocal connections' we understand that emergent space in-between differences, which not only allows for the formation of 'political subjects' (Butler, 2011; Rancière, 2006) but also appears as the precondition for the emergence of equivocal 'contact zones' (Santos, 2004) between different actors.<sup>7</sup> In order to visualize these 'equivocal connections', in this article we mobilize particular ethnographic conflicts

expressed by a Mapuche-Pewenche healer, as well as long-lasting political conflicts underlying Mapuche hunger strikes in southern Chile. Hence, one of the aims of this article is to examine in practice how equality, as univocal principle of the modern state – understood in terms of the formal equality of its citizens – is impossible to achieve, not only because of the systematic dynamics of discrimination affecting Mapuche peoples but also because what modern-national and liberal equality notions negate, today as in the past, is the coexistence of two or more different ‘sensory worlds’. This divergence affects the possibility of understanding and translating one sensory world into another.<sup>8</sup>

As social scientists who strongly feel the mirror’s exhaustion illustrated by Borges, what we would like to examine and demonstrate in what follows is that ‘equivocal connections’ will be an ever-present condition in the sociological imagination and practices because there is no possible univocal mirroring of different sensory worlds.<sup>9</sup> We would like to suggest from the outset that not only are univocal comparative conceptual repertoires exhausted – as illustrated by the various critiques of all forms of essentialism and universalism – but they have always been historically *equivocal* within the sociological tradition itself. In order to make clear how we are using the term *equivocal* in this work, we first examine in detail the concept of ‘equivocation’ as developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004), exploring which contributions this concept may offer for rethinking the very foundations of the discipline of sociology.

## **Equivocation: Missed Encounters of Reversed Worlds**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, etymologically, *equivocation* signals the evasiveness of language: the uncertainties and ambiguities of using a word to conceal truth. From themed 16th-century Latin, *aequivocus* is composed by *aequus*, ‘equal’, and *vocare*, ‘to call’. In other words, equivocation indexes the fallacy of using one word in different ways in different moments of a given discourse. For Viveiros de Castro, the term ‘equivocation’ has been fundamental for radically rethinking comparative anthropology. For him, comparative anthropology cannot be understood as a univocal activity since it employs categories derived from different sensory worlds with different ontological premises. In fact, Claude Levi-Strauss already turned our attention to the paradigmatic encounter of two sensory words:

[In the Greater Antilles] many years after the discovery of America, while the Spanish were sending commissions from the Inquisition to investigate whether or not the natives had a soul, these same natives were submerging the whites that they had captured, to discover, after a long process of observation, whether or not their cadavers suffered putrefaction. (Levi-Strauss, 1973 [1952]: 384)

This anecdote of reversed worlds signals radically distinct activities and bodies, and has been taken up by Viveiros de Castro to refer once again to the mutual incomprehension of the missed encounter of the conquest:

In spite of sharing an equal ignorance about the Other, the Other of the Other was not precisely the same as the Other of the Same ... The Europeans never doubted that the Indians had bodies because animals had them, too. And the Indians never doubted that the Europeans had

souls because animals and spirits had souls, too. The Spaniards concluded that the Indians were animals, while the Indians suspected that the Whites were gods. European ethnocentrism consisted in doubting if other bodies had the same souls as themselves (what today we call 'mind'), while Amerindian ethnocentrism, on the contrary, consisted in doubting if other souls had the same bodies. (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 9)

In the missed encounter just cited, both participants made comparisons in reference to the body. Their intention was to clarify the difference between subjects, but the bodies behaved in radically different ways, making the comparison difficult. Viveiros de Castro elaborates in detail on this ethnographic event described by Levi-Strauss, in which different kinds of beings share the same culture but inhabit different natures or bodies. For Viveiros de Castro (2004: 4), Amerindians postulate a 'perspectival anthropology', for which there are not *different perspectives* about the same world, but every perspective opens up a *different world*. Inspired by this ethnographic consideration, he postulates that anthropology, and – we would like to add – perhaps also sociology, can learn a perspectival methodology from the Amerindians, replacing *comparison* with *equivocation*. In this perspective, equivocation not only refers to the mode through which different species communicate but also presents a way to make explicit how equivocal communicative processes are, particularly in intercultural contexts. This is a pressing issue if we consider that '[t]here are more ways to be other, and vastly more others, than the most tolerant soul alive can conceive' (Latour, 2004: 453).

In fact, in anthropology, as in sociology, that which is compared is always, and necessarily, a further comparison. Thus, equivocation does not imply an error, presumed by a given univocal standard; rather it implies that there is no univocal common reality out there waiting to be examined. It implies that any commonality is a contingent achievement, a process, which we build together.<sup>10</sup> In this context, what is to be considered socially constitutive is, and has historically always been, an equivocal issue. Moreover, in the same way that different understandings of the social entail different methodological approaches to studying it, different methodological approaches enact different ontologies (Law, 2004). We examine this premise by briefly revisiting different ontological traditions in sociology.

## **Equivocal Sociology: An Historical Background**

As Nedim Karakayali (2015) has recently shown, the discipline of sociology has developed through contentious and continuous disagreements regarding what counts as its own object of study. On the one hand, he claims, there are those whose sociological theorizing focuses on a taken-for-granted 'social ontology', namely focusing on the inner nature of social reality without problematizing its existence (ranging from Durkheim's 'social facts' to Weber's conviction about 'social action' to contemporary critical realists such as Margaret Archer and Roy Bhaskar). On the other hand, Karakayali identifies those who blur the boundaries of the social by placing more attention on the outward dynamics that make salient what is conceived as social (ranging from Tarde's notion of 'association' to Simmel's description of 'social life' as 'life processes' to Latour's Actor-Network Theory).

We further examine these ontological traditions by briefly revisiting some theoretical differences between Durkheim and Tarde, a dispute at the core of western sociology. Whereas for Durkheim 'society' was an ontological reality 'out there', resting upon the external force of 'social facts', for Tarde everything was a society. In other words, for him 'the social was not a special domain of reality but a principle of connections' (Latour, 2005: 13). One of the implications of this Tardean conceptualization of society has been a foregrounding of the 'importance of relational dynamics of becoming, the open-endedness of all things, the potential of all things to transform through their inherent situated relationality' (Harvey and Venkatesan, 2010: 130). In this sense, Tarde's resistance to Durkheim was an 'attempt to liberate, or at least do justice to, "the non-sociological ground of sociology"' (Toews, 2010: 83).

These two orientations in sociology index the equivocal character of what is at stake when the term 'social' is mobilized. As it is most commonly taught in sociology programmes across the western world, however, the disciplinary formation of sociology relies upon a univocal ground that takes for granted the factuality of society and the social (defined either in Durkheimian, Weberian or Marxist terms). The representatives of this ontological tradition are only in dialogue among themselves, if at all (Bhambra, 2011), without fully engaging with the validity of the other ontological tradition, which has, nonetheless, remained persistently present in the development of sociology (from Tarde and Simmel up to Latour).

David Toews (2010) has suggested that mainstream sociology, aiming at identifying social regularities, has preferred to focus on the study of the social as pertaining to the study of a normal social system. As we have shown, however, this focus on social regularities has been historically developed in opposition to a different, less normative, understanding of the social, focused mostly on terms of differences rather than regularities. According to Tarde (1903: 86), for instance, difference continuously permeates such regularities and can be traced by focusing on 'those who are really unsociable' and who 'strongly rebel against assimilation'. In fact, we could even imagine, as we will later in this article when focusing on Mapuche hunger strikers, that such rebellion against assimilation is also an instance of resistance to one of the main Durkheimian assumptions, that is, that 'the fact of association is the most obligatory of all, because it is the origin of all other obligations' (Durkheim, 1982: 130). This assumption indirectly underestimates the relevance of studying the (anti-)sociability of associations. As a result, the contingency and uncertainty of connecting with *others* has been excluded from relevant narrative in sociological research and has been located in the disciplinary field of anthropology;<sup>11</sup> mundane details are sociologically meaningless and appear to be obscured by the study of a sort of transcendental and holistic society existing beyond individuals.

We would like to emphasize here, however, that what these parallel foundational ontological traditions in sociology make evident is that the 'social' – and 'society' – have never been univocal conceptual tools within the discipline itself. Moreover, we would like to suggest that *equivocation* is a given condition of any sociological connection, either theoretical or empirical. Following from this, and in order to visualize equivocal sociological connections, we mobilize the controversial historical interactions between the Chilean state and Mapuche people in southern Chile.

## Different Sensory Worlds in Chile: An Historical Background

Insofar as it concerns the recognition of ontological differences and equivocal understandings of the social, the history of the Chilean state can be seen as a history of imagined ethno-national centrism based on a univocal form of political organization, the creole nationalisms of the modern nation-state (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). In fact, the Chilean state has consistently negated the equally consistent and resilient Mapuche difference, albeit more in some periods of time than others. The long-standing resistance of Mapuche peoples opposing the Chilean state can be seen as an illustration of the struggle over what counts as relevant fact (Santos, 2007) for the socio-political bounding of 'society'.

Mapuche people were the only indigenous population in Latin America who maintained their independence until after the 19th-century republican independence movements, inhabiting a territory called Araucanía at the southern end of the Bío-Bío River. From their first arrival in Chile in 1541, the Spaniards made several attempts to colonize and penetrate the lands south of the Bío-Bío, a long-standing conflict known as the Arauco Wars. However, in 1641 the first peace parliament took place between royal governors and Mapuche *lonkos* (or chiefs). Their agreement, known as Parliament of Quillin, established the Bío-Bío River as *La Frontera*, the frontline between the territories colonized by the Spanish kingdom to the north of the river-line and the independent Mapuche territories south of the river-line (Bengoa, 2003; Pinto, 2000). This Parliament, and the subsequent ones for the successive two centuries, provided instances of relative peace, marked by trade and festive negotiations. They provided an equivocal and tense peace, balancing the Spanish expansionist drive with Mapuche resistance. During those centuries, both parties maintained their respective positions on either side of *La Frontera*, respecting as well the delimitation the river established to the co-occurrence of two different sensory worlds.

As Latin America's 19th-century independence struggles reached Chile in 1810, they encountered a divided territory: one colonized mestizo land north of the Bío-Bío River and one standing independent indigenous territory south of this frontier. Chilean nationalists and their new state, however, sharply influenced and transformed Mapuche ways of life and social organization after Chilean independence, more than the Spaniards had done before (Bengoa, 2000; Pinto, 2000). Although 19th-century Chilean constitutions do not explicitly mention the Mapuche or their lands, in 1852 the newly formed state created the Arauco Province, declaring Chilean those lands located south of the former frontier, the Bío-Bío River (Foerster, 2004; Pinto, 2000). Prior to the creation of Arauco Province, most Mapuche lands were outside of Chilean jurisdiction. Hence, the expansion of the Chilean nation-state's jurisdiction over the territories of the Araucanía can be seen as the single most important event in subjugating and subjecting the Mapuche to the state's normative power and obligation to associate. This has been described as the second colonial moment for the Mapuche, with the incursion of transnational corporations engaged in forestry and dam projects constituting a third wave of colonization (Llaitul/Arrate, 2012).

Interestingly, we can also identify the global connections underpinning the modernization narratives of the Chilean state (Bhambra, 2014). Worth noting is how, shortly after the annexation of the Mapuche territories, Chile suffered a grain export crisis in the 1860s, the effects of which were compounded by the concurrent economic problems

experienced in Europe. Rural regions such as Araucanía were seen as offering untapped natural resources and an underutilized labour force – the Mapuche – to improve and support the nascent Chilean economy (Pinto, 2000). Ironically, the period of state interventions is known in Chilean history as the ‘pacification of Araucanía’ (sp. *pacificación de la Araucanía*), with peace understood to be the prerogative of the state apparatus, a ‘victor’s peace’. A further ironic process of ‘rooting’ (sp. *radicación*) was in place to relocate the Mapuche population to especially designated lands (sp. *reducciones*) controlled by the Chilean government. The Mapuche traditionally claimed 10 million hectares of territory in southern Chile. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they were assigned only 500,000 hectares (Aylwin, 2002). With the transformation of their territory, there is little doubt that the *reducciones* transformed Mapuche social, economic and cultural organization (Foerster, 2008).

The Mapuche suffered the effects of the ‘rooting’ process throughout the 20th century. A major legal change occurred during the 1970s dictatorship of General Pinochet. In 1978 the *reducciones* were abolished and, despite being unable to sell their lands, the Mapuche were allowed to lease them for up to 100 years. This gesture corresponded with the growing neoliberal spirit of market liberalization that shaped the state apparatus and its policies across the country. The implications of these policies have been numerous, but regarding the Mapuche, they have implied the further fragmentation and impoverishment of their communities.

In 1989, at the beginning of the country’s democratic transition, Patricio Aylwin, the first democratically elected president after Pinochet, declared a new era of political collaboration with the Mapuche at the famous Parliament of *Nueva Imperial*. Nevertheless, neoliberal policies in the country at large have not been fundamentally reformed with the democratic governments succeeding Pinochet’s dictatorship. The Mapuche continued to be subjected to devastating interventions by the state and the market, triggering further changes in their social organization, an increasing criminalization of their most vocal political actors and an equally increasing commodification of their culture and lands. Furthermore, Chile was the last country to sign the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169, the most significant international legal tool for the protection of indigenous and tribal rights in independent countries. The Chilean Parliament approved this Convention in 2008 after nearly 20 years of negotiations. Although this seemed promising, it fell prey, to put it in a more theoretical level, to a multicultural form of recognition working to inspire those subaltern minorities as domesticated others (Povinelli, 2002) – different but docile bodies, subjected to the univocal representation of the state – bodies without the right to inhabit their own sensory worlds.

After this brief historical contextualization, we now explore how equivocation is demonstrated and takes shape by examining different indigenous practices and the ways in which ‘equivocal connections’ emerge in practice.

## Bodies and Sensory Worlds

One of the cases explored in this article is based on the long-term fieldwork carried out by one of us in the communities of Alto Bío Bío. These communities have been decimated by, among other factors, the violent effects of the timber industry since the

mid-20th century and, in more recent years, the construction of hydroelectric dams, a third wave of colonization, as Llaitul describes it (Llaitul/Arrate, 2012). Both enterprises follow neo-colonial extractive strategies in their relation to the environment, increasing the privatization of lands and its, also increasing, trans-nationalization. Deforestation and dam construction have been pursued by companies that exploit the region's natural resources at the expense of indigenous populations' livelihoods, increasing the vulnerability and social exclusion of these groups (González Parra and Simon, 2008). They do so with the support and legitimacy granted by the Chilean state, which is in turn led by a modern logic of progress, basically understood as growth.

In 2010, two events illustrated the co-occurrence of different sensory worlds, despite the abolition of *La Frontera*. The following two events will illuminate different aspects of Mapuche sensory worlds that are crucial for our argument: one dealing with the relevance rural Mapuche people give to practices as a key ontological operator, another dealing with the Mapuche's bodily struggles over what life is all about.

We begin our first event evocation by referring to the devastating earthquake that took place in Chile in February 2010, as it was described to one of us by Flora, a Pewenche woman known in her community for healing illnesses with herbs (ch. *lawentucheve*).<sup>12</sup> A few days after the earthquake (ch. *nüyün*), one of us asked Flora if many people had come to her seeking remedies such as herbs (ch. *lawen*). 'No' was her simple reply. When further asked if people had been worried after the *nüyün*, she repeated her 'No' and said that 'everyone was quite calm; no one made a sound, but those of the other blood are worried, very worried'. However, she expressed her concern about some Mapuche people who had reacted with anxiety, as she thought they were behaving like Chileans, or *winka*. She said,

When there's an earthquake, I look to see if the bones are moving – which hang next to my stove, where I make *tortillas* and bread, and heat water for *mate* – to see if the earth is shaking. The Mapuche do the same, but many Mapuche are *entering into winkalwun*, doing things that are not for the Mapuche, eating and thinking as those who attend those evangelical churches ... that's for the *winka*, not the Mapuche, though the Mapuche are caught up in it ... The gospel is for the *winka* – I think all of that is terrible. My father taught me well – the evangelicals don't understand, they're ... they're not Mapuche, they're more Chilean, they end up that way because [of] the book they study – one of my nephews is an evangelical, and I argued with him because he's studying the book. I can't believe it. That book they study, the Bible – I don't get it, it's backwards [sp. *al revés*], like I told my nephew. My father gave me the word. [In those days] they knew a lot even if they couldn't read, but now these new folks are beginning to forget the ancestors; they erase what the ancestors knew. The ancestors didn't have bibles, what my father said wasn't written down. I don't know how to read, but God teaches me. Our forebears, our grandparents – they had knowledge, the *rakiduum*. So I don't pay attention to the evangelicals. God is going to send them an earthquake. The night of the earthquake they were having a vigil for an evangelical brother who had died; his children are evangelicals, too. God sent the earthquake to frighten them.

*Winka* is a word commonly used to describe that which is not Mapuche, the Chilean, the other of the Mapuche. *Winkalwun* is the verbal form of the noun *winka*, used to describe the practices of those Mapuche who act like the Chilean, who assume the



Chilean way of life and relate to the Chilean state. It is a set of practices through which one becomes 'other', a Chilean, a *winka*. Interestingly, 'to enter *winkalwun*' is to engage in a distinct set of practices alien to the sensory world of the Mapuche. *Winkalwun* involves a specific way of doing and, as such, a different way of enacting worlds: it involves reading the Bible, referring to it as the source of knowledge instead of dreams (ch. *peuma*) or the counsel of the ancestors (ch. *ngulam*). This way of doing is seen by the *lawentucheve* Flora as transgressing being 'Mapuche'. To enter *winkalwun* is, for Flora, to enact a different sensory world.

Flora's emphasis on these transformative practices resonates with the Tardean 'non-sociological ground of sociology', for which the social appears as a principle of connections rather than as an independent reality 'out-there'. Indeed, the use of the concept of *winkalwun* by the Mapuche strongly contests the sociological ontology that takes for granted the existence of society 'out-there'. *Winkalwun* resonates, in turn, with the performativity and practical ontologies shown by the tradition in sociology connected to Tarde, which has inspired contemporary Actor-Network Theory (ANT) scholars and their reluctance to accept any phenomena as given. For Flora, as for current ANT scholars, realities are somehow considered to be practical achievements.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, what the concept of *winkalwun* does is to emphasize how different practices open up different sensory worlds.

The second event we would like to bring to our discussion was not triggered by the movement of a large body, the earthquake or the practices of *winkalwun*, but it affected personal bodies. Also in 2010, a group of Mapuche people engaged in an 82-day hunger strike. They were contesting the state's enforcement of antiterrorist law when dealing with Mapuche resistance. The antiterrorist law was promulgated during the Pinochet dictatorship in 1984 and has since been systematically applied to the Mapuche people who fight against the state to recover their ancestral lands.<sup>14</sup> The law is being implemented recurrently, without a clear and coherent policy, making evident how, in practice, all claims for land, cultural and national recognition and autonomy are initially categorized by the state as acts of terrorism. According to this law, terrorists, independent of how volatile the application of that category is, have no right to legal political self-expression. The law is still in place and is frequently used to put Mapuche activists 'out of bounds' while criminalizing their vindictive political activities.<sup>15</sup> The hunger strike began on 12 July 2010, with 34 Mapuche from various communities who had been incarcerated on the basis of this antiterrorist law.

The hunger strike was pursued to stop the enforcement of the antiterrorist law under the assumption that fighting for one's rights is not an act of terrorism. It also demanded an end to the dual system of civil and military courts – in which the military courts awarded sentences up to three times longer than the civil courts – and the prohibition of anonymous testimony to implicate presumptive out-laws, which in practice undermines judicial transparency and makes the defence's work very difficult. In a nutshell, the Mapuche hunger strike was a practice that enacted an ontological difference by demonstrating that the kind of univocal associations promoted by the state were neither normatively obligatory nor equally applicable to all citizens of the Chilean state.

Some statements made in the media during the hunger strike can be read as a description of the extent to which ontological difference, in terms of sensory difference, was

denied. Examining these statements helps in conceptualizing the equivocal connection between different sensory worlds. On 27 August 2010, Héctor Llaitul declared in an interview: '[a]lthough it sounds paradoxical, nothing remains for us but to give our lives in order to fight for life. Our bodies are all we have left' (Calluqueo, 2010). Other strikers in the Temuco prison further released a joint statement that said,

We are prisoners because we are right, and we have always been right. In the same way that we have the right to life, we have the right to death. This is the supreme right to decide conscientiously what we do with our bodies in this endless conflict. (Comunicado Presos Políticos Mapuche en Huelga de Hambre, 25 August 2010 (Presos Políticos Mapuche, 2010))

In the above declarations we glimpse the value of a human life through an ultimate paradox: life renounced as an affirmation of life. Put otherwise, the 'value' of life is that which makes a life not worth living if one is deprived of it (see Latour, 2009). It is pertinent to stress here that, in the act of risking their lives, the Mapuche strikers struggle to demonstrate their equivocal equality – understood as the equality of anyone with anyone else, based on a presumption of difference and not of similarity.

As a reaction, on 30 August 2010, the spokeswoman in La Moneda, the seat of the Chilean government, assured the public that, in light of the hunger strike, it was the government's responsibility 'to protect life'. Alongside its ethically problematic outcome, it is interesting to note just how this equivocated affirmation was used 'to justify measures taken to force-feed the prisoners' (Correa and Leiva, 2010). In other words, the univocal voice of the state reflected the attempt to enact a world in which Mapuche sensory worlds are actively made to not exist. The state action made explicit the absence of the Mapuche sensory world in the act of feeding their bodies *qua* citizens. The state intervention to feed the strikers responds to their recognition of the Mapuche's equality as Chilean citizens, whereas what the Mapuche were reclaiming was the recognition of their difference – a dangerous difference as it questions the univocity of the state.

The word 'body' (sp. *cuerpo*), understood as the liberal index of a differentiated yet individualized biological unity, does not exist in Mapudungun, the Mapuche's native language. Thus, the body that the state feeds by force indexes a liberal and individual body that is not the body for which hunger strikers 'strike', so to speak. Echoing Levi-Strauss' anecdote about reversed forms of life, discussed above, one of the implications of this practical ontology is that the same words may index different worlds: '[T]he same representations and other objects, a single meaning and multiple referents' (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 4), therefore paving the road for the emergence of continuous equivocations.<sup>16</sup>

As the strike wore on, it gained attention from national and international media outlets, and organizations from around the world eventually came out in support of the Mapuche demands. After 67 days, the Chilean government took its first steps towards addressing the strikers. The strike ended after 82 days, when an agreement was reached between the parties. The government agreed to drop existing terrorist cases, declaring, '[w]e have come to the conclusion that the actions of the accused can no longer be classified as terrorist conduct' (SERVINDI, 2016). Those particular actions would be reclassified under the norms of the common penal code. Thus, the equivocal connections between actors, and between concepts and practices, becomes evident.

We recall the antinomy described by Spivak (1988): a terrorist is one who is outside the laws of the political game, an equal *less* equal, a silenced subaltern. What we would like to emphasize here is that, by the very act of stopping eating, Mapuche hunger strikers enacted an equivocal connection that creates a space for their recognition as political subjects and not only terrorist bodies. The strike strove to attain this equivocal political interval – an in-between – in which the struggles for recognition were fought through their own Mapuche bodies. The hunger strike was a form of public dissent against the state's univocal definitions. It entailed a struggle that permeated the alleged regularities enacted by the antiterrorist law with Mapuche ontological differences. The strike was an ultimate move of emancipation, forcing the national government to question themselves regarding their univocal regulatory premises when applying the antiterrorist law. For the Mapuche protestors, however, it implied a struggle using the last resource left from their sensory worlds: their own bodies. The strikers, in a painfully literal way, enacted the equivocal connection existing in the relation between the state and the Mapuche people. They demonstrated, in a way, the 'commensurability of incommensurables' (Rancière, 2009b: 11).

## Towards a Sociology of Equivocal Connections

The equivocal conceptualizations of the body we have exposed above index a radical divergence of two sensory worlds and their equivocal connections. A third brief example makes this even clearer. At the Chilean National Conference of Original Peoples in 2010, a Mapuche shaman commented on the particular body of Mapuche medicine, stating that a healthy Mapuche body cannot be uprooted from its relational ('spiritual') networks. She said,

There's a failure there, because they say that the state is democratic. But if the state is democratic then, when we read Convention 169,<sup>17</sup> we immediately end up arguing. If we are going to have spiritual diversity, then the state has to give us back the *menokos* and the *yanyan*, the *trentren* and the *guillatues*. It has to give us back a lot, because that's our Mapuche spirituality. That's what we'd argue about if we were [really] in a democracy.

*Menoko*, *yanyan*, *trentren* and *guillatue* are all Chedungun words related to environmental places, some of them considered to be sacred. In this statement, it is clear that Mapuche bodies are not liberal bodies, individualized and defined by their unitary biological condition; rather, they are bodies strongly marked by the Mapuche conceptualizations of the relationship between persons and the places to which they belong. For the Mapuche, their bodies are immanently related to the land (Bonelli, 2015b; Di Giminiani, 2015; Llaitul/Arrate, 2012). The shaman's words, nevertheless, clarify how the state does not seem able to engage with this possibility, not even in the case of a democratic state.

This issue resembles what Santos (2007: 420) describes as the fallacy of false contemporaneity, namely 'assuming that there is only one way of being contemporary and that it applies indifferently to all participants in a given event or behaviour'. There is a fallacy of false contemporaneity embedded in the body enacted by the state as an individual entity, as it does reduce the constitutive relational network of Mapuche relations that accounts for each singular body. When these relational networks are threatened by the

univocal hegemony of the state, Mapuche practices such as the hunger strike re-enact the differences between these two sensory worlds.

The equivocation is evident: whereas for the state, the body of hunger strikers is an ontologically bounded reality that needs to be fed – as, for one ontological tradition in sociology, society is there to be studied – for the Mapuche, their own bodies are just one hinge in the network of relations that constitute them as peoples – a notion of an unbounded society, where everything is relational. The connection of divergent sensory worlds demonstrates that the state's univocal interpretation is nothing more than a silenced equivocation: a polyphony reduced by the power of one hegemonic discourse (Gramsci, 1977). This ontological divergence epitomizes the fixation of univocal forms of knowledges, rather than revealing how 'confrontation and dialogue among knowledges is confrontation and dialogue among the processes through which practices that are ignorant in different ways turn into practices that are knowledgeable in different ways' (Santos, 2007: 429).

At this point we approach our conclusion by returning to our ethnographic case: if *winkalwun* is the verb designating a way of acting or conceiving of oneself as *winka*, then we should attend to the equivalent everyday *winkalwun* practices of western social scientists. To do so, we need to develop a sense of our own social practices as if from the outside: to see them with a foreign gaze, or in Rabinow's (1996: 36) words, 'to anthropologize the west, to see the exotic way that it has constructed reality'. For sociology, this would imply fully embracing the proposal of connected sociologies, which states that '[t]o think sociology differently is to take *connections* as the basis of the histories which we acknowledge; to do sociology differently is to act on the basis of having recognized those *connections*' (Bhambra, 2014: 416, emphases added). In addition, we would like to suggest that every connection between different sensory worlds is inherently equivocal and entails ontological, rather than epistemological, differences. The equivocal character of these connections needs to be actively considered if we aim to reinvigorate alternative sociological imaginations and knowledge practices.

In this article our primary, though until now implicit, objective has been to demonstrate that we are all on equivocation's stage, even though sometimes this needs to be explicitly demonstrated. Inhabiting equivocations in daily life entails *processes* – we must avoid the univocal temptation here – that involve entering and leaving different sensory worlds. The process of entering and leaving creates an equivocal connection in which, for example, 'winka' and 'Mapuche' can never name univocal positions used to speak of a univocal 'Other'.<sup>18</sup> Through this process we are forced to recognize that, Flora – along with all the other authors cited in this article – is also in equivocation when she thinks of herself as 'truly' Mapuche. This approach will enable us to avoid 'mapuchist' or 'winkist' interpretations (falling into orientalist or occidentalist conclusions).

An 'alter-native' sociology, however, is not an easy endeavour as it requires that we put in motion, with the same tenacity as a stubborn hunger striker, a ceasing to nourish ourselves with the certainties and a priori of our own modern condition. Putting it differently, when sociology engages with its non-sociological grounds, any static and univocal form of disciplinary knowledge vanishes. Moreover, when sociology engages with its non-sociological grounds, we begin to conceive the possibilities and, indeed, the ethical

imperatives of seriously rethinking the sociological imagination from the perspective of our equivocal lexicons, lexicons whose entries are of beings in becoming.

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### Notes

1. 'I feel the mirror's exhaustion, it does not rest on a single image' (our translation).
2. This unicity can be found even within the paradigm of multiple modernities and its expanded focus on alternative experiences and forms of modernization (see Eisenstadt, 2000).
3. See Khasnabish and Haiven's (2015) research in Halifax but also, more specifically linked to our case studies, see Llaitul/Arrate (2012) and Nahuelpan Moreno et al. (2012).
4. See Blaser, 2013; Bonelli, 2015a; Latour, 2005; Law and Hassard, 1999; Mol, 2002, among others.
5. By sociological imagination, we refer to the Millsian promise and the commitment of sociology to establish a bridge between biographical problems and larger historical trends (see Gane and Back, 2012; Mills, 2000 [1959]).
6. The Pewenche are currently considered to be Mapuche people who reside in the mountains, though originally they did not belong to the Mapuche ethnic group (see Bengoa, 2000).
7. As one of the reviewers of this article stated, this concept echoes Nancy's (1991) conceptualization of 'community'. For Nancy, a community is not what puts individuals in relation to one another, nor is it a kind of depository of univocal communalities; it is rather the very being of the relationship enacted as a dis-continuous process. Rather than being a substantial and stable common identity, community is the being 'in common' of an existence that emerges through exposure to otherness.
8. A fundamental equivocation here is the presumed equivalence between society and the nation-states, when in fact they have never been equivalent (Latour, 2004).
9. The sociological imagination is doomed to be equivocal in as far as it entails a contention regarding major issues affecting different publics – different sensory worlds – in connection to the troubles of specific actors. If, as Gane and Back (2012) suggest, the Millsian 'promise' can still inspire sociologists, it is because the openness and sensory attentiveness it requires demand from sociologists the skills to recognize the connection and coexistence between different sensory worlds, shaping both biographical problems and larger public concerns.
10. In this line of thought, the problem with cosmopolitanism (particularly in its European version) is that it presupposes 'one cosmos', an agreement over the basic sensory world upon which our commonalities are built. Yet, that assumption is equivocal, as Latour (2004) explains, making explicit reference to William James' equivalence between cosmos and pluriverse.
11. See Bhambra's (2015) discussion of sociology as a field of study focused in the modern *us*, whereas anthropology becomes the domain to study *others*.

12. There are some traceable differences between Mapudungun (mp. 'Language of the Land') and Chedungun (ch. 'Language of the people'), however these are mostly defined by the geographical location of the speaking communities.
13. For some examples, see Mol (2002) and Stengers (2011).
14. In a Schmittian sense, it is the state that has the prerogative to define others as terrorist and itself as 'non-terrorist'. The regular applicability of the antiterrorist law in the Mapuche conflict reflects the pervasive presence of an a priori definition of an enemy, who opposes the state as univocal valid sensory world.
15. Today, even the UN has recognized and condemned the Chilean state's application of anti-terrorist law to deal with the Mapuche conflict (UN, 2013) based on its volatile definition of 'terrorism' and its disproportionate application to those who struggle for the Mapuche cause.
16. For an example of the tragic situations that may follow particular equivocations in southern Chile, see Bonelli (2012).
17. The shaman refers to the International Labour Organization's convention on indigenous rights, mentioned above.
18. In a way, this echoes Julia Kristeva's (1991) notion that we are in a process of becoming foreigners, despite the apparent unity of scientific progress.

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