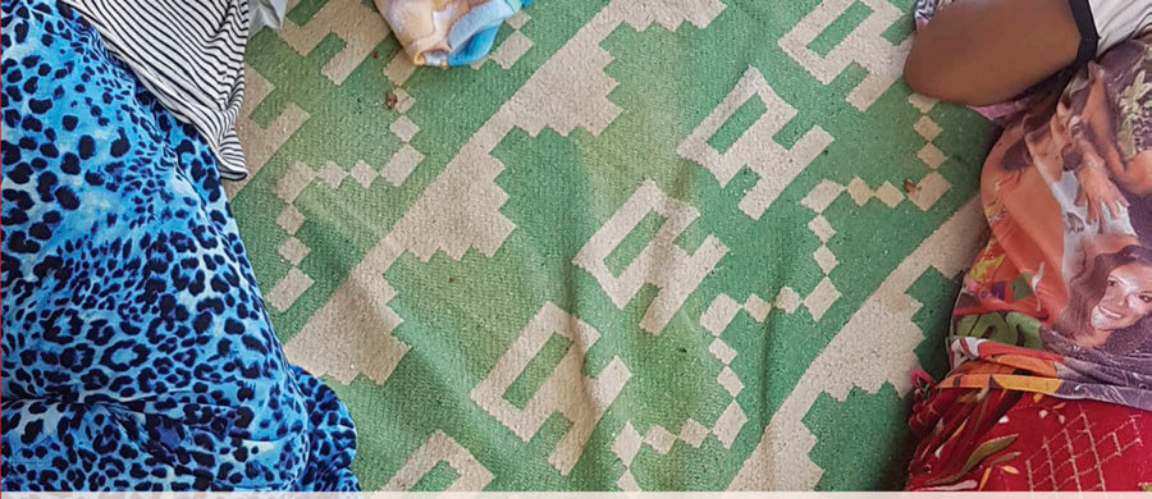

FRONTIER INTIMACIES

AYOREO WOMEN AND THE SEXUAL ECONOMY OF THE PARAGUAYAN CHACO

PAOLA CANOVA

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To
Haydeé and Horacio

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Preface

I met Upusia Picanerai in 2001.[1] I had been hired to conduct a general health survey of indigenous populations in the western region of Paraguay, also known as the Chaco.[2] At the time, Upusia was twenty-two years old. I first saw her at the local government office on Hindenburg Street, the central artery of Filadelfia. The main urban center of Fernheim Colony is Filadelfia, which was established in 1930 with just over 1,000 Russian Mennonite refugees; an additional 600 had joined the initial group by 1932. These settlers remained geographically and ideologically isolated in Paraguay for many decades.[3] Given its dusty roads named after European political figures, German street signs such as "vorsicht Schüler" (caution—schoolchildren) and "Einfahrt/Ausfahrt" (entrance/exit), European-style houses with enclosed gardens, and store clerks who greet you in Plautdietsch,[4] it is easy to mistake this for a quiet European town. The tropical, semiarid climate becomes increasingly noticeable when the temperature reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It is in this heat that Filadelfia transforms from a town with European visual references to a busy frontier town. The street buzzes with motorbikes, luxury four-wheel-drive trucks, and noisy cattle trucks that leave trails of dust behind them.

Most of Filadelfia's 17,500 inhabitants, now primarily Paraguayan mestizos and indigenous individuals, fill the streets as they come and go: women carrying firewood or buckets of water on their heads, young male workers trying to navigate their way out of the bus terminal, and ranchers picking up provisions from the home-improvement stores. But all this movement is new to Fernheim; up until the 1980s, this was a tight-knit community whose mostly fair-skinned and blond residents wore overalls and drove ox-carts. While the Mennonite community was forced to open to an outside labor force to meet the demands of its growing economy, it has striven to maintain its social cohesion in the face of dramatic demographic change.

During my trip to Filadelfia, the research team members, most from Asunción, had assembled to distribute the results of blood tests to Ayoreo people living there. It was a hot afternoon, and we were crowded in the long, narrow corridor of the 1930s refurbished European-style country house that had been turned into a public office. Upusia made her way toward the improvised table from which the doctors were calling out people's names to give them the results of their exams. She was followed by a group of about eight young women and was obviously unlike the rest of the Ayoreo gathered there. Rather than the long, colorful, imported nylon skirts typically worn by women, Upusia was dressed in a pair of tight white jeans. Her long, fine, black hair stood out, and she carried herself with an imposing presence that immediately claimed my attention. With a firm voice and in perfect Spanish she told one of the doctors at the table, "My friends and I sleep with white men. We want you to take blood samples from us as well. We want to make sure we're healthy." She briefly paused, only to shift to an angrier tone: "How come none of you have thought about taking any blood samples from us yet? We demand that you do. Now!" The physicians, who did not include people they considered prostitutes in their public health surveys, reacted in shock. One of the local Mennonite government health officials present told the physician in the group that the way the young woman conducted herself was typical of Ayoreo women. When I asked what he meant, he stated that unlike other indigenous women, Ayoreo women were "shameless" and "uncivilized."

A few days later, I had the chance to talk with Upusia in person. We happened to run into each other near the local Mennonite-run health post for indigenous people on the edge of a busy side road in Filadelfia. With reservation I decided to engage her in conversation. Soon after I introduced myself and we started to chat, a passing truck driver honked at her and reached out to wave. She waved back with a big smile on her face. Naively, I asked,

"Do you know him?"

"Oh yeah, he's my friend. He's a very nice guy. When we have sex, he always buys me a Coke."

Without thinking I remarked, "Aren't you afraid of him?" She replied, "No, but I know some men can be very mean." She told me that one time she and her girlfriend took a ride with two *paraguayos*, and on the way out of town, they stopped the truck and wanted to have sex with her younger friend.

Upusia continued, "One of them was acting violently. I was scared but acted as if I was mad. I told him to go ahead with me if he wanted to screw somebody, but not my friend. She was too young. He was so mad that he

ended up throwing us both out of the truck. That night we had to walk back a few miles to Filadelfia."

For the second time, Upusia shocked but also amazed me. How could she talk so naturally about such a violent event? I must acknowledge that at the time, I shared the same stereotypes that most Paraguayans from the eastern region of the country have about mestizo men living and working in the Chaco, stereotypes that constructed these men as ruthless in approaching women and hypersexual because of their work in forested areas or isolated ranches, away from urban areas for too long. Why would she have sex with a truck driver simply in exchange for a soft drink? The question persisted in my mind. It was my encounter with Upusia that marked the beginning of a long, life-changing journey that would take me into not only her life but also the lives of many other young Ayoreo women and through them, into the lives of male Paraguayan workers, Brazilian migrants, and Mennonite settlers in the region. Although Upusia's path turned out to be quite different from those of most young women I would come to know, like many of theirs, her life has been marked by discrimination, violence, and marginalization. Despite those conditions, the determination of these women, the kind Upusia showed in approaching the physician, is driving them to challenge the very terms under which economic transformations are taking place in today's Chaco.

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INTRODUCTION

An Economy of Intimate Transformations

The South American Chaco is a vast ecoregion that covers 60 percent of the land area of Paraguay as well as parts of Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil. It constitutes the second-largest forested area in lowland South America after the Amazon. Even with the long history of colonial exploration by travelers and missionaries, most Europeans settled only along its margins, with the exception of a few missionary posts.[1] Until the turn of the twentieth century, the Chaco remained an isolated, extractive frontier because of its geographical inaccessibility. This was the ideal scenario for the migration of Mennonite refugees living at the time in Canada and Russia who were looking to settle where they could remain ideologically secluded from surrounding populations. Invited by the Paraguayan government, they came to the Chaco in three waves, establishing three communities to which locals refer as *colonias menonitas* (Mennonite colonies).[2] Their isolation was not disrupted until the mid-1960s, concurrent with the beginning of the rapid acceleration of their economic development, which fueled the growing regional economy of the central Chaco.

Since at least the sixteenth century, the Ayoreo have had a continuous presence along the present-day northern Paraguay-Bolivia border. The limits of Ayoreo territory were the mountain ranges of the Chiquitanía to the north, the Mennonite colonies of the central Chaco region to the south, the Parapetí and Grande Rivers to the west, and the Paraguay River to the east. The center of their territory was in the area of the salt pans by Cerro San Miguel on the Paraguay-Bolivia border.[3] During the early twentieth century, internal conflicts and warfare between local Ayoreo groups increased. These conflicts were fueled by increasing incursions by outsiders (military and civil) into their territories. During this period two large and important confederacies were established: the Direquene-gosode, "people from

the following day," in the northern Ayoreo territory and the Guidai-gosode, "people from the villages," to the south. The two groups engaged in warfare against each other (Fischermann 1988). Pressure on the northern group was such that it eventually drove them to make contact with missionaries of the New Tribes Mission (NTM) on the Bolivian side of the border in 1947.[4] On the Paraguayan side of the border, the Ayoreo people still inhabited the forests of the northern Chaco until the 1960s. Until that time, the sexuality of their women was embedded in logics of exchange by which sexual liaisons were reciprocated with goods such as meat or honey. But by the mid-1960s, in less than a decade, Ayoreo lives underwent a dramatic change. They settled in religious missions, their ecological landscape shifted as a result of the rapid advance of frontier-style development, and their lives became deeply embedded in the market economy.

In the following decades, Mennonite settlers turned the so-called green hell of the Chaco into one of the main economic nodes of the country. Waves of agricultural and ranching investment followed, encroaching on indigenous peoples and their territories and forcing them to become incorporated as a labor force, mostly for Mennonites (Hack 1975; Loewen 1964; Redekop 1980). In recent years, the striking and persistent economic advances of the colonies have set off another wave of development in the northern Chaco, making it one of the newest economic frontiers of the country. The sale of undeveloped public lands at the lowest prices in the northern region and the increased demand for beef in international markets have brought mostly foreign investment, especially to the district of Bahía Negra.[5] The sales and development of lands have had an adverse impact on the region's forests, most of which are being converted into pasturelands for ranching. By 2018 it was estimated that about 1,927 hectares were deforested daily in the Paraguayan Chaco (Guyra Paraguay 2018).

The narratives in this book describe how a frontier economy is experienced in the realm of intimacy. The stories reveal the contemporary meanings of sexual intimacy for indigenous women like Upusia who are constructing their lives amid the intense transformations and in a regional market economy that has historically excluded them. What links the exchange of sex for money with earlier Ayoreo patterns of premarital sexuality? How do women's practices challenge the moral assumptions that settler-colonialists attach to sexual intimacy? How are the changes in Ayoreo sexuality symptomatic of economic changes in the region? The answers lie in the articulation between economic transformations and the intimate sphere in a postcolonial context. The advance of the economic and missionary frontiers has affected the intimate lives of indigenous women and reconfigured gender

Figure 0.1. *Desfile de la Paz del Chaco* (Peace of the Chaco Parade). The event draws residents of Filadelfia to commemorate the peace accords at the end of the Chaco War of 1932–1935 between Paraguay and Bolivia. In the background is the monument erected in 2005 for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of Fernheim Colony. Photo courtesy of José Argüello.

roles, sexual ethics, and notions of desire. As a result of historical patterns of discrimination in the colonies, Ayoreo women, perceived as uncivilized, were marginalized and excluded from the market economy. Ayoreo men, in contrast, were quickly incorporated as laborers, and their absorption into the labor market amplified the commodification of Ayoreo social relations at all levels. In the midst of these transformations, women commoditized their sexuality.

This book is an inquiry into the lives and relational practices of young women whose ages range mostly from fourteen to twenty-eight and who monetize their sexuality with non-Ayoreo men in the Mennonite colonies. In a historical context of gender discrimination, labor exclusion, and rapidly changing economic transformations, Ayoreo women have reappropriated their sexual practices, developing "the *curajodie* phenomenon." *Curajodie* (plural) and *curajo* (singular) are terms used by the Ayoreo to refer to single women who seek monetized sexual liaisons with non-Ayoreo men. These women approach intimate liaisons on their own terms; they initiate courting and flirting, and they see the involvement of money not as mor-

ally problematic but rather as constitutive of sexual encounters. Their practices, which are not considered ethically fraught by Ayoreo, defy the moral standards and racialized boundaries that Mennonite settlers have carefully crafted vis-à-vis outsiders. Following the liaisons of *curajodie* with Mennonite and Paraguayan mestizo men offers insights into how Mennonite settlers as well as Paraguayan and Brazilian migrant workers construct and experience intimacy in a frontier marked by racialized labor and social hierarchies that have been key to cementing and spearheading the regional economy.

It is important to note that herein I use the racial/ethnic categories employed by locals in the Chaco to differentiate groups of people. The general mestizo and white populations self-identify as Paraguayan. Ayoreo and other indigenous peoples do not self-identify as Paraguayans; rather, they use their own denominations, such as Ayoreo, to differentiate themselves from nonindigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in general refer to all nonindigenous peoples as "white" regardless of ethnic background. I use the terms "white" and "Paraguayan" interchangeably throughout the book. I use the term "Mennonite" to refer to the Mennonite settlers and their descendants, as this is the self-denomination they deploy. This categorization derives from their use of the term "Mennonite" as an ethnic category rather than a religious one, evidenced in that no Paraguayans or indigenous people of Mennonite faith are referred to as "Mennonites."[6] Moreover, although more than two generations of Mennonites have been born in Paraguay, they label Paraguayans migrating to the central Chaco *latino-paraguayos* to distinguish themselves from this population.[7]

Framing the Commodification of Intimacy

In much of the world, the experience of capitalist development, urbanization, and modernization over the course of the twentieth century reformulated the terms of the commodification of sexuality. A prominent body of scholarship exploring sex work has successfully shifted debates focused on the moral connotations of this activity by paying attention to its labor aspect (Chapkis 2010; Hochschild 2003, 2012; Katsulis 2008). Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2010:6) argue that sex work in its diverse expressions such as streetwalking, bar hostessing, and escort services should be considered forms of "intimate labor" in which, like domestic work and child care, "the worker responds to a need or desire that is directly expressed by the recipient." These perspectives have opened possibilities for women to

rally around issues of decriminalization, labor conditions, and stigma associated with these activities (Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2011; Sha 2014).

Another important contribution of such studies is that they highlight the varied and personal factors that drive individuals to enter the commodification process, factors that are influenced by class, race, and ethnicity, all of which are culturally determined. Scholars have moved beyond discussions that treat the commodification of intimacy solely as an economic survival strategy to show how it can also coexist with affective subjectivities (Bernstein 2007; Hoang 2015; Williams 2013). In this vein, some anthropologists have questioned the appropriateness of the term "sex work" as a universal category (Groes-Green 2013; Wardlow 2004, 2006). Amalia Cabezas (2009) chooses to use the term "tactical sex" to refer to commoditized intimate liaisons of women working in the hospitality industry in Cuba. She argues that intimate liaisons with tourists blur the boundaries of market and nonmarket transactions, and while economic necessity is the driving force behind these liaisons, women do not foreclose romantic attachments and international migration.[8] Similarly, in the cross-cultural context of Africa, "transactional sex" has been used to designate intimate arrangements where exchange of sex is not limited to money but also involves a broader set of material gains and kin obligations that do not fit neatly into the sex-work category (Cole 2010; Hunter 2002, 2010; Wojcicki 2002).

The commodification of sexuality is a process also profoundly marked and shaped by broader, continuously shifting socioeconomic landscapes. In her ethnography on the Huli women of Papua New Guinea, Holly Wardlow (2006) shows how the commodification of sexuality is used as a form of "negative agency" in response to shifts in gender roles and kinship arrangements. This kind of agency results from structural economic changes that drove Huli men to become labor migrants. Similarly, Noelle Stout (2014) unveils how changing market regimes also created shifts in ideas about love, intimacy, marriage, and romance in post-Soviet Cuba. These works refrain from portraying individuals as victims of larger changing socioeconomic structures but rather highlight people's strategies to negotiate shifting structures of power.[9] This stance is shared by scholars exploring issues related to the feminization of labor in contexts of economic restructuring (Freeman 2000; Mills 2017; Ong 2006; Schuster 2015). Building on these insights and paying attention to the crucial role of sexuality in postcolonial contexts (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995, 2002; Walkovitz 1980), the stories of Ayoreo women provide a novel analysis of how indigenous sexualities, racialized intimacies, and frontier projects are co-constructed and repro-

duced in contemporary lowland South America. I focus on how indigenous women experience the commodification of their sexuality in a context of rampant regional economic expansion established upon hierarchical racial structures and politics of exclusion toward indigenous peoples. Important to note is that this exploration is not a conventional case study about the commodification of intimacy *sensu stricto*; rather, in analyzing the commodification of women's sexuality, I more broadly examine how contemporary frontier economies are constructed, transformed, and experienced through intimacy by different groups of people inhabiting what are perceived as "the margins of the state" (Das and Poole 2004).

Intimate Frontiers

The Chaco historically has been constructed as outside the boundaries of the state. This construction reifies conceptualizations of frontiers as sites that mark the boundaries between civilization and wilderness (Sarmiento 1998 [1845]; Turner 2014 [1894]), a perspective much discussed and problematized by scholars of different disciplines. Donna Guy and Thomas Sheridan (1998:12) contend that frontier areas have always been active "zones of interaction," with long precolonial and colonial histories of "economic and political contestation over natural resources and ideological control." Similarly, Anna Tsing, in discussing how capitalism reshaped the rainforests of Indonesia in the 1980s and 1990s through links of unexpected connections, proposes rather to conceptualize a frontier as an "imaginative project capable of molding both places and processes" (2005:32). It is this imagination that leads, for example, to the construction of nature in these areas as wild and uncontrolled, requiring its conversion into a set of productive resources or, if not, its elimination altogether.

These perceived imaginary margins are not just peripheral spaces but are central for the reproduction of state-making processes (Das and Poole 2004); they play an active role in shaping what lies within and outside the state (Garfield 2001). Gastón Gordillo has brilliantly described how for centuries the failed colonial projects of state territorialization in the Argentine Chaco furthered its construction as a void, that is, "a vector of deterritorialization that voided state territoriality and overflowed it with the event of indigenous armed resistance" (2014:54). He argues that these failed colonial projects did not put the spatial geography of the Chaco outside the realm of the state; rather, it was precisely the presence of the state that led to the reaction to negate, drag down, and slow down state forces, ultimately repro-

ducing the region as an uncontrollable and unpredictable space. This analysis is relevant because it situates state agents as actively helping produce the void through their very presence in the region, which is precisely what has happened in the Paraguayan Chaco; the state has never been entirely absent, although scholarly and popular discourses about the region emphasize that idea. Construction of the Chaco as a site outside the realm of the state reproduces and obscures the unequal relations of power, domination, and exclusion that have characterized the region for centuries.

Frontier regions historically have been shaped by the strategic deployment of gender and sexuality to further the economic expansion of colonial projects. These processes have been profoundly characterized by gender violence and discrimination. Albert Hurtado (1999) has examined the interplay of sexuality, courtship, and marriage in shaping the US frontier from colonial expansion onward. He describes the devastating effects of multicultural encounters on indigenous peoples in California, a process that involved violent assaults and abuses of indigenous women in their encounters with missionaries, later fur traders, and then gold seekers. Audra Simpson (2014) has argued that in the United Sates, imaginaries about Iroquois women are shaped by simplistic ideas of them as "caretakers of the land" and "mothers of the nation" (148). She challenges these constructions as being problematic, since they "occlude the ongoing effects of white, settler patriarchy in their communities and in their lives" (148). Similarly, Andrea Smith (2014) has argued that US settler forms of governance cannot be disembedded from a history of gender violence.

The gendered subordination and violence that marked frontier projects show how these projects are made possible by the cementing of patriarchal structures that, Hurtado (1999) contends, cannot be homogenized as patriarchy, as they can take on different shapes in different contexts. Other key aspects fundamental to frontier projects are the reproductions of masculinities and racial hierarchies. Ana María Alonso (1995) explores the unique way gendered ethnic identity was constructed by local colonists in the Mexican state of Chihuahua during the late eighteenth century. She shows how colonists used masculinity, honor, and autonomy as a way to differentiate themselves from "barbarous" Indians, a label that would later be applied to the colonists themselves by Anglo settlers. Joane Nagel, whose work has focused on the links between sexuality and race, ethnicity, and nationalism, uses the term "ethno sexual frontiers" to refer to the "symbolic and physical sensual spaces where sexual imaginings and sexual contract occur between members of different racial, ethnic, or national groups" operating during different historical contexts (2003:14). Nagel finds that these fron-

tiers are spaces facilitated by conditions such as migration, wars, and tourism in which sexuality has been used as a means of domination and oppression. These spaces create racial "others," thereby justifying acts of abuse and violence. Colonial expansion in Latin America was also characterized by a history of gendered violence and oppression of indigenous women (de la Cadena 1991, 2000; Weismantel 2001). This history continues to affect the lives of indigenous women in the region (Babb 2018; Mora 2018; Radcliffe 2015).

With particular histories and complexities, such works offer nuanced analyses of the commonalities that shape gendered experiences of frontiers constituted by ethnoracial divides, hypermasculinity, transgressions, violence, and gender discrimination. In the same way, frontiers have been and continue to be conceived as masculine spaces of competition, desire, aggression, and economic gain. Although different imaginaries may collide, frontiers are built on agendas to incorporate, civilize, and develop; those agendas are advanced through violence, subjugation, and the creation of socioeconomic hierarchies enacted mostly by force and regulations. I build on these explorations to understand how contemporary indigenous frontiers in lowland South America are constituted and experienced. I do this by drawing on "intimacy" as an analytical category that moves beyond the strict use of the term in a sexual and private dimension (Giddens 1992; Weeks 1998). Rather, I use it as a category capable of describing the connections and blurred boundaries that link personal and subjective experiences to broader economic and political processes (Berlant 1998; Povinelli 2002).

The term "intimate frontier" is used in this book as a metaphor to highlight the ways intimacy reproduces the logics of frontier economies while simultaneously challenging its terms, destabilizing cohesive frontier projects such as those of the state, missionaries, and Mennonites. Intimacy, as experienced in daily social interactions, labor, and gender arrangements, is constituted by blurred racial hierarchies, transgressive desires, shifting boundaries, excesses, liminality, and violence. To examine these many faces of intimacy, the stories of Ayoreo women trace how sexuality is used to construct an intimate frontier that operates according to logics in tension and competition with the racially biased capitalist system. Ayoreo women thus reframe the commodification of their sexuality. In doing so they expose the fractured and incomplete workings of frontier capitalism in spaces of rapid transformations.

Their narratives stand in contrast to discourses that emphasize indigenous women's experiences of subordination and passivity. Without romanticizing women's practices or trivializing the abuses and violence that they experience today, theirs are stories about women who find an agentive and

transformative sense of themselves in the midst of an economy that is itself undergoing dramatic transformations.

The Moral Economy of Ayoreo Intimacy

Ayoreo women offer a unique illustration of the commodification of sexuality in that they belong to a group that made contact with the surrounding society only in the mid-1960s but underwent rapid change since then. Transformations in the Chaco open a window for exploring how indigenous moral economies are experienced in tension with Christian values and neoclassical economic frameworks.

I frame my analysis by drawing on Viviana Zelizer's (2005, 2010) argument that money also exists outside the sphere of the market, where it is shaped by sociocultural structural factors.[10] In *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005), Zelizer's insightful analysis draws on the assumption that social relations involve a minimal set of shared meanings, operating rules, and boundaries separating one relation from another:

> For each meaningfully distinct category of social relations, people erect a boundary, mark the boundary by means of names and practices, establish a set of distinctive understandings and practices that operate within that boundary, designate certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation, bar other transactions as inappropriate, and adopt certain media for reckoning and facilitating economic transactions within the relation. (35)

Zelizer refers to these practices as "relational work" (37). Her analysis may be extended to the nature and valuation of the relational work involved in the sex-for-money exchange among Ayoreo women, that is, how women match particular intimate relations with specific economic transactions and engage in practices that are considered appropriate within that boundary. Their relational work in intimate liaisons shows a constant process of conversion between capitalist and noncapitalist value systems. A focus on the value conversion embedded in intimate liaisons highlights how the sex-for-money exchange is strategically deployed to garner social and economic forms of capital that are then used to negotiate racial discrimination and gendered labor exclusion in a postcolonial context.[11]

An inquiry into the relational work embedded in the intimate exchange also demonstrates how women negotiate cultural logics of conversion to

Christianity at the ethical level.[12] Sexual ethics operates in continual movement between pre- and postcolonial moral and economic frameworks, allowing Ayoreo women to defy the capitalist system in which they are embedded. In the Ayoreo case, logics other than economic ones are intertwined with practices of sexuality to shape the value of intimate transactions. Distinct traits of Ayoreo ethics of sexuality are the autonomy of women to lead sexual courting and flirting and sexuality that is rooted in systems of exchange and reciprocity. The values associated with these practices can be traced to the ontological narratives of the male Jnani Bajade and female Cheque Bajedie, collectively referred to as Original Beings. These were nonhuman entities with human traits who were considered responsible for conceiving and guiding the world order that Ayoreo people inhabit. Through different experiences, catastrophes, and conflicts, the Original Beings gave rise to the present world order, which is known by Ayoreo as the time of the Disi Ejode, the current generation (Fischermann 1988). As a result of contact with Western society, women's intimate practices have undergone transformations and now operate alongside new notions of racialized desire since the introduction of money into the realm of intimacy.

Although intense missionization erased most of the narratives of the Original Beings from Ayoreo daily discourse, it has not eradicated the ontological values of sexuality as documented in the mythical-historical corpus that continues to be validated through the practices of young women. These practices were also enacted by older women in their youth, in "the time when we lived in the *monte* [forest]," as they put it. Some moral precepts enacted by contemporary young women resonate with those of older women who grew up prior to contact and were familiar with the narratives of the Jnani Bajade and Cheque Bajedie.[13] This claim situates my work within the theoretical "slot" (Trouillot 2004) reserved for the moral economy of "hunter-gatherers," an approach that has been explored by other scholars in the Gran Chaco region (Kidd 2000; Villagra 2009, 2014).[14] In Ayoreo scholarship, this framework has been best exemplified by the work of Bartolomé (2000), Renshaw (2004), and von Bremen (1988, 2000).

Volker von Bremen (2000) has argued that the Ayoreos' "traditional" belief system and their traits as "hunter-gatherers" demonstrate how they have adapted and reorganized new elements of the dominant society within their lives during the 1980s, when he conducted fieldwork in the Chaco.[15] Von Bremen (2000) asserts that Ayoreo experience time in two dimensions, mythical and contemporary. Everything important to them, material goods and immaterial practices, was created in mythical time, when there was no culture/nature divide. New objects such as money and rifles were there-

fore considered to be associated with myths to which the Ayoreo did not have access. Their curiosity about the unfamiliar objects and concepts drove Ayoreo to want to "discover the myths associated with new phenomena" and to pursue their interest in accessing knowledge that was available only to white people (von Bremen 2000:279).

Following this same logic, goods sought to satisfy daily needs did not need to be produced but simply procured. This capacity of hunter-gatherers to adapt to new conditions led von Bremen to assume that Ayoreo subordination changed in an unproblematic way: "Since the Ayoreode do not distinguish between natural and cultural phenomena, they perceive the new environment as one that is given and to which they have to adapt. There is no fundamental questioning of the ruling socioeconomic and political conditions, since they belong to the environment in the same way as the natural, ecological conditions" (2000:280). Furthermore, he argues, missionary endeavors such as planning and decision making were accepted without contest "since they also belong to the given external environment and do not arise from the intentional action of human beings" (280). These are highly problematic claims not because they assume a non-Cartesian ontology but rather because von Bremen situates Ayoreo passive responses to change in their hunter-gatherer trait of adaptation. He assumes Ayoreo nature/culture contiguity to be passive, mistakenly attributing a nonintentional role to nature. For Ayoreo, however, intentionality is pervasive to everything created, nature and culture. Von Bremen's analysis erases the impact of broader structural processes affecting Ayoreo life at the time of contact and bluntly removes the role of Ayoreo agency in confronting and adapting to changing circumstances. Mario Blaser (2004) has raised a similar concern about the use of the hunter-gatherer category in Paraguay, critiquing how the category is deployed to define indigeneity either by siding with it or by challenging it.[16]

Another scholar of the Ayoreo, Lucas Bessire, builds on Gordillo's critique of the Ayoreo scholarship of Marcelo Bórmida and his students.[17] Bessire (2014:33) has further critiqued this scholarship by arguing that Ayoreo ontology cannot be understood as a function of an essentialized core "mythical structure" and causality and then used to interpret Ayoreo tradition. But in dismissing mythical structures as timeless and changeless, Bessire implicitly erases all agency and capacity for change pre-dating the colonial encounter and assumes culture change only as a result of external pressure, the central premise of his argument of "radical rupture." The lack of attention to indigenous capacities for change before the colonial encounter is a critique also raised in other contexts by scholars of lowland South Amer-

ica including Fernando Santos-Granero (2009). Villagra (2009), in his work on social change among the Angaité people of the Paraguayan Chaco, appropriately warns that the contingency of change as situated in "mythical" events should not be treated as lacking agency for not following an explanatory chain of events and sequential effects. Villagra cautions that the fact that these narratives might not incorporate or contextualize the events being described is not an act destitute of consciousness, and therefore it should not be treated as lacking agency (2009).[18]

In this sense, a closer look at von Bremen's argument (2000) shows a recognition of the fluidity of the borders between the "mythical sphere" and historical time. As he notes, Ayoreo incorporate events in recent historical time into their "mythical system," preventing a diachronic view of history. Von Bremen (2000:277) notes how the term "Jnani Bajade" is used interchangeably to refer to Original Beings and recently deceased Ayoreo. I have often heard individuals also refer to biblical figures as Original Beings. Making a similar observation, Bessire recasts these references as "slippages" (2014:45) that exhibit the "precarious and fractured" ways in which Ayoreo inhabit the contemporary world (191).

Alfonso Otaegui (2011), on the other hand, articulates this connection as a continuum in history that challenges scholars to rethink what events we ascribe to the category "myth." In this way, Ayoreo ontological narratives or myths/histories should not be treated as essentialized and ahistorical events in the lives of indigenous peoples; the narratives rather force us to acknowledge the transformative power of historical change experienced by indigenous peoples as the narratives shift or incorporate new aspects. This perspective is well established in scholarship on lowland South America (Gow 2001; Santos-Granero 2002, 2009); furthermore, the enactment of values associated with the moral precepts of the Original Beings in the contemporary context cannot be taken at face value as an expression of an essentialized and timeless hunter-gatherer trait being enacted in the present. Rather, the moral economy of Ayoreo intimacy has a transformative and agentive power by which women adapt to navigate a contemporary context set in a long history of gender discrimination and exclusion. From this perspective and as Villagra argues (2009, 2014), moral economies ought not to be constructed as a condition or archaic remainder of a specific mode of production, becoming its passive derivative. Instead, as he emphasizes, moral economies should be explored as fundamental parts of capacities, practices, and lived theories about person, body, and society, with the ability to be constructed and regenerated based on relations in changing situations. I seek precisely to highlight changes in the moral economies of women as a reflec-

tion of elements of continuity and discontinuity while avoiding presenting these changes as the product of essentialized binary opposites.

This approach stands in tension with that of Bessire, as he elaborates in his 2014 ethnography, *Behold the Black Caiman*. In it Bessire openly critiques what he perceives as an obsession of scholars of the Ayoreo people to rescue "tradition," a category he deems insufficient to understanding "disordered Ayoreo ontological responses" (189) in a social landscape that he describes as a "colonial space of death" shaped by "epistemic murk" (189) and "world-ending violence" (17). He argues that the way Ayoreo experience contemporary transformations that affect their lives is through "radical ruptures that create fractured and ambiguous new moral selves" (114). In an attempt to move away from essentialized constructions of mythical structures of the scholars he critiques, Bessire argues that Ayoreo cosmological orders were not stable but rather depended on a "radical break with continuity," or what he calls an "ontology of transformation" (2014:38–39). The specific way Ayoreo self-objectify the transformations they undergo is through negations; they try to make sense of their moral humanity through negations. In this way, Bessire describes how Ayoreo apocalyptic eschatology negates the ongoing violence and ecological changes, conversion to Christianity negates outsiders' construction of them as savages, and the "madness of memory or drugs" (191) negates the Christian moral self and their marginalization as "ex-primitives."

For Bessire, these negations coalesce into a condition of subjective possibility that he calls "negative immanence." Bessire identifies ambiguity as a distinguishing trait of Ayoreo social practices that he describes as "radical forms of immanence that simultaneously instantiated and subverted the contradictory meanings and values attributed to Indigenous 'life as such' within the contemporary" (2014:182). This perspective is problematic on two counts. First, his ethnographic description constructs Ayoreo practices as moving in and out of tradition, although he claims to have distanced himself from engaging with the concept of tradition; ultimately it represents Ayoreo life as disordered, incoherent, and undignified. In the stories offered herein, I hope to show how Ayoreo practices are not lived as fractured, ambiguous, or incomplete but are instead located in very specific contexts of being and acting in the world. This portrayal does not create random subjectivities that come across as chaotic or incomplete to outsiders; rather, it leads to very specific subjectivities that affirm women's ethical assertions about themselves, not just simple negations.

These ethical assertions are shaped by desires and aspirations as women strive to demonstrate to outsiders that to be an indigenous woman is not

necessarily related to how outsiders imagine them or discriminate against them in a context of structural violence and racialized socioeconomic hierarchies. Ayoreo women, historically excluded from the market economy, creatively draw on their ethics of sexuality to negotiate exclusion and access money on their own terms, delineating an intimate frontier with agency but also subject to abuses and discrimination. Contemporary Ayoreo ethics is capable of coexisting with market and Christian precepts; these different values become entangled with each other, creating tensions and adverse impacts. However, it cannot be argued that Ayoreo ethics is experienced overall in a disordered, senseless, or undignified way.

The second problematic aspect of Bessire's perspective is his argument that Ayoreo have embraced Christianity as a radical rupture from their "immoral past" and that the turn to drugs and "prostitution" is yet another instance of rupture, this time from Christian values. This argument leaves no room to understand the complex and specific ethical negotiations in which Ayoreo engage and accommodate the dramatic changes they have experienced and continue to face. Rather than experiencing the present in a series of ruptures, the Ayoreo ethical system is co-constructed at the juncture of customary values, Christian moral norms, and socioeconomic dynamics that shape the lives of the Ayoreo today. Ayoreo women link specific social practices related to intimacy and sexuality to specific ethical frameworks according to the context and nature of their liaisons. And in this way they creatively continue to enact the sexual autonomy and patterns of reciprocity and exchange by which they reappropriate the value of money to mediate their new racialized desire. Their practices unsettle the racial and economic frameworks that operate in today's Chaco, frameworks taken for granted by the majority of its inhabitants. The stories in this book do not neatly fit women's practices into an essentialized category but portray and unravel the tensions, anxieties, and social problems that their practices generate. However, these stories also demonstrate the power of the women's moral economy to be transformative and agentive, at times reproducing the logics of frontier economies while at other times challenging them.

The complex and dynamic nature of these intimate practices immediately draws attention to young women's engagements with conspicuous consumption, a key component of their practices. Conspicuous consumption is a topic that has been widely explored in relation to the commodification of intimacy (Curtis 2009; Groes-Green 2013; Williams 2013). Jennifer Cole (2004) argues that women in Tanzania use money from transactional sex to purchase clothes, cell phones, and other commodities. These are considered forms of social capital that increase the women's chances to access job op-

portunities and/or wealthy, marriageable partners. This is a common trend especially in the context of sex tourism (Cabezas 2009; Padilla 2007; Stout 2014). Other scholars, among them Curtis (2009), Leclerc-Madlala (2003), and Wilson (2004), emphasize the role of consumption in the commodification of intimacy as related to Western ideals created by the media and globalization; some see them rather as oriented toward daily economic subsistence (Wojcicki 2002).

In the Ayoreo context, because of intense discrimination, conspicuous consumption does not have the end goal of employment or marriage with white men as is typical of women in other contexts presented in most of the literature. New, racialized notions of desire can lead to conspicuous consumption, but consumption primarily becomes a key mechanism for Ayoreo women to navigate the hierarchical social space of the Mennonite colonies on their own terms. The social atmosphere of the colonies constructs Ayoreo bodies and women's bodies in general as abject, as, in Julia Kristeva's assessment, "that which does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1983:4). In engaging in conspicuous consumption, women are challenging these racialized constructions and consummating the desire to craft their own social spaces in a context that has historically excluded them.

The Social Embeddedness of Capitalist Relations

From colonial times onward, the incorporation of indigenous peoples into Latin American nation-states has been as economic subjects (Greenberg 1981; Nash 1979; Taussig 1980; Wolf 1982); that reality persists in recent decades and has been explored in the context of neoliberal citizenship (Canessa 2012; Goodale and Postero 2013; Gustafson 2009; Hale 2006; Jackson 2019) and more recently in discussions of autonomy and redistributive politics (Anthias 2018; Mora 2018; Postero 2017). In the Ayoreo case, unlike others in Latin America where indigenous women have been incorporated at the bottom of the labor force (Babb 2018; de la Cadena 1991; Weismantel 2001), the erasure of Ayoreo women from the regional market is an exclusion based on their condition as purportedly abject, although such condition has not prevented them from developing their own forays into the market economy, directly and indirectly.

Analytically, I follow the proposal of Laura Bear and colleagues (2015), who argue that "instead of taking capitalism a priori, as an already determining structure, logic and trajectory, we ask how its social relations are

generated out of divergent life projects."[19] I draw from this perspective to explore how women have come to develop their own terms of involvement with the economy according to their own logics. Their practices show how Ayoreo women refuse to acknowledge the expected terms of economic inclusion envisioned for indigenous peoples in the region. They do so by appropriating their male partners' wages and engaging in what I call "disruptive practices" meant to generate tensions and even lead to the abrupt termination of their partners' work opportunities. In this way, women are rejecting the idea that the wage-labor system is the only means available to access the rights of citizenship for indigenous peoples in today's Chaco. Analysis of this phenomenon contributes to literature such as Asad (2003) and Chakrabarty (2000) that critiques linear and progressive grand narratives of capitalism and modernity.

The commodification of female Ayoreo sexuality surfaces as yet another means to confront their exclusion from the market economy, unsettling basic assumptions about the economy in the region. This happens via three unique avenues. First, the sex-for-money exchange challenges expected gendered labor roles for indigenous women in the region as either domestic workers or factory workers. Second, the intimate practices of Ayoreo women defy and complicate market logics of exchange in that money obtained from liaisons is treated interchangeably in one of three ways: as gift money, a commodity, or social capital; I use the term "gift money" to emphasize how the construction of money as a gift stems from customary values by which money has become integral to the Ayoreo system of exchange and reciprocity. And third, their modern notions of desire defy the racialized social structure of the Mennonite colonies on which labor arrangements are based. This three-point analysis offers a conceptual framework that highlights the ways gender is interwoven with race and intimacy to generate capitalist values that cannot be consolidated into one single, core logic as proposed by feminist scholars in anthropology.[20]

Several ethnographic works have analyzed the impact of capitalism and rapid econonomic transformations on indigenous peoples in the Gran Chaco region from different perspectives that include the role of agriculture and rural development (Biocca 2017), the establishment of agroindustrial enclaves (Córdoba, Bossert, and Richard 2015; Gordillo 2006), and the material and affective ruptures that capitalism generates (Gordillo 2004, 2014). But rather than focusing exclusively on the impact of capitalist endeavors and how people come to terms with these endeavors, I shift the scale of analysis by turning the focus toward the social forces that play a key role in shaping and reproducing the economic sphere. Such social forces in today's Chaco include the strategic deployment of sexuality and the role of race in establishing a

hierarchical labor force and crafting an unequal social structure, both paramount to structuring the current economic system.

Another social force is a pervasive historical and contemporary discourse of the region as a sexualized and hypermasculine social space; it is a discourse that sustains these very characteristics. In this context, the commodification of intimacy is not the result of a totalizing economic project in the region. Rather, it is constructed at the juncture of individual experiences, heterogeneous projects, and colliding agendas filled with expectations, contradictions, excitement, and deceptions that cannot be collectively grouped into a single trajectory. Ultimately, the social value of money for Ayoreo women crystalizes out of multiple intimate desires that drive capitalism in today's Chaco: the desire for racialized bodies, the desire to transgress social norms, and the desire to access commodities, prestige, money, social equality, dignity, and much more.

Toward an Ethnography of the Ayoreo Woman in Today's Chaco

Most of what we know of the lives of indigenous women in the Gran Chaco region during the first half of the twentieth century has been derived through the work of classic ethnographies (among them Metraux 1946; Nordenskiöld 2002 [1912]; Palavecino 1935; Schmidt 1938). The modernist-functionalist approach of these studies worked within standard compartmentalized categories that constituted a specific aspect of culture such as social organization, economy, and life cycle. It was only within these categories that specific references to women were made, and often the allusions were to indirect observations or third-party descriptions. And while many of these ethnographies were rich and descriptive, most of them give only glimpses of the lives of women in the Chaco in the early to mid-twentieth century. Any focus on women's sexuality, concomitant with the times, considered their practices "morally lax" (Grubb 1993 [1911]:204) and "shameless" (Nordenskiöld 2002 [1912]:208). Later work shifted away from that approach and shows extensive interest in details such as the gendered roles of women in diverse realms. Common themes in these later writings are specific aspects related to gender and sexuality such as eroticism, fecundity, and maternity among indigenous groups such as the Mak'a, Nivaclé, and Enxet of Paraguay (Chase Sardi 1969; Chase Sardi, Siddredi, and Cordeu 1992; Kidd 1995) and the Pilagá and other Mataco groups of Argentina (Idoyaga Molina 1981).

Some newer contemporary scholarship on the Chaco tends toward broader analysis, such as in descriptions of education and socialization among the Bolivian Guaraní (Penner 1998) and the Nivaclé (Regehr 1987), notions

of the body and personhood among the Toba (Tola 2012), and the socioeconomic and political status of indigenous women in the Gran Chaco explored from varying perspectives (Caputto 2014; Citro 2009; Gómez and Sciortino 2018; Hirsch 2008).

Sexuality as a category of analysis in Ayoreo scholarship has been only superficially addressed in classic ethnographic accounts; in them, sexuality and the people themselves are portrayed as monolithic and bounded (Bórmida and Califano 1978; Kelm 1964). An accurate outline of Ayoreo sexual ethics, like any other aspect of Ayoreo social life, must consider its multiple intricacies as opposed to the use of a model that implies linear temporality. To avoid representations of women either as fixed in time or as having lost important aspects of their sociality, the present discussion spans from pre-mission times to the present. A wave of female scholars of the Ayoreo people has offered a more nuanced contribution to understanding the complexity of gendered relations (Amarilla 2018; Nostas and Sanabria 2009; Roca Ortíz 2012; Rojas 2004; Suaznábar 1995); some of these scholars reference the monetization of sexuality, although they mostly treat it as both a new phenomenon and one exclusively linked to sex work. An outline of Ayoreo ethics of sexuality will demonstrate how gendered practices of sexuality are also constructed in conversation with and opposition to customary and Christian values. As a result, the monetization of women's sexuality is neither new nor linked solely to sex work; it has been constitutive of the sexuality of young women for at least two decades.

Intimate Encounters in Ethnographic Research: A Note on Methods

I have had the privilege of long-term relations with the Ayoreo people since 1999. Discussing the practices of *curajodie* is a sensitive topic for the Ayoreo, as they are aware of the perceptions of outsiders regarding these young women in the Mennonite colonies. As a result, the Ayoreo continue to be collectively ostracized in the minds of outsiders. The exploration of this topic and indeed most of the content of this book would not have been possible without these long-standing relationships with Ayoreo families and their children, many of whom I have followed to adulthood. The Ayoreo are a cross-border group of approximately 5,600 individuals living in Paraguay and Bolivia. They belong to the Zamuco linguistic family, one of five linguistic families that make up the nineteen indigenous groups in the country.[21] As of the 2012 census (DGEEC 2012), there were 2,481 Ayoreo individuals in Paraguay, distributed among twenty-six villages in two of the

three *departamentos* of the Chaco region: Boquerón (1,513 individuals) and Alto Paraguay (968 individuals). Most Ayoreo living in Alto Paraguay were missionized by Catholics, while the evangelical New Tribes Mission (NTM) interacted with and missionized most of the Ayoreo living in Boquerón.[22]

The present work draws from field research I conducted mainly with the Guidai-gosode subgroup, although interviews among the Totobie-gosode in Alto Paraguay also made a significant contribution to the study. The sites selected were an urban settlement and several villages. The urban settlement was a fluid community of up to 200 Ayoreo living under harsh conditions in Filadelfia in the Departamento de Boquerón. Since 2001 they have been repeatedly evicted and forced to change their location more than eight times; in 2015 they were granted the first Ayoreo urban neighborhood in Filadelfia, called Guidai Ichai, where I also conducted interviews. The villages included Campo Loro (about 270 families), which was founded by the New Tribes Mission in 1979 and serves as the mission base for the US-born missionaries living there. Campo Loro is the first and largest Ayoreo village established in the central Chaco and has played a key role in the missionization of the Ayoreo people. I also spent considerable time at Ebetogue (about 95 families), a village that was established in 1995 and supported by Mennonite missionaries whose members had split from Campo Loro. Other Ayoreo villages that provided valuable and unique opportunities to conduct this research are Arocojnandi, Tunocojai, Ijnapui, Garai, La Esquina, Jesudi, 2 de Enero, and Barrio Amistad.

While the narratives presented in this book are the result of ethnographic work among the Ayoreo people of Paraguay between 2000 and 2018, the bulk of data on Ayoreo women and their intimate practices was gathered during my longest period of uninterrupted fieldwork, sixteen months between 2009 and 2011. In 2009 I spent a month visiting Ayoreo on the Bolivian side of the border, where I interviewed and interacted with the inhabitants of the Ayoreo urban neighborhoods Barrio Bolívar and Garai in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and visited the village Puesto Paz. Between 2000 and 2005 I had conducted intermittent research activities among the Ayoreo; during that time I gained the necessary perspective to complement information on *curajodie* and Ayoreo women. Information on Mennonites comes exclusively from the residents of Fernheim Colony, one of three colonies established in the Chaco since the first immigrants arrived in the mid-1920s. Being an outsider to the Mennonite community has at times proven challenging, but my long-term presence among them has been rewarding in many ways. I gathered information on the Mennonites' system of self-administration and their history during the summer of 2006 and again in 2009–2011.

Most of the narratives of Mennonites, especially of women, were gath-

ered more recently, in the summers of 2013 through 2017. While I had been acquainted with Paraguayan migrant workers from the time of my first visits to the Ayoreo villages, until 2011 my focus on these men had been only in relation to Ayoreo women. And like most middle-class Paraguayans and Mennonites in the region, as a Paraguayan native myself I had an overall stereotyped perception of them as always violent and dangerous, and if possible, I avoided any interactions beyond our brief encounters in bars or on the street. This attitude shifted dramatically as I began my research trips to the northern Chaco, first for brief stays between 2013 and 2016 and more steadily during the summers of 2016 through 2018.

I visited large *estancias* (ranches) that have opened up in the region in the past two decades; I interviewed ranchers and talked with all kinds of employees, many of them men who had entered into liaisons with Ayoreo women. I was drawn to the region to experience the dramatic, fast-paced ecological changes taking place since my first visit in 1998, but soon I found myself intimately involved in life in this isolated expanse. In one of my early trips to the northern Chaco, I witnessed a fight among four intoxicated ranch employees that ended with the stabbing of a young man in his mid-twenties. As the only person with a vehicle, I was asked to drive the victim, covered in blood and with part of his bowels exposed, six hours through the cold winter night until we reached the Mennonite Hospital in Filadelfia. Twice during the trip he lost consciousness, and between his shock and the rush of adrenaline, I expected the worst. The Mennonite physician who operated on him said he had never seen such a "bloody attack" and remarked that the young man had survived by sheer good fortune. I remained in Filadelfia for his operation and recovery, as none of his family members had the money to make the trip to the Chaco. The experience emphatically shifted my perception of migrant workers in the Chaco. During the days at the hospital I recorded his life story and bore witness to the extreme economic poverty in which the lives of work migrants are embedded and the harsh working conditions they encounter in the Chaco. This motivated me to conduct additional research to further probe the finer points of the lives of cowboys on *estancias*.

Throughout my visits to the Chaco, my ability to freely converse in the Ayoreo language has allowed me to weave a tapestry of intergenerational narratives through interviews from all of the relevant Ayoreo social groups, the *curajodie*, youth, elders, couples, preachers, and political leaders. On another side of the social assemblage I also sought interviews with NTM missionaries, although approaching them for this purpose has been difficult for anthropologists conducting research in Paraguay, as discussed by Bessire (2014) and Renshaw (2004). A long history of differences between anthro-

pologists or civil activists and missionaries has left only limited opportunity for meaningful conversation with each other. This was my status as well until the 2009–2011 fieldwork period, when I became acquainted with one of the two NTM couples who resided in Campo Loro at the time. Originally from the United States, they had lived in Campo Loro for more than thirty years. And despite our ideological differences and opinions regarding the Ayoreo, I slowly developed a friendship with them that no doubt has generated some opposition among their colleagues. Our relationship has provided me with valuable insight into their lives and work as missionaries in Paraguay. The couple, along with a retired couple from Canada who lived among the Ayoreo between 1967 and 1972, gave me a space from which to learn about their life stories and missionary endeavors among the Ayoreo as well as the process of Ayoreo Christianization. From that time on, I participated with them, along with Ayoreo preachers, in church services in Campo Loro, and those experiences deepened my understanding of Ayoreo Christianity.

To provide a multifaceted overview of Ayoreo life, I have taken a multisited ethnographic approach that has allowed me to map the frequent movements of young Ayoreo women between the city and their villages following their interactions with different social groups. In Filadelfia I joined young women at night on the streets and became familiar with local bars. There, I also experienced firsthand the hardship faced by most Paraguayans with limited funds for housing in the colony. During my sixteen months of fieldwork in 2009–2011, high demand and high prices for housing kept me from finding a satisfactory residence for several months, during which I rejected the small, overpriced, dark rooms that workers in the colony are frequently forced to accept. In the meantime, I lived with two families. One was a family of migrants from Paraná, Brazil. Having been raised on the Paraguay-Brazil border myself and freely conversant in Portuguese, I was able to become acquainted and mingle with the small Brazilian and Catholic community in Filadelfia and learn about their experiences as a minority in a mostly evangelical social space. I was also hosted on occasion by a Paraguayan Mennonite couple. The native Guaraní speaker from eastern Paraguay met her Mennonite husband during a trip he made to visit relatives in a Mennonite colony in eastern Paraguay near her hometown. My stays with them gave me insights into the daily lives of young so-called mixed couples in the colony and the difficulties of raising children in a multicultural family there. Furthermore, my knowledge of German language paved the way for communication with members of Fernheim Colony with whom I conducted several interviews focused on the administrative system of the colony; interviewees included Mennonite employers at Fernheim Cooperative,

Figure 0.2. Mennonite monument. The northern edge of Hindenburg, Filadelfia's main street, looks deserted during an afternoon siesta. At the center is a monument commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment in 1930 of Fernheim Colony. Photo courtesy of José Argüello.

the major economic institution of the colony's administration, and other community members.

Staying in Filadelfia over time provided me many opportunities to observe members of the colony and experience its hierarchical and differentiated social space on a day-to-day basis. The differentiations became more striking as I began to move almost daily between the colony and the Ayoreo urban settlement. Another social space where this differentiation was made visible was in church services. I sporadically attended three Mennonite churches in town, one of which had services in German only. The other two churches conducted their services in Spanish and were mostly frequented by Paraguayans and some Mennonites married to Paraguayans or Brazilians. Finally, I conducted archival research in Paraguay, Bolivia, and the United States that has enriched the historical aspects of this work.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1, "Drawing Boundaries," explores how discourses fueled by imaginaries of an absent state naturalize racialized labor and social hierarchies

upon which frontier economies are constructed. Specifically, it traces the establishment of Mennonite settlers in Fernheim Colony, showing how discourses of an absent state in the region have allowed them to successfully reproduce a system of self-government and materialize their economic project. Stories of Mennonites and migrant workers unveil the social structure on which the current economic frontier rests and operates. In this chapter I also look at how the patriarchal Mennonite community is experienced by Mennonite women and how their sexuality has been crucial to help build and sustain the boundaries of the contemporary Mennonite socioeconomic hierarchy.

Chapter 2, "Liminal Masculinities," focuses on the northern Chaco frontier as an offshoot of the economic development in the central Chaco region and yet another space transformed with the active support of the Paraguayan state. Like the central Chaco, the northern Chaco exemplifies how frontiers are constructed as liminal spaces shaped by subjective experiences of masculinity, violence, and transgression. Life on the *estancias* shows how this liminal space is experienced through transgressive infrastructure, excesses, masculine experiences of labor arrangements, and perhaps most dynamically, intimate liaisons.

Chapter 3, "Labor Exclusion," shows how the missionary frontier among Ayoreo created a gender hierarchy that reified gender roles, facilitating the incorporation of men into the economy while subordinating women to the domestic realm and excluding them from the formal labor force. Their exclusion from the market, however, has not prevented women from developing their own terms of involvement with the economy, as they take a prominent role in the wage-labor arrangements of their male partners and tacitly challenge the expected terms of economic inclusion envisioned for indigenous peoples in the region.

In chapter 4, "Commodifying Sex," I explore how indigenous sexualities are constructed and enacted in frontier regions in light of rapidly changing socioeconomic and cultural processes. I trace the ethics of sexuality of older generations of Ayoreo women and their resignifications in the contemporary context. The commodification of their social relations ultimately reached the realm of sexuality, and money has now become constitutive of courting and marriage for new generations of Ayoreo. Customary values of exchange, reciprocity, and sexual autonomy persist despite the commodification of sexuality, and the circulation of money at the intimate level is a new expression of these established customary practices that have been reconfigured to accommodate the expansion of a frontier economy.

Chapter 5, "Consuming Desire," examines how the intimacy of Ayoreo women with Mennonite men is used to negotiate the overt discrimination

that Ayoreo women have historically experienced in the urban spaces of the Mennonite colonies. I highlight how *curajodie* frame their encounters with non-Ayoreo men by drawing from an understanding of monetary compensation defined in terms of help and generosity. The commodification of their sexuality with non-Ayoreo men challenges the economic logics of frontier projects, since the value of the exchange, despite the involvement of money, moves in and out of a capitalist logic. In liaisons with Mennonites, young women use the gift money to engage in conspicuous consumption, which is in turn deployed to navigate the hierarchical social space of the colonies. The experiences related in this chapter underscore how their intimacy is experienced as an intimate frontier navigated at the boundaries of racial hierarchies, transgressive desires, and capitalist/noncapitalist relations.

Chapter 6, "Negotiating Inclusion," looks at the ways young Ayoreo *curajodie* craft their sexual and emotional intimacy with Paraguayan men. In what ways are these encounters fraught with deception and violence? This chapter focuses on this question to further show how Ayoreo women experience their intimacy as a frontier dominated by transgressions, sexual excesses, and violence, all characteristics that also shape the economic frontier project of the Chaco. Unlike what occurs in liaisons with Mennonite men, in liaisons with Paraguayan men the value of the exchange resides in crafting emotional bonds. The noneconomic logics of exchange are reframed as racialized desires. The women's stories convey those desires but also intimacy that is experienced through deception and violence. While *curajodie* are experiencing their relationships with men as part of reproducing the logics of frontiers, they are also challenging these logics, as their practices are affecting Ayoreo contemporary marriage patterns and gender roles.

The conclusion, "Toward an Intimate Frontier," unites the ideas and experiences to reinforce my main argument, that as a result of their incursion into the surrounding society, Ayoreo women experience their sexuality as an intimate frontier that continually seeks to civilize and integrate them through expected gendered roles and social norms but is also experienced through transgressive desires, blurred boundaries, sexual excesses, and violence. What has occurred and continues to occur in the Paraguayan Chaco demonstrates the transformative power of moral economies to adapt to contemporary contexts. The colonization and development of the central Chaco by Mennonite settlers with the active support of the state have given rise to the emergence of a frontier with its own particular social and economic dynamics, experienced both geographically and personally.

CHAPTER 1

Drawing Boundaries

For weeks, the talk among Ayoreo *curajodie* was the Expo Rodeo Trébol. The event, organized jointly by the three Mennonite colonies of the Chaco, has become the second-largest ranching and agricultural fair in the country. For five consecutive days, the dusty dirt road that links Filadelfia with Loma Plata is packed with traffic from more than 20,000 visitors. Cars drive back and forth to the fair that is midway between the two urban centers. This is one of the few public events in the central Chaco that brings together individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds into a common social space; it is a time when locals can also mingle with visitors who come to the fair from eastern Paraguay. For Upusia and her friends, attending the expo became a kind of tradition, a perfect occasion "to have fun and flirt with white men," as she put it. "I speak Spanish very well, so men will think I'm Paraguayan. This is good because they'll give me more money if they don't realize that I'm an Ayoreo."

In her village, Campo Loro, at the age of fifteen Upusia started having liaisons with non-Ayoreo men working on a nearby *estancia*. Her father did not mind that she was sexually active with different men, as that is a socially accepted practice among Ayoreo. Still, he worried about her welfare when she spent time with men from the *estancia*. I was aware of his stance, as he would years later repeat to me on several occasions, "White men can do bad things to our girls." Tensions with her father about her outings escalated, and Upusia eventually left for Filadelfia, where she stayed with friends. It was the mid-1990s, and the *curajodie* phenomenon was slowly taking root as young Ayoreo women began to seek liaisons exclusively with non-Ayoreo men.

One of Upusia's friends was seeing a Paraguayan man who invited a group of five young women to travel with him to Asunción. Excited, Upusia

joined them, and what was to have been several days in the capital turned into almost a month. Going out almost every night, she became intimate with Paraguayans. She explained, "I went to have fun. I was young and didn't know anything about money, but men would be kind and give me money if we had sex." The stay in Asunción ended abruptly after the police raided the bus terminal where the group was hanging out. The incident was picked up by a local newspaper that labeled it a case of prostitution. Upusia told me, "The Paraguayan guy and his Ayoreo girlfriend were taken to the police station for a few days. I was under age, so they brought me back to the Chaco." Outings to Asunción by young women were rare at the time, but Upusia's narrative, rather than reflecting the traumatic event described in the newspaper, transmitted a different tone. She remembered it as a time when she learned Spanish and "got to know the city and the *cojnone* [white people]," which motivated her to make more trips to the capital to "laugh with men." Laughter is one of the ways single Ayoreo women signal sexual availability when looking for potential partners.

On the inaugural day of the Expo Rodeo Trébol, Upusia did not want to risk missing out on a spot on the wooden bleachers of the rodeo arena, so to get there early she paid Don Gómez, a local private taxi driver, to take her and her friends. As one of the first few Paraguayan residents in the colonies, he witnessed up close how Fernheim was transformed from an isolated community wary of outsiders into the main economic hub of the central Chaco, seeking to attract investors while managing to remain socially isolated until recently. The expo proudly highlights the invitation to invest in the region; the grounds are set up with carefully decorated stands displaying expensive farm equipment, veterinary supplies, and other cutting-edge ranching products. Nearby, award-winning horses and livestock are on display. The main attraction of the fair is the rodeo arena where the major events take place, the bargaining for, selling of, and awarding of prizes for livestock, as well as roping competitions, music shows, and the much-anticipated inauguration of the event.

It was on inauguration day that Upusia met Sawatzky. His grandparents were among approximately one hundred Mennonite families who left Fernheim Colony for lowland Bolivia in 1954 and established the first Paraguayan Mennonite community across the border, where Sawatzky grew up. Unlike their Paraguayan counterparts, the Bolivian community remained closed and had little exposure to outsiders. Neither did Sawatzky until in 2011 he was forced to flee to Paraguay, where friends helped him find a job in Filadelfia. A tall blond man with broad shoulders and small brown eyes, he seemed even taller next to Upusia when I met him. By his mid-forties,

he had left a wife and three children back in Bolivia. The reasons were unclear, as he refused to discuss them with Upusia or with me when I inquired one afternoon. Unable to find housing, like most workers living in Filadelfia, he rented a small, dark, wood-frame room with poor ventilation and a shared bathroom.

Upusia seemed happy around him but continued to see other men as well, as it is a common practice for Ayoreo single women to have multiple partners before getting married. A year after they met, he was hired to manage a newly established ranch belonging to a Mennonite near Agua Dulce in the district of Bahía Negra, the new northern hub of economic development in the Chaco. Sawatzky welcomed the opportunity but wanted to take Upusia with him. His employer firmly refused that option, stating, "No Ayoreo prostitute will be brought to my ranch, under any circumstances." Sawatzky recounted the story and was obviously offended. He wanted me to intercede in his favor so Upusia would understand the situation, as he did not want to lose the job opportunity. But she had already made up her mind that she was unwilling to sustain a long-distance relationship.

Not long after Upusia and Sawatzky separated, I encountered Don Gómez, the taxi driver, again in Filadelfia. With an imposing demeanor despite his short stature and advanced age, Don Gómez immediately comes across as an intimidating individual. As always, eager to share the latest gossip in town, he insinuated that Sawatzky's move to the north might have been related to the sexual assaults that had come to light in a Bolivian Mennonite community.[1] He murmured, "Ajendu ha'e ojota Chaco-ruguare. Upepe ikatu mamave ndotopa-moai chupe" (I've heard that he went to the backwoods of the Chaco. No one will be able to find him there).

Ruguare is a term in Guaraní, an indigenous language spoken by the majority of the population in Paraguay, that literally translates as "tail" and is commonly used to refer to the Chaco as a place of isolation.[2] Paraguayans going to work as cowboys on *estancias* commonly use the term to indicate the location of their work sites: "Amba'apo Chaco ruguare" (I work in the backwoods of the Chaco). The meaning of this phrase highlights the Chaco as the edge of civilization. Also denoting this spatial isolation, early Mennonite writers popularized the term "green hell" in their depictions of the region to connote a harsh environment where chances of survival were dim. The term has reinforced a contemporary discourse that emphasizes how Mennonites turned this inhospitable environment into a ranching and agricultural oasis and has fostered perceptions that construct the Chaco as a frontier. Such discourses obscure how Mennonites, with the active sup-

port of the Paraguayan state, have established a patriarchal socioeconomic structure built on a racialized labor force and a discriminatory social space. It is in these masculinist and hierarchical spaces that men like Sawatzky might escape accusations of assault and women like Upusia might hinder their partners' abilities to find jobs because of their own ethnicity.

Tracing the establishment of the Mennonites in Fernheim Colony shows how discourses of an absent state in the region have allowed them to successfully reproduce a system of self-government and materialize their economic project. The project is epitomized in the Expo Rodeo Trébol, which incentivizes national discourses that attribute the economic success of the region to Mennonites' faith and hard work. But the stories of Mennonites and Paraguayan migrant workers reflect the hierarchical and racialized social structure on which the current economic frontier rests and operates. Moreover, the narratives of Mennonite women show how their sexuality has been crucial to help build and sustain the boundaries of the contemporary Mennonite socioeconomic hierarchy and highlight how female Mennonites experience the patriarchal community.

The Mennonite Frontier Project

Lidia works at the gas station in Filadelfia. She is originally from a small village outside of Concepción near the Chaco in eastern Paraguay; she moved to the Chaco after marrying Torsten, a divorced Mennonite truck driver who works for Fernheim Cooperative. He is on the road six days a week transporting agricultural commodities to market outlets in Asunción, 280 miles away, and bringing back construction materials or other goods that the cooperative resells to locals. This exhausting job hardly leaves him time to spend with his family, although Lidia appreciates the material comforts that his income helps provide. From her perch as a cashier, every year Lidia witnesses the intensity of the expo. I was aware of her position at the center of activity and decided to seek her opinion. As a Paraguayan married to a Mennonite, Lidia has struggled over the years to be recognized by the Mennonite community, so it was very important for her to voice her support of Mennonites. I immediately sensed a judgmental tone in her words:

> The expo is good for us. It brings in money. But it also shows to *asunceños* [residents of Asunción] that the Chaco is not this backward place, as many tend to think. If it wasn't for the Mennonites we wouldn't have all we have here. This is not just another village, like my hometown in eastern Paraguay. Paraguayans don't know how to work.

Her sentiment about Mennonites is shared by many Paraguayans. National news outlets reproduce similar views that emphasize Mennonite hard work and faith as the developmental engine of the region. The 2018 expo is described in a national newspaper as follows: "It demonstrates the transformations that the Chaco Region is undergoing. The displays of new technology, the incursion of extensive farming, and the evolution of livestock breeding are indicators of the ample development of a territory with a bright future to keep on achieving" (Gilbert 2018).

The Expo Rodeo Trébol is, as one of the organizers characterized it, the "display window" of the Chaco and an opportunity to showcase the success story of the Mennonites in the region and their potential. This is how Egon Neufeld, a veterinary doctor and president of the event for 2018, expressed it in a national newspaper: "We can't look forward without knowing on what foundation we're building. So it is that Expo Rodeo Trébol shows how the Chaco has progressed in its history of development over time" (Neufeld 2018). In a video promotion of the forty-fourth season of the fair in 2018, Neufeld, wearing a black cowboy hat, states,

> Last year the slogan was "Ven a palpar la producción y la tierra" [Come palpate the production and the land], and a lot of new people came to do that, and it was a total success, but we also want to start to savor the future, because the future is coming with a demand for the technology that is already here. Five years ago we would never have dreamed of growing soybeans in the Chaco. Today the Chaco has the potential for growing 1,236,000 acres of this crop thanks to the technology available and already making its way into the Chaco. (In Paraguay Magazine Digital 2018)

Neufeld draws on the imaginary of the Chaco as a frontier area full of potential, evoking palpation as a sensory image to convey a means to experience and feel its development. Palpation is a technique of diagnosis, the process of examining a body, using the sense of touch on external parts or cavities to access the interior. A call to experience the Chaco and its economic development through the intimacy of touch continues a trend that has historically constructed the Chaco as a geographical and social space to be penetrated, civilized, now palpated, and it is followed by an invitation for the Chaco to be savored. It is precisely this idea of the Chaco as a frontier region, evoked by individuals like Neufeld, that allowed a group of Mennonites to establish themselves in the region in the mid-1920s.

The Chaco has been constructed at the margins of the Paraguayan state. By the turn of the twentieth century, the presence of the state was evident in military posts and indirectly in mission stations established through-

out the region, including in Ayoreo territory (Durán Estragó 2000; Grubb 1925; Susnik and Chase Sardi 1995). The state saw the colonization of the area as part of a geopolitical strategy to ensure its claim of ownership, which was being disputed with Bolivia. Following the same logic of capital expansion in other frontier zones (Guy and Sheridan 1998; Schmink and Wood 1984), this rhetoric of the Chaco as *terra nullius* had enabled the conditions for a process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003). Depicted as a spatially isolated no-man's land, it was therefore open to settlement and economic development. Under this premise, most of the territories of the region had transitioned into public lands by the nineteenth century, to then be sold to foreign investors and other private capital, which funded the establishment of tannin industries (Blaser 2010; Bonifacio 2017) and what was to become the region's main economic activity, cattle ranching.

After World War I, Canadian Mennonite descendants of those who had left Russia for Canada in 1874 were looking for a country in South America that would grant them special privileges to protect their religious identity. At the time, the Canadian government had passed a national education law by which Mennonites living in the country would have to stop using the German language in their education system.[3] The law was perceived as a threat to the reproduction of Mennonite identity and served as an impetus for some conservative Mennonite communities to leave Canada (Stoesz 2008). They considered Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay but were not satisfied with the type of privileges they would receive.

The Paraguayan ambassador to the United States, Manuel Gondra, was interested in inviting this group of Mennonites to settle the Chaco. A few years later, as president of the country, he and his new ambassador to the United States, Eligio Ayala, became the main promoters of the Mennonite settlement project in the Paraguayan Chaco (Klassen 2004). To attract their establishment in Paraguay, the government granted Mennonites special privileges through Law 514 of 1921, which spurred heated debate between members of the Senate before being approved. The privileges included freedom of religious practice, exemption from military service and the taking of oaths, the right to establish their own schools, freedom to teach the German language, and the right to self-administration in several areas (Klassen 2004).[4] Supporters of the law argued that the privileges would not represent any threat to the Paraguayan state because "the area of the Mennonite colonies is so remote that it would essentially be beyond the reach of the laws of the state" (Klassen 2004:49). A member of the opposing group, Senator Gerónimo Zubizarreta, contended that the decision to settle the Mennonites conflicted with the constitution, as doing so would delineate two types of citizens, effectively creating a "State within a State" (in Klassen

2004:48). Zubizarreta's argument would prove to be prophetic, as the Mennonites would indeed establish a system of self-government characterized by racialized hierarchies that has led to different types of economic citizenship in the region.[5]

Work Migrants to the Mennonite Colonies

While the Expo Rodeo Trébol drives middle-class and upper-class individuals to the Chaco seeking to invest, economic poverty and a desire for a better future drive young and impoverished men from eastern Paraguay to the region. Since the 1990s the central Chaco has become one of the main hubs for receiving these young workers. The influx of a migrant labor force to the colonies, however, is not a phenomenon of recent times. Migrations of Paraguayan mestizo campesinos to the region began during the tannin boom of 1890–1920. Later on, military personnel assigned to the region as well as families of ranch cowboys would also settle in the Chaco. The second and third generations of these families today self-identify as *chaqueños*, a group that draws on the geographic location as a marker of identity to differentiate themselves from campesinos from eastern Paraguay.

The Mennonite colonies received their initial Paraguayan work migrants during the mid-1960s, when their economy began to take off after the initial decades of hardships following their establishment.[6] The construction in the 1960s of the Trans-Chaco Highway connecting the colonies to Asunción was key to their economic development.[7] Up to that point, the region was geographically isolated, and the only connection to Asunción was the Paraguay River, which for Mennonites meant eight to fifteen days of travel, first by oxcart to Puerto Casado and from there by boat to Asunción. The Trans-Chaco Highway shifted the dynamic dramatically. It alleviated the geographic isolation of the colonies and greatly aided the marketing of their agricultural and dairy products. Furthermore, the highway opened up the central Chaco to an influx of workers who, with time, would modify the character of the colonies. As migrants arrived, they congregated in unwelcomed labor camps on the outskirts of Fernheim Colony, typically on the side of the road. By the 1980s the number of people living in tents had grown significantly (Fritz 2011). The waves of workers came from different regions of eastern Paraguay but mostly from Concepción, a city near the Chaco that for decades had remained underserved, underdeveloped, and isolated from the rest of the country due to the strong opposition of its population to the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner from 1954 to 1989.[8]

To solve the migration problem, in 1987 the Mennonites created an offi-

cial foundation, COVE-Chaco (Cooperación Vecinal, Cooperation among Neighbors), to resettle the worker camps (Klassen 2004). That was when the first Paraguayan village was formed, under the name Villa Choferes del Chaco, a name given in remembrance of the Chaco War veterans who served as drivers during the conflict. Located on the Trans-Chaco Highway nine miles from Filadelfia, the town was established next to the military base of an engineering battalion.[9] The stark spatial divide between Mennonites and Paraguayans through the establishment of Villa Choferes del Chaco was part of a broader Mennonite ideological project to maintain the community's isolation from outsiders, the same mindset that originally brought them to the Chaco. With that goal in mind, they also created and naturalized ethnic rather than religious categories of the local population. The Mennonites' initial social-spatial differentiation from the non-Mennonite population in the present reproduces practices of racism and exclusion in the colonies. This needs to be understood in part as a response to their own experiences of abjection and exclusion in the diaspora where they lived for centuries as refugees persecuted as they sought to reproduce their religious and social identity. This response, of course, should not be used to justify the contemporary forms of discrimination that different groups of people experience in the colonies.

Alongside Paraguayans, Brazilian and Brazilian-descent families had begun to arrive in Filadelfia by the 1980s. Unlike wealthy Brazilians who would later colonize the northern Chaco with *estancias*, this group belonged to individuals of low socioeconomic background who migrated to Paraguay in the 1970s. They were families who settled mostly in the Departamento de Caaguazú in eastern Paraguay.

Don Aparecido is one of the Brazilian pioneers in Filadelfia. Like many other migrants, he experienced a series of adversities before he was able to successfully establish his own business in the colony. His family had left a small town in the Brazilian state of Paraná, which borders Paraguay. The infamous frost of 1975 that decimated most of the coffee production in the region affected the farm where his father was employed.[10] Left with nothing, the entire family migrated to Paraguay in an effort to find work. Already in Paraguay and after an unsuccessful stint in the Departamento de Alto Paraná, they moved to the Departamento de Caaguazú, where many other Brazilian families previously settled. Don Aparecido had eleven siblings, and all of them helped their father in the *chacra* (small farm). A strong young man at the time, he was determined to support his parents and the household with temporary jobs day and night. His income was crucial for

the family to survive, as the *chacra* did not always ensure sufficient revenue. In 1981 he was invited by a friend to work on a ranch in the Chaco, and that is how he arrived in Filadelfia the same year.

When I met him, he was comfortably sitting behind his office desk in a fancy air-conditioned office near downtown Filadelfia. With a passionate tone, he recounted his story: "As soon as I arrived in Filadelfia after a few months of work on the *estancia*, I changed my mind and wanted to stay and work in the colony. It didn't matter to me in which of their stores. I wanted to live here and become part of the community." He made an unsuccessful attempt to settle, but a Mennonite from Colonia 6 eventually hired him in a metalworking shop as a welder, a skill he brought from eastern Paraguay. A goal-oriented individual, he soon had a new objective of starting his own metal business. This is how he put it: "I had the vision but no money at the time. I did have a car, so I would go to Oriental [eastern Paraguay] and bring cheap materials and sell them for double in the colony. This is how I started. I would make up to three trips a month." It took Don Aparecido's intense effort to open and operate his own business in Filadelfia.

A dark-skinned man, he encountered and fought the ostracism and discrimination of Mennonites for years before his business began to thrive. He proudly shared with me that he was one of the first Brazilians who was able to buy a house in the colony. I was aware of Mennonite politics of closing themselves to outsiders until at least the late 1980s, so it surprised me that Don Aparecido was able to make that home purchase. Later, this made sense once I learned that his wife is a Brazilian of German descent with an acquaintance in Filadelfia who sold them the property. "That's when I started having problems with Mennonites," Don Aparecido said. "They didn't appreciate having an outsider owning a place in Filadelfia unless they were somehow related to the colony." Things did not get any better once he established his own metal shop.

Two stories Don Aparecido told me vividly illustrate the discrimination he encountered in the beginning. One afternoon he was sitting in the shop, drinking *tereré*, a cold infusion of yerba mate, with two of his employees, a Paraguayan and an *indígena*, when a Mennonite arrived. Not saying a word, the visitor walked past them toward the back of the shop, returned, and approached Don Aparecido with the question "Hay gente acá?" (Are there people here?), to which he replied, pointing to himself and his two workers, "Yes—me, him, and him, we're here." But the Mennonite quickly replied, "I mean white people," to which Don Aparecido countered, "No, we don't have any of those here." Seemingly annoyed, the visitor left. For Don Aparecido, this was common treatment from Mennonites for a long time. On

another occasion, while waiting for a customer, a Mennonite man came in asking for the boss, and Don Aparecido replied that he was the boss. The man looked at him in a strange way and asked, "You're the boss? Do you have enough to eat? You better, because from here on you won't get any." Then the Mennonite turned around and left.

Today, Don Aparecido's metal shop is one of the largest and most competitive in town. At the entrance to his office hangs a golden plaque with the seal of a governmental office. Above it hangs a red, white, and blue Paraguayan flag. The plaque was a recognition of his efforts to generously open his house and devote his time to serving as a paralegal aide to Brazilian migrants who lacked legal documents to live and work in Paraguay. Notwithstanding the racism he experienced, he told these stories with a sense of pride: "All of that I've had to suffer, in my face. But I've never mistreated anyone who came to my shop—no one." I asked, "Would you say that things have changed today?" He replied,

> Yes, because they lost their power. Today we have here 5,000 to 6,000 Paraguayans and Brazilians who can survive without depending on them. Today I don't need a Mennonite to survive. Before, it wasn't like that. You either worked for the Mennonites or you had to close your business because there were no outsiders. I am very proud of all that I have, since I was illiterate and never had the chance to go to school. But look at what I have built despite all that.

Brazilians like Don Aparecido and Paraguayans have experienced an overt Mennonite politics of exclusion articulated by discourses that use economic criteria to define Mennonite social worth and attribute economic success to inherent cultural, racial, or technological superiority.[11]

Prior to the work migration of Brazilians and Paraguayans to the region, Fernheim Colony already had a history of labor relations with indigenous peoples living in the region since its establishment in 1930. In general, the economic expansion of the central Chaco during the first half of the twentieth century had a detrimental impact on indigenous peoples, who, suffering land encroachment and having limited access to natural resources, became increasingly dependent on the regional economy for their livelihoods. This drove them to the colonies, which would become one of the main nodes of development in the region. The labor force was initially welcomed by Mennonites, who assumed a civilizing role toward the native people. But the work relations would soon come under scrutiny.[12]

Walter Quiring, a German researcher who visited Fernheim Colony in the 1930s, speculated that the indigenous workers would develop into a "Chaco proletariat" that would provide "cheap labor to the colonists' farms" (in Klassen 2002:70). Increasing labor migrations and tensions between indigenous peoples and Mennonites obliged the latter to establish agricultural settlements for workers on the outskirts of the colony by the early 1960s with the support of the Mennonite Central Committee (Loewen 1964; Stahl 1982). The indigenous presence grew from 3,000 in 1951 to approximately 10,000 individuals by 1976 (Redekop 1980). Access to freely moving labor power that readily adapts to the shifting spaces of capital is critical for the development of an economic enclave (Harvey 1991). Living in close proximity and having temporary access to work, indigenous peoples formed a latent labor reserve that could be conveniently drawn upon as needed.

Several scholars have noted the deplorable labor conditions of indigenous peoples in the colonies at the time (Basso 1973; Hack 1977; Loewen 1964).[13] In 1971, Paraguayan anthropologist Miguel Chase-Sardi denounced Mennonite employers at a famous international symposium on indigenous peoples.[14] He condemned the existing labor conditions, describing them as debt-slavery, since indigenous peoples were paid less than Mennonites for the same work. He also noted that most transactions with indigenous laborers were made not in cash but rather in chits, fostering their dependence on Mennonites for their livelihoods (Dostal 1972). Today, marginal labor conditions and meager salaries continue to be a reality for most indigenous peoples in the Mennonite colonies and the region as a whole. Like the communities of Paraguayan and Brazilian migrants, the indigenous *barrios obreros* (workers' neighborhoods), which were established during the 1960s,[15] have also expanded, albeit with resistance from Mennonites.

The way Mennonites dealt with the influx of outsiders, which would alter their project of social isolation, was by creating socioeconomic institutions that would allow them to sustain social differentiation. They successfully established a racial hierarchy, evident not only in the spatial arrangements but also in the labor arrangements in the colony. Indigenous peoples are at the bottom of the labor structure, some performing agricultural and ranching jobs and others working in the colony's factories. Paraguayans were initially hired for ranch work, but their rank has been consistently higher than that of indigenous peoples. Now many Paraguayans work in retail and other industry-related activities. The labor force of Brazilian migrants has come to occupy an even higher rank than that of Paraguayans because of their ethnicity and the knowledge of German some of them possessed. Mostly hired as machinery operators, many Brazilians have taken over positions origi-

nally occupied by Mennonites. But the labor hierarchy is not as cohesive as this simplified structure might indicate. For example, some Brazilians eventually acquired their own machinery and hired Paraguayans to perform the labor. Don Aparecido's brother-in-law is a case in point. He became an operator who saved money, bought a used bulldozer from his boss, used it for several years, and eventually purchased his own 2,470-acre ranch.

The Mennonite community of Fernheim itself is also very stratified. Although they arrived in the Chaco under conditions of extreme material poverty and later strived to reproduce a more or less economically homogeneous group through their communal system of administration, over time they developed into a socioeconomically stratified group although perceived as homogeneous by outsiders. The stratification becomes particularly evident in their contemporary labor arrangements. There are individuals in the lower ranks of the Mennonite community who are usually truck drivers or machinery operators, positions that non-Mennonites also hold. At the other end of the spectrum, there are wealthy Mennonite families who own successful businesses such as ranches or machinery operation companies. This differentiation has become particularly stark since the mid-2000s as economic inequalities within the community have expanded. Regardless, the social institutions of the colony's administration continue to foster equal access to economic opportunities and social services for Mennonites as a group as long as they remain members of the colony's cooperative system.

The fact that Mennonites, like Paraguayans or Brazilians, can also be truck drivers or machinery operators is yet another expression of the lack of clear boundaries within the overall labor hierarchy. The hierarchy puts Mennonites at the top, followed by Brazilian migrants, then Paraguayans, and finally indigenous peoples at the bottom; it has been naturalized and is constantly being reinforced in tandem with social hierarchies that stratify access to social services and shape other aspects of life in the colonies.

Mennonite Self-Government

Today, Filadelfia is home to about 17,500 individuals, of whom 14 percent are Mennonites, 30 percent Paraguayans and Brazilian immigrants, and about 56 percent indigenous (Fritz, personal communication 2018); it is estimated that Brazilians number around 3,000 individuals. The city is structured in ways iconic of the social tensions between the different groups that inhabit it. Space is crafted in a hierarchal fashion resembling colonial contexts, where the divide between natives and settlers is obvious (Fanon 2008

[1952]). Paraguayans and Mennonites attend different churches, and Plautdietsch (Low German) is still actively used. Importantly, the Fernheim Cooperative system established in 1944 initially served to facilitate the financial management of the Mennonites' growing economy for the settlers; over time it allowed Mennonites to distinguish themselves in relation to outsiders by means of unequal distribution of resources and access to services. These include a different health care system, schools, and housing benefits.

But as Achille Mbembe has argued (2004) in the case of South Africa, the social binary in urban spaces is never totalizing, as racial segments do interact. In Filadelfia this happens intermittently in public spaces, most importantly at work sites. Nevertheless, this spatial arrangement, in place for more than seven decades, shifted somewhat with the neoliberal decentralization of the Paraguayan state during the late 1990s. Up to then, Mennonites had their own police, locally known as *agentes del orden*, who were eventually replaced by national police.[16] Since then, the administrative functions of the national government have come to play an active role in the region through municipalities. In 2006 Filadelfia established its first Paraguayan municipality; until then, the community's *Stadtamt* (municipality) functioned independently from the system of municipalities that governs the rest of the country.

Relinquishing the Mennonite municipal system has involved uneasy negotiations with members of the Paraguayan government and has created tensions, as the municipal government has no legal rights over most of Filadelfia because the land on which it was established belongs to the colony. This can be traced back to the arrival of the Mennonites, at which point they adopted a communal land-tenure system that had been previously established in Russia; in the system, families have rights of usufruct over residential and farming parcels that are communally owned by the colony.[17] Fernheim also established the same organizational structure as had been used in Russia (Klassen 2004). The main authority of the colony is the *Oberschultze* (administrator), who also serves as president of the cooperative and is elected by all members of the colony. Spatially the colony is divided into twenty-six *Dorfen* (villages, *colonias*) that surround the city of Filadelfia.

Alongside the new municipal institutions arose the first so-called Paraguayan neighborhoods within Filadelfia; the first was Villa Dollinger in 1996 for Paraguayan public officers, then Villa Amistad in 2000 for Paraguayan and Brazilian working families. The city later expanded to include new Paraguayan neighborhoods such as Villa Primavera, Barrio Florida, and more recently Barrio Florida Sur.[18] Most of the properties in these neighborhoods continue to be under the Mennonite communal land-tenure

system and are therefore still subject to the laws and regulations of the colony's administration and not just the municipality. This system, which gives preferential benefits to its members, reveals the power of the colony's administration to control and regulate spatial arrangements in the city, thereby fostering unequal relations of power vis-à-vis non-Mennonites.

In the same way, Mennonites have used the cooperative system as a way to restrict access to social services exclusively to their members. Doing so has been possible through the creation of the Asociación Civil Fernheim, a civil association linked to the cooperative that is sustained by the support of members. The association has had an adverse impact on Paraguayans and indigenous peoples in the region, who are mostly nonmembers, since the main institutions that provide social services in Filadelfia belong to the cooperative. For example, the education costs of cooperative members are subsidized, whereas those of nonmembers are not.

Through intense lobbying, Mennonites have also achieved the extralegal power to maintain their own customized health insurance system for indigenous peoples, known as the Caja de Ayuda Mutua Hospitalaria. By law, all employers in Paraguay are required to enroll their employees in governmental health insurance. However, the Mennonites are exempt because they do not participate in the governmental system. The reason, they argue, is that the governmental system is bureaucratic and corrupt. It follows that the Mennonite health care system has no legal status within Paraguayan laws. Although the national government is aware of this extralegal status, officials overlook it by contending that it supports indigenous peoples in the region. While members of the cooperative enjoy a 70 percent discount on the total cost of hospital services, nonmembers do not have access to those services if they do not work for Mennonite employers. Indigenous peoples receive attention through a differentiated health care service at the Clínica Indígena, a primary health post located outside the Mennonites' Hospital Filadelfia. To be admitted to Hospital Filadelfia, indigenous residents must have logged a certain amount of uninterrupted work hours with their Mennonite employers, which almost never happens for Ayoreo. If admitted to this hospital, they are given attention in a separate "indigenous" ward.

Mennonites say they are open to the participation of outsiders in their cooperative system, but non-Mennonite participation nevertheless remains low. That is because individuals have to be approved by the colony administration to be admitted as members and have to contribute between 10 percent and 17 percent of their annual incomes to the cooperative. Such an amount is not within the means of most of the area's Paraguayan and indigenous workers, who earn lower wages than Mennonites.

The decentralization process in the Chaco has unexpectedly led to increased political participation of non-Mennonite actors in different government agencies. However, only Mennonites have reached the highest positions of power in local government institutions; their prominence contributes to the invisibility of the Paraguayan state for local people, a perception Mennonites actively advocate to sustain their symbolic power regionally. The divide is deeply embedded in the local imaginary and best described in the hierarchies of adherence mentioned to me by an indigenous leader: "First Jesus Christ, then the Mennonites, and lastly the Paraguayan state."

The current Mennonite system of administration reflects how the power to regulate and control is not simply a capacity stored within the state, from where it extends out into society, as Timothy Mitchell (2006) would argue. Moving away from discourses that emphasize the absolute absence of the state in the region, the existing socioeconomic and political order is a result of overlapping institutional workings, direct and indirect, between the Paraguayan state and Mennonites. These workings have allowed the colonies to effectively become the main social and economic institution operating in the region. The monopoly over social and economic services reverberates through all levels of society, sharply drawing boundaries between groups.

The Patriarchal Structure of the Mennonite Community

Today, the public face of Fernheim Colony is notably male. The Mennonite community, like Paraguayan society at large, characterizes itself as a patriarchal structure in which the role of women is limited in economic and political spheres. Men occupy the highest positions in administration and public office. Meanwhile, Mennonite women run family stores or work as nurses or teachers, two common vocations.[19] Fernheim Cooperative now employs a few professionally trained female Mennonites in its managerial positions. This is a significant shift from previous decades, but still "much more can and should be done to include women within the cooperative structure," a female administrative officer told me.

The growing economic power of the cooperative has turned it into one of the most important political institutions of the colony. This creates tensions between the economic leadership of the cooperative and the religious leaders of the community, especially since the latter have traditionally held political authority.[20] The cooperative structure itself displays a gendered hierarchy, as a woman's political status is recognized as "dependent" on male

heads of the household. This legal capacity restricts women from voting in decision-making assemblies. If interested in doing so, they must become nominal members, a status that comes with extra fees that stifle their interest in taking active participation. Most of the few voting women are widows, as they are permitted to vote in place of their deceased husbands. The only other instance in which the cooperative has granted women voting status has been in cases of mixed marriages with Paraguayan men. For many decades the cooperative did not allow Paraguayan men married to Mennonite women to become members; in those cases, membership was a role their Mennonite wives assumed until recently. The stories of two generations of women from Fernheim Colony illustrate ways women have experienced their subordinated status in the colony. Although the stories cannot be generalized to all women in the Mennonite community, they represent women's subjective experiences in three historical periods. Importantly, they also illuminate the key role women have played in the establishment and development of the colony, especially during its initial years.

Betty is in her mid-fifties. She was born and raised in Fernheim Colony but left when she turned eighteen to study in Asunción. After becoming a lawyer, she returned to the Chaco and eloped with a Mennonite man, but her marriage did not last. Her divorce in the 1980s was a major local scandal in which, in the eyes of the community, she was portrayed as the one at fault rather than her husband. Colony members' perceptions drove her to take her children and move to Asunción definitively, as she was not able to bear the social pressure of the blame placed upon her. Since then, she has been back only sporadically to visit her parents, who now live in the community's *Altheim* (elder house). Fernheim Colony has a state-of-the-art retirement housing program for members of the cooperative. One of the communal features of the thriving capitalist colony gives members the chance, regardless of their economic status, to apply for living assistance once they turn seventy.

I met Betty during one of her visits to Filadelfia, at her parents' semi-abandoned house on Unruh Street. With a bitter tone, she shared, "They never really took women seriously in this colony. Our mothers did hard work. In addition to having multiple children and running the household, they would actively work in the gardens, milk cows, and engage in many other agricultural and construction activities. This is what actually allowed men like my father to take leadership positions in the colony." To learn more about Betty and her family, I paid a visit to her mother, Anne, a first-generation migrant to the Chaco. Still strong and sharp in her eighties, she

Figure 1.1. An elder Mennonite woman with a nurse on the grounds of Filadelfia's *Altheim*. Photo by the author.

received me in her private room at the *Altheim* with a kind smile and eagerness to engage in conversation. In Hochdeutsch (High German), she eloquently narrated how her family journeyed from what is now Ukraine to Paraguay when she was a baby and how she grew up in the midst of hardships in Colonia 9 during the initial years of Fernheim. She vividly remembered those early years: "I only stopped feeling hungry by the fifth year of being here. By then we had enough produce in the vegetable garden and milk to drink. Oh, and how we treasured watermelons!"

During their first year, new families had the right to food rations to sustain themselves. In addition, each family was given two oxen, one cow, five chickens, and a laying hen. This support was received through the Mennonite Central Committee, the international Mennonite agency that also extended a loan to Fernheim Colony to buy the land where it was established (Klassen 2004). Although not the case with Anne's family, the number of female heads of household was large as a result of the sickness and death from typhus and other maladies involved in the journey to Paraguay and during the initial years of the settlement. However, the Mennonite Central Committee considered female-headed households to be "weak" and "des-

tined to fail," so these women received less support and experienced even more hardships; their success came with a price that included jealousy and social exclusion (M. Epp 2000). The sufferings of the initial years of settlement were also documented by Emmy Barth (2009), a Hutterin woman who with a group of families was temporarily hosted by Fernheim Colony during the 1940s.[21] In her memoir Barth describes her shock at how Mennonite children "looked so skinny and full of worms" and how they worked ceaselessly alongside their parents. Their condition discouraged her and other members of her group from staying and raising their own children there. Besides the hunger and other difficulties new settlers encountered, the narratives of hardship also testify to the unequal gendered roles instituted in the colony since its beginning, as recalled by Anne.

> Those were hard times. Our colony's motto was *Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz* [common good before self good], and therefore my father had to give most of his time to work for the colony building roads and infrastructure. But this left my mother on her own to do all the work around the house and in our plots. She only had a shovel but had to grow a garden to feed us all, including my father.

As a child, Anne worked intensely alongside her mother. "All the women worked very hard," she said. "I don't remember one man who could whitewash walls. It was us, the women, who did even that." Mennonite women were also in charge of making adobe bricks, as described by a local Mennonite in his family history, "mixing clay and straw and kneading with their feet until the mixture reached the necessary consistency to be placed in molds, doing the molding, and then placing the bricks in the sun to dry."[22]

Growing up, Anne began to read books, an activity she loved because it took her out of the world she knew: "Books stimulated my interest in becoming a teacher." But her father's decision was definitive; they had no money to support her studies, and regardless, she was expected to support the household. As she grew older and more stubborn about studying, her mother gave her the hidden savings she had accumulated over time and interceded with her husband until he finally agreed to allow Anne to study. Later in her own marriage, Anne was to take charge of her household, children, and vegetable garden. This time she had an added responsibility, to teach at the local school in the colony where they lived. "It was so much work that I eventually had to leave the teaching position," she told me, "but the head teacher was so happy with my work that he asked my husband to allow me to return. Back then our husbands made all the decisions

for us women. My husband consented, and this was how I finally resumed teaching."

Anne said the status of women still had not reached parity with that of men in the colony, and women still depended on the decisions of their husbands. One afternoon I found her sitting on her bed at the *Altheim*, surrounded by souvenirs, posters of pedigreed horses on European landscapes, and pictures of her grandchildren. As I greeted her, she said, "Let me tell you, I just read in the newspaper that a friend of mine died. She passed away with cancer. Sadly, she was made a member of the cooperative only after her husband died, which was just a few months before she herself passed away." In a frustrated outburst she exclaimed, "Only now, in the coffin, is she considered a member of the cooperative!" The conversation that followed focused on her concerns about the garden, which she was not able to tend since she left her house on Unruh Street to move to the *Altheim*.

The lived experiences of these women give a clear glimpse into the patriarchal structure of the community, based on Christian models of male-led household leadership. However, women also crafted their own spaces of sociality in which they would often cook together, knit, and build a sense of female community. But their stories also unveil the internal hierarchy of gender roles within the community that are key to understanding how the sexuality of Mennonite women later would be deployed to craft racial boundaries and sustain unequal relations toward outsiders.

Policing the Boundaries: Mennonite Female Sexuality

During the Dutch colonial expansion in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, *métissage* (miscegenation) was considered a challenge to European middle-class family order and racial frontiers. Ann Laura Stoler (2002) has found that the *métis* emerged as a concept, though not a legal category, signaling the potential destruction of the empire from within. Hence, shaping the cultural identity of the *métis* as European became a political priority. In a similar fashion, the intimacy of Mennonite women with non-Mennonite men has been the object of strict control and enforcement since the establishment of Fernheim Colony. But rather than a nationalist ideology, it was religious principles that drove their seclusion from outsiders in the Chaco. A discourse of racial superiority, along with the policing of women's sexuality, became important aspects of upholding social differentiation to avoid a process of racial mixing with Paraguayans or indigenous people, which, like

métissage, was perceived as detrimental to the reproduction of Mennonite identity. As might be imagined, however, remaining isolated was a difficult project to sustain from the very beginning, especially in intimate matters.

The Chaco War of 1932–1935 led to the initial contacts between Mennonites and outsiders who were mostly military personnel, as the colonies had become a supply source for troops, and many were stationed in the region (Klassen 1976).[23] Already in the 1930s, shortly after the colony was established, the first few emblematic cases of single Mennonite women "running away" with Paraguayans appeared. Sabine was one of the first young women to leave the colony with a Paraguayan military official. An elderly woman who knew Sabine's parents recalled, "Her parents were not believers. His father would drink and sleep around with indigenous women. They saw only death when they looked into the future. Back in Russia the scenario was bleak, and during their initial decades here in the Chaco too. Since they thought that only death lay ahead, nothing mattered to them." The story goes that the official waited for Sabine at the entrance to Filadelfia in his green military jeep. Young and beautiful, Sabine left with a small suitcase and was never seen again.

Intimate liaisons with outsiders such as this were morally condemned and strictly prohibited by the Mennonite community. For many decades, mixed marriages with outsiders led to excommunication of mostly women from the community, and many of the couples were forced to leave the colony. The opposition to Paraguayan men stemmed particularly from stereotypes about them, constructed in part as a result of encounters between Mennonites and Paraguayan military personnel during the war, but it also stemmed from the broader national imaginary of the Chaco as a place of outlaws. In this context, Mennonites upheld their racial superiority over locals and prevented young women from associating with these men. Moreover, as noticed by the sociologist Calvin Redekop, who conducted research in the colonies in 1971-1972, Mennonites strived to remain socially isolated and avoid "mixing with unbelievers" (1980:129). Ostracism mostly of women who became intimately associated with outsiders played a key role in maintaining isolation. Women like Sabine had to leave the colony if they became involved with non-Mennonite men.

In the late 1960s Elke married Antonio, a Paraguayan government official working in a regional office of the Ministry of Defense in Filadelfia. The office was one of the first public institutions other than the military to establish a presence in the colonies. Elke's brother recalls, "She was intelligent and beautiful. She had been trained as a teacher but married someone she

was forbidden to marry." The family deeply regretted her marriage to Antonio, especially as they found out that he had a wife and children back in Asunción but had deceived Elke and her family by introducing himself as single. "All that the guy knew was how to eat; you know, a good person but he didn't like to work," her brother told me as we sat on the ornate porch overlooking a garden full of flowers at his house in a Filadelfia neighborhood reserved for Mennonites. The depictions he gave me of Antonio emphasize the recurrent Mennonite stereotypes of Paraguayans as dishonest, lazy, and morally problematic. The stereotype also responds to the broader changes taking place in the contemporary Chaco as a result of work migration to the region. Redekop (1980:129) notes that by the early 1970s, "intermarriage between Mennonite and Paraguayans is of course strictly forbidden by the Mennonites, but there is an increasing trend toward it." He states that of the more than thirteen cases he recorded from between 1940 and 1972, all Mennonite spouses were obliged to leave the community. Eventually Antonio left his family to move in with Elke, but her brother concluded, "In the end, she was shunned by the community for having married a Paraguayan, so they settled down for good in eastern Paraguay and never returned to the Chaco. Such a big loss for our family." His words clearly carried a sense of mourning.

The social pressure of the Mennonite community was such that Elke felt forced to leave the colony. The Mennonite historian Peter Klassen (2004:241) echoes this type of reaction by observing that applying social pressure is a common practice among tight-knit social groups. Referring to the Mennonite colonies, he says, "Social pressure has always been one of the strongest stabilizing influences." The intimate scenario changed slightly around the 1980s with the growing migration of workers from eastern Paraguay. Some Mennonite women began to marry Paraguayans and stay in the colony despite the social pressure. It was easier for girls who came from families with good social standing in the community to do this. In such cases, if the parents supported their daughters, there was not much the community could openly do. The women's male partners, however, would be ostracized within the community by not being allowed to work for Mennonites or become active members of the cooperative, at least until they proved they were hard workers and good people. Several Mennonite men would eventually marry Paraguayan and indigenous women, and while this arrangement was also seen in an unfavorable light, it was not as morally condemned as Mennonite women marrying Paraguayans. By 1988 the increasing influx of Paraguayans to the colonies forced the Mennonite community to hold

an assembly and vote to let Paraguayans who married Mennonite women become full members of the community (Klassen 2004). Although there were attempts to incorporate outsiders, Paraguayans who married Mennonites would remain largely excluded but less so since about the 2000s. Some Mennonite families I have met over the years in the colony have embraced Paraguayans kindly into their households.

The racial boundaries Mennonites established between themselves and outsiders must be understood, partly, in light of Mennonite beliefs of separation from worldly matters. Maintaining these boundaries has been important in preserving their Mennonite identity. Klassen (2004:237) refers to their separation from outsiders in writing about Mennonites in the Chaco: "The defensive and to some extent rejecting forces were rooted in the desire of a large part of the population to preserve their own identity." That desire translated into the incorporation of outsiders in a labor hierarchy and a social hierarchy, both of which kept Mennonites at the top of the racial and economic hierarchy. The inherent socioeconomic inequalities made way for practices of discrimination and racism to become rooted within the community.

Initially, Fernheim Colony was established as more progressive and open to new influences than its neighbors from Menno Colony, who were much more conservative. Fernheim welcomed external influences and contact with outsiders, many of them from Asunción and Germany, but a group of people within Fernheim favored geographical isolation (Klassen 2004:237). These colliding trends created tensions at the heart of the community, dividing conservative clerical and progressive groups. These and other tensions arising from religious beliefs were expressed and experienced in gendered ways, reinforcing the community's patriarchal structure. For example, in 1939, schools in Filadelfia introduced sports clothing for girls. But as a result of moral criticism based on the Bible, which states that "women are not to wear men's clothing" (Deuteronomy 22:5), girls' sports were banned between 1945 and 1951. A subsequent agreement was made that girls whose parents did not allow them to wear sports clothing were not required to participate (Klassen 2004:58). At the time, in addition to sports, other newly introduced activities for young people such as dancing and folk and military music were constant sources of strain among congregations, schools, and the colony's administration that greatly affected the social life of the colony (Klassen 2004). The tensions in the community highlight how its members remained divided into groups with different ideological inclinations. It is important to note that not all of Fernheim's inhabitants migrated from the same place, further debunking the popular imaginary about Mennonites as

a homogeneous group. This portrayal contributes to obscuring the internal socioeconomic hierarchy at play.

Overall, the policing of the sexuality of Mennonite women was internalized by the community through means ranging from the enforcement of dress codes for schoolgirls to prohibitions on dating and marrying non-Mennonite men. The intimate practices of sexuality of Ayoreo women like Upusia would be cast in opposition to those of Mennonite women, reinforcing the divide between them that would deepen the exclusion of Ayoreo women in the colonies.

The rapid socioeconomic changes under way in the colonies are affecting Mennonite families as they experience significant tension in trying to uphold their Mennonite identity. The resulting friction has fostered an internal pressure expressed in fraught gender dynamics within households that often are not openly discussed beyond the Mennonite community and remain mostly secretive in nature. Among the non-Mennonite local community, these internal tensions circulate in the form of rumors that highlight the patriarchal gender relations in place; cheating men are sent to spend time in Canada with relatives to reflect on their actions isolated from the community but are expected to eventually return and resume honorable lives. Meanwhile, women who are known to have been unfaithful to their husbands are said to vanish from the community or are sent to the nationally renowned Eirene psychiatric sanatorium on the outskirts of Filadelfia. It is also fairly common to hear about alcohol abuse and intrafamily violence that remain unrecognized by the community in general. And stories circulate about men who sexually abuse their own daughters and continue to hold visible positions within the colony administration. Outsiders to the community can only speculate about these rumors.

It is precisely because of the secrecy that it is relevant to give voice to young women like Elsa who are willing to share their testimonies and whose stories also challenge the patriarchal structure in place. According to a local government official at the Secretaría de la Mujer, Niñez, y Adolescencia (Bureau of Women, Children, and Adolescent Affairs), Mennonite women arrive asking for guidance regarding abuse, but they do not make accusations, instead posing their questions in the third person. Government institutions like the bureau more often are working with local Mennonite institutions now to increase the types of support they can provide for victims and their families.

The account of Elsa, who moved from a neighboring Mennonite colony to Fernheim and had been a sex worker in Filadelfia, offers an illustration of

uncontested intrafamily violence and how as a response women use their sexuality to transgress social norms that oppress them. A beautiful redhead, slim and tall, Elsa was in her late twenties when we met. She had left her household after being sexually abused by her father, who was never formally charged. She had been on the streets for two years and was being pimped by her Paraguayan boyfriend. Elsa accepted arrangements only with wealthier men, usually middle-age Paraguayans, as she requested much more than Paraguayans would give Ayoreo women. She aspired to become an architect and told me that since she was unable to find any other jobs, she was engaging in sex work until she could save enough money to pay tuition at the university in Asunción. Elsa noted that even with a high school diploma, she had limited work opportunities, and this was one of the reasons she decided to engage in sex work, a reality commonly experienced by women in other contexts (Nencel 2001; Van Stapele, Nencel, and Sabelis 2018). Elsa said her parents were unaware that she was on the streets but were not open to welcoming her back home. In Fernheim Colony she had neither friends nor family other than her boyfriend, who took most of her money, and an older Paraguayan sex worker who took her in as her protégé but also took her money.

It did not take Elsa long to open up to me regarding the abuses she had experienced first in her family and later on the streets. This candor is relevant in the Mennonite context since, like Elsa, only individuals who have severed their ties to the colony openly share experiences involving gender violence or other sensitive topics related to the Mennonite community. Intrafamily violence and substance abuse are realities that not only affect the Mennonite community in the Chaco but represent a growing trend among the local non-Mennonite population, especially among indigenous peoples. However, the stories of Elsa, Elke, and Betty point to the collective capacity of Mennonites to remain closed to outsiders regarding internal matters that threaten to disrupt narratives of respectability and put into question the moral values of group members, especially in intimate matters. I saw Elsa for about two years in the streets of Filadelfia, and after that I never saw or heard of her again.

Conclusion

Although national institutions and state-sponsored programs to support the non-Mennonite population have been absent in the Chaco region, that does not mean the state has been completely absent there. The Paraguayan gov-

ernment has played an active role in granting Mennonites permission to settle in the region and giving them a great measure of autonomy over their internal affairs. The state has gone to great lengths to allow them to create what resembles a colonial system of indirect rule for managing the regional population, and Mennonites have taken advantage of the power granted to them to establish their own economic and social institutions.

One important attribute of the Mennonite system of government is that unlike the Paraguayan state, which historically has sustained its power through a bureaucratic system and the structure of the Colorado Party,[24] it uses the cooperative system as the main social and economic institution through which the colony continues to control the space, wealth, and political power of the region (Canova 2015). Mennonites' hold on power has been possible since the Paraguayan state granted them social and economic autonomy upon their initial settlement, seeing in them a way to colonize what was considered wilderness. The state has continued to support them because they remain the dominant social and economic power in the region amid ongoing changes. Their socioeconomic system has given Mennonites the power to reorganize the social and spatial order of the region. While discourses about the Chaco emphasize the role of Mennonites' hard work and faith, few note or speak of the labor force and the racialized hierarchies in place that have been fundamental to reproduce the flourishing of a frontier-type economy in this region. The relatively subdued sexuality of Mennonite women has been crucial to help build and sustain the boundaries of the contemporary Mennonite socioeconomic hierarchy. But ultimately, the Mennonite socioeconomic frontier project has had internal tensions that challenge the ideal of remaining isolated from the surrounding population. Divisions show that their will to conquer, civilize, and incorporate the region is not totalizing or all-encompassing. Rather, the experiences of different people in the community reflect the fractured nature of the Mennonite project and the blurred boundaries between Mennonites and outsiders, especially in the liaisons of Mennonite women with Paraguayan men. Fernheim Colony continues to face internal social challenges as its economic growth advances.

CHAPTER 2

Liminal Masculinities

One night, I found Nejamia and a group of seven other young Ayoreo women at Copetín Aventura, a new bar by the bus station frequented by *curajodie*. The indoor space of this bar was essentially a small room with chairs and tables and a plasma TV hanging on the wall; next to that room was a space covered by a tin roof and unfinished walls, with a pool table in the center and two large speakers. To avoid having customers go in and out of the indoor barroom, the owners had improvised an opening to the unfinished area from which the bartenders handed customers beer after beer. The usual crowd was indigenous, with a large number of Paraguayan men, mostly cowboys working on *estancias*, but no Paraguayan women were to be spotted in the place. Because of this, I was viewed with suspicion by the couple who ran the bar. But they relaxed as we chatted, and they shared that they were renting the bar for some extra income to help make ends meet in Filadelfia, which had become one of the most expensive cities in the country. I seldom encountered Mennonite youth in these types of bars. They usually hung out in private spaces such as friends' houses or on the outskirts of town, where they gathered to drink and listen to music from the speakers of their cars on dark street corners or the side of the road.

When I arrived it was already late, and people had been gathering since sunset. For the first time, I saw Ayoreo mingling with Nivaclé and Guaraní youth, something not as common in the bars I had frequented in previous years. Two Paraguayan men who appeared to be in their late teens were sitting with the *curajodie* I went to meet. One of the young men stood out. He was very tall and was wearing a black gaucho hat and cowboy boots. Noticing his thin frame and incomplete set of teeth, I could only wonder about the hardships he had endured and the circumstances that had brought him to the Chaco. Later, as we started to chat, he told me his name was Ramón,

and he was waiting to be picked up to go to a ranch up north. He had already been waiting for several days because rains had made the roads inaccessible. Cowboys like Ramón usually make their way to Filadelfia on commercial buses and from there are picked up in 4 × 4 trucks that take them to their destination. The bus terminal in Filadelfia, privately owned and with improvised infrastructure, is usually filled with people who can hardly find a space to sit and wait for transportation as they move back and forth between their work sites and their hometowns in eastern Paraguay. Once they arrive at the bus terminal in Filadelfia, the men travel for typically six hours or more to reach their destinations, often in the backs of pickup trucks alongside provisions, eating dust as they cross what is undoubtedly a monotonous landscape for newcomers to the Chaco.

"Why not have a bit of fun before going back to work?" Ramón remarked. He was visibly intoxicated, and my Ayoreo friends were pushing him to buy more beer for them. One of the young women was holding hands with him, seemingly interested. Around the closing time of the bar, a taxi truck was waiting outside. In exchange for a small fee it would take people to Misión Nivaclé, the Nivaclé neighborhood where the party was to continue. The local Mennonite-run municipal government has struggled with the sale of alcohol in Misión Nivaclé, as the national law on indigenous issues (Law 904/81) does not allow outsiders to intervene in the internal matters of indigenous villages. Outside Copetín Aventura, several young people, all indigenous, were already in the taxi truck waiting for it to depart. The Ayoreo *curajodie* were still discussing whether to go. That same night when I met Ramón, another Paraguayan man approached me and insisted that I dance with him. Some Ayoreo girlfriends told me he was the same person who just a few days earlier murdered an Ayoreo man after a fight caused by a domestic issue. As I evaded his attention, I considered how these men's heavy drinking was symptomatic of their complex realities.

The northern Chaco, where Ramón was headed, is the most recently opened ranching frontier in today's Chaco. Constituted as a spin-off of the economic success of the central Chaco region and yet another space transformed with the active support of the Paraguayan state, the northern Chaco exemplifies how frontiers are constructed as liminal spaces shaped by subjective experiences of masculinity, violence, and transgression. Victor Turner (1969) has explored liminality as a period of time in which personae or entities are detached from an earlier, fixed point of the social structure and pass through a cultural realm that has the attributes neither of the past nor of the coming state. He argues that they are "neither here nor there, they are betwixt and

between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (1969:95).[1]

Building on the concept of liminality, the narratives in this chapter describe how the Chaco is constructed as a liminal social and geographic space, reproduced at multiple levels through transgressions against nature, infrastructure excesses, and male-centered experiences of labor and intimacy. *Estancias* in this region are nodal points that contribute to the construction of the Chaco as liminal, through the development of infrastructure and labor arrangements, both of which are commonly experienced through exploitation. This violence is also reproduced in intimate relations; like Ramón, cowboys often enter into temporary intimate liaisons with *curajodie*. The social vulnerability of indigenous women allows men to act in these liaisons with a greater sense of entitlement and privilege. Such dominance is something that these men would be unable to assert at their work sites, where they are subordinated to abuses by their employers.[2] But the narratives of Paraguayan men working on *estancias* also speak of the motivations that drive them to work there as well as their intimate and subjective experiences once they arrive. These perspectives challenge popular and stereotyped constructions of cowboys in the region and rather emphasize, as Matthew Gutmann (1996) has argued, the ways in which manhood can be experienced amid structural inequalities.

Throughout the twentieth century, a time when most of the northern Chaco was still state land, the region went through several boom and bust periods of frontier projects. The economic projects implemented there, similar to those in the central Chaco, included the exploitation of timber, oil exploration, military expansion, and later, commercial hunting. By the 1980s, Texaco, which had been exploring for oil in the region for decades, found an important source of potable water in the vicinity of the military post Agua Dulce. The discovery renewed interest in the forested areas of the northern Chaco, and a wave of land purchases by military agents was facilitated by Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorial regime. Many of those who acquired properties did not fully pay for them but still received titles; most of the land remained underdeveloped for another decade.

By the 1990s, with the transition to a democratic government and the economic surge in the central Chaco led by Mennonites, President Juan Carlos Wasmosy, who had bought large tracts of land in the region a decade earlier, called for the National Institute for Land Reform to standardize the possession of all properties in the north. This process allowed the state to reclaim properties which had not been fully paid or legalized; these lands were again made available on the market. Paraguay's relatively low property

taxes in comparison to neighboring countries incentivized an intense wave of real estate investments and land speculation that brought a group of Paraguayan ranchers and foreign investors to the region. The high investment costs because of the distance from the capital drove some of the Paraguayan owners to sell their properties again, while an increasing number of transnational companies bought more land, turning the region into Paraguay's newest center of intense ranching and agriculture.

This economic-political dynamic in the northern Chaco has made the region one of the fastest-growing economic hubs in the country. Just the district of Bahía Negra holds more than 400,000 head of cattle (ABC Color 2019b). This dynamic also created a new ranching culture in the region. Ranching has been historically an economic activity that characterized the southern Chaco, a different ecological region within the Paraguayan Chaco also known as the Bajo Chaco (Lower Chaco). With a landscape of wetlands, palm trees, and natural grasses dramatically different from the semiarid vegetation of the central and northern Chaco, the Lower Chaco has been home to a family-owned ranching tradition since at least the early 1800s, an economic activity passed by families from one generation to the next.[3]

In the northern Chaco, rather than following family lineage, ranch owners range from private individuals with no previous ranching experience to politicians, presumed drug dealers, transnational businessmen mostly from Brazil and Uruguay, and even international soccer players as well as world figures like George W. Bush (ABC Color 2006). Typical of frontier regions, the diversity and new trajectory of ranch owners in the northern Chaco give rise to suspicion by individuals and NGOs in Asunción surrounding the legality of the ranching enterprises; the new wave of expansion is discursively inscribed as associated with intense criminal activity and narcopolitics. For example, officials of the NGO Iniciativa Amotocodie have labeled the district of Bahía Negra a site of "state-criminal-narco-ranching" (Franceschelli and Lovera 2018:27) sovereignty and have described the district as "a logistic enclave for the illegal traffic of substances and other illegal materials" (26). Note the repetition of the word "illegal" here. The description, which emphasizes drug-related activities, a lack of state presence, and a sparse population, reinforces the contemporary ways the frontier is reimagined in the Chaco as liminal. While some ranches are known to be owned by drug dealers who use ranching as a money-laundering activity, such totalizing discourses obscure the complex, overlapping histories of the twentieth century that contributed to current socioeconomic dynamics in that part of the country. As in the central Chaco, the different waves of economic endeavors that have shaped the northern Chaco despite the scarcity of state agents in

the region have had active approval and support, direct and indirect, from the Paraguayan government that challenge perceptions that continue to reify the region as outside the boundaries of the state.

Taming Nature with Bulldozers

Estancias are key sites that reify a logic about the Chaco as a male-centered space. It is there that nature needs to be tamed and dominated and experiences are enacted mainly through infrastructure excesses and transgressions against nature. The northern region is a major playing field where ranching infrastructure brings about unprecedented environmental destruction. Expensive machinery such as the supersize bulldozer known as the *pisamonte* (forest crusher) has been adapted to raze its way through thick jungles. In a bold move in 2017 while still in office, President Horacio Cartes promulgated decree 7702/17, which authorized ranchers to completely clear forests in the Chaco, disregarding any and all environmental regulations. A week later the Ministry of the Environment approved an environmental plan for Cartes to deforest his own property (Earthsight 2017). Although this polemic caused a generalized uproar and the law was quickly abrogated, the NGO Guyra Paraguay (2018), which is monitoring deforestation in the Gran Chaco region, has reported that in June 2018 alone, deforestation in the Paraguayan Chaco reached an average of 145 acres per day.

The decimation of much of the diversity of flora and fauna is inevitable, although several ranching enterprises are framing their activities through a local discourse of "armonia ecológica" (ecological harmony) that contrasts with the reality on the ground (Neufeld 2018). This language is shared by institutions such as USAID in Paraguay, which has partnered with Minerva Foods, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Neuland Cooperative, International Finance Corporation, and the Association of Municipalities of the Central Chaco to promote "good ranching practices" in the northern Chaco (WWF 2018).

Throughout the region, huge elevated round tanks with specialized pumping systems, known as *tanques australianos*, ensure provision of water to vast herds of cattle during the prolonged dry season.[4] The construction of lavish ranch houses and private roads and airstrips allows year-round access for ranch owners. These investments in infrastructure sharply contrast with the realities of indigenous peoples living in the Chaco who experience what resembles a permanent state of liminality. During the wet season, they cannot leave their villages for weeks because of flooding, and during the dry season, they must walk for miles to collect water from unclean ponds. These

conditions affect mainly children, who often perish, if not from parasites, then from the inability to reach hospitals in time to receive adequate treatment from other ailments such as respiratory diseases. Conditions in the indigenous communities are an expression of what US geographer Joel Correia has labeled "infrastructure violence" in his discussion of ranching in relation to the precarious lives of indigenous people in the Lower Chaco (personal communication).

The business of forest clearing with heavy machinery to establish cattle ranches initially belonged exclusively to Fernheim Cooperative. However, with growing demand to open ranches to the north, by the mid-1990s eight to ten private Mennonite businesses offered the service. Rudy was a low-ranking machine operator for one of the first such businesses. His Mennonite employer owned four machines. He took his first job back in 1997 at the age of twenty, when he was still single. He explained, "It's a tough job. Noise, bugs, dust, and heat, but the pay was good. Not everyone can do this job. We would spend months at a time in the forest. We had to get the job done before the rainy season started." Groups of operators like Rudy live in temporary camps and take turns operating the equipment. Rudy worked with four Mennonites in shifts of twelve hours per day except Sundays, since, as he put it, "it was prohibited to work on Sundays." Workers like Rudy spend an estimated 540 hours per month on the bulldozer. He said, "The largest job I had as an operator was to clear 50,000 acres of forested land, a whole ranch."

Rudy explained to me one of the most popular methods, introduced by Mennonites, to open up forests and turn them into pasturelands.[5] This technique deploys a thick, stainless steel chain about 200 feet long with each end hooked up to a separate tractor. The pair of operators opens paths in the forest every 100 feet, advancing in unison as the steel chain brings the trees down. With no communication devices, loud noise, and low visibility due to dust, the job often becomes a guessing game. The construction and preparation of foundations for *tanques australianos* with a mean capacity of 50 million cubic liters are also common tasks. Rudy confessed that this latter job is a very difficult and dangerous task that requires utmost precision on the part of the machine operator.

By law, ranchers with properties in the Chaco must maintain at least 25 percent of their land area under forest; this requirement increases to 50 percent for ranches within or near conservation areas that form part of the Reserva de la Biosfera del Chaco (Chaco Biosphere Reserve), which was created by national Decree 13/202 of 2001 and added to the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 2005 (Avila 2015).[6] In practice, however, illegal deforestation is a pervasive problem in a region that in 2019

represented about 56 percent of the total forested area of Paraguay.[7] The business of deforestation, commonly known as *desmonte* (literally, "undoing the forest"), is a lucrative endeavor. Several of the wealthiest individuals in Fernheim and Menno Colony have acquired their fortunes clearing pasturelands and building ranch infrastructure. They have subsequently bought large tracts of land outside the territory of the colony that are not subject to the colony's communal land management policies. The disproportionate acquisition of wealth by some over others in the Mennonite community, partly as a result of developments taking place in the north, adds to internal class formation and tensions as the colony administration can no longer supervise the economic endeavors of community members as it did.

With the opening of *estancias* in the northern Chaco, a steady stream of workers from eastern Paraguay has been moving northward to be employed as *estancieros* (cowboys). This movement not only of people but also of cattle and presumably drugs complicates the frontier scenario. Intimacy on isolated ranches is the outermost expression of how liminality is experienced alongside physical and sexual violence. Stories abound. A ranch hand was abruptly fired and, with no money, walked for three hours until a passing truck picked him up. A ranch foreman was mysteriously burned under a tractor he was repairing (Almirón 2018). A ranch owner's wife was raped and killed in revenge for oppressive working conditions. A female cook was raped repeatedly by the ranch administrator. Two young *curajodie* were murdered while visiting cowboys on an *estancia*. Yet as one ranch manager put it bluntly, "Everything that happens in the Chaco stays in the Chaco," highlighting the common suspension of rights in the liminal spaces of ranches.

Many Mennonites and Paraguayan employers from higher socioeconomic classes perceive ranch workers as naturally violent and aggressive. But who are these workers? What drives them to the Chaco, and how do they make sense of their experiences? Precarious labor conditions are a starting point to understanding their lives in the Chaco. The workers' imaginary of the Chaco as a liminal frontier influences the ways they experience and enact their masculinity. The reasons cowboys give for coming to the Chaco as well as their desires and experiences explain how their practices help reproduce the Chaco as a liminal frontier space and also provide an important context for how they view those intimate relations.

Paraguayan Cowboys Going Westward

Don Miguel, a short, strong man in his mid-forties, full of energy and charisma, first came to the Chaco in his early twenties as a cowboy. I met him at

Figure 2.1. A typical Mennonite house, with its own rainwater collection system, in one of the *colonias* surrounding Filadelfia. Photo by the author.

his cantina in Kilómetro 17, one of the few settlements of Paraguayans on the road that links Filadelfia to the northern Chaco military post of Agua Dulce, which is only thirty-eight miles from the Bolivian border. To reach Kilómetro 17 from Filadelfia, one passes through a series of changing landscapes. Leaving Filadelfia, the first *Dorf* (village) toward the north is Friedenshof.

Also known in Spanish as Colonia 9, Friedenshof comprises a tidy row of houses resembling a nineteenth-century European hamlet. Front porches are covered with bougainvillea or other flowery bushes as protection from the heat and dust, obscuring the houses, most of which were built in the 1930s. The roofs have visible rainwater collection systems and carefully tilled front vegetable gardens as well as milking sheds and small pastures with horses or cows. After the bucolic setting of Friedenshof, the landscape turns into forest punctuated by patches of pastureland, with occasional chained wooden gates signaling entrances to ranches. A few miles farther lies an abandoned military post with a thick *palo borracho* tree (literally, "drunken stick"; *Ceiba speciosa*) with its bottle-shaped trunk growing inside an abandoned house. Soon after that, the isolated tin-roof shacks of a village inhabited by members of the Guaraní-Ñandeva group signal that Kilómetro 17 is just ahead.

Don Miguel worked on several ranches before moving to 17, as he called it. Seemingly nostalgic, he recalled,

> There used to be no traffic at all on this road up until the early 1990s. At times you wouldn't be able to spot a truck for a week. We used to travel by wagon to Filadelfia, and the journey always felt endless. Midway between here and Filadelfia there was an improvised *paraje* [pit stop] under a huge *quebracho* tree where travelers would stop to rest and chat. Those days are long gone.

Even for me, a frequent traveler to the Chaco since 1998, it is impossible not to notice the greatly increased traffic in the area over the years, mainly of cattle trucks and trailers. Transformations are taking place at an amazingly rapid pace. The Paraguayan government has been actively supporting this expansion to the north through the development of vital infrastructure.[8] Among their major projects is the Ara-Chaco consortium, a public-private alliance put in place by the Cartes administration (2013–2018) involving ranchers and private organizations. The consortium has provided money for the maintenance of the principal road, known as Línea 2, that links Filadelfia with Agua Dulce and surrounding *estancias* in the north; the road is pivotal for cattle transportation.

Kilómetro 17, a village of Paraguayan mestizos, is easy to spot in contrast to the Mennonite *colonias*, as its small cluster of houses sits right beside the road in the open, with domestic animals running around and few trees for shade. Modern brick houses have replaced the original aging wooden ones, and electricity has finally reached the settlement. Most of the eighteen families living there since the early 1980s are those of Paraguayan cowboys and other ranch workers who settled their families in the Chaco near the *estancias* where they worked to avoid the long trips back to their villages in eastern Paraguay. Over time, some of them were able to acquire their own small parcels of land and became small-scale ranchers themselves. In Kilómetro 17, three cantinas provide additional income for families by selling food and entertainment, mostly to nearby Ayoreo and Guaraní-Ñandeva villages.

I met Don Miguel through the Ayoreo living in Jesudi, a nearby village. I visited his cantina several times, initially to purchase food. Over time I would often see him around as I accompanied young women on weekend nights to parties where they would meet potential sexual liaisons. Among the Ayoreo, the story goes that for years Don Miguel was madly in love with Tina, a young Ayoreo woman, but he never found the courage to leave

his wife (also from Concepción). He avoided talking about this in our exchanges and preferred to emphasize how much he was "helping" the Ayoreo village through joint economic ventures. Like most exchanges with outsiders, this was an unequal partnership that involved either making wooden fence posts from Ayoreo forests or pasturing his cattle on Ayoreo land in exchange for a small fee. Regardless of the activity, the Ayoreo were often underpaid and misled by Don Miguel.

Shortly after meeting Don Miguel, I learned that he had survived two shootings, one by one of his employees over work issues and another over a land dispute. I wanted to hear more of the stories and get to know him better. After a few years, he and his wife felt comfortable enough to welcome me into their home despite their reservations about my relations with the Ayoreo. Don Miguel, however, seemed more troubled about my going around on my own on the back roads of the Chaco. Every time he saw me, he would ask, "Why is it that you are here on your own? You're a woman, and it's not safe to be coming and going on your own around here, driving up and down. You either need a gun or a man to come along with you. But tell me again, what exactly is it that you do with the Ayoreo?" Explaining my research to Don Miguel only made him more suspicious of my motivations for visiting the nearby Ayoreo villages.[9] His surprise at seeing me go around on my own was also shared by other men whom I encountered and interviewed during my trips in the region, but few were as outspoken about it as Don Miguel. At the most, men would comment, "Aren't you afraid of going around alone?"

At times I also perceived implicit flirting tones in conversations with men. They were a constant reminder of the ways the back roads of the Chaco are constructed by men and women alike as a masculine space where women are expected to fit into established gendered categories as either providers of domestic labor or providers of sexual intimacy. My privileges as a fair-skinned, middle-class *asunceña* living in the United States prevented men from propositioning me in a more frank manner. But that is not the reality for most young Ayoreo women, whose bodies bear the marks of violence as a result of *machismo*. The subordination of women by men involves a vicious cycle of physical and emotional violence full of contradictions. At the same time that men seek companionship and emotional bonding, they objectify women and abuse them physically and emotionally while the men themselves experience abuse as they endure precarious work conditions on *estancias*.

In 2018 I passed by Kilómetro 17 once more to find that Don Miguel was no longer around. Not far from there, by the entrance to Jesudi, lies a small

brick memorial with a cross. One afternoon, as Don Miguel was riding his motorbike to meet with a local Ayoreo leader, he was shot to death on the road entering Jesudi. That was how his neighbor settled the ongoing land dispute. The same neighbor had tried to kill him years earlier, in an incident that left Don Miguel with three bullet wounds and resulted in the death of a friend accompanying him. Although he reported the incident to the *fiscalía* (prosecutor's office), the official in charge at the time did not investigate the case, and the perpetrator remained at large. The death of Don Miguel stands as a reminder of the discriminatory nature of the Paraguayan justice system, which hears only those who have the money to buy or obstruct justice.

Growing up monolingual in the Guaraní language, Don Miguel had come to the Chaco with the dream of having a better life: "I can't read, Paola, because I didn't make it beyond second grade. For people like me, there's no future on the other side," in eastern Paraguay, across the Paraguay River. Don Miguel got his first job in the Chaco as a cowboy. But after a few months, at the invitation of a friend in the Chaco who worked as a *contratista* (contractor), he joined his team. In ranch-related work activities, *contratistas* are responsible for assembling work teams usually of five to ten individuals. They manage the work assignments, are responsible for paying the workers, and buy equipment, tools, and food for the team members. The teams work mostly clearing land or building and repairing fences. After two years of sporadic work for his *contratista* friend, Don Miguel decided to stay in the Chaco permanently: "Avyama Chaco'pe" (I'm already happy in the Chaco). By that time Don Miguel, a savvy and charismatic person, had gathered a work group of young men from Concepción and become a *contratista* himself.

The outmigration of individuals like Don Miguel is the result of the advance of mechanized soybean agriculture in eastern Paraguay. Mechanization has been advancing for decades and intensified in the 1990s (Codehupy 2016; Hetherington 2011), pushing mainly unskilled laborers to places like the Chaco. Their displacement, coupled with their lack of formal education, has left thousands of families at the margins, able to survive only if incorporated into the informal economy (Fogel 2019). Largely, however, the informal economy provides only a meager income insufficient to sustain a family, and under such circumstances many set their sights on the Chaco as a place of opportunities to escape poverty. Male migrant workers know that while the region offers work opportunities, this new life comes with a price, often adaptation to living on isolated ranches far from one's family. Moreover, they must become accustomed to dry winters and hot, rainy summers

that bring mud, mosquitos, and many other discomforts. Don Miguel summarized the motto of these workers: "Chaco-pe ndaigusto, ijetu'u pero ojeaguanta" (It's not fun in the Chaco. The conditions are hard, but you just deal with it).

The Intimacy of Lives on *Estancias*

As I started to travel to the northern Chaco, I met and talked with several young cowboys. Repeatedly I heard the same motivation for coming to the Chaco, to earn "lots of money" or save money in a shorter time, something they could not do back in eastern Paraguay. In eastern Paraguay they might be paid daily and far below the basic salary for similar tasks in the Chaco. Therefore, receiving higher pay and several months' worth of payments at once in the Chaco often makes wages appear larger than they truly are. The reality is that many ranches in the Chaco hardly pay fair wages to their employees, and workers discover this only after they arrive. Some *estancieros* speak of spending a lot of money at the ranches' kiosks that sell sweets and sodas, items usually not provided by the ranches. Alcoholic beverages, which are usually smuggled onto the ranches, can also be very costly. When workers are given permission to leave to visit their families, they might stop in Filadelfia. There, they quickly exhaust much of their pay on drinks and liaisons with women. Ultimately, the economic opportunities that they envisioned in the Chaco resonate with the qualities used to describe "millennial capitalism" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000), that is, a capitalism characterized by encouraging the rapid movement of persons and goods, turning them into free-floating labor units. This type of capitalism is simultaneously presented in messianic terms and as having a capacity to "transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (292).

A sense of freedom is articulated in the motivations of younger cowboys to seek opportunity in the Chaco. This freedom is equated with the intertwining of choice and excitement. Work opportunities are presented as involving exploration and adventure in a new place and the chance to enact a sense of manhood through taming animals and nature and living with a group of male peers. "I knew it would be hard, but I also knew I could do it" is a common narrative, although the more detailed experiences shared by some tell a different story. Alcides, a thirty-year-old from the Departamento de San Pedro and father of two,[10] shared his story on a cold Sunday morning as we sat around a wood stove at the *estancia* La Victoria. His wife, Ruth, an active and friendly young woman, was the only female on the

estancia. While attending to her children, she prepared lunch for the ten-member crew and joined in our conversation here and there. This was the second job Alcides had taken in the Chaco, he said.

> I grew up hearing stories about the Chaco, as my neighbor in San Pedro had worked on and off in the region. Each time he returned, during our rounds of *tereré* [cold yerba mate brew], I would hear stories of hunting and wandering in the forest. Many years later, I was invited by a friend to work with him on a ranch on the road between Pozo Colorado and Concepción. I was young and single back then, and it was a lot of fun to be a cowboy. Every now and then the administrator paid us extra if we brought *sagua'a* out of the forest.

Sagua'a in the Guaraní language refers to cattle of any breed that become unruly, often as a result of the difficulty of herding them in overgrown pastures. As a result, the animals tend to separate from the group by breaking through fences and wandering into the surrounding forests. They are hard to reunite with the herd, and after prolonged isolation, often years at time, their weight can reach up to 1,600 pounds. Men like Alcides who herd them are known as *sagua'aceros*. He continued, "It was a dangerous task, but it was fun and we would place bets on getting the *sagua'a* out. But after a few months, the rainy season started, and most of the ranch was under water. This is when the mosquitos started attacking us. It was a nightmare. I wasn't used to it and left immediately." Alcides returned home to help on his father's farm.

Don Miguel had said, "Workers come with a vision in their minds, an objective, and this is why they survive the environment—for the money." Jesús is one of these individuals. Originally from Concepción, he was hired as a *campero*, another common term used to refer to a cowboy. *Camperos* oversee the management of cattle, water sources, conditions of fences, and other responsibilities. During the summer, men embark in groups of two or three, typically before dawn to avoid the extreme heat of afternoon.

Jesús was working on an *estancia* recently established on Línea 1, the road that links Agua Dulce with the town of Bahía Negra. I met him when he had been working there for six months. He said, "I was told that I'm allowed to have a week off after three months full-time here. However, I haven't left yet because if I go home, I'll spend all my money. I'm actually trying to save for my daughter's birthday celebration. We want to throw a *quinceañera* party for her." He paused to show me his daughter's picture on his cell phone, and then continued, "We don't make much more here in the

Chaco, but the difference is that here, there are fewer temptations. Back home, whatever money you make, you spend, as our families depend on our work to survive."

Jesús's narrative is shared by other ranch workers. While they idealize the Chaco as a place of wealth and opportunities, the lived realities speak instead of a disposable labor force with access to higher wages in comparison to eastern Paraguay but still low considering the amount of work and poor living conditions. Ranch meals mirror this situation but also become the sites where these very conditions are contested. Workers are most obviously discriminated against in the meals they are given. The way ranchers operate their business is by offering lower salaries, known as *salario libre*, which includes meals. When meals are excluded the term used is *salario seco* (dry salary). What is problematic about this system is that owners try to save money by serving staple foods such as beans, *locro* (white corn soup), and *fariña* (cassava flour) and excluding costlier items such as meat and potatoes. Mario, who had been working in the Chaco for more than four years, recalled his first job as a *playero*, a handyman who takes care of the owner's house and its surroundings, on a ranch owned by a prominent member of the Asociación Rural del Paraguay, the wealthy national ranchers association. Mario complained that the food was deplorable: "They hardly gave us any meat. Instead of butchering a cow, they would kill a goat, half of which was set aside for the boss. We could hunt, but the rule was that we had to pay for each animal we brought out of the forest. The animals didn't belong to him, but he still charged us." Another worker, José, who had worked more than eight years in the Chaco on three different ranches, remarked, "On the last ranch where I worked, it was common that for days we would eat poorly cooked noodles or just tortillas. I ended up spending most of my salary on sweets and other small items at the kiosk owned by the ranch administrator."

Tomás, however, from the Departamento de Caazapá, felt differently. When asked what he liked most about working on the *estancia* La Aguada, he said, "They serve us milk with every meal. I really like that, although I have to tell you, I don't like the beans and corn soup." Having grown up in extreme poverty in Caazapá, Tomás considered milk a luxury; beans and corn were mostly all he ate. Meat is also considered a luxury item, and the workers make a point of showing a preference for it and complaining about ranchers who are stingy about serving it.

Don Miguel had a critical perspective on ranch owners and administrators that echoed what the young workers felt: "Che heta lado ambaapoma, heta patron ndi. Heta lado ahecha mbaeicha la empleado oiko'i. Ojemal-

trata pero haekuera o aguanta" (I've worked in many places already, with many bosses. In many places I've seen how the workers live. They're treated badly but they hang in there). He mentioned how on ranches one cannot even sleep at night because of the *polvorines* (biting gnats) and the lack of basic comforts.

A common complaint about ranch administrators is their tight budgets for food for employees. Don Miguel said food spending was low especially in places that have a long family tradition of ranching; those ranches usually are in the Lower Chaco. In earlier days, treatment of employees on some ranches was not the best, and those patterns tend to continue. In recent years the conditions on ranches have been brought to light by international commissions working on labor abuses in Paraguay (Bedoya, Santsteban, and Garland 2005; Kidd 1997; UN OHCHR 2017).

The provision of better food gives rise to a paradoxical situation that Don Miguel described: "Workers, if happy with the meals they are served, might tolerate meager salaries and deplorable living conditions. You might offer them better salaries somewhere else, but if the food is alright where they are, it's enough of a reason for them to stay." Most likely, aware that better salaries might fall through, workers prefer the assurance of at least being well fed at their work sites. As a way of contestation, it is also common for employees to work around some of the food prohibitions on ranches where control is more relaxed, and they boast proudly about the tricks they use to deceive ranch owners. As one put it, "If you're afraid of your boss, you won't survive the Chaco." They might, more often than not, report dead animals due to sickness or natural death in order to have more meat on the table. Killing cattle to eat is another way to make up for the meager food rations. It is not uncommon for workers to also kill cattle to sell the meat to neighboring workers to make extra money. On ranches where foremen are not permanently present, this is an easier task, although if they are discovered, they are dismissed.

The stories and experiences of workers I met while visiting *estancias* in the northern Chaco, such as Don Miguel, Alcides, Jesús, Tomás, José, and Mario, highlight the contradictions between their representations of the Chaco and their lived realities. These men, along with indigenous men, belong to the lowest ranks of the labor hierarchy in today's Chaco. In contrast to their native towns, they see the Chaco as a space of prosperity; however, the realities they encounter are far from prosperous. Forming a *Lumpenproletariat* of unskilled and disposable labor, they respond to the abuses of their work sites by "learning to be a man in the Chaco," as one employee told me. This means to be tough in order to make it. Heavy drinking and

the ensuing violence reinforce these ideas of manhood and contribute to the construction of the Chaco as a liminal place at the edge of rules and regulations where manhood is enacted.

The sense of masculinity constructed through experiences of liminality in the Chaco comes not just from the perspective of migrant ranch workers but also from affluent individuals who travel to the Chaco to attend the yearly automobile competition known as the Transchaco Rally. One of the most anticipated sports events in Paraguay, the rally mobilizes thousands of people to come to the Chaco every October for three days of race. By its forty-sixth season in 2019, the Transchaco Rally has become a key site where the region is experienced as a hypermasculine social space. The event exploits an imaginary of the Chaco environment as wild and harsh, adding excitement and an element of danger to the race. In 2019 the route included multiple paths totaling 1,955 kilometers (ABC Color 2019b), primarily between Filadelfia and Mariscal Estigarribia. The racecourse itself, which runs through back roads under hot and alternately muddy and dusty conditions, gives an opportunity for the competitors and the general public to exhibit virility and courage in navigating an unknown landscape, one to be tamed and dominated.

The rally provides an upper-class experience of masculinity on the frontier, enacted through wealth and experienced as entertainment. Stories of sex and rape proliferate during and after the rally that objectify women and portray their bodies, especially those of indigenous women, as disposable. After each rally season, videos of naked women dancing around crowds of men go viral, reifying gendered meanings and practices that construct the Chaco as a site where transgression and excesses have little or no consequence. The abuses that take place during this time go unaccounted for, and this strengthens a perception of the Chaco as a social space where anything and everything is possible. Overall, the practices of the rally serve to reproduce the masculine desires of a wealthy upper class and a space for entertainment and aspirations of a middle class. This is expressed and enacted through domination over nature, display of wealth, and objectification of women and local communities.[11]

Like rallygoers but in a different context, cowboys draw on an exaggerated sense of masculinity linked to physical strength and aggression to cope with the adverse conditions they encounter on *estancias*. Labor relations are largely oppressive but at the same time open spaces for men to contest the power of the *patrones* (bosses). In these male-dominated spaces, men enact a fantasy of idealized masculinity, using their independence from their fami-

lies to engage in excesses in drinking or hunting *sagua'a*, contesting food restrictions in *estancias*, spending their money on women, and at times even engaging in duels that might take the life of one of them. These behaviors help reproduce the Chaco as a liminal space where individual lives are constructed beyond the boundaries of civilization, outside the realm of law and order. There, men express certain masculine self-representations that are not permissible in other social contexts.[12] Entering into relations with young Ayoreo women is yet another way ranch workers enact their masculinity.

The Liminality of Intimate Relations

In one of my trips to the Chaco, I owed a visit to one of the six Ayoreo villages north of Kilómetro 17. The chief hosted me a few times in 2001, but in 2004 he split from the village he was living in and formed a new one with his closest relatives and friends farther from Filadelfia, so I was not able to visit them as often as I desired. When I arrived this time, I was surprised to find three young Paraguayan men living there. When I asked the chief who they were, he proudly told me, "They're my family, Paola. They married my three daughters." This took me by surprise, since at the time very few Ayoreo women would marry non-Ayoreo men, as group endogamy was strictly observed until the early 1990s and remained in force even afterward.

The three young men were from eastern Paraguay and had been working in the Chaco for a while. I remembered hearing the news that the chief's eldest daughter, Nejamia, had married a Paraguayan a few years earlier, but I assumed that like most Ayoreo-Paraguayan marriages, this one soon would dissolve. That was not the case. The men had brand-new wooden houses that contrasted with the older Ayoreo houses, notably by the addition of faucets and showers. They were also in the process of fencing the perimeters of their houses, a practice common among Paraguayans but never among Ayoreo. The night of my visit, we sat around a fire where a tortoise was being grilled. This Ayoreo delicacy, no longer available around most villages on account of intense deforestation, was brought by the chief's son, who was working on an *estancia* up north, where the last important patches of forest are being decimated. Nejamia and her husband, Pedro, brought one of their children in a fancy stroller, a new sign of conspicuous consumption among Ayoreo, to the fire circle at the house of the chief where we were gathered.

Pedro had been working for more than three years on a 150,000-acre ranch on the Bolivian border that belonged to the owner of one of Brazil's largest oil companies. Pedro was an acquaintance of Don Miguel in Kiló-

Figure 2.2. The Three Sisters kiosk. It is one of three cantinas in Kilómetro 17, a village of Paraguayans on the road to the northern Chaco. Photo by the author.

metro 17 and met Nejamia at his bar. For a while, Nejamia and her *curajodie* friends moved between Filadelfia and Loma Plata to avoid fights between groups centered around access to male liaisons. But this arrangement did not last long, as the police in Loma Plata were very strict, the young women said, and prohibited them from lingering in the streets at night. If they were spotted, they would be taken to the police station, something *curajodie* would try to avoid at all costs because of the violence and other abuses they might experience in the process. Tired of Filadelfia after a while, Nejamia moved back to her village. From there, with her girlfriends, she went to Don Miguel's cantina on the weekends, an alternate party scene from Filadelfia that started in 2013. With more movement as a result of ranches opening in the northern Chaco, the cantina became a popular truck stop, and it was situated close to several Ayoreo villages.

Nejamia said that at first she was just looking to play with Pedro and did not think of marrying him. Marriage was something she never considered with any of her non-Ayoreo sexual liaisons. When I inquired, she said, "Je yuasade ore gu" (They are not our people), but Pedro was insistent. He said he was aware of her lifestyle, that is, he thought she was a sex worker, as he had witnessed her talking with other men at the cantina. Still, he thought

he could change her. Young and lonely, he later shared that he felt that her company would ease his time in the Chaco, and he told me that having a place to stay in the Chaco other than his work site gave him a break from being on the *estancia* too much. I asked Pedro how his Paraguayan friends perceived their relationship, and he told me, "My co-workers always made fun of me for having an indigenous wife. And I lost touch with my mother because of my decision." But Pedro did not seem to mind. "I'm not like most of my friends, who go around with Ayoreo girls just to *jorobar* [play around]," he said. He and Nejamia decided to live together in her village, an arrangement that worked for him. He found the lifestyle adjustment of living in an Ayoreo village easier because of the presence of two other Paraguayan men living there. Nejamia and Pedro had twins, a boy and a girl. Although I rarely saw him, when we would chat we made people laugh, as we were two non-Ayoreo individuals speaking to each other in Ayoreo. He was proud of how quickly he managed to pick up the language.

Pedro and Nejamia had been married more than three years when, during one of my trips to the Chaco, I spotted him in front of Fernheim Cooperative's supermarket in Filadelfia. The night before I had seen Nejamia with another man at the Copetín Aventura. I greeted him and we started to chat. He was obviously frustrated with Nejamia when I asked about her.

"She was my first wife. I love her," he lamented.

"So, what happened?"

"In the beginning, everything was *tranquilo*. For about a year and a half. But then she started to go out again. Since we were close to Kilómetro 17, she would go there to have fun with her girlfriends while I was away working. I used to talk to her about this, but she wouldn't listen to me. I was also afraid that she would leave me if I was too forceful with her."

Eventually the situation drove Pedro, exhausted, to end their relationship. He assured me that he continued to provide for her by giving her money every month, but he blamed her for spending the money on partying rather than on their children. What made him most upset, however, was that she gave the two kids away after they separated: "She gave the girl to her mother, and the boy to a relative." Pedro was unaware that this is a common practice among Ayoreo women after divorce, especially if they are thinking of remarrying. He had come across before as shy and quiet, but this time, Pedro was loud and clear: "I'm done now. I don't want to have anything to do with her, except trying to get at least one of the kids back."

"What would you do with a child, since you're always at work?" I asked.

"My aunt could take care of him," he replied. "Do you happen to know who I could talk to around here to get help with this?"

Pedro was clearly upset and unsure of how to proceed. After the long re-

counting of his feelings for Nejamia, he surprised me by stating, "But now I have a new girlfriend. I'm done with Ayoreo women. I don't want to suffer any more."

Nejamia, however, had a slightly different story to share with me. As it turned out, Pedro had a wife in eastern Paraguay about whom he never spoke openly with her; Nejamia learned about the wife only after a serious fight with Pedro when he came back from work unannounced and found her with some girlfriends in Kilómetro 17. "They don't respect us, Paola," she said. "I am sure Pedro didn't tell you why I left him." It is not uncommon for Paraguayan cowboys working in the Chaco to seek temporary liaisons with young Ayoreo women who can provide intimacy and domestic help, an arrangement similar to those in other frontier contexts (Ferguson 1999; White 1980). However, because of the discrimination toward indigenous women, most men venture into only fleeting relationships with Ayoreo women. This is not always the case, as Nejamia's siblings have stayed married. For some men, the hardships of living far away from their families drive them, when free from work, to seek and develop emotional liaisons with young Ayoreo women in Filadelfia. It not uncommon to hear that some of them, like Pedro, already have wives and kids in eastern Paraguay, and as a result, relations are fraught with lies and deceptions.

Moreover, colliding moral values regarding the sexuality of Ayoreo women foster competing expectations and generate unequal power dynamics in relationships. To non-Ayoreo men, the act of single women requesting money in exchange for sex is immediately indicative of sex work and all the associated moral implications. Bigamy and cheating suddenly become permissible in what cowboys perceive as a liminal space, as one put it: "We can do as we want in the Chaco. Far away, who will find out back home?" For young women like Nejamia, the encounters can be complicated by outright deception as well as symbolic and even physical violence. As divergent moral registers meet, conflicting expectations and practices ensue and are reproduced again and again. Paraguayan men reproduce the violence of life on ranches in their relations with young Ayoreo women. While violence toward young women is a constant reality in these liaisons, these women deploy the moral economy of their sexuality to challenge the transgressive masculinist social context of today's Chaco.

Conclusion

The persistent image of the Chaco as a liminal, male-centered social space, reproduced at all levels in society, plays a key role in naturalizing the re-

gion as a frontier, which justifies the ongoing deforestation and investments for further economic expansion. The intimate experiences and harsh labor conditions of cowboys further reify the Chaco as a space outside the boundaries of the state, and this also shapes the way they experience sexual intimacy. It gives men the symbolic power to enter into relations with indigenous women who commonly suffer discrimination by Paraguayans in general. Experiencing the Chaco as a liminal space gives men the confidence to engage these young women because the men are away from their families and friends who most likely would evaluate such relationships with disdain. However, indigenous women provide companionship and sexual intimacy otherwise unavailable for these men. Not all Ayoreo women are aware of the fraught dynamics in place, but they resort to their own economic and intimate practices to navigate this unequal social scenario.

CHAPTER 3

Labor Exclusion

For months, this was the usual weekend ritual for Toje and Queneja: Each day just before dusk, they would leave their 1-hectare urban settlement in Filadelfia to bathe in a nearby cow pond on the outskirts of town. They did this due to a lack of basic services in Casa Pasajera, the temporary work camp where they and more than eighty Ayoreo families lived in plastic tents. Once back in their tents, the young girls eagerly discussed plans for the night as they applied makeup and dressed in tight new jeans carefully selected to match their high heels. The night began at Canaan, a downtown hostel and bar owned by an excommunicated Mennonite preacher who named the place after the biblical land of Canaan, a region of prophetic occupation by the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt. "As long as I make sure that no fights break out and if I close the bar by 11 p.m., I don't get in trouble with the colony administration," the bar owner explained.

The hostel is one of the few lodging alternatives to the high-end Mennonite-owned Hotel Florida, where cattle ranchers from Asunción typically spend the night before heading out to their properties. Canaan instead hosts mostly ranch workers who come into town to cash their paychecks. While the hostel welcomes indigenous guests, young Ayoreo women are banned from renting rooms because, as the owner put it, they are "too dirty." The ban does not stop them from filling the place each weekend to drink and seek potential sexual liaisons. A smaller group of women, however, prefers to meet "friends" on street corners just off Hindenburg Street, the main artery. This suits older Mennonite men better because of the corners' dim and discreet character near the entrance to town and farther from their residences. *Curajodie* have thus permeated Filadelfia's night scene, manifesting an urban presence that is an ongoing challenge to the city's social fabric.

Late at night, as the vibrant nightlife quickly subsides following the local curfew, everyone disperses from the bar where Toje and Queneja have been

Figure 3.1. A woman washing clothes. Until 2015, several cow ponds on the outskirts of Filadelfia were used by Ayoreo living in Filadelfia's urban camp to bathe in and wash clothes. Photo by the author.

drinking and playing pool. Instead of continuing the party at the Misión Nivaclé, the urban Nivaclé neighborhood, Toje, Queneja, and a few other friends have chosen to walk to the roundabout that welcomes outsiders to the city. The roundabout itself encircles a monument constructed in honor of the seventy-fifth anniversary (in 2005) of the establishment of Fernheim Colony and is equipped with a new lighting system to highlight the large cross at the center. Here the young women will continue drinking, passing time, and chatting with the men they have just met. Inadvertently they might walk by the small plaque on the monument that declares the motto of the colony on its anniversary, perhaps invoking an unsettled vision: "Gemeinsamkeit und Entwicklung" (coexistence and development).

The urban presence of *curajodie* challenges the typical local stereotype of indigenous women as submissive and quiet and seen in one of only two places: cleaning the yards of Mennonite houses or leaving Fernheim Cooperative's factory after work. Young Ayoreo women, in contrast, boldly make themselves visible at all times, drawing attention as they walk in miniskirts, talking loudly and flirting with non-Ayoreo men. These practices fuel local perceptions of Ayoreo bodies as out of place; the opinions often surface in casual remarks such as "Ayoreo women are not in a position to clean anybody's house. Just look at how they live and behave." Moralizing com-

ments filled with race and gender judgments show how locals rhetorically construct the practices of *curajodie* as repeatedly transgressing the colonizer/colonized divide and therefore as being worthy of exclusion (Fanon 2008 [1952]; McKinnon 1994). But the rejection is not just a contemporary phenomenon based on the commodification of their sexuality; rather, it has deep historical roots marked by a politics that excluded Ayoreo female bodies from the labor force that constitutes the Chaco frontier economy.

In today's Chaco, the wage system remains the dominant mechanism by which indigenous peoples are integrated, either directly or indirectly, into the capitalist economy. For Ayoreo, missionization played a fundamental role in this process. It created a gender hierarchy that reshaped gender roles and thus facilitated the incorporation of men into the economy while subordinating women to the domestic realm, excluding them from the formal labor force. Ayoreo dependence on wage labor ensured the commodification of their social relations and increasingly drove them to the Mennonite colonies, where women were further excluded and discriminated against as they used these spaces to experiment sexually with non-Ayoreo men. Still, their exclusion from the wage-labor system has not prevented them from developing their own terms of involvement with the economy. Women have responded to these new realities by taking a prominent role in the wage-labor arrangements of their male partners. They do so by engaging in disruptive practices by which they refuse to acknowledge the expected terms of economic inclusion envisioned for indigenous peoples in the region. As a result, the practices prevent their husbands' smooth participation and integration into the regional economy, intensifying the discrimination toward Ayoreo women by the surrounding society. Yet, the disruptive practices are precisely ways women have come to negotiate the discrimination and rejection that they experience in the colonies. Furthermore, their involvement is an overt critique of the precariousness of labor conditions experienced by indigenous people in the region. Ultimately, women's practices disrupt economic narratives of incorporation in frontier economies; their practices challenge and reject presumed universalized assumption that wage labor is the only means available to access the rights of citizenship for indigenous people at the margins of the state.

From Foragers to Wage Laborers

In 1962, shortly after the first group of Ayoreo was contacted by the Salesian missionaries, the anthropologist Branislava Susnik visited a temporary Ayo-

reo camp established near the military post Teniente Montanía.[1] She noted that a group of women, seemingly angry, grabbed their belongings and left without their men. Susnik learned that the women were frustrated by their men's lack of interest in foraging after they began receiving food provisions from the mission. This episode, recorded in Susnik's 1963 book *La lengua de los ayoweos-moros*, was an early prelude to the shifts that were to come to Ayoreo spatial and socioeconomic spheres as a result of sedentarization.

Women played a prominent role in the productive sphere alongside men prior to their settlement into mission stations (Fischermann 1988; Nostas and Sanabria 2009). They would accompany their male partners on hunting trips and engage in productive activities such as looking for honey and collecting *dajudie* plants to make weaving threads out of their fibers. They were also responsible for the production of material household goods such as covers and *utebei*, large bromelia fiber bags used to carry utensils. Women cultivated the vegetable garden together with their partners and were above all responsible for the exchange and redistribution of hunted goods and garden produce. Like men, they could also aspire to be *naijnane* (shamans) and occupy other important social roles. While the position of *asute* (chief) was reserved for men, women played a role in communal decisions, and in the absence of the chiefs, they would exercise command over the group (Bórmida and Califano 1978). These gendered roles would be reexamined after contact with Catholic and NTM missionaries.

The first New Tribes Mission (NTM) station was established in 1966 among the Guidai-gosode people by Cucarani (Big Rock), a prominent landmark also known as Cerro León within the largest public national park in the Chaco, approximately 155 miles north of Filadelfia. Their sedentarization forced Ayoreo to shift from a life of foraging to the new spatial arrangements of the mission. The change did not take place at once but rather occurred in gradual stages. According to the narratives of elder individuals, many small groups of extended families would move back and forth between the mission and their camps in the forest where they still had their gardens at the time. Others did not make their appearance in the mission until two or three years after the initial process of contact.

NTM played a significant role in introducing Ayoreo to wage labor as a male-only sphere, dramatically shifting the productive role of women within Ayoreo society. The US-born missionaries Norman Keefe and Robert Goddard were the first to encounter Ayoreo at Cucarani. As Ayoreo were the last group in the Chaco to make continued contact with outsiders, the imaginary of them as fierce and uncivilized persisted in the minds of many Paraguayans. They were known as *moros*, a pejorative term with origins in

Spain that came into use during the Reconquista to refer to Moors or Muslims. Goddard, in looking back at his work among Ayoreo, has stated, "Los moros, conocidos por su brutalidad, eran el último pueblo entre el cual yo quería llegar a trabajar" (The Moros, known for their brutality, were the last group among whom I wanted to end up working) (in Hein 1990:133). This imaginary violently pushed for Ayoreo's immediate incorporation and civilization. As early as his first encounter, Goddard had Ayoreo clear an abandoned path that linked a nearby oil company camp to the mission site. In exchange for their work, Ayoreo were to receive axes (NTM and ISB 1977).

Iquebi Posorajai, a tall, thin man with a cheerful face, lived in 2 de Enero, an Ayoreo village not far from Kilómetro 17, on the road to the northern frontier. An ex-Catholic, Iquebi was the only Ayoreo who still had two wives, subverting decades of missionary prohibition to do so. He became an icon of Ayoreo contact with the surrounding society, as he facilitated the initial encounters between Ayoreo and NTM missionaries. He did so because he was eager to find his parents and siblings, from whom he was separated as a child. In 1956, at the presumed age of ten, Iquebi was hunted down by Paraguayan employers of a ranch in the area of Ingavi.[2] He was taken under the protection of Salesian missionaries, learned Spanish and Guaraní, and was later used as a *señuelo* (decoy) by Catholic and NTM missionaries to reach uncontacted Ayoreo (Escobar 1988; Perasso 1987). As a child, Iquebi was often displayed to the public in a cage in Asunción at the Salesian congregation's house as an icon of "tamed" fierce *moros*, as Paraguayan and Mennonite society contemptuously referred to Ayoreo.

In Cucarani, Goddard put Iquebi, then a young man, in charge of twenty hunting traps to teach fellow Ayoreo how to use them (Hein 1990:137). This was the first step toward incorporating Ayoreo into the fur trade that was beginning at the time in the northern Chaco. This activity attracted large numbers of people to the Chaco starting in the 1940s and set off an economic boom (Ferreira 1968).[3] By 1973 a hundred Ayoreo were employed in the trapping venture, and missionaries were the exclusive providers of the rifles and traps. Initially, the missionaries bartered material goods such as food and tools with the Ayoreo in exchange for work, but they soon shifted toward a cash economy. The skins of *gato onza* (ocelots, *Felis pardalis*) and *gato montes* (Geoffroy's wild cat, *Felis geoffroyi*) provided an important income to the missions, as they took 50 percent of the sales. That income also supported the mission work programs and was used to invest in the mission. By 1975, trapping ended abruptly as a result of the bust in the global fur market.

The economic activities promoted by NTM had an extractive logic and implied a commodified relation to nature, a mindset to which the Ayoreo were introduced from day one of their encounter with the missionaries.[4] Work took place in the context of a patron-client relationship through which the mission became the employer of the Ayoreo and the exclusive provider of services (NTM and ISB 1977:7). Missionaries deployed a discourse of Ayoreo self-sufficiency, but their business model contradicted their rhetoric, since no Ayoreo were involved in administrative and decision-making processes. Their participation was limited to labor, and soon unequal power relations were established and economic dependence took root.

As in other parts of the Gran Chaco, the work activities of Ayoreo not only served to financially sustain the mission but also helped give coherence to the civilizing role of missionary enterprises.[5] Along with the introduction of wage-labor activities, a goal was to institute changes in Ayoreo conceptions of time. In a report entitled "Economic Development at El Faro Moro: What Is Feasible?" missionary Norman Keefe noted that the Ayoreo were not used to working by the hour (in NTM and ISB 1977:11). Keefe contended that they would work for only a few hours and then stop. He stated, "Our desire was to teach them that work for the civilized would be rewarded in proportion to the amount of time put into it." (15). The importance given to time measurement as a means of labor exploitation by NTM missionaries parallels the eighteenth-century transition to industrial capitalism in England (Thompson 1967). Over time some individuals indeed increased their work hours, but they expected all workers to be equally rewarded regardless of the number of hours they worked individually. The solution was to switch from hourly wages to a system of piecework in which Ayoreo were paid according to the task completed regardless of the time spent on it (NTM and ISB 1977); that work system allows the intensification of labor and the minimization of daily wages.[6] By 1968 the mission was relocated 124 miles south to be closer to the Mennonite colonies. The change of location was prompted by droughts at the mission station by Cucarani. Mission staff also took into consideration that many of the subgroup Totobie-gosode, mortal enemies of the Gudai-gosode, lived in the vicinity of the new mission; NTM staff hoped the move would facilitate the eventual contact of Totobie-gosode people as well. The new locale was named Faro Moro (Moro Lighthouse); it was to be a "lighthouse destined to irradiate the gospel enduringly, to offer all moros the opportunity to save their souls and to reach eternal life" (Henry Buchegger quoted in Hein 1990).

From there, the Ayoreo would become a workforce crucial to Mennonite economic expansion, as they were much desired for their physical strength

to clear forests by hand with axes. One of these former workers, Edopie, an elder, put it bluntly: "We were the bulldozers of the Mennonites. Now they seem to have forgotten that." Ayoreo were drawn into this labor pool at the beginning of the 1970s. John Renshaw (2004:141) has remarked on Ayoreo labor relations in the colonies, "They were so keen to find employment—or so desperate—that they offered to work for lower wages than other laborers. This caused tensions with other Indians . . . but endeared the Ayoreo to the Mennonite farmers." They were employed primarily clearing pastures, building fences, and cutting firewood on ranches. Initially, NTM missionaries were opposed to Ayoreo migrations to the colonies because they considered the dispersion a hindrance to the successful expansion of their own missionary enterprise. One of the missionaries, Austrian-born Henry Buchegger, worked among Ayoreo in Bolivia and witnessed their process of proletarianization. He worried that the same would occur among Ayoreo in Paraguay. He expressed his concern to the colony's leadership: "¿Acaso yo, señores, arriesgué mi vida y la de mi familia para que al final los Ayoreo se conviertan en peones de ustedes?" (Have I, gentlemen, risked my life and that of my family, only to have the Ayoreo become your peons in the end?) (in Escobar 1988:299).

Given their close relations with Mennonites, NTM missionaries lobbied for the restriction of Ayoreo access to jobs in the colonies. Since a massive pool of indigenous labor was available at the time, the colony's administration responded affirmatively to the request, and in 1972 a decree was issued that prohibited all Mennonites from hiring Ayoreo (Escobar 1988). The measure was not strictly enforced, and some Mennonites continued to hire them. A few years later, with the prohibition on trapping and the decline of work opportunities at the Faro Moro mission station, NTM missionaries made immediate arrangements to have the earlier decree rescinded. They moved to supervise the work of Ayoreo in the colonies, assembling teams to supply labor to the Mennonites. The missionaries' promotion of these economic activities clearly exposes the failure of their economic programs at the mission station but also the way their agendas changed in response to the vagaries of the economy, as is common of frontier regions.

By the mid-1970s Ayoreo dependence on wage labor made households also highly dependent on marketed goods. It was estimated that during dry seasons, 70 percent of food in the mission station was store-bought (NTM and ISB 1977). This shift was a direct consequence of the increased time taken up by wage-labor activities, which partly hindered the pursuit of subsistence activities. By 1977, seasonal migration to the colonies had become continuous. At times only about one-third of the population at Faro

Moro remained at the mission (NTM and ISB 1977). In general, Ayoreo responses to the process of proletarianization make it difficult to fit Ayoreo subjectivity into a single or absolute category and even more difficult for it to correspond to European ideals. Their nuanced responses through urban mobility, rather, involved the mutually productive interplay between colonial discourses, institutions of capital and spatial management, and processes of indigenous cultural production (Canova 2012). But the market economy quickly commodified the Ayoreo economic sphere, and this subsequently commodified social relations and systems of exchange, a vital aspect of Ayoreo sociality. Money deeply permeated social relations at all levels. But money became "domesticated" (Akin and Robbins 1999); that is, the advent of money did not eradicate practices and networks of exchange and redistribution but instead was incorporated, along with store-bought goods, into the networks.[7] This does not mean that the commodification of Ayoreo social relations was experienced as an overall smooth process; it also had the effect of altering certain aspects of their sociality, a reality experienced by other groups of foragers in the Chaco (Gordillo 2006).

Referring to Ayoreo exchange and redistribution, Bertha Suaznábar writes, "The flux of gifts from one domestic unit to another through kinship networks is one of the strongest social norms in Ayore society" (1995:122). She notes that under a new context of circulation of money and incipient signs of accumulation, practices of exchange and reciprocity were dramatically reduced to the nuclear family, bringing tensions to social relations. Mercedes Nostas and Carmen Sanabria (2009:189) argue that customary Ayoreo values related to exchange and reciprocity have continued to be upheld and are expected to be followed and fulfilled despite the adoption of values that hinder them, particularly values related to individuality and accumulation. Colliding values have become a constant source of tensions and contradictions at the center of Ayoreo contemporary society. The realm of sexuality, which was customarily embedded in systems of exchange, especially has undergone important shifts and resignifications from the commoditized social relations fostered by the market economy.

Reinscribing Sexual and Gender Roles

The inculcation of Christian values was intended to establish a gender hierarchy among Ayoreo that would reshape existing gender roles. The primary target was their bodies; they were constructed as exhibiting excesses that

needed to be contained. In one of the early visits to the Faro Moro mission station in the early 1970s, a Mennonite visitor observed,

> I feel that we are among grown-up children that let themselves be taken by their whims. They run wantonly like children, they eat like children on whom their mothers forgot to put the bib. They don't feel like dressing or combing their hair. They laugh and scream like children. Unconsciously, I think of Eve and Adam, of how they were naked but not ashamed. (In Hein 1990:125)

Disciplinary forms of power were exerted by missionaries over Ayoreo bodies by attempting to make them conform to perceived acceptable standards that would help instill Christian values. As values related to an individual sense of self—sexual chastity, fidelity, and humility—were cultivated, women's bodies in particular came to be the target of these new dispositions. At Faro Moro, infanticide was no longer socially accepted. The adoption of unwanted children became an alternative to infanticide. This new practice brought an increase in family size, which affected the ordering of the domestic sphere as women became increasingly focused on child-rearing. This in turn altered features of the division of labor in which women played a prominent role in the productive sphere. Men were trained to become workers, preachers, teachers, and leaders, while women were taught to engage in domestic activities, sewing, and the production and sale of handicrafts. Eventually some women would be trained as teachers and nurses.[8] The marked division of gender roles fostered a gender hierarchy among Ayoreo that was detrimental to women. The introduction of a cash economy had a further impact on women as they became exclusively dependent on money for their livelihoods, which in turn made them reliant on male family members for access to it. An exception to women's total exclusion from the wage-labor force has been the sale of handicrafts in Filadelfia and Asunción, an activity promoted by missionaries, although over time this has remained only a marginal economic activity because of the instability of the local handicraft market.

Besides their exclusion from wage-labor activities, Ayoreo women were described by Mennonites as having a harsh character that differentiated them from other indigenous women. Christian Graber, who had served as director of the Mennonite Central Committee for South America in 1954–1956, visited Paraguay in 1955 when an important attack on Ayoreo took place. He returned to Filadelfia for two months in 1963, a time when "the

Figure 3.2.
An Ayoreo woman weaving a bag from bromelia fibers. Photo by the author.

Moros [Ayoreo] came out of the jungle and showed unexpected friendliness" (Graber 1964:5). In his book about his experiences with Ayoreo in the colonies, Graber notes (1964:18), "While the Chulupí [Nivaclé] and Lengua [Enlhet] women are timid and remain very much in the background, the Moro women are bold, aggressive and vocal on all occasions." Reflecting that perception, Mennonite colonial discourse about Ayoreo women as uncivilized and aggressive fostered a stigma that has remained embedded in the imaginary of the colonies to the present day and becomes evident in the urban exclusion experienced by *curajodie* like Toje and Queneja.

The sexual practices of women were yet another realm of Ayoreo sociality that missionaries sought to eradicate. Sexual autonomy was a topic of conversation for everyone who came in contact with them. Susnik, after her

visit in 1962, described Ayoreo women as so invested in their sexual relations with men that she thought they were not respecting the clan exogamy taboos. She notes how, as they engaged men, they had "no consideration of the group of the new partner" (1963:3). This portrayal of women's sexual practices as promiscuous was also shared by Paraguayans, New Tribes Mission workers, and Mennonites alike. Missionaries expected women to adopt Christian models of sexual behavior that focused on chastity for unmarried women and procreation for married women. Mariana Gómez, who has explored the process of missionization of Toba women in the Argentine Chaco of the early twentieth century, has shown how despite resisting the intense Christianization of Anglican missionaries during the two initial decades of life in the missions, Toba women eventually lost their sense of sexual autonomy as a result of "missionary intervention in regulation of their sexual, reproductive and affective life" (2011:218–219). The case of Ayoreo stands in direct contrast to this example; the moral values that encouraged single women to initiate sexual contact and actively engage their sexuality from early puberty until finding a permanent partner were not eradicated as expected. This has facilitated the present blossoming of the *curajodie* phenomenon. Nevertheless, the construction of women's sexuality as morally fraught reinforced outsiders' perception of them as uncivilized, which further marginalized Ayoreo women in the colonies.

Despite this push toward marginalization, the changes promoted by missionaries were not all passively incorporated by the Ayoreo. They crafted their own spaces for maneuvering according to their own needs and desires, and overall the missionary project exposed excesses that could not be neatly contained. For men, the piecework system was used as one way of contesting the new time discipline imposed on them. They did this by engaging in other activities such as hunting at times they were expected to be working for the missionaries. Women also found ways of negotiating the dependence on cash and their formal exclusion from the market. They adapted to the new socioeconomic context by retaining the income derived from the work of their male partners and by finding their own forays into the market economy through the commodification of their sexuality. Also, rather than staying confined in the mission as expected, many of the younger men and women would temporarily leave it to go to the Mennonite colonies, initially to visit and later to look for work. Women used the colonies as a new space in which to explore their sexuality while single. Their doing so led to women being further excluded from the socioeconomic fabric of the colonies, as they were perceived as morally loose by locals.

Ayoreo Sexuality and the Transgression of Boundaries in the Colonies

Rudolf is a Mennonite who as a young man lived in Filadelfia during the early 1960s. He recalled the initial visits of Ayoreo to Filadelfia:

> They would come and walk around town. They came in groups of two or three, making unexpected appearances in people's homes or work sites. Their women were young and good-looking, and they used little clothing back then. Our people were not used to that, but for the Ayoreo, it was their natural way, to show everything . . . and you know, what was shown attracted the attention of the men.

The first visits, at the end of 1962 and early 1963, caused an uproar among Mennonites not only because of the unclothed bodies of Ayoreo women, who were seen as morally lax, but also because the fierce and feared ones were finally there. Cornelius, a Mennonite elder who worked in a local public office, once overhead me speaking Ayoreo as I was filling out some paperwork while accompanied by Ayoreo elders. He approached me to ask how I had learned the language. Without giving me time to answer, he followed up in a burst, "I saw them come out of the jungle into Filadelfia for the first time!" He continued, "I was fourteen years old at the time and remember being at school. Out of the blue they came to our class windows looking inside our room. They were naked! And we were so scared!" He went on to share more details with a mix of awe and excitement, revealing how for him, as for many other Mennonites with whom I conversed, the initial encounters with Ayoreo caused an impression on Mennonites who since their arrival built an imaginary of them as fierce and frightening.

At the same time, the bodies of Ayoreo women were seen by Mennonite men as exotic and therefore eroticized and desired; this perception eventually led to casual sexual encounters. Graber of the Mennonite Central Committee insinuated this as he recalled the visit of a second group of Ayoreo that reached the colonies in January 1963. He states that two Mennonites had been appointed as police to protect the "moros," as "there were always those who would take advantage of friendly Indian women" (1964:40). That men felt drawn to women's naked bodies and sexuality was constructed as natural, and men's transgressions, while problematic, were not as strictly enforced as in cases of Mennonite women who had liaisons with Paraguayan men. This difference is evidenced in the reaction of the colony to a request by NTM missionaries. The latter considered these intimate ex-

changes a growing threat to the inculcation of Christian values. A Mennonite named Peter told me the missionary Henry Buchegger presented a note to the colony's administration in the mid-1960s requesting that Mennonites stop "sleeping around with Ayoreo women." Peter said the reaction of the administrator was to tear the letter to pieces. I asked what might have been the reason, and he told me, "I didn't ask him, but we could speculate that there might have been names there that he preferred not to see noted." This was yet another instance in which men, unlike women, were given the benefit of the doubt instead of being socially sanctioned.

Older Ayoreo women like Nauja remember having approached white men around the same time, in the mid-1960s. A grandmother in her late sixties, she recounted her first encounters with Mennonite men in the colonies: "I had sex with them in the beginning. We were good-looking, and our parents didn't mind that we approached them." Her friend Cheque had a different impression of white men; she said she remembered being "afraid of them," although some of her girlfriends were not. The liaisons were only fleeting, and parental permission was given as long as single women did not bear children, since at the time, Ayoreo group endogamy was still strictly observed.

By the 1970s, the first biracial babies appeared. Ayoreo have a narrative of the Jnani Bajade that explains the events that led to these babies. Collected in 1977 by the anthropologist Marcelo Bórmida (in Wilbert and Simoneau 1989), it coincides with the time the phenomenon was taking root. According to the narrative, Ayoreo visited the camp of a group of white people. In the camp were some young white men who wanted to have sexual relations with the visiting Ayoreo young women. The men consulted with their mothers, asking if they could have intercourse with the girls, but their mothers did not allow them to do that. Ayoreo said the mothers of the young men did not give permission but failed to explain to their children that in the future they would have the opportunity to marry white women, not Ayoreo women. The failure of the mothers to make that clear to the men drove them to proceed to have intercourse with Ayoreo women unaware of their mothers' expectations. That is the story of how Ayoreo women began to have children with white men.

By means of this narrative, intercourse with white men was incorporated into Ayoreo narrative as a way to give meaning to contemporary changes in their lifestyles. The narrative depicts the key role of women in Ayoreo society, of guiding their sons which in this narrative Ayoreo applied to non-Ayoreo; that is, the white mothers did not want their children to have intercourse with Ayoreo women. But this decision, according to Ayoreo, was

not respected by the young white men because their mothers failed to guide them in explaining that they should wait for white women rather than having intercourse with Ayoreo women. The lack of clear guidance caused this observance to be broken by the white men. In this way, biracial sexual relations were established by white men, rather than Ayoreo women, breaking a taboo.

The first biracial babies came from liaisons with Mennonite employers who had hired Ayoreo and their families for varying periods. Ayoreo helped clear private plots of forest in the *colonias* to sell wood to the colony to produce electricity. The biracial babies put in public evidence the active and undeniable sexual involvement of Mennonites with Ayoreo women. Moreover, the appearance of these children evidenced the blurring of colonial boundaries and hierarchies, a process that characterized the category of colonial mestizos in the Americas (de la Cadena 2005). Some Mennonites who had liaisons with Ayoreo women in the earlier period of contact, in the 1960s and 1970s, are still vividly remembered by many Ayoreo. Stories about them circulate time and again, and many of the men were even given Ayoreo names based on a physical or personality trait. Older members of the Mennonite community are discreet about the stories when asked, but a Mennonite woman told me, "These men were not anonymous; they were well known in the colony for going around with Ayoreo and other indigenous women. Many of them led immoral lives."

One of the men, Ugui ("the one who walks," in Ayoreo), was an employer who fathered one of the first biracial babies. I visited him at the *Altheim*. I began searching for Ugui after hearing the story of his daughter, Enoe. I was struck when she shared with me her childhood memory of growing up "ashamed of my white skin among my people." Enoe's Ayoreo mother had raised her until she was four years old, then gave her to some relatives. Enoe had never met her Mennonite father and was not interested in doing so. She felt no connection or curiosity to reach out to him. I traced Ugui's whereabouts in the colony and soon learned that because of several health issues, mostly a damaged liver due to alcoholism, he was living in the elders house, where he could receive better assistance, as he was divorced and no longer had relationships with his children. He was never fully accepted in the community for reasons that remained unclear to me even after inquiring among some individuals who knew him.

The day I met him, he was quietly sitting in a wheelchair in a shiny, white-tiled corridor, staring blankly into the beautiful garden full of bougainvillea in bloom in front of the brick building. I immediately recognized Enoe's oval face. Our exchange was brief, and I had chosen not to mention

her name or that of her mother. We talked about the Ayoreo he had employed at his place in Colonia 15, and I updated him on some of their lives. He had neither seen nor heard about them since the last time he hired them in the mid-1980s. He did not show much interest but seemed to appreciate this stranger's visit on a hot October afternoon.

Despite a history of intimate liaisons between Ayoreo women and Mennonite men from early on, these encounters have not been as morally sanctioned as those of Mennonite women who married Paraguayan men. Any critical reflection on active Mennonite male intimate involvement with indigenous women in the initial years of Ayoreo encounters would have challenged their racial boundaries and the Christian values held by the community that emphasize fidelity and sexual chastity. Still today it is not unusual to hear Mennonite men from the higher socioeconomic ranks say that their fellow Mennonites who become involved with indigenous women come exclusively from the lower social ranks of the colony; it is a way to stress that men of lower standing are the only ones who would dare to do such things. This discourse among those of higher status reinforces their own place at the top of the social ladder and as the bearers of moral values and underscores the ongoing exclusion of men who do not fit the expected social roles of the community. The intimacy of Mennonite men with Ayoreo women unsettles the racial boundaries that the community has carefully put in place and sustained over time, especially by patrolling the sexuality of Mennonite women. But male transgressions with Ayoreo women also serve to reify the perceived low status of Ayoreo women, allowing Mennonites to justify their social and economic distinction in relation to the Ayoreo and outsiders in general.

Refusing Work and Negotiating Exclusion

I met with Alba one afternoon in Filadelfia. A short, gregarious woman in her mid-thirties at the time, she worked as a *comisaria* (superintendent) on a ranch in the northern Chaco that is owned by a Brazilian. She is one of the few women to hold such positions on *estancias*; top jobs usually are reserved for men. *Comisarios* supervise the day-to-day logistics of a ranch and are in direct communication with the administrator, the second in authority after the ranch owner himself. They are also responsible for resolving problems between employees and complete the paperwork for the purchase of food and equipment. I decided to meet Alba because I had learned that several Ayoreo were working on the ranch she supervised. Her two children were at

a boarding school for children of ranch workers, as is common among ranch families with school-age children. Full of life, Alba shared her experiences of working with Ayoreo: "They are hardworking people, really great workers." She paused to sip *tereré* to help ease the Chaco summer heat, and then continued with a grimace on her face: "Of course, this is until you have their wives come along to the ranch. Oh my God, that can really be a nightmare." Alba's comments resonated with those of many Paraguayan and Mennonite employers I came to know over the years. Ayoreo are much desired for being hard workers able to adapt to the precarious living conditions typical of ranches, and although employers do not readily disclose this, Ayoreo also rarely complain when they are not paid their *aguinaldos*, the end-of-year bonuses to which they have the legal right in Paraguay, or when they are underpaid or dismissed without notice. In contrast to the desirable disposition of Ayoreo men from the employers' perspective, their wives are seen as a threat and a disruption to their husbands' work. Many employers describe women as troublemakers.

Jimmy Duerksen, a Mennonite rancher from Filadelfia, told me, "The problem with hiring an Ayoreo employee is that they can leave you unexpectedly. You might never find out why a guy left, but if he's with his wife, she's probably the reason." He shared what he viewed as an "awkward" experience he once had in negotiating a salary with an Ayoreo from Ebetogue whose father had worked for his own father for years. "Throughout our conversation," Duerksen said, "his wife was standing a few meters away and would interrupt us and speak to him in Ayoreo. He couldn't make a decision without her interruptions, but I don't know what she was telling him."

Another Paraguayan rancher shared a similar story with me. He once went out to the urban camp where Ayoreo were staying in Filadelfia, looking to hire four of them to repair fences at his ranch. To him it seemed that every aspect of the negotiation process was communicated by the men to their wives before they eventually made a decision. Employers recognize the influence Ayoreo women exert on their partners' decisions, and they often blame the women when their husbands abruptly abandon their work. In my visits to Ayoreo villages, I have also witnessed many arguments arise between couples when wives' recommendations are not heeded.

The decision-making power of Ayoreo women over their partners' work must be understood in the broader context of their absence from formal participation in the market economy and their role in the productive sphere prior to missionization. In the National Indigenous Census of 2012, Ayoreo women were the group with the lowest amount of paid economic activity compared to other indigenous women who work mostly in Fernheim fac-

tories or as domestic workers in the region's colonies and on *estancias*. Their employment rate was less than half of that of other groups such as the Nivaclé and Enlhet (DGEEC 2012). "They think we'll steal their husbands" is how one young Ayoreo woman referred to female Mennonite employers. In discussing labor opportunities for Ayoreo women in the colonies, one of the Mennonite supervisors at Fernheim's industrial plant explained how one of the factories is the largest employer of seasonal indigenous women's labor. The work involves manual selection, cleaning, and packing of agricultural produce to be exported to Europe. In an honest reflection, the supervisor mentioned that it had never occurred to her to hire Ayoreo women, as she, like most locals, stereotyped them as not clean enough to perform such duties. Most Ayoreo women lack knowledge of Spanish, which limits their ability to find and keep a local job. This situation is the contemporary expression of the historical marginalization of these women in the colonies. Importantly, several local Mennonite and Paraguayan individuals have begun to consider the situation and are actively discussing a way to effectively incorporate Ayoreo women into the labor force, although no concrete efforts are yet seen on the ground.

In Ayoreo society, women have always played important roles in the distribution and exchange of goods within the *jogasui* (extended household) and frequently beyond. Graciela Zolezzi and colleagues (1996:3) describe Ayoreo women's agency and its relation to social status: "The control over distribution of goods and the means of cooperation rests in the hands of the women. A source of prestige for the Ayoreo woman is based on her capacity to regulate and distribute productive economic resources in her family group." While this prominent role was customarily exercised with hunted goods and products gathered from the forest, it is exercised today in the context of money derived from wage labor, as the two common forms of exchange, *mejai* and *doi oredie*, are enacted in the contemporary context.

Mejai is a delayed type of gift exchange voluntarily initiated by one party that is expected to be compensated by the receiving party although not necessarily immediately. Most commonly, Ayoreo use this type of exchange to forge and sustain larger kin relations, especially with relatives and friends living in faraway villages or in Bolivia, where a large group also resides. Bolivian Ayoreo enjoy receiving bromelia plants, highly valued for handicrafts because they are in short supply in Bolivian villages. In exchange, Paraguayan Ayoreo like *mantas* (wool blankets). These exchanges take place between close relatives, but clan membership can be enough of a reason to send someone a present even if the parties have never met. Whoever sends a gift expects to receive something in return at a future time. *Doi oredie* is the

other common form of exchange. The term *oredie* derives from the word *ore*, which translates as image or likeness. The term referred to an intentional exchange between two parties for the acquisition of a specific good needed. Someone who desired a certain good would initiate this type of exchange. If an individual needed a rope, for example, he would approach the person known for his expertise in making good ropes and express what he could offer in exchange for one. The *doi oredie* exchange, unlike *mejai*, is immediate. *Orerane* (those things which have value) included tapir sandals, honey receptacles, ropes, and food bowls. However, access to cash and the growing dependence on industrial items led to a decline in the production and exchange of such items. With the monetization of the economy, Ayoreo now use the term *doi oredie* to refer to a monetary transaction to acquire an item in exchange for money.

Women lead these exchanges by accessing money from their partners' wages. A fundamental aspect of the role of the woman as manager of goods in the contemporary context is that Ayoreo men have maintained the custom of giving their wages to their wives for management and distribution, considering that money has now entered these systems of exchange. I discussed this with Diri, a young man from a newer generation of Ayoreo. In his late thirties, he worked for a year on a Mennonite ranch not far from Filadelfia clearing posts and fixing broken fences. I asked him what he did with his salary. "I give it all to my wife," he said.

"Do you keep anything?"

"No, I don't. But she knows when I need or want something, so she'll use the money to buy it. But she uses the rest of the money. This is something that's starting to make me mad, because she spends all of the money, mostly on clothes. And I have to keep working to make money again. But she, she doesn't know how hard the work I do is. It's hot, and I have to use all my strength to fix fences. But she doesn't understand this. I think that this arrangement of giving all my money to her will have to change sometime."

"But do you think other Ayoreo also give the money to their wives?"

"Yes, most Ayoreo do that. But I think we'll need to split my salary, so that I can keep part of the money."

"Do you know of men who do this?"

"A few, but it's uncommon for us."

Diri seemed to use our exchange to voice a preoccupation he might not easily have discussed with his wife, as the arrangement he describes of giving the wife the salary is common among Ayoreo, and there is not much that Diri seems to be able to do about it. Our exchange took place before Diri abruptly left the position due to a hernia in his back caused by heavy

exertion. The hernia did not heal well, and he scrambled to find day jobs that do not involve much heavy lifting.

It is also common that when men receive their wages, women give part of the money to immediate members of her family as a gift, without complaints from the husband, as it is expected that she will redistribute his income as a sign of solidarity. While women like Diri's wife have become dependent on men to access cash, they have renegotiated their exclusion from directly participating in the market economy by taking prominent roles in managing their partners' wages and decisions about work arrangements such as getting their husbands to ask for *adelantos* (advances) and even telling their husbands to quit. The wives' participation is seen unfavorably by employers.

The Paraguayan administrator of a ranch near Kilómetro 17 shared with me that when an Ayoreo man takes a job at the ranch, the new employee's initial request is usually that part of his salary be deducted up front and that food be delivered to his wife. It could be said that Ayoreo men effectively serve as interlocutors with employers to meet the demands of their wives. In Ayoreo decision-making processes, Karl Giesbrecht has noted, "women play a very decisive role in tightly controlling, as much as they can, any negotiations that are made, emphatically reprimanding the men if their interests are not perceived to be met" (in Nostas and Sanabria 2009:191). If expectations are not met, it is common for women to engage in disruptive practices that force their partners to abruptly quit their jobs. It is often the case that when an employer makes an agreement with an Ayoreo man, if the female partner is unsatisfied with it, she will let her husband know this and incite him to leave the employer or push for his demands to be met.

I contend that women are aware of the consequences of their actions, but by engaging in disruptive practices, they are challenging the terms by which Ayoreo men are expected to participate in the economy as wage laborers. These men are expected to occupy the lowest level of the economic hierarchy in the Mennonite colonies. It is rare to find Ayoreo men who will complain about unfair labor conditions. One Ayoreo man's comment to me could well be that of most or all of them: "Mennonites talk among themselves. If we denounce things, we'll lose our jobs and not get hired again by any Mennonite." Aware of this pressure, women's practices more often than not serve as a public voicing of their men's own perspectives, which the men do not share with their employers. Rather than men voicing their opinions directly to employers, this type of communication places the responsibility for work decisions on women in the eyes of employers. This strategy protects men if they are to return to work. Ayoreo men I have interviewed have no

objections to these practices, which also follow Ayoreo customary etiquette of the role of women in the public sphere when problems arise within the community. In contrast, Mennonite employers perceive these practices as a lack of male domination and often make fun of the apparently marginalized role of men in such situations. But the women's practices reveal how they maintain a prominent role in the productive sphere through new social roles related to their partners' work. They not only manage their partners' income but also monitor or audit the unfair working conditions their partners face that most indigenous people experience in the region.

Conclusion

Examining the incorporation of Ayoreo men into the market economy as wage laborers highlights how women have remained excluded from this process on the missionary frontier. New Tribes Mission forcefully incorporated Ayoreo into the labor force and simultaneously created a gender hierarchy that prioritized the productive role of men over women. Women were expected to adopt Christian values, including those that extended to the realm of sexuality. The missionary frontier project, rather than becoming a totalizing endeavor, was marked by contradictory excesses such as that of the great outflow of Ayoreo leaving the mission stations to work, which drove missionaries first to contain them but later to foster work activities in the colonies. The same occurred in the realm of gender and sexual practices. The sexual experimentation of Ayoreo women with Mennonite men also challenged the expectations of missionaries, although it served to reify racial boundaries as well as the us/other dichotomy for Mennonites. This in turn led to further discrimination in urban spaces.

The exclusion of women has driven them to create their own terms of participation in the regional economy, at the same time challenging wage-labor arrangements within today's frontier economy of the Chaco. One sphere in which they have secured an important role is in shaping the participation of their male partners in the economy. Consequently, Ayoreo men do not follow the expected template of how indigenous employees ought to negotiate and behave at their work sites. While men are aware of this etiquette after decades of engaging in wage labor, women continue to have the last word in how their husbands will participate, at times creating tensions in the household. Despite this, women have no reservations in addressing the precariousness of their partners' work conditions and status. The role of women has been adapted in the new socioeconomic context through the

management of money. The income derived from the work of their partners generally remains within the women's control. This indirect participation of Ayoreo women in the economy through their partners has made a rather bold, albeit unspoken, statement to employers who do not take fair labor conditions into consideration. By appropriating their partners' wages, women are challenging exclusion and finding their own way into the market economy despite decades of marginalization and discrimination. The commodification of Ayoreo sociality as well as the women's responses to the new arrangements of capital and labor cannot be read as overarching and totalizing processes; rather, they expose the fractured nature of capitalism's impact on Ayoreo life as well as the creative ways Ayoreo, especially women, have appropriated the changes they are experiencing.

I found Doria under a shady mesquite tree, just on the side of a tin shed where machinery and other farm equipment were stored. Sitting on a wool blanket turned into a mat, she was drinking a cold *tereré* with María, her daughter-in-law. It had been two weeks since they arrived at La Brisa ranch. Doria was accompanying her husband, Oji, who had been hired to repair old fences around the 12,000 acres of pasturelands owned by a Mennonite rancher. The new rancher is part of a larger trend of members of Fernheim Colony who in recent decades have successfully invested the gains from their family-owned milking businesses into ranching. Oji himself hired his son and two other young men to help with the job, which was estimated to last a month. As I approached the women under the tree, Doria grinned at me while simultaneously putting her index finger on her lips to silence my greeting. I didn't notice at first, but she was leaning over a tiny Nokia 1100 cell phone lying on her shoulder. I realized this as she started talking in Ayoreo and her voice reverberated in the battery-operated radio lying on the mat. She was "on air" with Radio Pa'i Puku, one of the two main radio stations in the Chaco,[9] sending her greetings to relatives back in her village.

It was siesta time, and the heat was unbearable. Doria was wearing a red tank top and had her long, loose, colorful skirt rolled up to the knee. I spotted some leftover ash on her right knee, a sign that she had been curling thin strips of dried bromelia fibers into threads. She would always take advantage of the trips with her husband to his work sites; there, she would gather *jui* (wild peppers) and *dajudie* (bromelia leaves),[10] goods highly esteemed by Ayoreo but no longer available in most villages.

Hanging from a low branch of the mesquite tree was a large cooking pan, blackened with soot from the fire, and inside were some leftover noodles with chunks of meat in what seemed like a diluted tomato sauce. Un-

like Oji, who has a long history of working for Mennonite and Paraguayan employers, Doria had few opportunities. On a few occasions she was hired to do small jobs such as picking buffelgrass seeds from pastures and spraying vegetable gardens on *estancias* where her husband was working, but nothing beyond that. She was never offered the opportunity to take a position as a domestic worker to wash clothes or cook on *estancias* or in households of the colonies. "People don't want us in their homes, Paola," she told me. "These are jobs reserved for other indigenous peoples or Paraguayan women but not for us Ayoreo."

"Not easy to work with," "too strong personalities," "problematic," and "dirty" are some of the ways Paraguayans and Mennonites alike explain the lack of paid work for Ayoreo women in the region. The Mennonite historical imaginary of the Ayoreo has undoubtedly contributed to this stereotyped representation. Regardless, these are the same women who get up early every day to make a fire to cook for their extended families, who endlessly haul water back and forth between their houses and wells in twenty-five-liter grease containers made into buckets to bathe children and wash clothes; these are women who can walk for hours through dense forests and precisely spot honey and other wild fruits; they are women who deftly balance large fiber bags (*utebei*) filled with freshly hunted meat on their heads, carrying them for miles. With no apparent effort, they wield heavy axes to cut trunks of *palo santo* trees that will light the village's fires at night. During the rainy season, they tend their communal vegetable gardens and help their partners make charcoal in underground ovens. They do all of this and still find the energy to weave their handicrafts as they sit around the fire at night. These women, whose strength and capability are readily evident to even the most casual observer, are the very same women who have been deemed insufficient to enter the regional labor force, a site where capitalist wage labor is the only means afforded to indigenous peoples to become recognized as citizens in today's Chaco.

CHAPTER 4

Commodifying Sex

The night I decided to join a group of *curajodie* on their way to Villa Choferes del Chaco, they were visibly excited, especially because I offered to drive them there. Usually they hitchhike or pay for a taxi ride. This bedroom community for Paraguayan workers is ten miles from Filadelfia, and every weekend private bars host large parties attended by Paraguayans and indigenous people alike. Jidabia was one of seven girls who rode with me. She seemed shy, but her soft voice concealed a strong character, which I would discover only later. Once at the party, she did not leave my side the whole night while her friends were out dancing and meeting men. Without being asked, she assumed a guardian position and rejected anybody who approached her to invite her for a dance. She would also cut in front of anyone who tried to invite me to dance, abruptly contriving before I could say a word: "Déjenle en paz, no habla español" (Leave her alone, she doesn't speak Spanish). That night a fight broke out between Jidabia and a young Paraguayan woman who showed up at the party with Jidabia's ex-boyfriend. They started pushing each other and grabbing each other by the hair. The fight ended when the police expelled, in a humiliating way, all Ayoreo women and only Ayoreo women, regardless of who was actually involved in the fight. I remember tensely observing from behind a fence as the police pushed the women to the gate like animals and dealt them several kicks on the way. With that, the party came to an end.

The next time I ran into Jidabia was when she asked me to donate blood for her older, convalescent brother, Ugai, who was at the time in his late twenties. A few days earlier, a Paraguayan shot him at the entrance to town, thinking Ugai was going to steal his backpack. The bullet ruptured one of his lungs, and Ugai was taken to Fernheim Colony's Hospital Filadelfia. He was rejected there for not having the Mennonite health insurance, so

the police took him to the public hospital in Villa Choferes del Chaco. It turned out that this hospital did not have the necessary infrastructure to attend to the injury and urged the Mennonite hospital to take him; otherwise, he was expected to die. The Mennonite physician who finally admitted him declared that it was a miracle that Ugai survived the trips back and forth in the back of a police truck. It was by accompanying Jidabia at her brother's bedside in the separate "indigenous ward" of the Mennonite hospital that I got to know her better and learned more about her story. She had started to "walk the streets," as she told me, at the age of sixteen.

> That was the first time I had sex with a Paraguayan. It happened in Filadelfia. I was with my parents. My father has a Mennonite employer in town, and he was looking for work at the time. One night, I went out with some *curajodie*. I was excited to get to know white men. I was also was very afraid the first night because I had heard things, you know. . . . Later, that feeling went away, after a few weeks. I returned to my village with my family but started going back to Filadelfia to keep playing with men. In the beginning, men wouldn't pay me to be with them, and I didn't ask for money, either. I just went out, and if they were generous, they would give me some money.

The narratives of women such as Jidabia highlight how indigenous sexualities are constructed and enacted in frontier regions in light of rapidly changing socioeconomic and cultural processes. Their stories, and those of older generations of women, provide an overview of Ayoreo ethics of sexuality and their resignifications in the contemporary context. Ethical values related to sexuality that were customarily embedded in systems of exchange have become commoditized as Ayoreo have become incorporated into the market economy. The resultant commodification of their social relations ultimately reached the realm of sexuality. Money has now become constitutive of courting and marriage for younger generations of Ayoreo. The process of commodification of intimacy is not unique to Ayoreo but rather resonates with scholarship in other contexts where money and emotional ties are intertwined in intimate liaisons (Curtis 2009; Padilla et al. 2007; Rebhun 2002). The Ayoreo case, however, lends a new and unique aspect to the study of these processes; despite the commodification of sexuality, the market economy and Christianization have failed to discontinue the Ayoreo values of exchange, reciprocity, and sexual autonomy embedded in practices of sexuality. The circulation of money at the intimate level is a new expression of established customary practices of exchange and reciprocity that have been reconfigured to accommodate the expansion of a frontier economy. This re-

configuration has not necessitated a break from earlier social values embedded in women's practices.

In his work on the Ayoreo, Bessire argues that they experience contemporary transformations in their lives through "radical ruptures that create fractured and ambiguous new moral selves" (2014:114). These ruptures are experienced as processes of self-negation, such as the self-negation of a supposedly sinful past from one's Christian present life. As a result, Ayoreo people often make sense of their history and experience their present as a series of negations and ambiguities. A closer analysis of the discourses and practices of the women indicates that the ruptures proposed by Bessire are neither as radical nor as ambiguous as he portrays them. The commodification of sexuality creates very specific subjectivities that do not lead to an outright negation of the past. Instead, it involves specific negotiations and adaptations. While tensions indeed result from acquired Christian values and the new context into which Ayoreo lives are embedded, these tensions, rather than highlighting ambiguities, illustrate how earlier values are being deployed to navigate new realities.

The discourses and practices of two generations of women highlight the historical continuities of certain practices as well as the modification of others. The discourses and practices refrain from adhering to a model that implies linear temporality to understand the contemporary life projects of the Ayoreo. Rather, they show how the enactment of customary values in the present is anchored and reproduced as a result of contemporary socioeconomic dynamics that shape the lives of Ayoreo; these values are not vestiges of the past or of dying traditions. At the forefront of the dynamics is the intense commodification of social relations that they have experienced in the past fifty years.

The Ethics of Ayoreo Sexuality

In the courtyard of Poca's house there was always a small fire burning, regardless of the weather. Poca was born before the time of missionaries, north of Cucarani (Cerro León) in the northeastern Paraguayan Chaco. The area, once covered in lush forests, was where mainly the Ducode-gosode, one of the many Ayoreo subgroups, roamed before making permanent contact with the settler society in the mid-1960s. At the time, the Ducode-gosode were under the leadership of Uejai, a feared chief and shaman who had successfully brought together a confederacy of Ayoreo subgroups under the name Guidai-gosode to engage in warfare against the Direquene-gosode

and Totobie-gosode subgroups (Fischermann 1988). Poca's father, Jutoi, had been an important *dacasute* (chief) along with Uejai, and both men had multiple wives, a practice reserved exclusively for chiefs before Christian values were inculcated.

When I first visited Poca in the early 2000s, her parents were still alive, living next to her in a tiny wooden shack in the village of Campo Loro. Skinny and blind, Jutoi sat near the fire and would repeatedly request a piece of *carnaza*, a specific cut of beef, from whoever came to visit. Campo Loro is near the Mennonite colonies and far removed from Cucarani, where Poca grew up; that area is now inaccessible to most Ayoreo for lack of transportation. Every time I visited her she would ask me with a heavy tone if I had been to Cucarani lately and if so, to share with her any updates on what the place looked like. She had received news that ranchers had taken over the forests she had once known, and she was eager to gauge these changes in hopes that the landscape remained intact. Her longing lingered throughout our conversations, and I never found the strength to tell her that except for the Cerro León National Park that surrounds Cucarani, she would not be able to recognize what remains of the forests where as a child she had followed her mother to collect honey, *dajudie*, and *doridie*.[1] Even the national park forests are under threat from prospecting activities permitted by the Paraguayan government (Canova 2018).

Poca had just turned fourteen when she and her parents, along with another seven families, decided to walk from a summer camp they had near Cucarani to Bolivia to visit relatives. "The trip to Bolivia took us about a month or two on foot. We didn't have motorbikes or bikes back then," she told me. "It was during that trip that I had my first period. This is when I started wearing the *dajudie* skirt for the first time. My mother had made it for me. When I began to wear the skirt, I also started to become more independent from my mother." Glancing at Dasua, her neighbor who had joined us to chat that hot afternoon, she recalled,

> It was our time of laughing [flirting] with young men, right? I remember I wanted to find a good hunter. We all wanted that. Going around with different men is wrong, but back then this was our mothers' way of thinking, which is why we also did it. We went around with men and then left them to go with others until we found someone we wanted to stay with.

Giggling, Dasua said,

> I was ugly back then, but I did the same things as the good-looking girls did, as we were all the same age. Sometimes I would sleep with someone in

> the men's house in the middle of the village. Other times I would accompany male friends on hunting trips. And then we started looking for white men too. Poca can tell you about our trips to Filadelfia.

Like Poca and her friend Dasua, young, single women of earlier generations had the autonomy to experiment sexually. They were given the exclusive role of initiating the courting process, a trait shared with women of other indigenous groups in the Chaco (Chase Sardi, Siddredi, and Cordeu 1992). Practices and discourses of men and women of different generations regarding sexual initiation, courting, marriage arrangements, and the commodification of intimacy constitute what I refer to as Ayoreo ethics of sexuality; ethics here is understood in the Aristotelian tradition also known as positive ethics (Colebrook 1997; Hacking 2002). That is, ethics involves a set of practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, and truth (MacIntyre 2007). Foucault (1997:177) has suggested that practices of the self are "not invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group." In the Ayoreo case, the ethical work in which individuals engage proves to be more of a social matter than an individualist one as Foucault asserts. Nevertheless, the value of his approach lies in the construction of moral systems not as a monolithic set of regulatory norms and values made exclusively of moral codes, Kantian style (Myhre 1998), but as constituted by actual practices in which groups of people engage. People's choices and practices thus inform values in the same way that values inform people's practices, a perspective taken by anthropological analyses of moral and ethical thinking (Faubion 2001; Hirschkind 2006; Laidlaw 2002).

Ayoreo sexual ethics was constructed on the paramount value of personal autonomy, one of the pillars of their sense of personhood (Renshaw 2004). This strong sense of personal autonomy is a defining trait of the sociality of various indigenous groups across lowland South America for whom the basis of the collective, key to the reproduction of their social life, is dependent on the autonomy of self (Londono 2012; Overing and Passes 2000; Santos-Granero 2002). It is in this sense that I use the term "autonomy," that is, as constructed through the mutual imbrication of the social and the individual, differing from Western liberal frameworks that construct individuals as self-constituting autonomous subjects and equate individuality with freedom as critiqued by Mahmood (2005) and Rose (1999).[2]

The Ayoreo sense of autonomy was enacted out of the principles of the

Jnani Bajade (Original Men) and Cheque Bajedie (Original Women), principles that guided sexual behavior but also community structure and gender relations (Fischermann 1976, 1988; Nostas and Sanabria 2009). Positive values attached to practices of the sexuality of single women were built around notions of autonomy, desire, reciprocity, and exchange established by trial and error according to their daily vicissitudes when the Original Men and Women (collectively referred to as Original Beings) were still humans. These daily vicissitudes were transmitted through narratives from generation to generation. The structure of the narratives centers on a human protagonist who could take the form of an animal, plant, or other being. The narratives depict specific aspects of daily life and the roles of the Original Beings. That is, the episodes describe situations in which the protagonists find themselves by force or as a result of their own will. Each story ends with the protagonist's transformation and relinquishment of the human figure for that of an animal, plant, or other being or artifact. Before dying, the protagonist leaves a prohibition, precept, or precaution regarding the situation that resulted in his or her eventual death and transformation. Many protagonists also leave behind healing chants known as *sarode*.

The observance of taboos in the realm of sexuality left by Original Beings served as a set of principles through which values, beliefs, and self-understandings were recognized, constituted, and expressed from one generation to the next. Importantly, these were not a bounded set of principles; instead, new narratives would be introduced over time to give meaning to changes Ayoreo experienced in their lives. The narratives might be more appropriately referred to as "myths/histories" to emphasize their historical and agentive nature, moving away from categorizations that treat myths as ahistorical and belonging to the realm of belief.[3] For Ayoreo, rather than stable, timeless structures, the myths/histories carried transformative capacities.

A common theme that runs through the narratives of the Jnani Bajade and Cheque Bajedie is that of the woman as enactor of her own sexuality; she had the independence to choose her sexual partners, she would make herself sexually available to different men until eventually finding a permanent partner, and she took the lead in the process of sexual flirting and courting without male impositions. While these practices have survived missionization and are seen today in how young *curajodie* like Upusia and Jidabia enact their sexuality, it is notable that most of the female Ayoreo elders I met rarely linked any description of their intimate practices to the precepts of the Original Beings or related taboos. This omission is a resounding confirmation of the impact of intense Christianization by New Tribes Mission, whose workers aimed at forcefully eradicating Ayoreo customary values (Escobar 1988; Lind 1974).[4] Although older women would describe their role as enactors of

courting and flirting, in the same story, they often discursively emphasized their rejection of the principles of the Original Beings by reframing their practices from life "iji monte" (literally, "in the forest," an expression used to refer to life prior to the arrival of missionaries) in terms of a temporal rupture from the past. This rupture is constructed by describing their practices as belonging to the time when "we did not know anything." While such statements allow them to highlight their past practices as detached from their contemporary Christian subjectivities, discourses like these are not sufficient to argue for a complete or "radical rupture" from their "traditional past," as proposed by Bessire (2014). Although Christian values were adopted in the discourses of older women, values related to autonomy and exchange continue to characterize the contemporary sexual practices of newer generations of women. However, these values are now expressed through new practices such as the racialization of desire enacted by *curajodie* and the incorporation of money into the realm of sexuality, both of which resignify young women's experiences of intimacy in today's Chaco.

Since contact in the mid-1960s, NTM missionaries have expected women to align their practices with Christian values through models of sexual behavior focused on chastity for single women. Flirting and courting activities came immediately under scrutiny. Prohibitions against them fell in tandem with a larger trend in Protestantism, which as Webb Keane (2007) has pointed out, has an anxious concern to distinguish subject from object, that is, the dematerialization of the person and a focus on the inner self. Despite missionary surveillance, the positive value placed on the sexual autonomy of unmarried women was never totally eradicated. In contrast, the practice of infanticide ended not long after the establishment of the missions. Why was the sexual autonomy of women not discontinued as well? I contend that missionaries enforced sexuality as a private matter, replicating nineteenth-century Victorian bourgeois society (Foucault 1978). The shift of Ayoreo sexuality from the public to the private realm made women's practices less visible and therefore allowed the practices to survive over time. While intense Christianization eradicated practices such as infanticide, sexual autonomy is a distinct marker that continues to define the contemporary intimacy of women as they experience continuities and changes in the realm of sexuality.

Becoming a Young Woman Today

Modern Ayoreo teens typically reach puberty between the ages of twelve and thirteen. The *dajudie* skirt woven of bromeliad fibers and wrapped around

the waist in earlier times marked the transition into adolescence; it has been substituted by imported Pakistani nylon skirts or tight jeans, with makeup and high heels. Beginning at this age, Poca's daughter, Gieja, was expected to begin exploring her sexuality while still under parental control, mostly because Poca and her husband agreed that Gieja was beginning this exploration earlier than girls in previous generations. Poca's friend Dasua described girls at this stage as "je ore chiraja jnanione unerai" (those who already know sexual things about men). When staying in the villages, I very rarely spotted girls with young male friends during the day. At night, however, their social activity flourishes. They gather in small groups to hang out, listen to music, and talk. Often one can hear them laughing from afar. They carve their own social spaces separate from those of older people and married couples, who often meet around the fire at the compound of the village chief, one of the main communal spaces of village life.

During puberty, a girl's sexuality becomes a public matter, co-constructed within the public sphere. Family members, usually female, have a public role in reinforcing codes of expected behavior for young girls, often around the fire at the chief's house. At times Poca would openly scold her daughter in front of other people. She would start by recounting her daughter's actions and contrasting them with how girls her age were expected to behave. Other older female family members and close friends of Poca's would contribute to the conversation with comments and advice. In such exchanges, women add anecdotes of similar events to the conversation, and their anecdotes are revisited and retold in fragments by different people, as they are usually already known by most. These discourses provide a space in which values regarding sexuality and gendered roles are reinforced and transmitted to younger generations. Parents, by publicly displaying their anger and preoccupation with their daughters' actions, openly reassert their views and the values they uphold about young women's sexuality. But to the extent that single women's sexual practices do not interfere with married couples' relationships, the sexual practices of adolescents do not have undesirable moral connotations.

Around age seventeen, Gieja transitioned from a *gapu gatode* (girl without hair) to a *gapu* (young woman) when she became sexually active. She asserted an exclusive role in initiating the courting process, and she signaled her sexual availability through various means. Like Gieja, young women usually become sexually active before reaching age seventeen, so most of their stories involve strict parental control before then. The restrictions in turn create more friction, as the average age at which Ayoreo become sexually active has decreased significantly in recent decades.

In contrast to the proactive role played by young women, a single man requires the mediation of female friends to make himself visible to potential partners. Such mediation gives girls like Jidabia the status of *boquere*. This term, which implies the leading role of women in courting, translates as "mischievous" or "playful" and has a definitely sexual connotation. Young women may establish temporary relations with men they call *ijnora* (friend), while for more permanent relations they use the term *gajmai* (boyfriend, fiancé); this latter term is used for undivided sexual and emotional commitment to one person which is rare at this stage. *Curajodie* often use the term *ijnora* to refer to their male liaisons. A couple's relationship is not constructed as an evolving process with the ultimate goal of sexual intercourse (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006); sexual intercourse is instead integrated into the broader process of courting.

One of the main teachings Poca remembers from her mother was that pregnancy without a permanent partner was considered a major moral flaw. The use of therapeutic chants known as *chubuchu* were common to avoid pregnancy. But with few other birth control or abortive methods known to Ayoreo, most would carry a pregnancy to term and then terminate the life of the child by putting the baby in a *pozo* (pit in the ground) soon after birth. This practice was known as *ijóchame jnumi*, which translates as "to plant in the ground."[5] Infanticide was not considered ethically wrong; on the contrary, it allowed single women to avoid becoming single mothers, a status that was morally censured. The same practice of infanticide was typically performed with the firstborn child after marriage; since there was no certain way to identify the father of one's child at that point, it was expected that the life of the first child would be terminated. Poca recalled how she buried her first child:

> I buried him soon after getting together with Yigo. I got pregnant and we decided to bury that child. I felt sad because I saw the baby alive, but I didn't want to keep it because we had already made the decision. It belonged to someone else, not him. The child was born while Yigo was on a hunting trip. There was a hole from a *chicori* root [*Jacaratia corumbensis Kuntze*] that had been extracted a few days earlier by the place where I gave birth. That was the place where the newborn baby was buried.

Fatherless children are referred to in a demeaning manner as *ecaqueo* (rootless). In the past, these children were often marginalized for lacking a provider and family to guide their formation into adulthood. Stories were told of relatives terminating the lives of these children. In spite of the strong

stigma carried by children with no definite, known father, not all newborns ended up in a *pozo*, as there were couples who took these children in as their own. Puru, my hostess in Tunocojai, a small village that split from Campo Loro in the late 1990s, enjoyed recounting the story of how she was saved from the *pozo* by her adoptive parents. The decision to practice infanticide was personal, but it could be discussed with family members. Over time, as a result of intense missionization, the practice was eliminated, and adoption has substituted it. Today the term *ecaqueo* continues to be used, but its meaning has shifted as a result of missionization. While it continues to have an unfavorable connotation, in the present it highlights a break with the Christian moral code related to celibacy before marriage rather than a lack of provision as in the past.

Around the fire, Poca and Dasua recalled how single women would use natural plant dyes to paint their faces with clan designs to display beauty and to advertise their sexual availability, a practice they continued for a few years after living in the mission. "But these days girls use makeup," Dasua explained. Like painting, laughter also is used to signal interest in a potential partner. Indeed, the Ayoreo word for laughter, *inganare*, meaning "to play" or "to fool around," can carry a sexual tone. The transition to married life is articulated as *je ore cana*, meaning "they no longer laugh," Poca emphasized. With marriage, a woman's role changes significantly. The independence to enjoy one's sexuality while single is completely restricted after marriage. A marker of this transition up to the present day is the bearing of children after marriage, not marriage itself; this is what changes a *gapu* (young woman) into a *cheque* (full woman).

The practices of single women emphasize their personal autonomy in enacting their sexuality from a young age; their initiation of flirting and courting shows how these practices persist as a trademark of Ayoreo sexuality. The sexual explorations of Jidabia resemble those of most Ayoreo single women who take a lead in flirting and courting until they find a steady partner. Jidabia met men on the street corners or in the bars of Filadelfia. As she described it, her goal was "to get to know them and play with them," a discourse among young Ayoreo women referring to their sexual liaisons. Jidabia's practices, which involved streetwalking, resemble those of sex workers in other contexts (Agustín 2007; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattakaik 2011), but they differ in content and meaning. Jidabia was not focused on going out each night to find men. Her outings, like that of most *curajodie*, were casual. To the Ayoreo, what made Jidabia a *curajo* in comparison to other Ayoreo young women was that she was interested in liaisons only with non-Ayoreo men. Even so, as the stories of these women illustrate, she and

Figure 4.1. Laughter, a trademark of female Ayoreo youth. Photo by the author.

other *curajodie* do not strictly adhere to that designation, showing a fluidity in their practices that goes beyond their discourses.

Competing Values in Tension

Although the sexual autonomy of young women is recognized, there is also an expectation that single women will eventually settle and marry; otherwise, their singlehood can run the risk of becoming morally reproachful by the community. This precept can be traced back to the narrative of Cuco (Bottle Tree), a Cheque Baje (Original Woman).[6] When human, Cuco was young and single and slept with men, but she did not want to marry any of them. Whenever she encountered a young man she had not seen before, she would spend the night with him. If someone wanted to marry her, she would decline. She would only spend the night with him. One day a man told her, "I am going to get you pregnant. That way you will always have to sleep [stay in a relationship] with me." She replied, "I am going to take measures not to have children." She did so in order to continue to sleep with as many men as she wanted. She said, "No one is going to get me pregnant. I am not going to get married, but I am going to continue sleeping with men." While Cuco stayed single, Ayoreo disapproved of her refusal to marry.

In this narrative, sexual autonomy is framed within and operates according to abstract guiding principles for one's actions, which could be punished if not enacted accordingly. Christianity has erased the precepts of the Original Beings such as that of Cuco's from women's discourses. Today, finding individuals who might be interested in discussing the Original Beings or who might link contemporary women's practices to the precepts of the Original Beings is difficult. While the discursive link between sexual practices and Original Beings has mostly been dissolved by Christianity, Ayoreo still refer to Original Beings in other contexts. They use the terms "Jnani Bajade" and "Cheque Bajedie" to refer to individuals not only from mythical/historical time but also from more recent historical time. That is, certain individuals who have died but who lived during the period prior to contact with missionaries are also referred to as Jnani Bajade. These individuals, unlike the mythical ones, are often remembered through stories about their lives and decisions they made in situations that can range from interpersonal relations to war and hunting. These stories are publicly shared and serve to reinforce values ascribed to social practices from the past. It is in this context that practices related to sexual autonomy and exchange continue to hold positive social value, at times coexisting in tension with Christian values.

Locals in Filadelfia often criticize the sexual practices of Ayoreo women as lacking moral guidance. However, these observers are unaware that according to Ayoreo ethics, the enactment of women's sexuality involves a complex set of negotiations of expected ethical codes of behavior on the part of young women. For example, while they have the independence to change partners, they also run the risk of being labeled *dipote* by the Ayoreo community. *Dipote* is a derogatory term that refers to an insatiable sexual appetite cultivated by a young woman who changes partners too often. Such a label can represent a severe criticism of the individual as well as her family. As a result, young women carefully negotiate how they handle their sexual liaisons to avoid creating problems between households. Later events in the life of Jidabia illustrate how *curajodie* are subject to a complicated and conflicting set of religious ideals and social norms that has resulted from the liminal frontier environment.

When Jidabia turned seventeen, she became pregnant by a Mennonite man. She did not keep the child. Soon after birth, she gave the baby to a couple who were relatives of her mother. Although her pregnancy was a shameful episode for her parents, they supported her throughout it and the birth. Her father, a *dupade anguesone* (preacher), complained to me about how she spent most of her time in Filadelfia. He related that although he

did not support her *adode* (ways) because he is a Christian, he was not able to do anything about it because he respects her decisions. His restraint reflects a common Ayoreo respect for the autonomy of the individual (Fischermann 1988). In most cases, Ayoreo parents do not condemn single women's sexual practices, although most parents self-identify as Christian. They do not usually oppose their daughters' sexual encounters with non-Ayoreo men, multiple sexual partners, or initiation of sexual liaisons; these actions are considered ethically acceptable for most Ayoreo. Jidabia's father, as a pastor, did not approve of her practices but nonetheless remained silent. What worries parents and dishonors them are heavy drinking and its consequences for young women in Filadelfia, especially in instances of violence. The father of another *curajo* reflected, "What I worry about the most is that they have access to too much alcohol and all these new diseases that they can get in the streets."

Sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and more recently HIV have become a major problem, although it remains unaddressed by the girls, their families, and government agencies. This silent affliction has spread to many young women and men and, although largely undocumented, is now leading to death among younger Ayoreo. In the occasional meetings organized over the years in Filadelfia by local authorities to discuss the so-called Ayoreo problem, I often overheard Ayoreo parents say they would feel more comfortable if *curajodie* went back to their villages and met non-Ayoreo men there. Such statements troubled Mennonites and Paraguayans alike who were trying to put a definitive end to practices they viewed as prostitution. In contrast to attitudes of Paraguayans and Mennonites, the moral issue for Ayoreo does not reside in girls having multiple partners; rather, the consequences of their involvement with non-Ayoreo men is considered a more serious moral problem because of violence, unwanted pregnancies, and alcohol abuse that derive from those encounters.

In addition to these issues, Christian moralizing discourses play a role in parents' reactions to their daughters' practices and how young women experience their own sexual autonomy. Iberua, a Christian convert, asserted, "When we first came out of the forest, we also went to look for white men. What we did back then was a bad thing." Again, the reiteration of elders' discourses reflects the conflicting sexual ideologies; that Iberua is a convert reinforces the conflict of narratives. But many elder women like her have daughters and granddaughters who continue to enact their sexuality in the same way without being socially penalized for their practices in their own communities. At the same time, the wife of an Ayoreo Christian preacher insisted, "My husband is against our daughter going out into the streets in

Filadelfia, but if I don't let my daughter go around with different men, how is she going to find a husband?"

These tensions between Christian values and the new context in which Ayoreo lives are embedded highlight how female sexual autonomy is not a customary value that pristinely continues to be reproduced in the present. Rather, without disappearing as a practice, it is experienced in light of new realities and colliding ethical systems (Robbins 2004; Ziggon 2008) that foster at times different feelings and perspectives on the same topic. Ultimately, there is not much that parents can do to enforce women's practices, as contemporary women's sexuality before marriage continues to be considered an independent possession that defines their sociality (Fischermann 1988; Nostas and Sanabria 2009; Renshaw 2004). This is in contrast to many societies where sexuality is subordinated to the larger sphere of social reproduction through institutions such as bride wealth (Strathern 1990).

The Female Lead in Marriage

It was always hard for me to find Lisabi at home in his village, Ebetogue. I had met him when he was starting his first job as a schoolteacher in an Ayoreo village. Now in his thirties and one of the few Ayoreo with a higher-education degree, he had served for several years as an interlocutor with NGOs and governmental institutions working with Ayoreo. When not teaching, he often made the hot, dusty twenty-five-mile motorbike ride from his village to Filadelfia for meetings. One afternoon as I was waiting for Lisabi, I joined his father, Esoi, for a chat. Esoi's face was wrinkled, and his bared torso and muscular arms told of a life of intense physical activity. For years, he had been one of the chiefs in Montecito, an Ayoreo urban settlement in the Mennonite colonies that lasted more than twelve years until it was permanently closed in 1994. He was employed by Mennonites and able to pay for Lisabi's studies at the Mennonite-led boarding school for indigenous people in Yalve Sanga, an Enlhet village sixty miles from Filadelfia.

Lisabi loved his time at the boarding school and often talked about it. He recalled, "When I was sixteen and returned home for the break, I remember noticing how girls started to look at me. They wanted me. I think it was because my skin was so white after having spent so much time inside the classroom." Evoking the racialized desires of his female classmates, he said it was then that he started to become sexually active. After he had spent time with different young women, one of them approached his father

to ask permission to marry him. Esoi was not keen on the idea, as he did not want Lisabi to drop out of school. As most Ayoreo parents do, he had a talk with his son and the young woman and stressed that they should make an effort to stay together if they were planning on getting married. "That's how we get married," Lisabi told me, with a confident tone. "Just like that. No churches like white people do." Although they had the chance to move into the bride's household, Lisabi was close to his parents, so they decided to stay near Lisabi's family in a small, wooden, one-room house. After a year of their being together and having no children yet, Lisabi was surprised to learn that his wife was seeing other young men:

> One day, I found out that when I was away from the village, she would go around looking for other guys. My father's advice was that I leave her. But she was the girl I wanted to be with, so it was hard for me to do that. We went on like this for a while, until I finally left her.

It did not take long for Lisabi to meet his second wife.

> My cousin passed the word between us to tell me that she wanted to be with me. We saw each other for about a week and then got married. She talked to her parents, and I talked to my parents. She already had a child from a previous marriage. Some Ayoreo don't like to raise those children, but I was okay with it. In any case, she decided to give the child to her mother because she'd already been raising him for a while. We had our first baby boy a year later.

Young men like Lisabi depend on the initiative of single women to approach them. They discuss marriage arrangements as a couple, although the women are the ones who make the final decision and make it public. It is common for men to use the expression "when my wife found me" to refer to how they met their wives. Several older women who shared their experiences with me agreed that in the forest, marriage did not start as early as it does today. "Young people are no longer afraid of the bird god Asojna, as we were in the forest," one said. It was a prohibition (*puyac*) of Asojna to marry too young, but the observance of this principle has been discontinued as a result of Christianization. Nevertheless, a certain tension remains when a couple is considered too young to marry. While marital decisions regarding age are no longer based on the proscriptions established by the Original Beings, the shame associated with marrying within one's own clan continues.[7] On repeated occasions I have heard people casually gossip about newlyweds

who married within their own clan. When serious fights break out, the failure of a couple to observe clan exogamy becomes one of the main sources of insult and critique between families; they use the term *tagu edodie* (to eat one's own eyes) to refer to violating this taboo.[8] A Christian churchgoer explained it to me like this: "If a person is not able to observe that rule, this means they are most likely not going to respect anything."

Another customary practice that continues to be enacted despite the inculcation of Christian values among Ayoreo is the possibility to marry multiple times. It is common for young couples like Lisabi and his first wife to marry and separate before settling down long-term with other spouses. While parents and family members stress their desire for newlywed couples to stay together, most marriages among young people undergo an implicit trial period. As long as the couple does not bear children, the marriage can be terminated without social reproach. The prohibition against marrying early is no longer observed, then; marrying within one's clan, while also no longer strictly prohibited, continues to be considered shameful for some.

Once Ayoreo are married, values associated with the sexual practices of women change significantly. The positive values associated with sexual availability and desire give way to values related to procreation, fidelity, and economic stability. Emotional bonding shifts from romantic infatuation and associated sexual desire during singlehood toward feelings of economic partnership and companionship during married life. The difference becomes evident in the terms used to refer to temporary partners: the term *ñiijora* (the one I desire) changes to the one used to refer to permanent partners, *ijina yu* (the one who accompanies me). If she divorces, a woman again acquires the sexual autonomy of a single woman. Her status is expressed in the term used for divorced women, *cheque dago*, which translates as "a woman who giggles/laughs a lot," alluding to her reinstated sexual availability to potential new partners. In cases such as that of Lisabi's second wife, who had a child from a previous marriage, the child is usually handed over to grandparents to be raised, allowing the woman to start a family with her new husband.

Unmarried adults are rare among older generations of Ayoreo. The predominance of older married couples is related to the value placed on the economic partnership for daily survival, as couples would often accompany each other on hunting trips and share equally in tasks in the productive sphere. Even through late adulthood, men and women who lose their partners by death or divorce usually quickly remarry. My friend Purua, in her late sixties, was an exception to this rule.

One afternoon I discussed Purua's situation with Chicode, an elder man

living in Tunocojai. He shared the news that Purua's daughter was making phone calls to his recently widowed friend Cojane to see if he would like to accompany Purua, who was widowed a few years earlier. Chicode related, "Purua has been out of luck. She's not been able to find a new husband. A hard-working woman, but no one seems to forget that she was also very mean when she was young. Maybe this is why she can't find anyone since her husband died." Chicode was referring to the time when he and Purua were in their late teens, shortly after contact with missionaries, and living in Faro Moro. Purua had gotten into a fight with Chicode's sister and mother. The mother intervened in the fight to defend her daughter, since Purua was pursuing her daughter's husband with the goal of becoming a second wife. As a result of that fight, Purua bears a scar on her face left by Chicode's mother.

Public displays of anger such as this fight represented a positive value constitutive of courage for Ayoreo.[9] The acceptable public display of anger was a trait not only of men; women who showed anger at the right time and to the proper extent were also viewed with respect. Missionaries considered anger a negative value and a hindrance to the submission and conversion they sought from Ayoreo. While the term *ajningare* was used to refer to courage, missionaries redefined it to mean anger, indignation, or rage, giving it an unfavorable connotation. In the same way, the expression of anger, *pisijnaringuei*, was translated by missionaries as sin, evil, wickedness. The change in meanings of these concepts reflects a shift in value because of missionization. Chicode's comment about Purua's marriage prospects reflects that logic, by which the value of courage expressed through anger no longer is attributed to women. But that is not the reason Purua was unable to find a new partner after the death of her husband. Rather, she would request that her potential suitors move in with her instead of her leaving the village where she was living to join the husband.

More than two years had passed after my conversation with Chicode when I learned that Purua finally found a new husband; he was not Cojane but someone else who agreed to come live with her. I found out about their union when Purua requested my help with moving her new husband's belongings in my truck. She sent him a firm message: "If you decide to come, don't bring your blankets and chair, as I have plenty at home." After so many years on her own, this message seemed to reaffirm her economic independence. Even without a husband for years, she was still able to own these valuable goods that are considered esteemed material possessions by older Ayoreo. By the time I made it to his village to pick up his belongings, the man had already moved in with Purua. I expected to find large white plas-

tic grocery bags full of clothes and maybe a used mattress, which Ayoreo usually take when they move. But his son handed me a beat-up large bromelia fiber bag and an old, rusty wire chair seemingly in disregard for Purua's warning.

Stories like Purua's are expressions of how women construct sexual intimacy through practices that are never disembedded from ethical values, which vary according to different life stages and specific situations. These values indicate continuities and breaks from customary practices that result from the influence of Christianity. Rather than creating "ambiguities," as Bessire asserts (2014:81), the different practices and their associated moral values that women carefully enact highlight their agency in navigating new and changing contexts.

Sex as Exchange

The origin of the practice of sexuality among Ayoreo as a means of exchange can be traced back to narratives of the Original Beings. The red parrot Suarejna, when she was human, was beautiful and had magnificent hair. All men of importance, who at the time were hawks, desired her because of her beauty. One of them gave her a spear as a present, and in return she gave him a piece of her body. A reminder of this exchange remains today in the red neck of the hawk. Akuejede was a Jnani Bajei (Original Man) who was unsuccessful at hunting anything. He would repeatedly return home with no game. A man in the same camp, Arebei, was known for his hunting skills. Aware of Arebei's skill, Akuejede begged his own daughters, who were very attractive, to go and live with Arebei, the hunter. He asked them, "Why don't you go and make love to that man? Don't you see what a good hunter he is?" But the daughters were not interested in their father's suggestion. One day Akuejede went out looking for honey but did not find any. Again, he asked his daughters to go and make love to Arebei, but the daughters did not comply with his request. Tired of begging, he told them, "Since you say that you don't want to marry that man, I'll try to find a way to marry him myself." Eventually, Akuejede turned into a woman, and his daughters had to leave him to go and live with their mother.[10]

After more than five decades of permanent contact with the settler society, exchange and reciprocity continue to be a central aspect of Ayoreo sexuality. When they were young and single, older women like Poca, Dasua, and Cheque would receive valuable hunting items from men such as *cucha arione* (meat) and *iborade* (harvested foods). It was expected that their

Figure 4.2. A couple in the Ayoreo village of Tunocojai harvesting their garden produce after the summer rains. Photo by the author.

temporary male partners would reciprocate with something in exchange for sex. The exchanges could be immediate or delayed; the former was especially common on hunting and warfare trips. Nostas and Sanabria (2009) and Suaznábar (1995) argue that the term *curajo* can be traced to these expeditions, when single women who exchanged sex for goods during life in the forest were known as *curajodie*. For a long time I was intrigued about the etymology of this term. I asked several Ayoreo about this, but no one was able to pinpoint the origin of the term. Most would just refer to such young women as "boque" (mischievous). One day I decided to ask Sidabi, an elder I often visited when in Campo Loro. He was quick to answer: "Boliviano gosode, je ore pesu. Yudote iji VHF, nijoai iji Bolivia uate chatata yu" (Bolivian Ayoreo made up that word. A relative of mine from Bolivia told me that via VHF radio). The topic had come up between him and his relative in Bolivia. One afternoon he was sharing the sad news of the death of two young women from his village over VHF radio. As Sidabi told his relative the story of what had happened, she reciprocated with a similar story, as follows.

In the 1960s, two young young women who lived in an Ayoreo village by Puerto Suárez, a small town in Bolivia just across the border from Corumbá, Brazil, suddenly went missing. The people in the village immediately sus-

pected two nonindigenous Bolivian teachers who ran the local school. The two girls were mischievous, and like any teenage Ayoreo girl might, they constantly flirted with the two teachers. The last thing some people remembered was that apparently one day the teachers took the young women for a ride. Since that day, the girls never returned to the village. The Ayoreo assumed that the two teachers drugged and abducted the young women. For a long time, the village people would hear news that the missing females had been spotted in the vicinity of a hillside known to locals as Cuacoco, near the Bolivian town Rincón del Tigre. The hill where they were last seen gave them the name "curajo," a shift in pronunciation from "Cuacoco."[11] Since that incident, after the process of missionization had already begun, the term *curajo* has been widely used to refer to an Ayoreo woman who has sexual liaisons with non-Ayoreo men.

Because sexuality was embedded in systems of exchange and reciprocity, men's skill at hunting was a prime attribute sought after by single women, and courting was an opportunity for men to display this ability. Hunting trips were opportunities for the women to experiment sexually and potentially find husbands. Young women would go along with friends or relatives on the trips to help with daily gendered chores such as fetching water and cooking. Their help was especially needed during longer expeditions, as elders and married women with young children would stay behind in the temporary camps.

Ducarobede, an older woman, recalled one of those trips she took when she was eighteen years old:

> At the time, I went with a girlfriend who was my relative. We were close friends. On that trip I fell for a married man. The news that we had been together reached the camp before we got back. His wife was really upset about this and fought with me when I arrived. They already had children, but that didn't prevent him from leaving her. Soon afterward we all left the camp, and he came along with my family's group.[12]

Although condemned, extramarital affairs were quite frequent on these trips. Even chiefs, for whom polygamy was reserved, would use these opportunities to find second wives. To find these potential partners, exchange in the realm of intimacy was prevalent.

With the transition to mission life, the realm of intimacy experienced important shifts in light of the commoditized social relations in the context of money circulation and incipient accumulation. Displays of generosity and gift-giving among couples shifted to small presents during mission

years. Cheque, my host who had been saved from the *pozo* as an infant, recalled how her husband would give her necklaces to show his interest in her when they were young and living in the Faro Moro mission station. Bracelets were also a common gift. These were mostly "just small remembrances," as it was explained to me, "not like today, when girls receive money or cell phones and other expensive gadgets from their male friends." A major shift in recent years has been the incorporation of money into the realm of sexuality.

Comai, a young man in his twenties, explained, "If a man wants to be with a girl, he will give her some money. If he doesn't give anything, they talk about him, and everybody will know he's not generous. But if they think you're a good person, girls will come up to you." For those under the age of thirty, a man's reputation is at stake in these encounters; generosity is a determining factor in finding potential partners. The commodification of intimacy is the result of decades of Ayoreo interactions with and participation in the market economy, in a process that has historically excluded Ayoreo women. Money has been incorporated into the realm of Ayoreo sexuality without this assimilation being considered a moral issue. This perspective challenges the "separate spheres and hostile worlds" discourses that Viviana Zelizer critiques as underlying bourgeois spaces (2005:20-22). For Zelizer, the separate-spheres perspective holds the notion that the private is fundamentally different from the public, that love and economic activity are on opposing sides of a spectrum, and that on moral grounds these spheres should not mix because they would contaminate each other.[13] The intimate practices of Ayoreo women contest these very assumptions.

For Ayoreo women, sex, although commodified, continues to be treated in terms of exchange and reciprocity. Young people do not frame their discourses about the practice in terms of market transactions. Rather, they construct them as involving displays of generosity and gift-giving that include money and presents. Moreover, young Ayoreo refer to the practice as an ingrained ritual integral to courting, flirting, and sexual intercourse. Some of these aspects came up in my dialogue with Iquei. It was a cold July morning as we were sitting on a few rocks by an improvised fire on the outskirts of Filadelfia, not far from the new Ayoreo urban neighborhood Guidai Ichai, about a mile from the entrance to town. He and his friend were the last of a group of eight young and middle-aged men waiting for random employers to pick them up for a few hours, or if they were lucky, a whole day, of work. After talking for a while about the scarce labor opportunities for Ayoreo those days, I ventured to ask about his relations with single women. Iquei responded,

"If I want to be with a girl, I'll give her money."

"Why money and not other types of presents?" I asked.

"Because girls know about money too, and they're aware of the needs they have. Before, they didn't see it. If I give money to a girl, it's because I want to be nice to her."

"And do you think girls like this?"

"They'll tell their girlfriends that a guy is nice if he gives money [for sex]."

"What happens if you don't have money to give away?"

"If a girl really wants me, she won't mind, but I have to get her something [a present] when I see her again."

"Do you think that this is something the Ayoreo copy from white people [paying women to have sex with them]?"

"No, this is the way of doing things that we Ayoreo have."

Just as a chief's reputation is at stake if he is not generous, a single man's prestige also depends on his generosity in these sexual encounters. Couples do not openly discuss the amount the men will give the women, but there is an implicit expectation of giving and receiving. It is important to emphasize that while the sexual exchange involves the transfer of money, the exchange is not framed in terms of a market transaction. The advent of colonization has complicated racialized subjectivities in the Chaco, and these exchanges are happening between non-Ayoreo men and young women like Jidabia. For non-Ayoreo men, young women like Jidabia are considered sex workers. Ayoreo, in contrast, do not consider the practices of single women like her as a form of labor or as ethically fraught. Instead, receiving money in exchange for sex is constitutive of young women's subjectivities.

Conclusion

Some scholars have claimed that Ayoreo hold Christian values only superficially and that they continue to hold their so-called traditional beliefs as the basis of their ethical system (Bartolomé 2000; Von Bremen 2000). Ayoreo practices related to sexuality disclose a more complex framework that cannot be easily forced into a false dichotomy. The contemporary Ayoreo ethical system is co-constructed at the juncture of values derived from customary values, Christian moral norms, and contemporary socioeconomic dynamics that shape the lives of Ayoreo. As a result, these intermittently colliding values are experienced in tension that surfaces in discourses of sexuality. Notably, the way Ayoreo have incorporated some Christian moral registers to guide their practices does not imply that feelings of shame and embar-

rassment related to previous moral orders have totally disappeared. Marrying someone from one's own clan, which was a prohibition established by the Original Beings, continues to create feelings of shame among some families.

While Ayoreo make no links in their narratives to the social codes established by the Original Beings, some of the values embedded in the narratives of the Original Beings can be recognized in women's sexual practices. At the same time, as customary values collide with Christian values, some practices are discontinued while others survive by taking new forms. A case in point is the permission given to young women to sexually engage with different men before marriage. In such cases, Ayoreo continue to observe values that do not condemn but rather further the sexual initiative and exploration of single women. The same occurs with the treatment of sexuality as a means of exchange and reciprocity. That practice has taken on a new form by the incorporation of money into the realm of sexuality.

Practices such as taking the lead in activities related to flirting and courting and making decisions about infanticide distinctly highlight the role of personal autonomy as constitutive of a woman's subjectivities. The dominant Judeo-Christian view is one of restricting women's practices of their sexuality by subordinating it to a patriarchal system that emphasizes the procreative role of women; in contrast, the principles established by the Original Beings created room for women to engage their sexuality with a great degree of personal initiative and independence. Ultimately, the practices of Ayoreo women cannot be conceived as expressing a subjective, essential, autonomous will inherent to the individual, as proposed by late liberalism; rather, women's practices are always contingent upon collective values and communal life. Values of sexuality of previous generations, which are linked to sexual autonomy and exchange, converge with the circulation of money to shape how women experience sexual intimacy.

CHAPTER 5

Consuming Desire

Hans is a Mennonite who was born and raised in Colonia 15 near Filadelfia. His parents, as small children with their families, belonged to the last group of refugees who came to Fernheim escaping Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union in a journey through China, France, and South America that lasted more than a year.[1] Hans is fluent in Plautdietsch, his mother tongue, as well as German and Spanish, both of which Mennonites learn in their schools. Hans's wife is a nurse at Hospital Filadelfia. Although the families of both now live in Filadelfia, Hans and his wife are part of a recent movement of younger urban Mennonites who have moved back to the rural *colonias*. The rising costs of housing in Filadelfia, now one of the most expensive housing markets in the country because of demand, are in part responsible for this trend. Nostalgia for the countryside is also a factor since Filadelfia is no longer the quiet town where everyone knew each other and one could easily bike from one end of town to the other. Rapid growth in recent decades has led to the perception that Filadelfia has been "invaded" by outsiders, as longtime locals sometimes murmur.

Every day Hans commutes the dusty five miles from his village to Filadelfia, where he is employed as a carpenter, a trade he learned from his father. When Isague told me about him, they had already been seeing each other for a year. Her round baby face gives her an appearance of being younger than her twenty-four years. Like most *curajodie*, she started seeing white men when her family moved to Filadelfia in search of work. She met Hans one night when she was hanging out with a group of friends on a dim street corner by a pond on the outskirts of town, a spot where Mennonites are known for approaching *curajodie*. Isague said, "He's like most Mennonites. They just want to be with us for a little while. They're afraid of their wives finding out. That's why they come here to look for us." Indeed,

it is rare to spot Mennonites on the main roads of Filadelfia in the company of indigenous women, as Mennonite men hardly show themselves in public. Isague's arrangement with Hans was that they would meet during the siesta, between 12:30 and 2:00 p.m., when the city comes to a stop for lunch and a nap during the peak heat of the day. Isague explained that this worked best for Hans, as he could conceal their encounters from his wife and still arrive at home at the same time every evening after work.

One afternoon she walked with me to the spot where they usually met, an empty lot overgrown by thick, low brush on the side of a dirt road. One can see a thin path making its way across the lot and ending suddenly as it turns to the right. She explained, "Oral sex is what he prefers. You know that this is something we don't do with Ayoreo men, which is why girls are embarrassed to share this." She stopped briefly and continued, "Our encounters are short, but he is nice and always gives me good money." She said Hans is not talkative, and Isague showed no particular interest or emotional connection when she mentioned him. Her descriptions emphasized his generosity and the "good money" she received. But neither did she talk of her liaison in terms of labor. "When a man has sex with me, it's not work for me. He's just being generous and trying to help me. I do it for the money, which is why I go with him." This is a discourse that shifted dramatically when Isague and other young women told me about their liaisons with Paraguayan men, as Ayoreo women place the value of the exchange with Paraguayans not on the amount of money they receive but on the emotional connections they make. I later learned that in addition to her encounters with Hans and contrary to her discourse of seeing exclusively white men, Isague was seeing a young Ayoreo man too.

Curajodie like Jidabia, Isague, and many others I have met frame their encounters with non-Ayoreo men by drawing from an understanding of monetary compensation defined in terms of help and generosity. I call the money young women receive as "gift money" to emphasize the Ayoreo moral economy of reciprocity and mutual obligation embedded in the exchange. Such an understanding of their commodification of sexuality with non-Ayoreo men challenges the economic logics of frontier projects, since the value of the exchange, despite the involvement of money, moves in and out of a capitalist logic. In liaisons with Mennonites, young women use the gift money to engage in conspicuous consumption, which in turn is deployed as a mechanism to navigate the hierarchical social space of the colonies.

The intimacy of Ayoreo women with Mennonite men is used to negotiate the overt discrimination they have historically experienced in the ur-

ban spaces of the Mennonite colonies. Young women gain the autonomy to participate in the social scene according to their own goals, follow their own aspirations, and construct their own economic projects. In doing so, their intimate liaisons with Mennonites become an overt transgression to the wage-labor system and the racial hierarchies of the Chaco capitalist frontier project. The perceived transgression drives locals to construct young women's practices as excesses and their bodies as abject. Their experiences, however, underscore how their intimacy is experienced as what I term an intimate frontier, navigated at the boundaries of racial hierarchies, transgressive desires, and capitalist/noncapitalist relations.

Transgressive Desires and Illicit Encounters

In Filadelfia, local discourses definitively scorn the practices of *curajodie* as immoral, effectively erasing the role of men and objectifying women's bodies as disposable and available for sexual gratification. Mennonites are the highest-paying liaisons. They are mostly middle-age or older men who come from different levels in the Mennonite socioeconomic hierarchy. Other men who seek liaisons with *curajodie* are ranchers from eastern Paraguay who arrive in trucks and quietly pick up girls to take them for a short ride or to drive them to their *estancias* for the night. Still others take advantage of their positions as mid-level employers by using Ayoreo employees as intermediaries to solicit young women.

For a while, an old gray Ford truck would go back and forth every afternoon in front of Casa Pasajera, the Ayoreo temporary urban camp in Filadelfia. I soon learned that the driver was Helmut, a man in his mid-sixties. He was among yet another group of Mennonite men who actively seek Ayoreo women. They are the most visible in approaching *curajodie*. Coming from the lower ranks of the Mennonite community, many of them have been excommunicated for leading immoral lives according to community standards. These men worry less about keeping up appearances and are often intoxicated when seeking out young women, making their liaisons more visible. An Ayoreo friend remarked about Helmut: "Driving back and forth in front of the settlement, this is his way of looking for *curajodie*." Unlike Hans, who was highly discreet and never let himself be seen publicly with Isague, Helmut seemed unconcerned about his association with *curajodie*.

The story of Helmut, who was considered a social outcast, is known to many in the Mennonite community. Originally from Colonia 14, he made a living from a small dairy farm that belonged to his parents. He had a

Figure 5.1. A young Ayoreo woman making a phone call to a male "friend" on a dusty street corner of Filadelfia. Photo by the author.

reputation for being a hard worker but also of drinking away most of his money, for which he was criticized by the community. This, coupled with his divorce, led to his eventual expulsion from one of the several Mennonite churches operating in Fernheim Colony. For a while Helmut was involved with a Paraguayan woman working as a cashier in a grocery store, but the relationship soon failed. Broken economically and living from the sporadic support of one of his sons, he spent his days drinking at his old European-style house in one of the Mennonite neighborhoods of Filadelfia. He always parked his beat-up truck in front of the house and left the gate open. I once ventured in, hoping to interview him. Doing a quick and wary survey of his yard, I spotted countless empty Ouro Fino beer cans scattered on a wooden table, making the house look neglected. I knocked at the door several times, but no one answered. A worn pair of short boots lay at the doorstep, so I figured he must have been inside; perhaps he didn't hear me, or maybe he had fallen asleep at this odd hour of the day, as I had heard was his tendency.

Curajodie characterize older men like Helmut as not requiring "work." As one of Isague's friends explained to me, "They just want to touch our breasts and give us money for that." For men like Hans and Helmut, intimate exchanges with Ayoreo women constitute sexual pleasure but also represent more than that. In a stratified social landscape where men have not been able to fulfill either socioeconomic or Christian family ideals, intimacy with Ayoreo women offers a way to escape from social and religious pressure.

The objectification of women's bodies by Mennonite men is a generalized trend that became clear to me when a Mennonite public official equated the presence of women in the streets to that of animals: "They stand in the streets at night, surrounded by men like a dog in heat followed by a pack. They have no shame in what they do." The likening of women to animals and judging them as embodying sexual excesses resonates with descriptions of nineteenth-century middle-class values in Europe, where the relation between social exclusion and the production of desire emerged with force. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) highlight how during that time the focus on bodily excesses served to efface the centrality of pressing economic and social conditions surrounding the proletariat in the city. In Filadelfia, the presence of *curajodie* likewise elicits repulsion and disgust, minimizing the broader, precarious conditions of urban life experienced by Ayoreo in the colony. At the same time, the presence of women triggers intense sexual desires that foster speculation among men about female sexual attributes and drives individuals to seek them. The objectification of women's bodies gives men the power to physically and emotionally abuse them in these encounters without having to be accountable for their actions. The stories of Utatabia and Ome illustrate these experiences.

Utatabia was a fourteen-year old girl who was visiting an aunt in Filadelfia when I heard her story. At that age, Ayoreo already begin to be sexually active, and her parents knew she was experimenting with white men. Her aunt bluntly told me what had happened: "This Mennonite guy from one of the *colonias* came looking for girls. I heard that he likes virgins, so he took Utatabia. But he didn't give her any money, claiming that her vagina was so small that he was unable to penetrate her." I never approached Utatabia to talk about what had happened, but I later learned from her parents that the experience was so traumatizing for their daughter that she did not return to Filadelfia for a long time. According to other relatives, Utatabia did not give her consent and was sexually assaulted. This type of abuse happens not only in Filadelfia but also on ranches, with younger girls being the most vulnerable.

Ome had a similar experience. She had been seeing non-Ayoreo men intermittently in Filadelfia since she was fifteen years old. At one point, she accompanied her family to the ranch of her father's Mennonite employer. The rancher's wife hired her to clean the house. Ome told me, "After a while, her husband noticed me. He approached me and we started having something. I liked him because he gave me money every time we were together. My parents didn't know about it, and they thought the money was coming from cleaning the house." This went on for a long time. One day, Ome realized that she was pregnant.

> I was afraid and didn't tell my family. Soon after, he dismissed my father, saying he didn't need his service any more. I think he was afraid his wife would find out. I was afraid of my parents and didn't say anything until they realized I was pregnant. They were very mad at me. My father was also upset at his employer too, but he didn't file a complaint since he was afraid of losing future job opportunities with Mennonites. Later, everybody found out I was pregnant, even his wife.

Ome's parents kept the baby and raised him, a common practice in cases when Ayoreo cannot find a relative to adopt the child. Unable to access money from other sources, young women like Ome consent to the type of liaison she sustained with the rancher for gift money.

Encounters like Ome's, for the most part, take place in a context of unequal power dynamics that allow men such as this Mennonite rancher to evade responsibility for their actions. Moreover, Ayoreo often find themselves in a position of preferring not to accuse these men because Mennonites are the main providers of work in the colonies. But such experiences have not prevented young women from continuing to engage in sexual liaisons with Mennonite men.

Abject Bodies: Urban Exclusions

Since the 1990s, Fernheim Colony has made an effort to accommodate the increasing influx of work migrants. Simultaneously, the colony has seen a growing movement of younger Mennonites to eastern Paraguay to work and study. Both trends have made it hard for the colony to enforce its social boundaries as strictly as in the past. The greater fluidity of cross-cultural interactions and relations makes it even harder to sustain the Mennonite project of social differentiation, and the presence of *curajodie* in the streets of Filadelfia epitomizes this tension.

For Julia Kristeva (1983), "abject embodiment" is a state in which bodily boundaries erode and the self has little control over the leaking of repulsive excretions such as blood, urine, feces, vomit, and pus, a process that she argues becomes evident when there is a threat to one's sense of self or to the distinction of self from other. Elizabeth Grosz (1989) suggests that abjection is necessary because some aspects of bodily experience must be excluded to allow for a coherent construction of the ego and body image. While Kristeva locates part of the self as the very source of abjection, I extend this construction to the experiences of repulsion of others toward Ayoreo bodies in general and women's bodies in particular. In the Mennonite colonies these experiences of repulsion are a source of abjection, that is, that which disturbs Mennonite identity but is also a necessary part of this identity, integral to the construction of their subjective experiences of self. Mennonites perceive the public presence of Ayoreo women's bodies in the streets of Filadelfia as abject. Their contours challenge the boundaries of the civilized, and as a result there is an anxious concern to remove them from the streets. These gendered and racial anxieties are also shared by Paraguayan residents of Filadelfia.

Shortly after my arrival for long-term fieldwork in 2009, Silvia, a municipal officer, invited me to join Filadelfia's Committee on Morality. The members' hope was that I would be able to provide input into solving the "Ayoreo problem," as she put it. Silvia self-identifies as *chaqueña*. She was born and raised in the Chaco after her parents migrated from eastern Paraguay to work there in the 1960s. She headed one of the social programs of the Mennonite-led municipality. Silvia explained to me, "We need these girls out of the streets. They give a negative image to our city. Other indigenous women at least stay in their villages or hide at night, but not the Ayoreo girls." When I asked about possible support programs for the young women, she mentioned that municipal leaders were considering opening a "red zone" on the outskirts of the city where girls could receive health cards and be checked for sexually transmitted diseases occasionally.

The project was put forward by a local Paraguayan physician with more than twenty years of experience working on health issues among indigenous populations. The doctor told me, "People might criticize me, but I told the Mennonite colony several times we should build a whorehouse, get them [*curajodie*] all inside, and do health checkups every week. Right now, we don't even know who they are." The reactions of Silvia and the physician in part stemmed from their frustration in trying to solve the so-called Ayoreo problem that in their view was not being tackled by the Mennonite community. Their discourses, pervasive in many contemporary contexts in reference

to sex workers (Katsulis 2008; Van Stapele, Nencel, and Sabelis 2018), parallel nineteenth-century Victorian constructions of the "prostitute body" as a category that needs to be medically and spatially surveilled and contained (Levine 2002; Walkovitz 1980).

The same physician, a member of the municipal governing board, was pushing for a local ordinance that would eventually regulate the practices of Ayoreo girls in the streets of Filadelfia. Although he garnered support among some, most members of the board have rejected his initiative out of concern not necessarily about its discriminatory nature but because it would clash with the Christian community, as the board would be officially supporting what Christians perceive as prostitution. This is the same reason that, despite concerns about the health of these young women, no local governmental institution has yet engaged in any programs to support the well-being of *curajodie* in the streets of Filadelfia. The discrimination that Ayoreo women experience in Filadelfia is indicative of a broader urban exclusion that Ayoreo have historically faced in the colonies, a reality that other indigenous women also experience in trying to access health care in the region (UN Women 2016).

In the midst of a generalized rejection of *curajodie*, men like Hans and Helmut nevertheless feel drawn to Ayoreo women as sexualized objects in a context where men themselves are not able to live up to the moral standards set by the community. At the same time, although Ayoreo are perceived as abject, Mennonites enact practices of Christian compassion that draw them toward Ayoreo people as objects of charity. It is not uncommon to hear stories of Mennonites who have supported, through personal donations, the building of houses for their employees and even community infrastructure for Ayoreo in their villages.

One Sunday afternoon, a truck approached the entrance of Casa Pasajera. Two Mennonite women in their mid-fifties came out of the truck holding three large bags filled to the top with clothes. They murmured something to an Ayoreo bystander, and soon a man started screaming, "Yocai!! Mennonita ore chukue ura eee!" (Yocai! A Mennonite is looking for you!). A short, muscular man with a baseball cap, jeans, and flip-flops came out of his home improvised from a plastic tent, followed by his wife and children. They had been living there for about three years, as it was more convenient for his employer to pick him up there than in his village. He approached the two women and took the bags. The expectation, as I overheard one of the Mennonite women say in broken Spanish, was to "share the used clothes with everybody." After exchanging a few more words with the family, the

women began to head back to the truck. By then, more Ayoreo had gathered like bees around them, trying to convey a message to the visitors in an incomprehensible mix of Spanish and Ayoreo. Not being able to understand what was going on and with a growing number of individuals surrounding them, both women reacted in sudden panic and pushed their way through the people to get in their truck. In the confusion, they did not notice that their truck had a flat tire and that the group was trying to warn them not to leave under such conditions.

The impulsive reaction of the two women epitomizes how local discourses about Ayoreo urban camps as dangerous and violent places are ingrained into popular consciousness, making some community members feel unsafe around them. In an obvious incongruity, Ayoreo and especially the women are pulled between the repulsion and desire of the nonindigenous local population. The complex and contradictory relations that construct Ayoreo as "other" while seeking their inclusion only intensify and reinforce their exclusion from the social life of the colonies.[2]

Being the last indigenous group in the region to leave their lives as foragers, and still having members living in so-called voluntary isolation (Glauser 2007; IGWIA 2009), Ayoreo have been perceived as the most Indian among Indians, as commonly remarked by other indigenous individuals in reference to them. In Filadelfia, the urban camp Casa Pasajera, where Ayoreo lived since the early 2000s, characterizes their exclusion. Until 2015, they were not allotted an urban neighborhood in Filadelfia because, local authorities argued, they were not yet ready to inhabit urban spaces. To justify their stance, officials deployed a discourse that reinforced an image of Ayoreo as being unprepared for living in society. One government official put it this way: "They are not ready as a group of people to have a neighborhood in Filadelfia. First they need to be trained on how to live in the white people's world within their communities; otherwise they become alcoholics and turn to prostitution here in the city." Because of this stance, Ayoreo have had to move their temporary camp to multiple locations as the colony's bulldozers destroyed each settlement. By the late 2000s, local authorities maneuvered a way to close all public faucets in an effort to force Ayoreo out of town. It was a drastic measure, as families lacked access to water in their urban camp, and public faucets were among the few means they had to obtain clean water (Canova 2011).

After decades of demands, in April 2015 Ayoreo secured their first periurban barrio in the colonies. This was accomplished without any support from the Instituto Nacional del Indígena, the national governmental agency in charge of indigenous affairs, which continues to be absent in the region,

Figure 5.2. A tent in Casa Pasajera, an Ayoreo urban camp in Filadelfia. Photo by the author.

reportedly from lack of funds to open an office in Filadelfia. Although having their own barrio was a step forward, the marginalization of Ayoreo continues to be reproduced in myriad ways, with *curajodie* as the main targets. For example, *curajodie* receive different treatment from others when they seek health care services. One medical doctor said, "They are prostitutes who make a lot of money and therefore have to pay for the service." Local motel owners ban them from renting rooms because they are considered dirty. And although the number of marriages between Mennonites and Paraguayans has increased significantly, marriages between Mennonites and Ayoreo are the fewest compared to those with partners from other indigenous peoples.

The Intimacy of Gift Money

For Marcel Mauss (2002 [1950]), a gift is any object or service transacted as part of social relations; what makes it a gift is the relationship within which the transaction occurs. He defines the transaction as involving a sense of obligation that binds the two parties together. This contradicts the common idea that gifts are voluntary and have an embedded sense of freedom.

In a commodity relationship, however, he argues that paying is not voluntary but instead represents the termination of the obligation that links the two parties. James Carrier (1991:132), in an analysis of Mauss's notion of the gift, notes that "gifts and commodities do not represent exclusive categories, but poles defining a continuum. Many gift transactions can contain an element of alienation and individualism, just as many commodity transactions are tinged by mutual obligation." The case of Ayoreo women echoes Carrier's analysis in that the monetary transaction in which women engage lies along this continuum because money, while retaining its value as a commodity, is also understood as a gift, retaining the logic associated with the reciprocity of the sexual encounter.

To highlight this gift-commodity articulation, I borrow from Anna Tsing's (2015) concept of "translation," a term used to explain how global commodity chains draw on noncapitalist values and convert them to capitalist values for profit. She argues that through such translations, goods and services, human and nonhuman, make it possible for investors to accumulate wealth. In my usage of the term, I seek to show how women draw on their own ethics of sexuality to engage the economy in their own terms. In doing so, they understand the value of the exchange in terms of a constant process of conversion between noncapitalist/capitalist value systems. This perspective challenges the assumption that a capitalist logic necessarily pervades the realm of intimacy, by revealing how competing "regimes of values" (Appadurai 1986) are at play in intimate liaisons.[3]

Intimate liaisons offer Ayoreo women the colony's only social context in which they can connect with or approach men such as Hans and Helmut. Mennonite men who become involved with *curajodie* seek only short encounters limited to sexual release, leaving little room for flirting or getting to know each other. The age and language gaps between the young women and Mennonites are often significantly greater than with younger Paraguayans, which further dissuades girls from building relationships with them. But for *curajodie* such as Isague, liaisons with Mennonites give them access to gift money, which is their primary and often only objective. Isague refers to her encounters with Mennonites as follows: "We ask them for high amounts of money because they're the ones with the most money. Whatever money I get from them I use to buy clothes and beer to hang out with Paraguayans."

Initially, sexual intimacy with Mennonite men seems to reinforce the racialized hierarchy that shapes the economy of today's Chaco to position Mennonite men at the top of the ladder. But *curajodie* have a clear inclination toward Paraguayan men even though they pay less than Mennonites

do. Zelizer (1996), in discussing the relation between payments and social ties, argues that monetary payments fall into three different categories: gifts, compensation, and entitlements; each monetary payment in any form involves a different set of social ties and meanings. *Curajodie* receive compensation from Mennonite men that they perceive as gifts. For them the social value of money in intimate liaisons with Mennonite men is the capacity to construct a sense of social belonging in a highly racialized and discriminatory scene. They enact this sense of belonging not by crafting emotional intimacy with Mennonite men but rather by engaging in conspicuous consumption. In this way, and following Mauss (2002 [1950]), money from intimate liaisons is perceived as a gift, involving a sense of obligation as embedded in the reciprocity of the sexual encounter, but then is translated into a commodity used to engage in conspicuous consumption.

Although exemplified by *curajodie*, conspicuous consumption is a growing trend among Ayoreo youth in general. It began with the rapid transformations of the 1990s in the central Chaco and then accelerated in an expanding urban center with numerous new opportunities to spend money. Almost overnight, Filadelfia shifted from a frontier town to a modern city and prime hub for consumption and commodity exchange. A visit to Fernheim's Supermarket attests to these radical changes. Upon entering its strip mall–type infrastructure, one steps out of the rugged Chaco into a modern shopping center. The vast building has a contemporary look, with large windows, central air conditioning, and white tile floors. Past the main entrance to the left is a shop that resembles a smaller version of a Home Depot store that is frequented by affluent ranchers and Mennonite farmers. To the right is the grocery section, with ample aisles that feature a large selection of products, and homemade and imported European specialty foods abound. For decades the cooperative held a near monopoly in town, but its dominance over smaller businesses has changed since the mid-2000s with the influx of outsiders. Today, several other supermarkets operate in Filadelfia, as do dozens of small clothing stores and boutiques, car dealerships, major banks, and even a shopping mall.

The abundance of readily accessible services that one encounters is not typical of towns in the countryside or, for that matter, of most Paraguayan towns at all, and it starkly shows the way capital circulates in the region. Paradoxically, the roads in Filadelfia remain unpaved, and in that way the city lacks what is perceived as an iconic marker of modernization and economic development typical of towns in Paraguay. Except for the main artery, Filadelfia has held onto its dirt roads in glaring contrast to the modern shops and old European houses secluded by gardens.

Among the changes in urban development, by the early 2000s generator-run television sets invaded the Ayoreo world for the first time. Music and dance video shows swept through the villages around Filadelfia. With growing Ayoreo labor mobility between the villages and the Mennonite colonies, television brought new patterns of consumption and racialized notions of desire among the youth. Newly cultivated desires to consume had girls dreaming about light-skinned men in cowboy boots displaying provocative dance moves. "White men are better-looking than Ayoreo men" was a comment I heard frequently. The racialized desires have had an impact on how young Ayoreo women experience intimacy.

Consuming Desire

I was driving along a rarely used forested path linking two Ayoreo villages and spotted Suaria, Abia's mother, walking with her youngest child. As I approached, I saw Suaria's husband step out of the forest. Wondering what they were doing, I stopped to chat and ask if they needed a ride. In Ayoreo, she said they were heading to Campo Loro to look for Abia and added, "She escaped today from the village with her friend Eri. Her father and I are very upset especially because Eri is older and she can be a bad example for our daughter, but her mother is also looking for them." I nodded without quite understanding what was really going on. I offered them cold water and left.

That night in the village, the conversation around the fire at the chief's house focused on the girls' escape with the *cojnone* (white men). I had known Abia since she was eleven, so I was interested to learn more about her first crush on a Paraguayan at fifteen. A few weeks later, I called Abia and Eri to the only brick construction in the village, a dilapidated hospital constructed by an NGO that never functioned for lack of funds. I was looking for privacy with them so they would feel comfortable sharing what had happened.

ME: So, what happened that day you both escaped?
ABIA: [laughs, looking at Eri] She knows it too.
ERI: Who told you, Paola? [*They laugh.*]
ME: I found Abia's mother on my way from Campo Loro. She was looking for you guys. [*They laugh and shriek.*] Then, once I got to Tuno [Tunocojai village] I heard that you both reached Filadelfia. Why did you go? What happened?
ERI: I'm sure you know about the *macateros* [traveling salesmen] who come every once in a while. They are the guys who sell ice cream and fruit.
ME: Yes, I think so . . .

ERI: They came that morning, with two young guys who were the helpers. They said to us, "Let's go to Filadelfia." One of the guys wanted to be with me and the other with Abia; so we left with them both in the truck [*laughs*].

ME (TO ERI): Weren't you scared of your mother?

ERI: No [*laughs*].

ME: What about you, Abia?

ABIA: I was very scared of my mother [*laughs intensely*].

ME: And what about the guys, were you scared of them?

ERI: No, but she was a little [*pointing to Abia*] because she doesn't know white men yet. [*They laugh.*]

ME: So what happened next? When you got to Filadelfia, did you get to be with the guys?

ERI: Before that happened, my mother found us in Filadelfia. That was a real pity. [*The three of us laugh hard.*]

ME: What did your mother say?

ERI: She didn't say anything. She didn't say anything because she found us. My father thought she wouldn't find us.

ME: So you didn't get the chance to be with the guys in Filadelfia?

ERI: No, because they went to unload the truck and told us to wait for them in front of the cooperative supermarket. But my mother was quicker and found us first there. [*They laugh.*]

The laughter in this exchange conveys the fun, enjoyable aspects of the sexual experiences of young single women. Their flirting with the young Paraguayan men was reenacted in our exchange through laughter, a key trait of single women's expressions of desire. Today most of them have had at least one sexual encounter with non-Ayoreo men; several had their first sexual encounters with non-Ayoreo. An exclusive interest in white men and money has in turn allowed the *curajodie* phenomenon to flourish. Opportunities to meet these men can arise when girls accompany their parents to work sites on ranches or when they go to the city with family members who are looking for work. The men are interesting to girls because they are considered different, and their seemingly fairer skin is a topic of conversation, although Mennonites would not consider them racially white, as Ayoreo do. Similar to the way dark skin in women is exoticized and eroticized by men in contexts of ongoing commoditization of sexuality (Brennan 2004; Kempadoo 1999), Ayoreo young women eroticize the fair skin of white men with whom they seek emotional liaisons. The likelihood of white men having more money than Ayoreo men to reciprocate the exchange is also very appealing. This is yet another contemporary reality that sustains customary

practices; that is, it gives meaning to reproducing customary values in the contemporary context.

Curajodie are perceived by other Ayoreo as embodying and enacting the new racialized desires of female Ayoreo youth. Adolescent girls look up to them for not being afraid of meeting strangers and for partying with non-Ayoreo in bars on the weekends. While a typical young woman can receive a small amount of spending money from her boyfriend, *curajodie* are known for receiving large amounts of money at a time that frequently exceed a full day's wages for an Ayoreo worker in the colonies.

The money that *curajodie* receive from liaisons with Mennonites is used to buy clothes and to party. They frame what they get in terms of gift money. That money is then spent mostly on clothes. As one *curajo* said, "We like to buy nice clothes so that white people don't look down on us." In a context of exclusion of Ayoreo women, it is not surprising that *curajodie* value aesthetics that enable them to interact with white men. Attention to aesthetics provides a way for them to inhabit the city, and their patterns of consumption in Filadelfia are used to navigate a discriminatory social space. Their trendy and modern wardrobes put them in unambiguous contrast to most indigenous women, who dress almost uniformly in long skirts made of imported colored cloth and wear flip-flops. *Curajodie* also spend their money on handbags, shoes, fragrances, and makeup, items available only in Filadelfia; the same goods are also desired in Ayoreo villages, but other women there do not have enough money to buy them.

One of the major influences on the aesthetic styles of *curajodie* is found in music videos, which have been setting standards of beauty and female behavior among Ayoreo youth. In Ayoreo villages, numerous teens pay to sit in small, smoky, crowded rooms at night to watch videos on old televisions mostly powered by electric generators. The teens spend hours listening to songs of Mexican and Colombian artists, carefully following singers and dancers as they move to the beats of imported Latin rhythms. This influence is particularly strong among *curajodie*. Having money gives them the means to emulate the dress of female performers in the videos. Like the singers, they wear tall boots, short skirts or tight jeans, provocative blouses, and accessories such as handbags and makeup. They copy the style of dress so well that teenagers in the villages now also call the female dancers in the videos "curajodie." *Curajodie* also copy ways of interacting with men based on what they see in the music videos. Dancing, drinking, and conspicuous public displays of affection have all become part of their social repertoire.

Money is enabling *curajodie* to buy consumer goods previously inaccessible to most Ayoreo youth; through them *curajodie* are trying to assert a sense of self that challenges long-standing stereotypes. Ultimately, the goal is to

construct a self to which others can, in Erving Goffman's words, "attribute positive social value" (1963:31); body, self, and social interaction become interrelated processes deployed toward that end. The attraction to Filadelfia as a place to construct a sense of self is obvious in the party and consumption habits of *curajodie*. Beyond discriminatory stereotypes that portray Ayoreo as trapped in consumerism, consumption patterns are part of a larger project of crafting a space from which to participate vis-à-vis the local population according to their own notions of sexuality, beauty, and desire. While consumption is not a means of seeking forthright approval from the local community, it ultimately becomes a vehicle by which women can feel connected to a broader context and in turn shapes the social valuations of their encounters with non-Ayoreo men.

Conclusion

The contemporary racialized social context of the Mennonite colonies resembles that of nineteenth-century European cities in which the relation between exclusion and the production of desire emerged with force. The clear separation of slums from suburbs, for example, fostered an obsession among the more affluent to transgress the boundaries of slums and dwell in what was considered the space of the other (Stallybrass and White 1986). In the same way, Mennonite intimacy with Ayoreo women has the force of a frontier to be incorporated but also transgressed primarily through a fluidity of feelings from desire to fear and disgust. Ayoreo bodies evoke a powerful local imaginary of them in incongruent ways, as sexual as well as moral objects. This is a violent process reproduced in the contemporary context through the intimate experiences of young women such as Utatabia, who experienced the trauma of abuse from a non-Ayoreo man. Still, the *curajodie* challenge local representations of their bodies in urban spaces as abject by actively engaging in the commodification of their sexuality.

The patriarchal social structure of the colonies, by upholding Christian values, has historically managed to tightly control the sexuality of women; the practices of *curajodie* are seen as a major social problem and a constant source of anxiety. For Mennonite men like Helmut at the lowest ranks of the socioeconomic hierarchy, transgressing the Mennonite/native divide through intimate liaisons with *curajodie* also entails a freedom from the pressures of their own subordination within the communal hierarchy. At the same time, the intimacy between Mennonite men and Ayoreo women serves to reify the place of these men and women in this very hierarchy.

More broadly, the economic incursions of *curajodie* in Filadelfia show

how the commodity exchange in women's intimate liaisons is constituted by different "regimes of value" (Appadurai 1986), in which the degree of coherence varies from situation to situation. In their liaisons with Mennonite men, women define the valuations of their intimate economic transactions in tension with capitalist economic logics, following customary values of exchange while also translating the values into money as a commodity to engage in consumption to navigate discrimination. In the exchange embedded in intimate liaisons with Mennonite men, *curajodie* are negotiating decades of social and economic exclusion by defining the terms of their participation in the contemporary economic sphere. They refuse to remain marginalized in engagements with the economy. However, the exclusion of Ayoreo women continues to resurface with even stronger force as they unsettle the boundaries established by the Mennonites and the boundaries that guide the terms of economic inclusion for indigenous peoples in the development of the region.

At the time Isague was seeing Hans, I knew that her father had a job and could provide for her, but nevertheless she preferred to remain in Filadelfia. She said, "Yiase jeti ñisoi calle uje ñingana nga patadie deji to" (I like to walk the street because I have fun and there is money too). This is a common attitude among *curajodie*, and I followed up by asking, as I had asked other women before, "Would you return to your village and settle there for good if you had the chance to own a small business?" A kiosk is a common source of income for families in villages. Isague's response was practically immediate: "No." This further indicated to me that although money plays an important role in these women's practices, they are determined to craft their own paths to access it. Money is not the only object; the party scene also makes their lifestyle attractive and is a major factor in the decision to continue living in Filadelfia. Isague had told me that if she eventually met an Ayoreo man with whom she could settle down, she would leave Filadelfia. Knowing how much she enjoyed partying, I did not envision that as a probability at the time. But two years later she met Pitai, a young Ayoreo I often spotted off-loading bricks for a local ceramic factory in Filadelfia. They got married in 2016, moved to Campo Loro, and were still together when I last inquired. Isague's trajectory resembles that of many young *curajodie* who move in and out of the streets and in and out of the party scene. Some might have brief stays in Filadelfia, while others stay longer, sometimes even several years, until they marry and move back, eventually embracing the rhythm of life in the villages once again.

CHAPTER 6

Negotiating Inclusion

"Que pasó de vos mi amor, sabés, quiero estar a tu lado, acariciarte, hacerte el amor. Todas esas cosas" (What happened to you my love, you know, I want to be with you, caress you, make love to you. All those things). This message was sent to Tona by Simón, a Paraguayan truck driver who had been seeing her sporadically for a year. She referred to him as *ñijoa*, her boyfriend, when she talked to me about him. She was seventeen years old when they met, and he was forty. Originally from the greater Asunción area, he was one of several truck drivers employed by Fernheim Cooperative to pick up cattle from ranches in the region to be transported to the cooperative's slaughterhouse. Upusia knew these men well, and she is the one who introduced Simón to Tona. Truck drivers would usually park on the grounds of Corral Filadelfia, the administrative office of the cooperative's cattle business, where they would spend a few days before receiving their specific assignments.

One Sunday afternoon, I joined a group of truckers along with Upusia and Tona. On the side of a Mercedes big rig, made to transport up to forty-five cows, was an improvised wooden table. An older Paraguayan and a young helper were peeling potatoes and cutting meat. Beside them on the ground was an improvised wood-burning stove, around which were seated four other men, Simón among them. In makeshift chairs they formed a circle and were passing time chatting and laughing. In the center of the circle was a blue cooler from which one of them grabbed a can of beer, which was then passed from one hand to the other for small sips. We briefly greeted them, at which point they lowered their voices. One of the cooks, from his facial expression, seemed surprised to see me there with the Ayoreo women but nonetheless tried to make small talk. He said, "As you can see we're trapped in Filadelfia until the weather conditions improve for us to go to

Figure 6.1. A truck driver on his way to the northern frontier to pick up cattle. Photo by the author.

the *fondo* [backroads of the Chaco]." Except for the cook and his helper, the men appeared to be mostly in their forties and fifties. The women and I did not join the group, as Tona and Upusia requested that I take photos of them in front of the Mercedes truck. Later they told me that all but two of the men had families back in eastern Paraguay, but they all still went around with *curajodie*. One of them had fathered a child with an Ayoreo woman. As *curajodie* were banned from going to hotels, most of their liaisons took place in the partial privacy of the trucks.

As soon as Tona began a relationship with Simón, he requested sexual exclusivity by asking her to be his girlfriend. This flattered Tona, and although she agreed to it, she did not take the proposition seriously. Like most young Ayoreo women, she knew from experience that Paraguayans do not make serious commitments with *curajodie*. As she put it, "Jne ore cae, jne ore adode gu" (They change partners all the time. That's what they do). She kept seeing other men as well, although she admitted to thinking of Simón as someone special. At one point she decided to accompany him on a trip to Asunción, where they stayed together for almost a month. In the beginning she was excited because she would have the opportunity to explore Asunción and go out dancing, something she was looking forward to doing. Soon after arriving in this unfamiliar setting, though, she began to miss her family and friends and wanted to go back to Filadelfia, but Simón did not listen to her. Although I had heard from one of her friends that the separation from home caused her a great deal of anxiety, when she told me about it

in person she downplayed its significance and spoke fondly of the opportunity she had to see Asunción during that trip.

How do young Ayoreo *curajodie* craft their sexual and emotional intimacy with Paraguayan men? In what ways are their encounters fraught with deception and violence? The stories in this chapter indicate how Ayoreo women experience their liaisons as an intimate frontier constituted by experiences of transgressions and violence, characteristics that also shape the economic frontier project of the Chaco. The economic development of the Chaco has attracted a growing number of male ranch workers. The desires of men toward young Ayoreo women are constructed in connection with their experiences as migrant workers. Separation from their families and long periods on isolated ranches, often under harsh working conditions, frequently lead them to seek sexual intimacy, companionship, and domestic help from single Ayoreo women. Men's desires also arise from an imaginary of the Chaco as a frontier and liminal space. Intimacy with indigenous women in any other social context would be perceived as transgressing Paraguayan class and racial hierarchies, but there it becomes permissible and at times even a rather exciting prospect.

In their liaisons with Paraguayan men, the "relational work" of *curajodie*, that is, the ways in which women match intimate relations with specific economic transactions and practices that are considered appropriate within that boundary (Zelizer 2007), takes on a different meaning than in relations with Mennonites. With Paraguayans, the value of the exchange for *curajodie* does not reside exclusively in the amount of gift money received. Rather, in relations with Paraguayans the value of the exchange resides also in feeling wanted, publicly and socially mingling, and developing emotional attachments with men who are normally inaccessible because of pervasive discrimination. But intimacy with Paraguayans is largely experienced through deception and violence, a situation that generates fraught encounters and fragmented connections marked by abuse. While *curajodie* are experiencing their relationships as part of reproducing the logics of frontiers, they are also challenging these logics, as their practices are affecting and shifting Ayoreo contemporary marriage patterns and gender roles.

Crafting Intimacy

Tona met men on the street corners or in the bars of Filadelfia. As she described it, her goal was "to get to know them and play with them." Tona

was not focused on going out each night to find men. Her outings, like that of most *curajodie*, were casual. While her sexual liaisons involved monetary transactions, money was perceived as a sign of generosity concomitant with Ayoreo ethics of sexuality. Later she started asking for money, a shift made by most young women, but she continued to understand the transaction as a sign of generosity. Importantly, Tona's sexual explorations resembled those of most single women, who take a lead in flirting and courting until finding a stable partner. While in Filadelfia, Tona, contrary to her discourse of seeking only Paraguayan men, started seeing a young Ayoreo man. He was aware that she was still having liaisons with white men, and this triggered some jealousy on his part, but it did not motivate him to leave her. Because she liked him, she did not charge him for their sexual liaisons, but each time they were together, he gave her some money. After a few months, they decided to get married. She moved to his work site, but they lived together for only a year and a half. With no children on the way, she left him when she found out he was seeing other *curajodie*.

Paraguayan men like Simón are highly desired by *curajodie*. There is a material and symbolic power associated with having a boyfriend and not just being friends. Unlike friends, boyfriends provide semipermanent access to money, in some cases in greater amounts depending on the attachment that might develop between partners. Most men in such relations support young women's party habits. For young women like Tona, sexual encounters are safer with men who become boyfriends than with strangers, although these relationships do not imply sexual fidelity on either side. For *curajodie*, seeing more than one man while single is a practice consistent with their courting patterns; they engage different partners for a period until finding a stable one. This practice reinforces the perception of them as "prostitutes," as they are frequently labeled by Paraguayan men. Ironically, the men who use this term are usually married, and more often than not, they also see multiple women at a time, which becomes a constant source of tension and often leads to fights between women over men as well as between spouses.

When young women attach themselves emotionally to men, the relationships tend to be fraught with unequal power dynamics; once they become emotionally attached, most girls do not charge their friends for the sexual encounters. The value of the exchange lies in trying to establish a stronger sense of emotional attachment and being desired by Paraguayan men. In contrast to the situations in which single women receive money from men, once an emotional attachment arises, young women will typically spend money on their liaisons, not just on themselves. Men, however, tend to take advantage of the situation, seeing it as a "good deal," as I was

once told. In exchange for a small amount of money and some beer, men can pursue sexual intimacy with young women who, in addition to making themselves sexually available, also give them presents and attention. Most of the Paraguayan men take advantage of such situations only temporarily until moving on to other relationships. The story of Gieja and Santiago is illustrative of the colliding expectations and the impact that liaisons with Paraguayan men usually have.

Gieja met Santiago while her family was staying in Asunción for her father's abdominal surgery. Outspoken and fluent in Spanish, Gieja, who was eighteen years old at the time, served as her parents' translator and navigator through the city. Santiago was thirty-eight; short and black-haired, every evening he sat comfortably in a used chair refurbished with cardboard by the entrance of the body shop where he worked as a night guard. A Catholic NGO has its office and temporary housing directly in front of the shop, half hidden by a shady cluster of mango trees. The NGO building is where Gieja and her family were staying when she met him. They first crossed paths the evening she went for a walk with her mother from house to house around the neighborhood to request used clothes.

After a few days of boredom while waiting for her father to be given a bed in a nearby public hospital, Gieja had the inclination to approach Santiago, whom she could glimpse every now and then from the patio of the NGO. But she was unsure of how to do it. While she was considering this, Santiago told a friend working at the NGO that he wanted to meet her. Gieja was excited about the idea of having a Paraguayan boyfriend, but she did not agree to it before asking her father's permission. He approved "as long as he's not a married man," which was precisely the first question Gieja asked him on their first date. When she felt satisfied with his answer that he was single, they began their liaison. Each time they were together, she requested money from him, and from her perspective, "he was always very generous."

A few weeks into their stay, the NGO expelled Gieja's family from the compound, accusing her of engaging in sex work with parental consent. When I inquired about the incident with the NGO, its employee who introduced Gieja to Santiago told me that he knew Santiago to be married and that it was obvious to Santiago that Gieja was behaving, in his words, like a "prostitute." When I shared my opinion that her parents had honest expectations about her relationship with Santiago, he laughed, unconvinced. Later, in discussing the incident with Gieja's father, he downplayed the family's expulsion from the compound and instead emphasized his satisfaction at seeing Gieja happy with a Paraguayan man. He described San-

tiago as generous and talked proudly about the money and presents Santiago gave Gieja. He mentioned that Santiago had promised to buy his family a new chainsaw, an expensive and important work tool for many Ayoreo.

After returning to her village in the Chaco, Gieja stayed in touch with Santiago. Two months later, he invited her to spend some time with him in Asunción. Her father took the time off work to make the long, expensive trip with her to the city to drop her off. By then, her parents were enthusiastic about the possibility of their daughter marrying Santiago, even though they were aware that Ayoreo-Paraguayan marriages rarely lasted. Santiago was seen as a great source of economic support for the family, whose finances had been strained by the chronic illness of Gieja's father. Their relationship would continue for less than a year, with ups and downs.

When I returned to the Chaco the following year, I found Gieja with a cute newborn baby on her lap. My curiosity was piqued, and after we exchanged greetings, I inquired further.

"What happened with Santiago?"

"I was sad when I first found out I was pregnant because it was the first time it happened to me."

"Did you talk to your family about it?"

"I talked to my mother and her friend, Ebedua. They advised me to take care of my body from that time on."

"Did you talk about this with Santiago?"

"Yes. He asked if the baby was his. I said yes, but he didn't say he wanted to come back to the Chaco and stay with me."

"So, what's going to happen now?"

"Some relatives are looking to adopt the baby. My mother asked what I wanted. I said it was up to them [her parents]. They told me that if I wanted, I could give it away. And we decided and that's what we're going to do."

"How do you feel about it?"

"Well, if Santiago would've accepted to take care of the baby, I would've kept him and we wouldn't have left each other. It feels sad, but my mother told me, 'Gieja, you shouldn't be sad, because he was not willing to support you with the baby.' I still think about Santiago a lot."

Not long after this, Gieja met an Ayoreo man and married him. Her experience exemplifies the increasing frequency with which Ayoreo women seek out Paraguayan men and the unequal dynamics that develop from these liaisons. Several scholars have highlighted how, in the process of commodifying intimacy, women's ultimate goal, especially in the tourism service industry, is to develop long-term relations and even eventual marriage and outmigration (Cabezas 2009; Padilla 2007; Stout 2014). In past de-

cades, discrimination meant that very few single women among the Ayoreo entertained the idea of marrying non-Ayoreo men. In the past five years, however, circumstances among youth have shifted at an amazing speed, in part through the initiative of *curajodie* who have taken the lead in marrying non-Ayoreo men.

New Marriage Patterns and Ayoreo Male Anxieties

I met Acoya when she was hanging out at Canaan with her friends. Full of life and like many young, single Ayoreo women at eighteen, she and her cousin would walk from Casa Pasajera, where Acoya was living with her parents, to the bar in downtown Filadelfia. There, she was never alone. I frequently spotted her drinking and engaging in conversation with Paraguayan men. Unlike her cousin, who seemed shy in approaching men, Acoya was outgoing and loud. Never without a can of beer in her hand, she would make jokes and laugh with her male companions, most of whom seemed to have already been drinking since early in the afternoon.

Sometimes on the weekends, Acoya's parents would accompany her to Canaan. They did not drink and were there not for the party but rather to keep an eye on their daughter's safety. They sat by a big flat-screen television watching Mexican music shows. A few times I saw her parents on a corner by Hindenburg Street, an alternate spot where their daughter would hang out with friends. To local authorities, what Acoya's parents and a few others did was perceived as pimping. Acoya's father said accompanying their daughter was the only way to protect her from the violence of intoxicated men that he feared. Rather than seeing the practices of their daughter as immoral or something to be ashamed of, they wanted to ensure that she would be in a safe environment. Agents of government institutions and local NGOs who work with indigenous people may be unable to morally conceive of parental involvement on such terms and assume that Ayoreo parents are actually involved in "child prostitution," I was told by a public officer. This adds to constructions of Ayoreo as sexually degenerate by Mennonites and Paraguayans alike.

On my next trip to the Chaco, I found Acoya and her mother, Chise, at the municipality's health post in Villa Amistad, the neighborhood reserved for Paraguayans and Brazilians. Acoya was visibly pregnant. I joined them in the waiting area, and after greeting them and updating them on my whereabouts, I asked about her pregnancy.

"The father is a *cojnone* [white person], Paola. His name is Juan."

"Is that right? How old is he?"

"He's twenty-seven and we've been together for the last seven months."

I felt curious and had many questions for her, but then she was called by a nurse, so I told them I would pay a visit to Casa Pasajera, where they were living at the time. A few days later I finally made it to their place. It seemed like a communal meeting had just ended as I arrived, as a large group of people was leaving. I was told that there had been another threat by the municipality to evict them from the camp, which was on property owned by the colony. It was easy to see the tension on people's faces. Eviction was an ongoing modus operandi of the colony to push Ayoreo away from Filadelfia, and it seriously affected families living in town.

Acoya's father greeted me and excused himself, saying he had to return to work from his break and could not stay to talk with me. At the time, he was one of the few Ayoreo living in Filadelfia with a permanent job; he worked at a carpentry shop owned by a Brazilian. Chise belonged to the Totobiegosode subgroup and was the daughter of one of the last Ayoreo female shamans, who died shortly after contact in 1986. After Chise and I talked about the impending eviction for a while, I shifted to ask about Juan, her daughter's Paraguayan husband. Acoya quietly sat next to us. Chise seemed excited about him. She said Acoya saw him only every two months in Filadelfia because he was working on a ranch near Neuland, another Mennonite colony. Every time he came to Filadelfia, he gave Acoya some money. I asked Acoya if she was sure that he did not have any family back in eastern Paraguay, to which Acoya replied, "No, he's not like most Paraguayans. He's very nice and doesn't lie." Chise seemed to disapprove of my question and interrupted me.

"He's a hard-working person, Paola. I see that he loves my daughter."

"That's good."

"Yeah, and Acoya is not like other Ayoreo girls, she's clean and knows how to cook and clean a house. I can assure you that Juan will not leave her."

Internalized discrimination drives women like Acoya's mother to demonstrate an apparent longing for acceptance by non-Ayoreo people. Such a search for approval appears in a newer generation of parents who approve and encourage relations with white men. In describing her daughter as having traits of a good wife, Chise might have been trying to cancel out the derogatory and discriminatory terms that Paraguayans usually use to refer to Ayoreo women. Later I learned that Chise's relatives criticized her for approving of her daughter's relationship with a Paraguayan, and in a critical tone some individuals mentioned to me that Chise was trying to emulate the lives of white people by allowing her daughter to marry one of them.

The following year, when I returned again, Juan had left Acoya, and Chise was raising the baby.

In 2009–2011, when I conducted most of the fieldwork for this project, marrying white men was a taboo topic for most of the single women with whom I talked. *Curajodie* occasionally desired to marry them, but the theme was either silenced or touched upon with fleeting humor. These reactions revealed internalized forms of colonialism (Bhabha 1994), which hinder single women from thinking of themselves as potential marriage partners of white people; as a result, they do not feel at ease talking openly about such possibilities. The situation has changed markedly, prompted by *curajodie* like Acoya who have been entering into such marriages with increasing frequency.

The number of Ayoreo women marrying non-Ayoreo men continues to rise steadily. It is a remarkable phenomenon, considering that since sedentarization the Ayoreo, unlike many other indigenous groups in the region, have been overtly strict about the observance of group endogamy in their marriages. From 2009 to 2012, there were no more than eight biracial marriages between Ayoreo girls and Paraguayan men in the Departamento de Boquerón. By 2014 that number had risen to twenty-five if not more. Ayoreo villages, with a few exceptions, have at least one Paraguayan man married to an Ayoreo woman. But such marriages rarely last for more than four years. Moreover, having Paraguayans living in Ayoreo villages implies an influx of outsiders that inevitably leads to tension with the village leadership, especially when the visitors and newcomers circulate alcohol on village grounds. On one occasion when I spent the night in an Ayoreo village, I was advised not to sleep outside because Paraguayans were coming in and out. The increasing presence of outsiders is creates anxieties and changing social and economic dynamics within Ayoreo villages.

A related change in the dynamic of couples that is increasingly common as a result of the practices of *curajodie* is a delay in marriage of young Ayoreo. For *curajodie*, access to money through liaisons that in turn means access to increased consumption and opportunities to party in Filadelfia allows women to postpone the usual priority of finding a permanent partner. The delay is slowly shifting the marriageable age of women. Young women are generally more prone to change partners, Ayoreo or otherwise, if the relationship fails, knowing they can find someone else in Filadelfia. Such a situation creates anxiety among single Ayoreo men.

A pressing reality that I sensed from young men during our talks is the need to access cash to deploy in intimate liaisons. But most have no formal education and work as unskilled laborers, so the opportunities available

to them to earn extra cash are limited. In the villages, if any work position opens, married men have priority, as they have families to support. The only viable alternative for single men is to find occasional temporary labor opportunities in Filadelfia.

Ichajui expressed anxiety about money in one of our conversations. He was a baby when his family was contacted in 1986 by Ayoreo with the support of New Tribes Mission, in a tragic event that led to the deaths of five Ayoreo (Perasso 1987). This was the third missionary crusade undertaken by Guidai-gosode with the support of missionaries to take the gospel to their mortal enemies, the Totobie-gosode, Ichajui's group, who at the time were still uncontacted. As a group of Totobie-gosode was reached by a group of the Guidai-gosode, five of the latter were killed in the encounter and became, in the eyes of Guidai-gosode and missionaries, martyrs.[1] Ichajui's mother was a beautiful woman with full, black hair in one of the few known pictures of the contacted group; in it she stands staring, with a bare chest and a long *dajudie* skirt. She died shortly after contact, in uncertain circumstances. Ichajui's father was considered a captive according to customary Ayoreo rules of contact and forced into marrying the woman whose husband he killed in the encounter. Ichajui was adopted by relatives who lived in Campo Loro. To me his face seemed downcast, but he was not shy in approaching outsiders. He learned Spanish on his own. When we met in 2004 he was in his late teens; he followed me continuously for three days pointing to specific objects and murmuring, "Usted la conoce?" (Do you know it?), to then say its name in Ayoreo. Soon after reaching thirty years of age, he died of tuberculosis. In our last exchange, he recalled his limitation in accessing money to give to young women.

> The problem is that we don't have work opportunities in the colonies. Sometimes I work for the Mennonite brick factory, loading and unloading bricks in Filadelfia. At times they might take me to ranches to unload construction materials. On those trips I make a bit more money, but overall the pay is low. Maybe that's why I continue to be single.

The same sentiment was shared with me by other single Ayoreo men who said they experienced the preference of young Ayoreo women toward white men. Until marriage, the economic dependence of Ayoreo women on men for money is notably high, as young women do not have work opportunities available to them. After marriage, most if not all of the money earned by men is transferred to women for management. The circulation of money at the intimate level among Ayoreo youth demonstrates how the moral econ-

omy of exchange continues to function according to Ayoreo ethics of sexuality. But the moral economy of exchange is anchored and reproduced as a result of contemporary socioeconomic dynamics, related to access to labor and money, that shape the lives of Ayoreo; it is not a result of a fading traditional past.

Without work opportunities, most young women depend on their parents for pocket money for clothing, shoes, and other consumer goods. Those expenses can be a burden for families, especially as young people are increasingly exposed to conspicuous consumption. A father of five put it this way: "These days when kids go to town they see all these things and they want them too. I make very little money from preparing charcoal for sale. While I can buy enough food for the whole family, it's hard for me to buy the things my children ask for, like new clothes and shoes." In such families, money from sexual exchanges is seen as an important means to engage in greater consumption. While the amount single women receive might not be enough for that consumption in Filadelfia, usually it covers monetized leisure activities and expenses within the villages, such as playing cards or volleyball and buying candy and other sweets. White men are more likely than Ayoreo men to have steady jobs and therefore are able to give more in intimate liaisons. This is yet another reality that shapes Ayoreo contemporary ethics of sexuality. As a result, monetized exchanges among youth are adding to racialized notions of desire that then drive *curajodie* to seek liaisons exclusively with non-Ayoreo men.

Disposable Bodies

Ana and Oide, who at the time were seventeen and nineteen years old, respectively, belonged to a younger group of *curajodie*. I did not have the chance to meet them, but I was in Asunción when I heard of their accident. They frequently hung out in Filadelfia, where they met two Paraguayans who were working on a ranch by Bahía Negra. After a few days in town, the men were leaving to go back to their work sites and invited the girls to join them. The last news from the girls was the phone call one of them made to her mother to let her know that she was doing well. About a week after arriving at the ranch, the four of them took a trip into Bahía Negra on the ranch tractor. By the time they decided to return, it was dark and they were inebriated. On their way back, a faulty maneuver by the driver caused the tractor to crash, instantly killing both girls.

The only forensic physician in the region did not make it to the site to

report the cause of death. He cited budgetary limitations that did not allow him to leave his office 250 miles away. The death certificate and corresponding notifications were not prepared, and no one informed the families of their daughters' deaths until weeks later. The indifference of local authorities toward the girls' deaths was such that police went ahead and buried their bodies on public land on the outskirts of Bahía Negra without trying to contact their families. Kin members learned about the incident only when an Ayoreo working on a nearby ranch found out and told them. Finally, after much bureaucracy, the girls' corpses were exhumed and taken back to Campo Loro to be buried.

Under a similar shroud of unclear circumstances, Julia, another Ayoreo girl, also became a victim of a relationship. She was with Rubén, a Paraguayan whom she had been seeing occasionally at Don Miguel's bar. Around 2013 a large group of *curajodie* had shifted their party scene from Filadelfia to Kilómetro 17. With more ranches opening in the northern Chaco, it became a popular trucker pit stop; in addition, it was situated close to several Ayoreo villages. The bar there was full on weekends. I had met Rubén's mother, Blanca, in 1999. At the time, Rubén was still a boy who accompanied his mother on her motorbike trips to nearby villages to sell *empanadas* and cake, which she carried in a large woven basket. Blanca did this to supplement her husband's meager income from working on a nearby *estancia* as a cowboy. Although he was abusive toward her, Blanca was unable to leave him until many years later. With the support of her new partner, she had settled in Kilómetro 17 and opened a small kiosk that Rubén called home. As a tall, bulky man in his mid-twenties, Rubén was known to be actively involved in the nightlife of Kilómetro 17. One night he offered Julia a ride from the bar back to her village. On the way, they stopped to have sex. She requested money in exchange, but he insisted on giving her a used cell phone instead. Upset, she screamed at him. Witnesses said Rubén, intoxicated and irritated, reached for his gun and in the heat of the moment shot her to death. The incident was never fully investigated, and her death certificate indicated an accident.

The number of unreported and uninvestigated deaths of young Ayoreo women has increased in recent years, and most of the cases remain unresolved. Stories of rape and other types of physical abuse are also very common, and a lack of information about women's rights obliges the young women and their parents not to report the crimes to the police. The few victims and families willing to talk about these crimes with me have said that one of the main reasons for not reporting them is fear of being prosecuted for having been inebriated or for allowing the girls to go out. That is, misin-

formation and misunderstanding of their rights are driving Ayoreo to place the blame on themselves, reinforcing their vulnerability to outsiders. Although some government programs exist to address gender violence in the Chaco, they operate with few resources and some according to moralizing assumptions, further ostracizing victims of violence in indigenous villages. Consequently, Ayoreo women rarely seek support from those programs.

Besides physical violence, girls frequently experience emotional abuse in their liaisons with men. As happens with physical abuse, the women are unlikely to discuss instances of emotional abuse either. Their silence is somewhat forced, as young women do not want to admit defeat or weakness in front of friends and family members; those are traits Ayoreo discourage. The narratives of female experiences of violence provide a critical firsthand commentary on the social constructions of what it means to be a woman within larger structures of inequalities. Exposing such experiences remains taboo, and the preconception of Ayoreo women as prostitutes leaves them further unprotected and increases the probability that they will suffer abuse at the hands of the men they encounter.

Negotiating Inclusion: Challenging Hierarchies

An unprecedented phenomenon among *curajodie*, born of spontaneous situations arising from urgency and necessity, is that they are beginning to challenge the boundaries of spaces open to indigenous women in the colonies. They do so by seeking to gain visibility and make their plight heard. It was *curajodie* who initiated filing for child support at the local office of Consejo de la Niñez (CODENI, Council for Children's Rights). This agency, dependent on the municipal government, promotes efforts to reach settlements before couples resort to formal legal proceedings to resolve disputes. Isague was the first Ayoreo woman to appeal to CODENI in 2009, shortly after its regional office opened in Filadelfia. A few years before meeting Hans she was in a relationship with a Paraguayan truck driver. She approached CODENI when she learned she could report him, since he had left her pregnant and was unwilling to support her or the child. The Paraguayan office personnel did provide her with support, but she was categorized as a prostitute, and the support was conditioned with expectations that she change her ways. Regardless, she did not desist until reaching an agreement with the father of her child. Following in the footsteps of *curajodie* like Isague, young women have filed complaints against Ayoreo exhusbands as well.

Similarly, taking the initiative to redress theft, Upusia filed a complaint at the local police station. Her years in Filadelfia experiencing many types of abuse led her to this decision when a Paraguayan man did not pay her what they had agreed upon and stole her phone. She explained,

> I was so mad because he stole my cell phone. Can you believe that? It was so expensive, Paola, and I lost it! He was a traveling salesman, and I spent the night with him. We slept in his pickup. I didn't even realize until later that he had stolen my new cell phone. He did it while I was sleeping. I realized it only later. I was so mad I went straight to the police station to file a complaint. They were idiots to me. They told me that this had happened to me for being a *puta* [whore], but I insisted that they do something about it. And you know what one of them told me? "If you don't leave immediately, we'll all screw you, because that's what you deserve."

Upusia's decision to file a complaint at the police station is not common among *curajodie* and even less so among Ayoreo women in general precisely because of the violent and discriminatory treatment they receive from police officers. Structural racism and discrimination combine to make women uncomfortable in denouncing such situations. A few days after the episode with Upusia, I was in Campo Loro with a group of young people listening to the local radio station. Casually, Upusia happened to call in to the program we were listening to. She told the radio host exactly what she had told me a few days earlier, denouncing not only the traveling salesman but also the police. This took the radio host by surprise. He seemed shocked that Upusia was revealing these "intimate matters," as he expressed it, on Christian radio. He murmured something and ended her call, quickly moving to the next caller. One of the young men in our group expressed disapproval at what had just happened. He said, "It's a shame that she's calling the radio station to repeat all the obscenities that the police told her. This is all her fault because she shouldn't be in Filadelfia in the first place."

His reaction reflects the generalized anxiety among male Ayoreo in the villages as their potential female marriage partners exhibit racialized desires and seek liaisons with white men. The anxiety drives Ayoreo men to discriminate against women when they could be providing support. Upusia's feeling of powerlessness after being harshly silenced by the police drove her to call the radio host, who also promptly muted her. At another level, her denunciation is a source of another type of gendered anxiety, as it is men rather than women who occupy the role of interlocutors between the village and outsiders. The increase in direct interaction with and exposure to white

people, as well as the availability of local institutions, are factors women are using to their advantage. *Curajodie* are becoming more adept at speaking Spanish, significantly facilitating communication where language has traditionally been the foremost barrier to the participation of Ayoreo women within the larger community.

Overall, the reactions of state and private officials when approached by *curajodie* reveal how the women's access to services is being defined in terms of their moral worth and how social institutions have become sites where Ayoreo women are introduced to the expected rules and rights of behavior in local society. In unmistakable defiance of those expectations, Ayoreo women are transgressing the established perceptions of what it means to be indigenous women in the region. The situation is also signaling a significant shift in gender roles. Moreover, young women use the space of the city to break free from the social hierarchy in which most of the power is retained by village leadership. In the city, women do not have to answer to the village authorities and are able to evade some of the social rules of communal life that families observe in the villages.

By engaging in monetized sexual liaisons, these women are indirectly defying the hierarchical and unequal structures of village life, wherein the head of the household monopolizes power dynamics and access to resources and prestige. A *curajo* once framed this tension in the following way: "The problem with Umusui [a village chief] is that he doesn't want us in Filadelfia. He prefers that we all go back to his village, so that we buy food from his kiosk. He can't make money on us if we're in Filadelfia." In the city, these power dynamics are disrupted, as the arm of village leadership and authority does not reach into the city, and therefore women are freer from having to submit to household and village restrictions.

The social power that *curajodie* are forging for themselves in Filadelfia is also having an impact on other aspects of leadership in the villages. A good chief can intercede for his people with outsiders. Village chiefs are commonly the ones who are most knowledgeable about the role of institutions in the city, as they are the ones who approach and negotiate with urban authorities. Women such as Upusia are becoming more familiar with the city and with local officials and authorities such as public prosecutors, social workers, physicians, and police. Some local figures might even become friends with the *curajodie* at night. This gives the women a sense that they are part of the social context of the city in a unique way that is inaccessible to village leaders.

As a result of their increasing incursion into the urban fabric, women are simultaneously shifting the hierarchical social structure of Ayoreo com-

munity life and of the Mennonite colonies in unexpected ways by inverting or shifting roles outside their villages. This trend is concomitant with the greater movement of Ayoreo into urban spaces in search of work opportunities. From outside the communal space, women are slowly assuming roles traditionally reserved for Ayoreo men.

Conclusion

The juxtaposition of stories of several *curajodie* and their male Paraguayan friends shows how the practices, motivations, and intimate arrangements of these single women are fluid and can vary from one person to the other; they challenge a unified categorization. Moreover, their practices in many ways reflect those of Ayoreo female youth in general, which at times blurs the boundaries between women who are *curajodie* and those who are not.

The practices of *curajodie* in Filadelfia collectively demonstrate racialized intimacy and desire that allow women to navigate an intimate frontier by constructing a sense of self in the face of ongoing violence and discrimination. For some young women, liaisons with Paraguayans are centered on having money to party; for others they are about emotionally mingling with non-Ayoreo and seeking a deeper connection while slowly increasing the potential for marriage. Irrespective of the fluidity of their practices and intentions, Ayoreo women are challenging the expectations of what it means to be an indigenous woman and the way indigenous women ought to behave and be economically integrated. Their challenges to the status quo have introduced changes and trends in Ayoreo lives that have primarily affected the social standing of Ayoreo girls and are redefining their roles in indigenous and outsider communities.

Although their practices can be empowering, the behavior of these young women also exposes them to violence and other abuse at the hands of non-Ayoreo men and increases the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies. Their active urban presence is geared toward finding their own space in the city, yet the practices of *curajodie* reinforce an image of most indigenous women as marginal, immoral, and unworthy of inhabiting the city's social scene. The experiences women have described to me demonstrate how intimacy with Paraguayan men is lived out in fraught encounters and fragmented connections tainted by abuse and reinforce the racialized structure that sustains the region's economic development. Ayoreo occupy the lowest tier in the structure and are likely to become even more fixed in this position as the cycle of intimacy and abuse continues.

* * *

Every time I returned to the Chaco, I would drive around town at night and stop to talk to girls on the streets. In 2016, I had not visited a bar for a long time, in part because the social scene had changed dramatically from when I started becoming acquainted with these young women.

The drinking habits of Paraguayans and indigenous youth had intensified dramatically, and the social scene had become more violent. At the bar one night, I saw many new faces of younger girls. Most of my *curajodie* friends had moved on to marry Ayoreo men, and a few others had married Paraguayans albeit in unstable and abusive relationships. There were also those who had not moved in either direction and remained indecisive; they continued to seek intimate liaisons with non-Ayoreo men in the colonies. This uncommitted group was greatly reduced, to fewer than five. The women, by then in their mid- to late thirties, no longer seemed to seek the same intimate arrangements as younger *curajodie*. They were more focused on money and did not seek emotional connection to the same extent as before. Upusia is one of these older *curajodie*. She complained to me that younger girls had taken over the streets. "Tontas son, porque no saben cuánto cobrar. Lo único que quieren es estar con un hombre blanco. Ellas cambian sexo por una cerveza" (They are fools because they don't know how much to charge. All they want is to be with a white guy. They'll trade sex for a beer). She was upset that men preferred younger girls to her. Her daughter had advised her to get off the streets and find an Ayoreo husband. But Ayoreo men are not interested in *curajodie* like Upusia who have spent too much time on the streets. It is common for mothers to advise their sons not to marry them because, as one woman remarked, "they start fights, drink, and are too happy in Filadelfia, not wanting to return to their villages." These generalizations do not apply to all *curajodie*. But for women like Upusia who have spent a long time on the streets, it is indeed hard to go back to life in an Ayoreo village.

CONCLUSION

Toward an Intimate Frontier

The contemporary intimate arrangements of Ayoreo women show how the framework of monetized intimate liaisons is experienced in a postcolonial context as frontier expansion affects the lives of indigenous women. Ethnographic explorations of sex work and the commodification of intimacy have advanced a broad range of case studies that highlight the changing socioeconomic structures that drive women to engage in monetized liaisons.[1] Part of this scholarship has paid close attention to how broader capitalist transformations are intertwined with the sexual subjectivities of men and women in places that range from the United States, to Southeast Asia, to Latin America.[2]

The Ayoreo case adds a new perspective to these studies by focusing on a theme within the literature that remains understudied, that is, how the commodification of sexuality operates among indigenous women who until the mid-twentieth century did not have permanent contact with the surrounding societies. In a rapidly changing frontier region, Ayoreo women experience their sexuality as a frontier in and of itself, an "intimate frontier." I use this term as a metaphor to highlight the connection among the characteristics of broader frontier development—boundaries, liminality, and transgression—and how these characteristics are reinscribed and simultaneously challenged in the realm of intimacy and sexuality.

Capitalist relations have mediated the realm of Ayoreo sexuality and accelerated its commodification, which has given rise to racialized desires. Enacting these desires, in a context of overt historical and contemporary discrimination toward indigenous women, has not prevented Ayoreo women from experiencing their sexuality through their moral economy and customary ethics, driving their own forays into the market economy. Through their incursion into the surrounding society, the intimate frontier of Ayoreo

women challenges the moral expectation of the surrounding society that seeks to integrate them through expected gendered roles and social norms. Moreover, this intimate frontier defies the economic terms that seek to incorporate indigenous peoples into the economic frontier of today's Chaco.

The liaisons of Ayoreo women with non-Ayoreo men challenge racial hierarchies and expected labor arrangements for indigenous women in the region. At the same time, the intimate valuations of their liaisons compete with capitalist values, revealing the fractured nature of the regional capitalist economy. The stories of Ayoreo women show how the monetized sexual liaisons of *curajodie* resist categorizations within any fixed approach. Describing their practices in terms of sex work or transactional sex blurs the multiplicity of factors that shape and give meaning to these practices. Their activities indeed overlap with transactional sex in certain aspects; however, the Ayoreo sex-for-money exchange, rather than having as its origin a means of economic survival or a path to become modern, remains firmly attached to their own moral economy, which became monetized as a result of the commodification of social relations. The introduction of money into this realm has not abolished customary practices and ethical values related to sexuality but has added a new set of practices such as conspicuous consumption and racialized notions of desire that have brought the resignification of previous values and new meanings to the enactment of women's intimacy.

The stories of these women enrich understandings of the commodification of intimacy by demonstrating that contemporary sexual subjectivities can be the product of multiple and contradictory discourses of sexuality generated by overlapping ethical systems of customary practices, Christian values, and market forces. Rather than reifying the distinction between "primitive" and "modern" monies,[3] or validating a model that implies linear temporality to understand their contemporary life projects, the Ayoreo case instead invites a reflection on the changing significance that the value of the exchange acquires as it carries both customary and contemporary meanings. The Ayoreo case also provides a critical reflection on the moral economy of indigenous peoples and their contemporary transformations. The incursion of Ayoreo women into the market sphere continues to be shaped by practices enacted by their moral economy, which, rather than having experienced a radical break, continues to operate alongside and in tensions with capitalist values. This coexistence shows the transformative power of moral economies to adapt to contemporary contexts. Such a phenomenon challenges scholars who seek to reify constructions of moral economies and customary values as belonging to the realm of tradition or to a static past.

Finally, looking into the dynamics of the Chaco's Mennonite colonies

brings insights into how contemporary frontier projects are established and reproduced in social spaces constructed outside the realm of the state in lowland South America. The colonization and economic development of the central Chaco by Mennonite settlers have been accomplished with the active support of the Paraguayan state. Discourses that attribute the economic success of the region to the Mennonites' inherent assumption of cultural and racial superiority hide the social forces that support the present frontier economy. These invisible but dynamic forces underpin the patriarchal structure of the Mennonite colonies and the role of Mennonite women's sexuality in maintaining social boundaries that exclude outsiders. The Mennonite system of self-government, supported by the Paraguayan state, has allowed them to sustain unequal relations toward outsiders. Today's gendered regimes of labor and a racialized social hierarchy constitute the framework of the current economic system of the colonies that is vital to its reproduction.

On *estancias* in the northern Chaco, that system is sustained through a pervasive historical and contemporary discourse of the region as a sexualized, masculine, and liminal social space. The experiences of ranch workers who migrated to the Chaco are hardly what the would-be young cowboys dreamed of on leaving behind economic poverty to work on *estancias*. Their experiences expose the harsh living conditions and the liminality of their lives at these sites that reproduce the Chaco as a frontier region. Broader frontier discourses are deployed to justify the rampant deforestation and intensive cattle production taking place in the Chaco. Such economic ambition is depleting the last remnants of forests in the region, where a remaining group of uncontacted Ayoreo still lives, and is accelerating environmental destruction at an unparalleled rate. But the contemporary wave of this frontier economy is not without precedent. Earlier economic and missionary frontier projects have historically excluded Ayoreo women while incorporating Ayoreo men as wage laborers. The exclusion of women, paradoxically, has given them freedom to engage in the market economy indirectly through their husbands and directly through the commodification of their sexuality. They have done this on their own terms and following their own logics, expressed largely through disruptive practices that challenge the labor arrangements of *estancias* or through their own valuation of money in their liaisons with non-Ayoreo men.

In September 2019, President Mario Abdo Benítez made his way to the Chaco to inaugurate, with much fanfare, the first 15 miles of paved road of a total 172 miles that will cross the Paraguayan Chaco as part of the Corredor Vial Bioceánico, also known as the Proyecto Bioceánico, an infrastructure project linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This $440 million in-

vestment in the region renewed, yet again, discourses of the Chaco as a site of infinite economic potential, a place where everything is possible with the right amount of investments (*La Nación* 2019). Years earlier an Uruguayan selling real estate in the Chaco described it as "a sleeping giant" (in *Hoy* 2013). But this is not the only story the Chaco has to tell. The intimate experiences of Mennonite women, of Ayoreo women, and of work migrants to the region voice multiple other stories that manifest the ways their experiences are constitutive aspects of today's economy in the Chaco. Their experiences, marked by violence and inequalities, are the social forces that help sustain but simultaneously challenge the economic projects of Mennonites, private investors, and the Paraguayan state in the region. To highlight this multifaceted reality, the economy in the region can be thought of as a sexual economy. This does not mean it is an economy based on the commodification of sexuality. Rather, the sexual nature of the economy refers in a broader sense to individuals' experiences of gender and sexuality as these intersect with labor, money, race, desires, ethics, and intimacy in an ever-shifting landscape. These experiences are precisely the social forces that have contributed to making the Chaco into the latest frontier in Paraguay.

After years of being on her own and with no prospects of finding an Ayoreo husband, by 2017 Upusia had been married to Luis, a fifty-year-old Paraguayan, for three years. Six years earlier, Luis had come to the Chaco on a job assignment. When he met Upusia, he was working on a dairy farm a few miles from Filadelfia. The farm was managed by Horst, the son of a widowed Mennonite physician who did not have the time to manage the farm and therefore put him in charge. Part of the farm was converted into a private park with a large swimming pool. For a small entrance fee, visitors can spend a quiet afternoon enjoying the pool and grounds. A beautiful garden full of flowers greets visitors. Wooden tables are placed next to a small refurbished old Mennonite house, and a kiosk offers visitors snacks and drinks. Toward the back of the property, Luis works three shifts in a large shed, milking fifty cows per day. Horst hired a young Paraguayan girl to clean his modern brick and tempered-glass house. Upusia is paid to feed the domestic animals, and when her husband is running late, she also helps him feed the cows.

The frequent tourists to the park conclude their visits with no notion of the exploitive working conditions that Luis and four other employees endure at the work site. He is paid daily, not monthly, so his employer can avoid having to give him an end-of-year bonus. He is not paid extra for working night shifts and does not have any form of health insurance. Any

mistakes or oversights that reduce the productivity of the milking process result in a deduction from his daily wages. But Luis continues to work there because he and Upusia enjoy free housing and electricity on the property. This gives Upusia a place to live in a small brick house with appliances, a fan, and access to ice to prepare *tereré* that offers much-needed refreshment in the heat.

Her life changed dramatically in those three years, as previously she spent her days in one of the tents of Casa Pasajera. In 2015, when Casa Pasajera was demolished, she and a few other women who had been on the streets for more than four years moved in with relatives at Olería. A brick factory, Olería Trébol, is located between Filadelfia and Loma Plata near the grounds where the Expo Rodeo Trébol takes place every year. The factory is owned by a Mennonite from Fernheim Colony and houses thirty Ayoreo families who have worked and lived on the site since at least 2006. Ironically, in the backyard of Fernheim Colony and next to the promises of wealth, economic development, and well-being that the Expo Rodeo Trébol offers visitors, the living conditions of these families remain among the worst for indigenous people in the region. The residents squat in improvised housing made of tents and wooden poles. Several nonfunctional latrines are shared by all families, and there is no access to water as there was in the settlements Ayoreo had in Filadelfia. Moreover, ongoing labor abuses plague the factory; the owner is known in the colony for teetering on the brink of bankruptcy because of family problems, which some observers say hinder him from being able to manage his business. Others murmur that the owner has no idea of the exploitive work system and places the blame on the business managers on site.

In Olería, Upusia would spend most of the money from her liaisons on drinks and parties. After several intermittent liaisons, Upusia met Luis at a dance party. A few weeks later they married and moved in together. For Luis, Upusia's companionship and domestic help made his life in the Chaco much more bearable. Luis confessed that his mother no longer spoke to him because he was "acompañado de una india" (together with an Indian). Luis said Upusia was a great help at home, cleaning, cooking, and washing his clothes. He told me more than once that Upusia was not like most Ayoreo. He said, "She is different because she is clean." Even in her late thirties, Upusia was still considerably younger than Luis. At one point she met a Paraguayan man younger than Luis whom she started seeing as well. Her liaison with the other man was viewed unfavorably by her Ayoreo relatives, as she was in a long-term relationship with Luis, but their opinions did not stop her. When Luis found out about the affair, he reacted violently and beat her. Upusia threated to leave him, so he soon repented and said his life

Figure 7.1. An Ayoreo woman outside Olería Trébol, on the road that links Filadelfia and Loma Plata. Photo by the author.

in the Chaco would feel like prison were it not for her company. Eventually Upusia ended her affair, but over time the beatings, driven by instances of jealousy, resumed and became worse.

Upset by the abuse, Upusia began to entertain the idea of leaving him. She would typically run away after the beatings and go to her mother's house in Ebetogue, but she returned to him every time. After many years of living away from her village, she no longer could settle there anew. At one point, tired of the ongoing abuse, she reported it to the police. A few weeks later, Luis was still being held at the local police station, and Upusia began to look for help to get him out again. She called me asking about the possibilities of getting a lawyer to help him. She said, "You know I can't live without him. How could I support myself if I can't get a job in the colonies?" Unconvinced of her own reasoning and forced to leave Luis's work site, she moved back to Olería. Luis was eventually released and returned to work. Upusia told me he kept calling for a while, but she had decided to move on. I was skeptical and expected to see them together again, but the next time I saw her in early 2019, she had married an older, divorced Ayoreo man. Following custom, she asked to go and live with him. Yet again, Upusia surprised me. And while so much has occurred in her life since I first

met her, the strong and inspiring presence of that young woman making her way among the crowd remains in her, as if untouched by time.

Although not all the routes Upusia has taken over the years are typical of the lifestyles of *curajodie*, the adversities she has experienced do speak of the imprints left on the lives of many women by their changing sexual practices in Filadelfia. Most return to their villages and construct their lives with Ayoreo men, but the impact has been difficult for many of them. Their difficulties are an undeniable reminder that the structural patterns of violence and discrimination continue to actively shape the lives of Ayoreo women. Nonetheless, they are seeking new spaces in which to construct a meaningful sense of self that adapts to the changing realities in which their lives are embedded. They are doing so by reworking their relations with their villages and the larger society, expanding the range of possibilities available to them to craft their own life projects.

The pace of economic and social change in the Chaco has a direct impact on the sexual practices of Ayoreo youth and thus continues to rapidly alter gender roles and male-female relations. Men like Luis are also thrust into the center of the changes taking place in the Chaco. The generalized perceptions about Ayoreo, however, have not changed. Women's bodies continue to be constructed as abject in the intercultural spaces of Filadelfia. This representation, historically forged in Ayoreo-Mennonite relations, has been shaped as well by Ayoreo participation in the political economy of the region. At the same time, the bodies of women have become a focal point for negotiating the terms by which meaningful definitions of intimacy are co-constructed around competing notions of sexuality, monetization, and Christian values.

As I began the long drive home from my most recent visit, I turned onto the same main highway that many decades ago was still a slim path in the middle of the forest that took missionaries and Mennonites toward their encounters with Ayoreo. It is the same highway that initially supplied and still feeds the changing social and environmental panorama of the Chaco. The people whose stories had become part of my own experience faded into the landscape, and the greater context of everything I had learned in these years reminded me of how much I still do not understand. The lives of Ayoreo are deeply embedded in the larger, changing landscape of the Chaco. Perhaps more rapidly than ever, these multifaceted communities change, with Ayoreo women in particular at the heart of some of the most dramatic shifts. If so much could change so quickly in just twenty years, it is hard to imagine what new and unanticipated changes the coming years will bring. The Chaco as we know it today will not be the same in the years to come.

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Notes

Preface

1. I use pseudonyms for all individuals in this book to help protect their identities and their privacy.

2. I was hired as a member of a research team from the Paraguayan Instituto de Investigación en Ciencias de la Salud (Research Institute for Health Sciences).

3. The beginnings of the Mennonites can be traced back to Anabaptist movements founded in 1525 in Switzerland by Ulrich Zwinglio as a result of Luther's Protestant Reformation of the Catholic Church. The Mennonites as a movement began in Holland and northern Germany in 1544 and separated from Zwinglio; considered dissidents, they began to be persecuted by the state. They derived their name from one of the main founding figures, the Dutch preacher Menno Simmons (1496–1561). Their religious ideology was shaped by a strict separation between church and state. They held that true Christians ought to avoid participation in the life of the "world," especially state activities. They also professed principles of nonviolence and a prohibition against taking oaths. Because of heavy persecution, the Mennonites who were living in Switzerland, Austria, and northern Germany migrated to West Prussia from the mid-1500s to the early 1600s. They established settlements in the region around the city of Danzig; the Mennonite settlements remained there for about 250 years. From Prussia some migrated to the United States (1683) and another group to Russia (today Ukraine), invited by Catherine II. Russia received approximately 13,000 from 1788 onward (H. Smith 1957). For a general history of Prussian Mennonites in Russia see Urry 2006.

4. Plautdietsch is a West Prussian dialect of the Low German family of dialects. It originated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Vistula Delta of West Prussia by Netherlandic Mennonites; therefore, the dialect has a distinct Dutch influence (R. Epp 1987). Plautdietsch continues to be used by the Mennonite community in the Chaco.

Introduction

1. For a historical and contemporary overview of the Gran Chaco, see Braunstein and Miller 1999; Combés, Villar, and Lowrey 2009; Metraux 1946.

2. The three colonies are Menno (founded in 1928), Fernheim (1930–1932), and Neu-Halbstadt (1947). The colonies are located within twenty miles of each other. Each has its own history and migration pattern. Members of Menno Colony belonged to three congregations that migrated to Canada from Russia in 1874. Loma Plata is their main urban and administrative center. Members of Fernheim arrived in three consecutive years; the first group was granted permission to leave Russia via Germany in 1930. In 1931 a small group of Polish Mennonites migrated to Fernheim, and by 1932 the group known as the Harbin group reached Paraguay. The latter were a group of Russian Mennonites who in 1920 moved from Ukraine to Siberia fleeing Stalinist persecution and from there left for Paraguay in 1930 through China. Members of Neuland came from Russia after World War II. For a general history of Mennonites in Paraguay see Klassen 2004; Stoesz and Stackley 2000.

3. The use of the term "Ayoreo," which means "person" in the Ayoreo language, was documented only in the mid-twentieth century. Previously it was absent from archival documents, where instead the group appeared as Zamuco (Combés 2009). They were first mentioned in the Jesuit Cartas Annuas of 1717–1718 by Jesuit father Hervas, who classified them according to their dialects into four groups: Zamuco and Zatieo, Caitpotorade, Morocota, and Ugaraño. Susnik (1973) proposes that the Zamuco of the eighteenth century might have been related to the sixteenth-century Tamacoci, who themselves paid tribute to the Chiriguano. By 1716 Jesuits led the missionization of the provinces of the Zamuco. They established the mission of San Ignacio de Zamuco, which only lasted until 1723 because of the harshness of the ecological landscape and hostilities between Zamuco groups. With the aim of breaking intertribal hostilities, the Jesuits resettled some small Zamuco groups at San José mission (1723–1738). However, all efforts to Christianize the Zamuco were abandoned in 1750. By that time, some had been sent to the mission of Sagrado Corazón de Jesus, where this group was absorbed, over time, by the intense process of assimilation, or "chiquitanization" (Susnik 1973). After the expulsion of the Jesuits and during the next century, the Zamuco were erased from history. By the early nineteenth century, travelers to the region made references to groups of Zamucos, albeit under other names. Individuals such as the Franciscan priest and missionary José Cardús as well as the French naturalist Alcide D'Orbigny, who visited several former Jesuit missions in eastern Bolivia in 1831–1832, made reference to the Yanaigua and Guaranoca groups that can be possibly traced to current Ayoreo (Kelm 1964).

4. For a history of NTM among Bolivian Ayoreo see Johnson 1984.

5. It was estimated in 2016 that 1.5 million hectares in the Chaco had been bought by Uruguayans alone for ranching and potential agricultural activities (Cinco Días 2016).

6. See Goosen 2016 for a discussion on the implications of the term "Mennonite" as an ethnic category.

7. See Bolke and Turner 1993 for a brief overview of *mestizaje* in Paraguay.

8. See also Brennan 2004; Gregory 2014.

9. For a discussion of resistance as a diagnosis of shifting structures of power, see Abu-Lughod 1990.

10. See also Appadurai 1986; Eiss 2002; Gilbert 2005; Graeber 2001; Maurer 2006.

11. Nineteenth-century social theorists, despite their evolutionary frameworks, had already explored the introduction of general purpose monies not merely in economic terms but also in social aspects (Marx 2011 [1867]; Polanyi 2001 [1944]; Simmel 2004 [1907]). For classical anthropological approaches to the social embeddedness of money, see works of Appadurai 1988; Kopytoff 1986; Parry and Bloch 1989.

12. For overviews of ethics and morality in the anthropological literature see Errington and Gewertz 2001; Harding 2000; Keane 2007; Robbins 2004; Ziggon 2008, 2009.

13. See Otaegui 2013 for a discussion of how precepts of the Original Beings that are related to clan affiliation continue to be enacted in Ayoreo daily life.

14. Villagra's use of the moral economy approach in his work (2009) reflects a desire to move away from overdeterministic categorizations of indigenous peoples as "hunter-gatherers."

15. Similarly to von Bremen (2000), Renshaw (2004) argues that the moral economy of hunter-gatherers, seen in the generalized reciprocity at play among Chaco Indians, determines their "cultural" preference for wage-labor work, which implies immediate returns, in contrast to activities with delayed returns such as agriculture.

16. Blaser (2004) argues that *indigenistas* in Paraguay have appropriated assumed traits of hunter-gatherers as criteria to define "indigenousness" and use these categories to justify or reject policies toward indigenous peoples in the realm of development projects. I would argue that governmental development policies and the *indigenista* agendas of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are more complex, as they are not necessarily consistent in theory and practice and therefore cannot be reduced to the terms of a single model. I nevertheless find Blaser's critique important in reflecting on the impact theoretical models have on the ground and how these models contribute to shaping policies.

17. Marcelo Bórmida, a leading figure of studies of the Chaco region in Argentinian anthropology, was known for his "phenomenological ethnology" (Bórmida 1984). In the 1970s he and his students at the Centro Argentino de Etnología Americana together produced multiple ethnographic accounts on the Ayoreo (Idoyaga Molina 1998; Mashnshnek 1986, 1990; Núñez 1979; Pagés Larraya 1974). One of his landmark works on the Ayoreo, co-authored with Mario Califano (1978), highlights the warriorlike characteristics of Ayoreo culture and the structure of myths as a prescriber of an individual's conduct. His accentuated focus on Ayoreo myths and associated prohibitions drove him to portray Ayoreo culture as one of "death and terror" (Otaegui 2011). Gordillo (2006:247) has criticized Bórmida's central focus on mythical structures, arguing that it was part of a broader conservative agenda committed to "erasing history and power relations from ethnographic accounts."

18. Translations here and throughout the book are mine.

19. These scholars build their perspectives on the work of early feminist substantivist traditions within anthropology that recognized the limits of the market/nonmarket binary for understanding the socioeconomic sphere (Kondo 1990; Mills 1999; Ong 1987; Strathern 1990). See Mitchell 2006 for a historical overview of how the economy came to be constructed as a separate from society at the turn of the nineteenth century.

20. See mainly Ho 2005, 2009; Tsing 2015; Yanagisako 2002.

21. The Ayoreo belong to the Zamuco linguistic family, along with the Ybytoso

and Tomaraho people. The three groups have a total population of 4,528 individuals (DGEEC 2012).

22. The New Tribes Mission was founded in 1942 by American Paul Flemming. It is a US-based Mission organization that supports members of different Christian churches in the United States with which NTM has ideological affinity in spreading the word of God. NTM does not have its own funding to support missionization, and it depends on support usually given by individuals, churches, or religious congregations. The focus of its work is so-called isolated populations in the "third world." For more on the general history of NTM see Johnston 1985. Recently the name of the organization was changed to Ethnos 360. Throughout the book I retain the name NTM as missionaries in Paraguay continue to self-identify as such.

Chapter 1: Drawing Boundaries

1. Beginning in 2005, nine Mennonite men of the Manitoba Colony in southern Bolivia had been raping female members of the colony. The women could not identify the perpetrators because the men used animal tranquilizers to drug their victims. The incidents finally came to light in 2011. See Toews 2019 for a novel based on these real events.

2. More than 80 percent of the Paraguayan population speaks the indigenous Guaraní language, which is officially recognized alongside Spanish.

3. The law, passed in 1919, made English the compulsory language in all schools in Canada, with strides toward eliminating the Mennonite educational system.

4. Importantly, the law also limited the sale of alcoholic beverages in the colony and its surroundings and included an exemption from import and export duties and taxes for a period of ten years.

5. The initial groups of Mennonites interested in leaving Canada belonged to four congregations: the Old Colonists group and the Sommerfelder group living in the West Reserve, the Chortizer congregation in the East Reserve (all in Manitoba), and the Bergthaler group in Saskatchewan. The three latter groups would move to Paraguay, while the former migrated to Mexico (Klassen 2004).

6. Edgar Stoesz and Muriel Stackley describe how, upon Mennonites' arrival in the Chaco, "instantly, expectation turned into disillusion" (2000:28). First, they were told they had to wait a few days in Puerto Casado for their lands be demarcated, a process that only began eight months after their arrival in Puerto Casado. During that time more than 170 individuals died of typhoid fever. Only after eighteen months of living in precarious conditions did they arrive in their promised land.

7. The financial support of Mennonites in the diaspora was essential for the initial establishment of the colony. The Mennonite Central Committee supported initial acquisitions and stimulated modernization of agriculture. This organization was founded in the United States in 1920. It began as a response to the needs of fellow Mennonites in the former Soviet Union and expanded to support other Mennonite communities around the world. For a history of the Mennonite Central Committee in Paraguay, see Ratzlaff 2014. Construction of the Trans-Chaco Highway in the 1960s further contributed to the process of modernization. The relevance of the central Chaco took a major turn with the introduction of intensive agricultural and

livestock activities by Mennonites. Since then, the growth of the Mennonite economy has been dramatic, so much so that from 37,000 acres initially, they occupied 1.6 million acres by 2007 (Fernheim Cooperative, personal communication, 2007).

8. Alfredo Stroessner was president of Paraguay from 1954 to 1989. He rose to power in an army coup in 1954. His thirty-five-year dictatorial regime, the longest in modern South American history, was characterized by brutal repression.

9. Next to the batallion was a small settlement known as Punto Cuarto, a name given after a USAID program in the region. Like most towns in the Chaco, these were formed as extensions of local military bases. Eventually Punto Cuarto was incorporated into Villa Choferes.

10. See Une 1982 on the history and impact of the frost on coffee plantations in Brazil.

11. See Franco 2019, Ramírez Russo 1983, and Vasquez 2013 for examples of scholarship that uses these discourses in referring to Mennonites in the Paraguayan Chaco.

12. For the history of labor migration to the Mennonite colonies and the contemporary situation of urban indigenous peoples, see Fritz 1994 for the case of the Nivaclé, Glauser and Patzi 2011 for the Enlhet, Canova 2012 for the Ayoreo.

13. For a rebuttal of Basso's critique of Mennonites' relations with indigenous peoples see Redekop 1973. And see Basso 1975, "Reply to Calvin Redekop."

14. This was the Symposium on Interethnic Conflict in South America, in Bridgetown, Barbados. It was organized by the Ethnology Department of the University of Berne in Switzerland and the World Council of Churches. In the meetings, formal reports of indigenous situations in several Latin American countries were analyzed. Participants issued the Declaration of Barbados, in which several states, religious missions, and social scientists assumed responsibility for immediate action to halt aggressions and contribute significantly to the process of indigenous self-determination (Susnik and Chase-Sardi 1995).

15. See Stahl 1982 for the history of these indigenous neighborhoods in Fernheim Colony.

16. Up to the end of the Stroessner regime in 1989, the Mennonite colonies were geographically under the military. Afterward, the national police system took over the region.

17. Scholars have referred to this land-tenure system of the Mennonites in Russia as communal-personal landownership and individualistic land commune. See Ehrt 1932 for details.

18. I have followed the development of Barrio Florida Sur since its establishment in 2018. Fernheim Colony made approximately 450 lots available for sale, and more than 600 interested individuals applied to the system of *sorteo* (lottery) by which a committee of the cooperative selects individuals, prioritizing those who reside in Filadelfia and work for the colony. In this system, once the buyer pays the total sum of the lot, he or she does not acquire ownership of the property but rather enters into a private contract with Fernheim Colony that lacks legal standing. Fernheim retains ownership of the property. Local municipal authorities claim that ownership will be transferred to private individuals once Fernheim transfers its ownership of the lots to the municipality.

19. In her fictional accounts, Canadian author Miriam Toews (2015, 2019), of

Mennonite descent, writes extensively about the patriarchal structure of Mennonite colonies in Canada, Mexico, and Bolivia. Her writings bear some similarities to daily life in the colonies of Paraguay.

20. See Ratzlaff 2002 for a detailed history of the Mennonite Church congregations in Paraguay.

21. Hutterins, also called Hutterian Brethren (German: *Hutterische Brüder*), are an ethnoreligious group that is a communal branch of Anabaptists who, like the Amish and Mennonites, trace their roots to the Radical Reformation of the early sixteenth century (see Kraybill and Bowman 2002).

22. The descriptions are by Juan Oscar Vuyk in his privately produced 2005 "Historia: Familia Vuyk-Heinrichs," page 56. The material was accessed at the private library of the Ferreiro-Vuyk family in Asunción.

23. For the impact of the Chaco War on the Mennonites see Klassen 1976. For the impact of the Chaco War on indigenous peoples living in the Chaco region, see Richard 2008; for the specific impact on the Enlhet people see Kalish and Unruh 2018.

24. Also known as the National Republican Association, the right-wing Partido Colorado held uninterrupted power from 1954 to 2008, the longest in Latin American history besides the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) in Mexico. In 2008 the Paraguayan Partido Colorado was defeated, and by 2013 it had regained the presidency.

Chapter 2: Liminal Masculinities

1. Turner (1969) has drawn on Van Gennep's three-phase concept of rites of passages—separation, margin threshold, and aggregation—to explore the role of margin or liminality in the context of ritual in African societies.

2. For examples of such unidirectional privileges enacted by men see Canessa 2012; Enloe 2014; Kempadoo 2004; Nagel 2003.

3. For an overview of ranching history in the Paraguayan Chaco see Caballero Vargas 2009.

4. The tanks are known as *tanques australianos* for their initial widespread use in Australia. They are elevated circular structures made with walls of earth, unlike the steel structures used in Australia, and installed over excavated and compacted land adjacent to extra water reservoirs known as *tajamares*. A series of channels directs rainwater into the tanks, where it is stored and later used to supply water to cattle either by gravity or with a specialized pumping system.

5. For an overview of similar methods and the creation of pasturelands in the Chaco see Glatzle 1999.

6. The Chaco Biosphere Reserve covers a total of 4.7 million hectares and includes six protected areas: the natural monument Cerro Chovoreca and the national parks Río Negro, Cerro Cabrera Timané, Médanos del Chaco, Defensores del Chaco, and Teniente Agripino Enciso. In 2005, the total amount of the reserve was expanded to 7.4 million hectares (Ávila 2015).

7. The Instituto Forestal Nacional (National Forestry Institute) of Paraguay estimates that in 2017 and 2018, almost 62,000 hectares were deforested each year. The Paraguayan Chaco has more than 13.8 million hectares of forest cover, which in

2019 represented approximately 56 percent of the total forested cover in the country (ABC Color 2019a).

8. Government megaprojects include the aqueduct project to bring water from the Paraguay River to the central Chaco (Canova 2018) and the continental Bi-Oceanic Corridor rail project to connect ports in Brazil and Peru through landlocked Paraguay.

9. In the vicinity of Kilómetro 17 are six Ayoreo villages. Jesudi is the oldest, founded in 1991. Upon my first visit to the Ayoreo in 1999, Jesudi was still the only Ayoreo village on the road that links Teniente Montanía with Agua Dulce. The other villages were established starting in the early 2000s.

10. In Paraguay, *departamentos* are geographical zones larger than districts, comparable in status to states in the United States.

11. For a thorough critique of the abuses that take place during the Transchaco Rally see Fritz 2011.

12. See Katsulis 2010 for the analogous case of American men who cross the border into Mexico to engage in sexual liaisons that allow them to enact masculinities not acceptable at home.

Chapter 3: Labor Exclusion

1. Susnik was a renowned anthropologist of Slovenian origin who migrated and settled in Paraguay after World War II and conducted extensive ethnographic and ethnohistoric work on the indigenous peoples of Paraguay. Ayoreo would later be contacted by the evangelical US-based New Tribes Mission.

2. See Amarilla 2004 for details of Iquebi's life story. Iquebi's story could be paralleled with that of Ishi, a Yahi Indian in northern California in the mid-1920s (Kroeber 1961).

3. The fur trade was one of several large-scale frontier projects. For its history in the Americas see Eric Wolf 1982.

4. Other work activities included logging *quebracho colorado* trees (*Schinopsis quebracho-colorado*), sold to a tannin factory in the Mennonite colonies, as well as clearing pasturelands, making fences, and working at the mission's sawmill and in brick and adobe production. Mennonites supported the establishment of a cattle program in the mission that was partly financed by Fernheim Colony, which had received funding from USAID, and by NTM revenues derived from trapping (Hein 1990:153).

5. For the Argentinian case see especially Ceriani 2008; Miller 1995.

6. See Taussig 1980 for a critique of the piecework system among Colombian plantation workers.

7. See Villagra 2010 for a similar argument on the Angaité indigenous people of the Paraguayan Chaco.

8. See Nostas and Sanabria 2009 for similarities in the case of missionization of Bolivian Ayoreo.

9. Pai Puku is a Catholic radio station established in 1992. It serves as one of the main means of communication across the Chaco, where other means tend to be scarce and communication is made difficult by the lack of year-round transportation.

10. *Bromelia hieronymi* fiber is used for making thread from which items such as skirts and bags are woven.

Chapter 4: Commodifying Sex

1. Unlike *dajudie*, which is used for its fiber to make threads, *doridie* is used for its edible fleshy leaf base.

2. My use of "autonomy" resonates with Charles Taylor's (1989) analysis of personhood. For him, one's personhood includes a sense of agency and consciousness of an agent and a capacity for self-interpretation, even if partial or incomplete, and purposes that inform one's actions and one's self-interpretation. This approach is useful in that it challenges ideas of individual freedom and autonomy usually attributed to the self. Instead, it conceives of the self as informed by and continuously involved in dialogical relation with others: "One cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors" (Taylor 1989:280). In his analysis of the modern self, Taylor traces the construction of personhood as embedded in two dimensions: ontological and historical. The ontological realm focuses on values, ideas, and beliefs and incorporates the self-perceptions of individuals. Taylor argues that these are prone to change over time, and precisely because of this mutability, a historical approach to understanding the self is just as fundamental.

3. For a critique of myths as ahistorical see Chakrabarty 2000; de la Cadena 2015.

4. By 1969–1970, Ulf Lind, a German anthropologist conducting research at Faro Moro, had already perceived the "clear influence" of missionaries on Ayoreo. He noted that taboos and traditional beliefs were in decline as a result of the introduction of "civilized" goods and life with the white people. He contended that if the intensity of the missionary endeavors were kept up, Ayoreo traditional beliefs would soon be "put to rest." Uejai Picanerai, the main Ayoreo chief at the mission station, told him, "Our youth is like the white people, this is why the taboos do not apply to them anymore. But I am one of the old people and I still observe them. Whether I eat deer or cow meat [i.e., implying 'whether I eat Ayoreo food or white people's food'], I still observe the taboos" (in Lind 1974:83).

5. For an overview of Ayoreo infanticide see Bugos and McCarthy 1984.

6. This narrative was compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau (1989:533–534).

7. Ayoreo have seven exogamous patrilineal clans, called *chucherane* (Bórmida and Califano 1978). For a discussion of the role of clans in Ayoreo society see Bartolomé 2000.

8. See Otaegui 2011 for a similar discussion.

9. For analyses of the role of anger among other Chaco groups see Barúa and Dasso 1999; Kidd 2000.

10. The narratives of Suarejna and Akuejede were compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau (1989).

11. I later corroborated this story during my stay among the Ayoreo in Bolivia in November 2010. In addition, I was told of another possible meaning linked to the term. According to some people, it refers to the name of a small bird, the black-crowned night heron, which in lowland Bolivia is known as *cuajo*, a word that

sounds similar to "curajo." Ayoreo girls who have sexual liaisons with white men are associated with this little bird because like the bird, the girls go out at night.

12. Often, after leaving his or her partner, a person would associate with the group of the new partner and leave the previous group behind.

13. Zelizer (2005:32–33) instead proposes an alternative approach she calls the "connected lives" perspective, according to which individuals blend intimacy and economic activity as a way to construct and negotiate relationships that create connected lives. This is done by differentiating varied social ties, marking boundaries between them through daily practices, and sustaining them through various activities, including economic activities. Zelizer contends that individuals are embedded in a constant process of negotiating the terms and content of their social ties.

Chapter 5: Consuming Desire

1. According to the account of a Ms. Heinrich, a Russian migrant to Fernheim, in December 1930 a group of 218 people left Russia, crossed the Amur River, and stayed for two months in Tsitsikar (Qiqihar), China. From there they went by train to Harbin, China, where they united with refugee Mennonites who had escaped previously. There they spent thirteen months. On February 14, 1932, they embarked on the "long and torturous path that would take them to the green hell," as described in "Historia: Familia Vuyk-Heinrichs," by Juan Oscar Vuyk in 2005, page 50. The group took a train from Harbin to a fishing port, from there a Japanese fishing vessel to Shanghai, then a merchant vessel to Marseille, passing Hong Kong, Saigon, Singapore, and the Suez Canal, crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and finally arriving in France. From Marseille the group continued by train to Paris and the port of Le Havre. From there they took ships to Lisbon, across the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro, then to Montevideo and Buenos Aires, and from there by river to Asunción and Puerto Casado. In Puerto Casado they took a train to a location known as Kilometer 145, and from there they went in oxcarts to their destination; they arrived in Filadelfia by May 1932.

2. See Sider 1987 for a discussion of the contradiction of the colonial process of domination that aims to incorporate a group of people but simultaneously fosters their "othering."

3. For Appadurai (1986:15), the conceptualization of regimes of value highlights how not every act of commodity exchange implies "complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation, and from commodity to commodity." He argues that the process of commoditization "lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors" (15).

Chapter 6: Negotiating Inclusion

1. The first missionary crusade to save the souls of Totobie-gosode took place in 1979 and led to the search for and contact with eleven people and then their families. New Tribes Mission firmly denied taking part in this endeavor but was none-

theless severely criticized (Escobar 1988). In 1986 another such effort and denial took place (Bartolomé 2000; Perasso 1987).

Conclusion

1. Nicole Constable (2009) presents an overview of studies that relate the subjective experiences of women in different contexts around the world.

2. For relevant case studies in these regions see Bernstein 2007; Gregory 2014; Hoang 2015; Stout 2014; Wilson 2004.

3. For approaches that critique and move beyond this categorization see Appadurai 1986; Ferguson 2015; Graeber 2001; Parry and Bloch 1989.

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