INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS: AYOREO SEX WORK IN THE MENNONITE COLONIES OF WESTER PARAGUAY

by

Paola Canova

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Paola Canova, titled Intimate Encounters: Ayoreo Sex Work in the Mennonite Colonies of Western Paraguay and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Thomas E. Sheridan

_____

Date: 04/16/2014

Brian Silverstein

_____

Date: 04/16/2014

Thomas K. Park

_____

Date: 04/16/2014

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

_____ Date: 04/16/2014

Dissertation Director: Thomas E. Sheridan

_____ Date: 04/16/2014

Dissertation Director: Brian Silverstein

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ABSTRACT

Locals in Filadelfia, the urban center of western Paraguay's Mennonite Colonies, see the public presence of indigenous Ayoreo 'sex workers' as a moral stain on the city and a major social problem. These young women's practices upend local perceptions as well as established theoretical categories of sex work. They treat interactions with male 'friends' not as 'work' but as 'play,' they do not see their practices as morally fraught; and they move in and out of the activity, until they leave it behind and marry within their own group. This dissertation, based on 49 months of long-term fieldwork, examines the cultural meanings of 'sex work' among Ayoreo young women to understand how colliding ethical systems, framed by five decades of Ayoreo engagement with the market economy and intense Christianization, shape (a) the cultural production of gender and sexuality and (b) notions of exchange and the commoditization of bodies. Ayoreo 'sex work' does not fit conventional academic models, which reduce such activity to proof of economic necessity or women's stigmatization of women. Rather than being a form of feminine submission or exploitation, it is a unique cultural phenomenon constructed in a web of social relations forged through processes of cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic shifts experienced by the Ayoreo over the twentieth century.

Chapter I

Introduction

The Research Subject

I met *Upusia Picanerai*[1] in the year 2001. It was my first work-related visit to the Chaco region of Paraguay. I had been hired as a member of a research team from the National Research Institute on Health[2] to do a general health diagnosis of indigenous populations in the western region of Paraguay. At the time *Upusia* was only twenty-two years old. I saw her first at the local government office, an old Mennonite house on Hindenburg, the main artery of Filadelfia. The town is the main urban center of Fernheim Colony, one of the three Mennonite Colonies established in the Chaco region of Paraguay at the beginning of the twentieth century.

That day, the research team had gathered to give out the results of blood tests to Ayoreo people living in Filadelfia. It was a hot afternoon and we gathered in the long, thin corridor of the 1920s refurbished European-style country house that had been turned into a public office. *Upusia* made her way towards 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[3] who visibly stood out from the rest of the Ayoreo gathered there. Unlike the long and colorful nylon skirts worn by Ayoreo women, *Upusia* had a pair of tight white jeans on. Her long and thin black hair stood out and she carried herself

[1] I use pseudonyms for all research participants' names, as well as composite identities to protect their privacy.
[2] This institution functions under the governmental Ministry of Health.
[3] Throughout the dissertation, I will use the term young women to refer to single female between the ages of 15 to 25 years old.

with an imposing presence, which immediately called my attention. With firm voice and in perfect Spanish she told one of the doctors by 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 are healthy.” She made a brief pause, only to shift to an angrier tone, “How come none of you have yet thought about taking any blood samples from us? We demand that you do so. Now!” The doctors, who did not include people they considered “prostitutes” in their public health surveys, reacted in shock. One of the local Mennonite governmental health officers present told the medical doctors that the way in which the young woman had conducted herself was "typical" of Ayoreo women. When I asked what he meant, he said 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 by the local health post on the edge of a dusty side road in Filadelfia. With reservation I decided to engage her in conversation. Soon after introducing myself and starting to chat, a truck that was going by honked at her and a man reached out waving. She waved back with a big smile on her face. The following was our exchange:

> *Paola*: “Do you know him?”
> *Upusia*: “Oh yeah, he is my friend. He is a very nice guy. When we have sex, he always buys me a coke”.
> *Paola*: Are you not afraid of him?”
> *Upusia*: No, but I know some men can be very mean. Once, my girlfriend and me took a ride with two Paraguayan men, and on the way out of town, he stopped the truck and wanted to have sex with my younger friend. He acted in a violent way. I was scared but acted as if I was mad. I told him to have sex with me if he wanted to fuck 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* amazed me. How could she talk so naturally about such a violent event? Was she not afraid of interacting with white men? Why would she have sex with a truck driver in exchange for a coke? These questions remained with me for a long time

By 2006, I had returned to the Chaco as an anthropologist to conduct fieldwork among Ayoreo for my Master's thesis. I chose to focus my research on urban Ayoreo, as the number of Ayoreo moving to live and work in Filadelfia was on the rise. To understand this phenomenon, my research explored the relationships between Ayoreo identity, economic processes and social production of space in urban areas. My main field site at the time was Casa Pasajera, an urban settlement where over eighty families (370 people approximately) were occupying a one-hectare plot in Filadelfia. The Ayoreo girls in the streets, no more than a handful in 2002, now numbered over twenty-five. Until then, I still had the impression they were sex workers. However, unlike what I expected, they did not hide in dim corners waiting for clients at night. Instead, they could be spotted drinking and talking to white men all over the main street of town. During the day, they were visible everywhere downtown, wearing short blouses and mini-skirts.

Aware that most Ayoreo self-identify as Christians, I had envisioned that these girls would live marginalized by most Ayoreo in Casa Pasajera. The dominating Ayoreo discourse—shared by Mennonites and Paraguayans alike—was that 'prostitution' by young women was something 'bad.' However, as I

became more acquainted with the people in Casa Pasajera, I realized that many of those who held this view of Ayoreo 'prostitution' actually had daughters or sisters who were going out every night to party and have sexual liaisons with non-Ayoreo men. Their families did not marginalize these girls; rather, most lived with and depended economically on their parents. Moreover, I soon learned that many of them married within their own group after one or two years of being in the streets—like *Upusia* did when I asked what happened to her. I became even more puzzled by the self-assured presentation and bold practices of these young women in a social space that is highly discriminative and hierarchical towards indigenous peoples.

Over time, the practices of young Ayoreo women in Filadelfia have fed the current local perception of Ayoreo urban-dwelling as 'out of place' and 'dangerous,' and therefore a major social problem in the Mennonite Colonies. Local debates about the topic have posited various reasons and explanations for the problem, but none of them questions the basic assumption that the Ayoreo urban presence is evidence of deep-seated structural inequalities resulting from larger historical socio-economic processes that shaped the regional landscape during the 20th century. In this context, I realized that what is perceived as Ayoreo 'sex work' could open a unique window to explore how larger historical structural inequalities have shaped the contemporary lives of Ayoreo people, and women in particular, from a women's perspective—an approach that has rarely been explored among indigenous peoples in the Paraguayan Chaco.

To this end, this dissertation examines the cultural meanings of monetized sexual liaisons—perceived as sex work—among young Ayoreo women, in order to understand how colliding ethical systems, framed by five decades of Ayoreo engagements with the market economy and intense Christianization, shape (a) the cultural production of gender and sexuality and (b) notions of exchange and the commoditization of bodies. I demonstrate how Ayoreo 'sex work' does not fit academic models that reduce such activity to proof of economic necessity or stigmatization of women (e.g. Barry 1996, MacKinnon 1989, Pateman 1990, Rubin 1994). Rather than being a form of feminine submission or exploitation, it is a unique cultural formation constructed in a web of social relations, themselves forged through processes of cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic discipline experienced by the Ayoreo over the twentieth century.

On the Ayoreo: A Brief Introduction

The Ayoreo belong to the Zamuco linguistic family along with the Ishir-Chamacoco Indians of western Paraguay. The Zamucos are one of five linguistic families that make up the 19 indigenous groups that currently live in Paraguay.[4] They were first mentioned in the Jesuit *Cartas Annuas* of 1717-1718, where Jesuit father Hervas classified them according to their dialects into four different groups: the Zamucos (Zamucos and Zatienos), Caitpotorades, Morocotas, and Ugaraños. The hunting grounds of these foraging people were located south of the region of Chiquitos.[5] According to Susnik (1973), the Zamucos of the eighteenth century

[4] See Map in Appendix A.
[5] Chiquitos was a vast region of flatlands, ranges and lowlands located to the south of Bolivia. Historically it included the current provinces of Chiquitos, Velasco, Ñuflo de Chávez, Ángel Sandoval, Germán Busch and Guarayos.

might have been related to the sixteenth century Tamacocis who themselves were tributaries of the Chiriguanos.

Starting in 1716, Jesuits led the missionization of the *Provincias de Zamucos* by establishing the Jesuit mission San Ignacio de Zamuco. The mission only lasted until 1723 due to the harshness of the ecological landscape and hostilities between Zamuco groups. Missionaries were not able to establish a homogenous socio/economic unit, as they had among the Guaraní and Chiquito indigenous groups, due to ongoing friction between antagonistic Zamuco groups. With the aim of breaking intertribal hostilities, the Jesuits re-settled some small Zamuco groups at Mission San José (1723-1738). However, all efforts to Christianize the Zamuco were abandoned in 1750. By that time, some Zamucos had been sent to the mission Sagrado Corazón de Jesus, where this group was absorbed, over time, by the intense process of assimilation or "chiquitanizacion" (see Susnik 1973 for details). Susnik argues that current "Moro" or Ayoreo are the descendants of missionized Zamucoan Morotoco groups who blended with other Zamuco groups that remained isolated. She further subdivided them into three groups according to their geographical location.

Combes (2009) suggests that as a result of Jesuit endeavor in the region, a historical reconfiguration of groups and identities took place that complicates the identification of links between Ayoreo and also Ishir to specific Zamucoan groups. She rightly points out that because of this reconfiguration, the ancestors of current Ayoreo and Ishir cannot be conceived as fixed categories that lived in complete isolation, as scholars have tended to portray them.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, and during the next century, the Zamuco were 'erased' from history. However, 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 Jose Cardús, as well as the French naturalist Alcide D'Orbigny (who visited several former Jesuit missions in eastern Bolivia between 1831-1832), made reference to the Yanaiguas and Guaranocas, groups who can be possibly traced to current Ayoreo (c.f. Kelm 1964).

In this way, archival evidence reveals that the ancestors of the Ayoreo underwent repeated contacts and fusions with other groups, never really living in complete isolation as 'one ethnic group' between the sixteenth century and the twentieth century. On the other hand, documentation also shows that from at least since the sixteenth until the twentieth century, Ayoreo had a continuous presence along the northern Paraguay-Bolivia border. This region, located in the area of the Salt Pans, has been considered the center of Ayoreo territory since even before the arrival of the Jesuits (cf. Bessire 2010).[6]

The Ayoreo have never had a unified political organization. The Ayoreo as a cohesive ethnic group only came to be known as such during the mid-twentieth century. This is a recent designation which, according to Combes (2009), had been previously absent in archival documents. Instead, Ayoreo lived divided into local groups. Each local group comprised between eighty to one hundred members, and moved within its own particular territory. They received their name

[6] These are the largest natural salt deposits in the northern Chaco; they are made up of two large Salt Pans located near Cerro San Miguel in today's Bolivia by the border with Paraguay.

according to a defining feature or event in the region within which they moved. However, rather than being monolithic, these groups and the territories they occupied were fluid and underwent both fusions and divisions according to specific situations or events. While some groups had friendly relations, there were ongoing hostilities between others, and oftentimes some groups would subordinate under a specific leadership to engage in warfare. Fischermann (2001) identified over fifty local groups during the 1970s, some of which were already extinct at that time.

During the early twentieth century, internal conflicts and warfare between local groups increased. These conflicts were fueled by increasing incursions by outsiders (military and civil) into their territories (see Richard 2008, Perasso 1988). During this time period two large and important confederacies were established: the *Direquedejnai-gosode* ("people from the following day") in the northern Ayoreo territory and the *Guidai-gosode* ("people from the villages") to the south. [7] Both groups engaged in warfare against each other. Pressure on the northern group was such that it eventually drove them to make contact with missionaries on the Bolivian side of the border.

This is how, after several unsuccessful encounters, American Protestants from

[7] The *Direquedejnai-gosode* confederacy included the *dachagaide cachopie-gosode,* the *dorojobie-gosode,* the *Menenei-achamisorone,* and *tobui-gosode.*The *Guidai-gosode* confederacy included *Ducode-gosode*, *Garai-gosode*, *Odocobui-gosode*, *Tie-gosode*, *Ñamocode-gosode*, *Ijnapui-gosode*; *Amome-gosode*, *Aboroe-gosode,* and *Erape pari-gosode.* All these groups were subordinated to Uejai Picanerai. According to Fischermann (2001) the *Totobie-gosode* were also part of this confederacy for a while. By 1974, the *Garai-gosode* had formed their own subgroups.

the New Tribes Mission made their 'first' contact with Ayoreo in Bolivia in 1947.[8] A year later, they established their first mission station, Tobité (1948). Americans from The South American Mission founded Zapocó in 1950 and later Poza Verde (1962). The Latvian Baptist Mission established Rincón del Tigre in 1950. Catholics from the Franciscan congregation (from Austria) founded Santa Teresita in 1953 and the Maristas from Spain founded Roboré in 1960. The New Tribes Mission founded a second mission station in Puesto Paz by1976. [9]Altogether, the establishment of these mission stations reveals the multiplicity of religious groups that reached the Ayoreo in Bolivia starting in the late 1940s. By the 1970s, Fischermann (1976) estimates that around 1,600 Ayoreo had been contacted in Bolivia and most of them were known as *Jnupedo-gosode* ("people from the gullies") and *Direquedejnai-gosode*.

In Paraguay, after several failed attempts, religious groups started to contact the Ayoreo during the 1960s. Catholics of the Salesian order were the first to make contact in 1962. They settled members of the *Garai-gosode* group in Puerto María Auxiliadora—outside traditional Ayoreo territory—by the Paraguayan River. There they bought almost 50,000 acres in 1963 to which 4,500 acres were added in 1984. With the support of the Mennonites, The New Tribes Mission contacted the *Guidai-gosode* and *Totobie-gosode* starting in 1966. They

[8] In 1943, five New Tribes Mission missionaries lost their lives trying to contact the Ayoreo, as they were killed by the latter (see Johnson 1966 for details). The New Tribes Mission (NTM) was founded in 1942 by Paul Flemming. It is an organization that supports members of different Anabaptist Churches in the United States with which the NTM has ideological similitude as regards spreading the word of God. They do not have their own funding to support missionization. To realize this goal, they depend on their own support usually given by individuals, churches, or religious congregations. They focus their work on so-called isolated populations in the 'third world'.

[9] See Map in Appendix B

established their first mission, in Cerro León (1967-1968), which was later moved to Faro Moro (1969-1979) and finally Campo Loro (1979 onwards) where they are currently stationed.

Both groups took different approaches to the conversion and Christianization of Ayoreo. The NTM focus was primarily on preaching and Bible translation into the Ayoreo language as a means to reach, convert and missionize the people. Deploying the methodologies of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, most of their missionaries have been/are fluent in the Ayoreo language, which has been a fundamental tool to access the Ayoreo worldview in order to shift customary values. The Salesian congregation, on the other hand, while not a direct advocate of the liberation theology movement in Latin America, is known for its pedagogical model that uses guidance and persuasion as methodologies to adhere individuals to Christian values (Wirth 1982). In this way, their missionaries placed emphasis on Ayoreo schooling as a conversion and missionizing strategy. From the beginning, Ayoreo were expected to learn how to read and write in Spanish. As a result, today there are more Catholic Ayoreos fluent in Spanish and with higher schooling rates than Evangelical Ayoreos. In spite of this, an aspect fundamental to the success of the process of Ayoreo missionization has been the training of Ayoreo preachers by NTM missionaries. This is something that the Salesians, due to structure of the Catholic Church, were not able to achieve.

Before being drawn into a sedentary lifestyle by missionaries during the twentieth century, the Ayoreo had a subsistence economy based on hunting, gathering, and seasonal agriculture. The division of labor was gendered.

Economic activities took place according to an annual cycle, divided in two different time periods according to religious and ecological criteria. During the *puyak eami*, or period of the prohibited world (May to August), which partially coincided with the dry season (approximately May to December), the Ayoreo lived as nomads, mostly hunting and gathering (including produce from the previous planting season). After that, the time of the *uomi eami* or free world (September to April) would start and mark the beginning of the *putaningai* or planting season, during which they cultivated different varieties of squash, beans, corn and tobacco (approximately September to December).[10] During this period, the Ayoreo settled in semi-permanent villages. Notably, they organized agricultural activities in a way that would not interfere with the continuation of their foraging activities.[11] At the end of the *sekere* or harvesting season (approximately December to April) they would break up into smaller groups and resume roaming their territories (see Bórmida & Califano 1978).

Classic scholarship classifies groups of foragers like the Ayoreo as 'egalitarian' societies (see Woodburn 1982, Viveros de Castro 1991). In the Ayoreo case, this ahistorical and simplistic classification has obscured the fact that they traditionally have a hierarchical model of social structure organized around prestige and social standing (for a similar critique of this classification see Schrire 2009). This is a fact that Ayoreo scholars are only now beginning to contemplate and explore further (see Nostras 2009, Bessire 2010).

[10] The dry season was interrupted by rains in July and August, which permitted the preparation of the soil for the planting of crops.
[11] They would typically plant crops in small plots and leave them to grow, returning to the same place after approximately three months to harvest.

During pre-mission life, men achieved social standing either by becoming an *asute* (chief) or *naijai* (shaman). The former was more important in hierarchical order, but was not exclusionary. The main quality of the *asute* was his courage, while for the shaman it was his power or *ujopie*. Both employed their status to protect their village and group. An individual could also gain social prestige by knowing therapeutic songs, or by being a good hunter. Late adulthood was the time during which Ayoreo men reached the peak of their knowledge, influence and prestige. The role of *asute* was excluded for women, and female shamans were rare. The prestige and influence of a woman would grow with that of her partner. To achieve this, her conduct—along with that of her family—had to be exemplary. In the absence of her husband and other leaders, she would be in charge of making decisions relevant to the group. In addition, she had to distinguish herself by her personal abilities, such as being a good counselor to young women, raising children, and having an aptitude for handy-work.

Exchange and reciprocity were paramount social values in Ayoreo social structure. While scholars rightly pointed out the role of exchange and reciprocity as leveling mechanisms in egalitarian societies of the Paraguayan Chaco (e.g. Kidd 1995), in the Ayoreo case, exchange and reciprocity were—and continue to be—integral to sustaining relations of domination and hierarchy within their social structure. While in the economic sphere this served to further an 'egalitarian' access to material goods and resources, in the social sphere, it allowed the maintenance of social hierarchy. The *jogasui*, or extended family, played a fundamental role in this process as the keeper of social power and prestige.

Family prestige was mostly inherited (i.e. "powerful families"); however, individual social standing was achieved based on an individual's hunting and/or warfare skills.

The *jogasui* is the fundamental Ayoreo economic unit and is structured according to matrilocal residency patterns (although descent is patrilineal). Its members include all members of the extended family who share responsibilities. Among Ayoreo, an individual with nothing (i.e. neither food nor basic access to material goods) was termed "*Ayoreo matagode"* which literally translates as "a person without family." This reveals the deeply rooted importance of the *jogasui* in Ayoreo socioeconomic life. Ayoreo have seven different exogamous clans, and reciprocity is expected between clan members.

Mennonites in the Chaco: Re-inscribing the Landscape[12]

While the Ayoreo were still roaming the northern regions of the Paraguayan Chaco, during the early 1920s, a group of Mennonites living in Canada was looking for a place to resettle. They did so because the Canadian government had recently passed a national education law which they considered to be a threat to the reproduction of their Mennonite identity (see Ratzlaff 2002). [13] At that time, the Chaco was being geographically disputed with Bolivia. The Paraguayan state

[12] The Mennonites are a religious group of Anabaptist afiliation, started in Holland and northern Germany following the separation of Zwigli, founder of an Anabaptist movement in Switzerland in 1525. Their name derives from one of their main foundational figures, Menno Simmons (1496-1561). Due to persecution suffered in Switzerland, Austria, and northern Germany, a group of 10,000 Mennonites eventually migrated to western Prussia from the mid-1500s until the early 1600s, where they lived for approximately 250 years in the Danzig region. When they were again obliged to migrate, Catherine II invited them to establish themselves in Russia. A group of approximately 13,000 migrated there from 1788 onwards (Smith 1957)
In this dissertation I use the term Mennonite to refer to the Russian-descent immigrants and their descendants born in Paraguay. The majority of them identify as such to distinguish themselves from the Paraguayan population

[13] This law, passed in 1919, made English the compulsory language in all Canadian schools.

viewed colonization of the area as a geopolitical strategy to assure its claim of ownership over the region. To motivate Mennonite immigration to the region, the Paraguayan government offered to grant them special privileges.[14]

A conservative branch of Mennonites saw in Paraguay the opportunity to settle in a geographically isolated region with the added bonus of legal privileges that would give them the freedom to reproduce their Mennonite identity. As a result the first group of 281 families arrived in Paraguay in 1926 from Manitoba, Canada. After several setbacks, they established *Chortitzer* Colony in 1928. The land was acquired from the Argentinean Company Carlos Casado, which at the time owned more than a million hectares in the Paraguayan Chaco.[15] Two years later, in 1930, *Fernheim* Colony was established with 1,600 immigrants in the vicinity of Chortitzer Colony. These were part of the last group of people who were granted permission to leave Russia under Stalin.[16] The third and final Mennonite Colony settled in the Chaco was Neu-Halbstadt, also in the same area. It was established in 1947 by 5,000 members of a group of 15,000 Mennonites who fled Russia after the Second World War.[17] The present discussion will focus on *Fernheim* Colony, since it was this Colony that first established initial contact with the Ayoreo and whose members have developed the closest relations with them since then.

[14] These privileges included freedom of religious practice, exemption from military service and the taking of oaths, the right to establish their own schools and teach their own language, and the right to self-administration in several areas. It also limited the sale of alcoholic beverages in the colony and its surroundings as well as exemption from import and export duties and taxes for a period of ten years (see Klassen 2002).
[15] For the history of Casado in the Chaco see (Donatella 2012)
[16] In 1932 a second group of 370 people arrived in *Fernheim*. They had escaped Russia via China (Ehrt 1932).
[17] The other part of this group established *Volemdan* Colony in the eastern region of Paraguay.

From its beginning, *Fernheim* established the same spatial and organizational structure previously developed and used in Russia. They divided the Colony into *aldeas* or villages, each of which was managed by a *Schultze* or administrator who answered to the *Oberschultze,* or general administrator. They adopted a communal-personal landownership system, also previously established in Russia, by which families had rights of usufruct over farming parcels that were communally owned by the Colony (see Francis 1948; Fretz 1953).

In 1931, soon after the establishment of the colony, the colonists formed *Fernheim* cooperative. Although they had developed several communal projects while living in Prussia and later Russia, this was a pioneer experience for them. Its founding was pivotal for the economic development of the Colony because it would soon become the main marketing agency for the products of Mennonite farmers, who due to geographical isolation and infrastructural limitations were not able to sell their products individually. In addition, it served as the principal financial agency for members. Because the Mennonites had unsuccessfully tried to legalize the communal administrative statutes of the Colony under Paraguayan laws, they finally decided to use the cooperative as a medium to do so. By this process, they incorporated the previous informal rules for managing the Colony into formal cooperative statutes. By 1944, the cooperative had subsumed all legal power in the Colony and since then has been in charge of all its social and economic institutions (see Klassen 2004).

Over time, the cooperative rose to become the main social and economic institution through which *Fernheim* Colony controlled the wealth and political

power of the region; this allowed the Mennonites to maintain social distinction and foster unequal relations of power vis-à-vis non-Mennonites in the region. During the following decade, with the support of the Paraguayan government and foreign capital, the Central Chaco region where the three Mennonite Colonies settled underwent a surge of socioeconomic change, developing from an extractivist frontier region into a vital agro-industrial region including an urban center. This change speaks to the shifting landscape of capitalist and territorial logics of power in frontier areas (c.f. Guy and Sheridan 1998; Schmink and Wood 1984; Wolf 1982). The expansion involved not only the deforestation of large tracts of land for the establishment of pasture, but also depended on the deployment of indigenous labor.

The Mennonites played a significant role in this development. Over time, capital investments gave them access to control the means of production, which in turn gave them the power to redefine commodity values in the region. The economic profile of the Central Chaco was altered dramatically by developing agricultural activities and intensifying ranching. This, in turn, significantly increased its economic relevance as new investors were drawn to the region.[18]

The economic success of this process has been attributed by Mennonites themselves to their inherent traits of cultural and racial superiority. Such a discourse, according to Clifford (1994:307), is not uncommon in diasporic groups. Some scholars have explicitly referred to the Protestant work ethic, which they characterize as involving precepts of 'hard work and faith' as the major

[18] Most of the investments in the region went into ranching. In the Departamento de Boquerón (where the Mennonite colonies are located) the number of cattle rose from 241,600 head in 1982 to 1,033,400 in 2002.

factor contributing to the economic success of the colonists in Paraguay (e.g. Hack 1975; Ramirez Russo 1983). [19]

While the colonists had to adapt to the harsh environmental conditions of the Chaco, their economic success cannot adequately be explained simply by hard work and prayer. Importantly, the capitalist expansion of Mennonites in the region was only possible due to other, more critical factors, including the introduction of capital through the international financial support of fellow Mennonites in the diaspora, the process of re-territorialization of the region, and the creation of a permanent indigenous work force.[20]

Indigenous peoples, suffering land encroachment and with limited access to natural resources, became increasingly dependent on the regional market economy for their livelihoods; as a result, they were drawn to the Mennonite Colonies. Since its formation, *Fernheim* has seen an active flux of indigenous peoples to the area in search of work opportunities. This was initially welcomed by the Mennonites, who in addition to employing the new labor force, assumed a civilizatory role towards them.

By 1936, one researcher who visited the Colony speculated that the indigenous people there would develop into a 'Chaco proletariat' that would

[19] Fretz (1953:86) has referred to them as "a progressive people in a backward country".
[20] The financial support of the Mennonites in the diaspora was essential for the establishment of the Colony. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) supported initial acquisitions and stimulated modernization of agriculture. Added to this process of modernization was the construction of the Transchaco highway in the 1960s. This aleviated the geographic isolation of the Colonies and greatly aided in the comercialization of their products. Furthermore, the highway opened up the Central Chaco to an influx of workers, which with time would modify the character of the Colonies. Up until then, the Paraguayan Chaco had been characterized by an extractive economy, dependent on natural resources such as wood, oils, and perfumes. The relevance of the Central Chaco took a major turn with the introduction of intensive agricultural and livestock activities. Since then, the growth of the Mennonite economy has been dramatic, so much so that from 37,000 acres initially, they currently occupy 1,600,000 acres as of 2007.

provide cheap labor to the colonists' farms (Klassen 2002:70). It is estimated that the indigenous presence in the Colony grew from 3,000 in 1951 to approximately 10,000 in 1976 (USAID 1977). The Mennonites needed their labor force but were not ready to deal with the multicultural cohabitation that this implied.

By 1955, increasing indigenous migration to the area obliged the Mennonites to establish agricultural settlements for the indigenous peoples in the city of Filadelfia (for details see Stahl 1982). Living in close proximity to the Colonies and working temporarily for the Mennonites, they formed a latent labor reserve, which could be conveniently drawn upon as needed. The commoditization of indigenous labor was one of the main characteristics of the capital expansion process in the Chaco. However, the process of proletarianization did not go uncontested. Indigenous peoples responded in diverse and creative ways, challenging, re-interpreting and re-appropriating meanings in the light of new experiences (see Blaser 2010; Loewen 1965; Kidd 1997; Canova 2007).

The Ayoreo in the Mennonite Colonies

According to official records, initial contacts between the Ayoreo and Mennonites did not take place until 1947, twenty years after the latter arrived in the Chaco (see Hein 1990). The first encounter between them was not pacific and resulted in the death of three Mennonites.[21] During the next eleven years, five other attacks by the Ayoreo were reported in Fernheim Colony.[22] These clashes

[21] In this encounter the Stahl family was suddenly attacked while at their home. The event resulted in the death of three family members, while two others were injured (Siemens *In* Hein 1990:20-23). According to the Ayoreo, the man who led this attack was called Abuejane.
[22] See details in Hein 1990.

fueled the settlers' constant state of panic and fostered popular beliefs among Paraguayans and other indigenous peoples about the 'fearsome *Moros'*.

In 1948, with the goal of Christianizing the Ayoreo, the Mennonites began a series of unsuccessful attempts to contact them. In 1958, Pure Oil Co. workers, who were conducting explorations in Ayoreo territory, had a pacific encounter with a group of Ayoreo in the base camp of the company, located in Madrejón. The Mennonites were quickly informed of this episode, and a group of their missionaries initiated several trips to contact the Ayoreo. In their second trip, one of the missionaries, Kornelius Isaac, was injured by an Ayoreo, and died shortly after. This only served to reinforce the negative perceptions that the Mennonites held of the Ayoreo.

Overall, these encounters promoted Mennonite discursive construction of the Ayoreo as 'wild' and 'savage' subjects, thus belonging to the realm of wilderness. Moreover, Mennonites perceiving the Chaco with European categories of social distinction tended to view this situation as a social problem; as one of them expressed, "We have the feeling that the time is not far away when the Moros will come out of the bush and when they do, the problem of knowing what to do with them and how to handle them may be greater than that of making contact with them" (Graber 1964:88).

After the failed attempts to 'contact' the Ayoreo, Mennonites requested the support of the New Tribes Mission, who would eventually settle a group of Ayoreo in mission stations (see Chapter III for details). The initial visits of the Ayoreo to Filadelfia started in 1962. These visits presented a challenge, as the

Ayoreo did not fit into the expected roles prepared for them either by Mennonites or by missionaries. From the beginning, Mennonite-Ayoreo interactions would set the tone of their future relationship. Their notion of the Ayoreo as primitive, and therefore 'out of place', urged the Mennonites to incorporate them into the social and spatial structure of the Colony. However, the only cohabitation model that they could offer was based on Eurocentric ideas of work, faith and development. Such a model would later foster a politic of exclusion, and this became more evident as the Ayoreo established a more permanent presence in the Colonies.

After contact the Ayoreo were introduced to a new commoditized relationship to nature, first by missionaries (details in Chapter III) and then by the Mennonites. In this context, Ayoreo established temporary settlements in the Mennonite Colonies beginning in the late 1960s. From this time on, conflicts between Ayoreo and Mennonites related to Ayoreo use and access of public spaces escalated. The *modus operandi* of the Colony was to periodically evict the Ayoreo from the city and take them back to their villages in trucks. Over time, this practice became systematic and continues to be used to this day (see Canova 2011). The Mennonite reaction to the Ayoreo urban presence also has its origin in the history of pre-contact fatal encounters such as those mentioned above. These encounters deepened civilized/savage dichotomies and further widened the gap between colonizers and colonized.

By the end of the 1960s most Ayoreo had been drawn into the labor pool of the Mennonite Colonies. They were hired mostly to clear pasture lands, make fences and cut firewood. According to Renshaw (2002:140), "…when they first

moved to the Mennonite Colonies, they were so anxious to find work—or desperate—that they offered to work for lower wages than other workers. This caused tensions with other indigenous groups….but they [the Ayoreo] made themselves likeable by Mennonite farmers".

Various scholars have noted the deplorable work conditions of the indigenous peoples in the Colonies (Basso 1973,1975; Hack 1977; Renshaw 2002).[23] In 1971, Paraguayan anthropologist Chase-Sardi denounced the Mennonites in an international symposium, condemning the work conditions of indigenous peoples. He described what was happening as a system of 'slavery by debt' and asserted that indigenous peoples were being paid lower than Mennonites for the same type of work.[24] He also noted that the majority of the transactions were not made in cash, furthering Ayoreo dependence on the Mennonites to subsist (see Escobar 1988). Today, marginal work conditions remain a daily reality for many indigenous peoples in the Mennonite Colonies, as well as in the rest of the Paraguayan Chaco (see Bedoya & Bedoya 2005).

Woodcutters for the Mennonite Enclave

Over time, the fast-paced industrialization of Fernheim Colony increased demands for electricity. As a result, in 1975 they acquired a steam generator,[25] fueled by firewood, to provide energy for the Colony. This created new labor opportunities for the Ayoreo as more forests were cleared for firewood. It is estimated that by 1976 there were between 200 and 300 Ayoreo looking for work

[23] For refute see Redekop (1980).
[24] The Barbados Declaration was drafted in 1972 as a result of this symposium.
[25] This was the fourth steam machine that the Colony acquired. The last one had been bought in 1955 and had a potency of 140kwh (see Duerksen & Harder 1980:46).

in the Colonies.

By 1979, the pressure of Ayoreo migrations was such that the New Tribes Mission had to be moved closer to the Mennonite Colonies, forming the village Campo Loro. The Mennonites supported this decision in hopes that this would put a halt to the migrations to Filadelfia. In Campo Loro, the majority of the people worked as *hacheros* (woodcutters) for Fernheim Colony, clearing their own forests. By the 1980s, due to destruction of their own ecological landscape as well as the increasingly poor social conditions resulting from the growing population and lack of permanent work, the Ayoreo began to migrate more permanently to the urban centers of the Mennonite Colonies.

In 1981, they successfully negotiated the permanent occupation of a location on the outskirts of Filadelfia that permitted them to stay in town while working in the Colony. The Colony's administration gave them a plot of approximately 7.5 acres that had been previously used as a garbage dump. The settlement did not have access to basic services, and people squatted in plastic tents. Ironically, the place became known as *Montecito* ("little forest").

This place became a conveniently located pool of labor force for the Mennonites. The most common pattern of Ayoreo mobility in the settlement was to work for a couple of weeks away and then go stay in *Montecito* for a few days to buy food and other commodities before going back to work. Some people stayed there while trying to find jobs. By 1992 only 292 people were in Campo Loro (Meliá 1997:156). At that time there was a great deal of mobility and

variability in access to work in the Mennonite Colonies due to ample labor opportunities.

With time, as the population of *Montecito* grew, living conditions became notably worse due to the lack of infrastructure. Instead of trying to improve the situation, *Fernheim* Colony decided to close down the settlement in 1994 and take the Ayoreo back to Campo Loro. Unlike previous instances, in which the Ayoreo had been driven out of their temporary camps in Filadelfia, this time the dynamic was different. Aware that their labor was needed in the Colony, the Ayoreo used this as a bargaining strategy. This resulted in the establishment of a new village for them, Ebetogue, 28 miles from Filadelfia.

The urban dynamics between Ayoreo and Mennonites reveal the dual effect of the colonial relations in which Mennonites and Ayoreo engaged (c.f. Sider 1987; Stoler 2002). The Mennonites perceived the Ayoreo as 'hard workers' and expected them to become incorporated into their system as laborers; at the same time, however, they were not seen as culturally fit to inhabit the urban spaces of the Colony. As a result, the Mennonites supported any initiative that would drive the Ayoreo out of the city. Ayoreo in turn used this categorization of them as 'Indians' to their advantage, in order to successfully negotiate their land acquisition (Ebetogue). They also challenged the categorization by refusing to follow the 'expected' economic roles later planned for them in Ebegotue (For details see Canova 2007).

By the end of the 1990s the Ayoreo had returned to Filadelfia. Since then, and up to the present day, they have established several urban settlements, from which

they have been evicted over and over again. The living conditions in all these settlements reveal the permanent discrimination that they continue to confront as well as the obvious violation of their basic human rights, despite having been key players in the economic development of the Mennonite Colonies.

The Contemporary Landscape of the Mennonite Colonies

Today, *Fernheim* Colony is a thriving agro-industrial enclave in the Central Chaco. Filadelfia, its main urban center, has a total population of 8,759 people. Ranching dominates the economy of the region: by 2004, Fernheim had 300,000 hectares of pasture lands and about 290,000 head of cattle, of which 80% were slaughtered for export. Important agricultural products include peanuts, castor oil, cotton, and sesame, exported to European countries as well as to Japan, Brazil and Bolivia. In addition, Fernheim has a milk and dairy product industrial processing plant that supplies about 70 % of the national demand. They are currently exporting these products as well to Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay.

This striking economic development has triggered a renewed wave of frontier-type economic development to the area in the last decade (cf. Vasquez 2013). The sale of undeveloped public lands at the lowest prices in the region, and the increased demand of beef in international markets have brought mostly foreign investment to the region. This has had a negative impact on the region's forests, most of which are being converted into pasture lands for ranching. According to current studies, it is estimated that currently about 500 hectares are deforested per day in the Paraguayan Chaco (see Cardozo et al. 2013).

The growing opportunity for work has resulted in a steady influx of

population to the region. The *Departamento* of Boquerón is home to the three Mennonite Colonies, and it is where most Ayoreo are settled. It has a total population of 41,106 individuals, of which almost half (23,950) is indigenous. This *Departamento* has the second largest indigenous presence in the country (21.2% of the total indigenous population). By 2002, the district of Filadelfia, where Fernheim is located, increased in population from 5,988 in 1992 to 16,363 (DGEEC 2002a). This increased migration, which was needed to sustain their growing economy, forced the Mennonites to open the Colony to the settlement of outsiders. This process was rather slow, and was obstructed by a lot of resistance from the Mennonite community, which had maintained itself very isolated for a long time via ideological forces and geographical distance.

Starting in the 1990s, the first 'Paraguayan' neighborhoods (as they are known) were formed and these increased over time. [26] The indigenous *barrios obreros* (worker' neighborhoods) which were initially established during the 1960s, also grew, although not without resistance from the Mennonites. Today, there are six indigenous neighborhoods in Filadelfia and its surroundings belonging to five different indigenous groups. These neighborhoods in Filadelfia include Cacique Mayeto (Enhlet); Ujhe Lhavos (Nivaclé), and Yvopeyrenda (Guaraní). Within a distance of 14 miles from Filadelfia are Colonia 5 (Guaraní Ñandeva), San Loewen (Enhlet), Colonia 22 (Nivaclé). In addition, there are two Ayoreo urban settlements which have a total population of 260 (Casa Pasajera and Oleria). All together the indigenous peoples living in Filadelfia and its surrounding make up a

[26] These neighborhoods include Villa Dollinger, established in 1996, and Villa Amistad, established in 1999, the latter home to numerous Brazilian migrants.

total population of 4,212 individuals. At present the Ayoreo are the only indigenous group that has not obtained permission from Fernheim Colony to establish an urban neighborhood in Filadelfia.

The urban exclusion of the Ayoreo from the city shows how Fernheim Colony continues to operate with the hierarchical resemblance of a nineteenth century industrial enclave. The Colony's administration plays a dominant role in instituting techniques of spatial control towards the non-Mennonite population in the area. This is also evidenced in the 'differentiated' division of neighborhoods according to groups (e.g. Paraguayans versus Mennonites versus indigenous), a division maintained by the paralegal administration of the Colony.

With the support of the Paraguayan state, the Mennonite Colonies have functioned for decades under their own administrative system. Until the early 1990s, they still used their own police force. Even today, they administer their own health insurance system, applied to all indigenous employees and functioning paralegal to the national public health system. Until 2006 the Colony controlled its own private municipality, in which inhabitants of the city were subject to public regulations as well as the administrative regulations of the cooperative, which until then had been the legal proprietor of the land on which the city was founded. At present, there is a 'national' municipality in place, to which the Colony's administration was forced to relinquish part of its land.

Despite all of this, the Colony continues to organize the space of the city that is under its administration according to its own standards and preferences. It does

this through a differentiated land tenure system.[27] This system, which gives preferential benefits to its members, reveals the power that the Colony and Fernheim cooperative have to control and regulate spatial arrangements in the city, thereby fostering unequal relations of power vis-à-vis non-Mennonites.

In the same way, the Mennonites have used the cooperative system as a way to limit access to social services exclusively to their members. This has had a negative 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. [28] For example, the education costs of cooperative members are subsidized. In addition, members enjoy a 70 percent discount on the total cost of hospital services. Non members are automatically denied access to these health services if they do not work for a Mennonite employer. Indigenous peoples are attended to through a 'differentiated' health system called *Clínica Indígena* and not in the Mennonite Hospital. To be admitted to the Mennonite hospital, indigenous residents must have a certain amount of uninterrupted work hours with their Mennonite employers (something that almost never happens for most Ayoreo).

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[27] The Colony's administration sells properties in Filadelfia to cooperative members through a *contrato de usufructo* which allows the administration to continue to have ownership and control over land. Non-cooperative members are not permitted to purchase any property under this system. They can only access property through a different legal rubric, more restrictive in its clauses, known as *contrato de comodato*. Unlike the usufruct contract, where the person has rights over the property although no ownership of it, the comodato contract does not give the *comodatario* any type of rights over the property. They are subject to having the property taken away at anytime and any improvements they may make belong not to them, but to the owner. In addition, the colony has the right to accept or deny the request, and moreover, decide where the non-member can fix the location.

[28] For adminstrative reasons, in 1993, the cooperative split into two organizations and from then on, all social services are provided by a civil association called *Asociación Civil Mennonita Colonia Fernheim*. This entity is administered by the cooperative as well.

Mennonites argue that they are open to the participation of non-Mennonites in their cooperative system. However, non-Mennonite participation remains low. This is because an individual does not only have to be approved by the Colony administration to be admitted as a member, but also has to contribute between 10% and 17% of their annual income to the Cooperative. This amount is not within the means of most Paraguayan and indigenous workers in the region, who earn significantly lower wages than the Mennonites.

The organizational structure of Fernheim Colony therefore reveals how Mennonites have used the establishment of their cooperative as a way to control and regulate space in Filadelfia. In the same way, they have established social institutions that have allowed them to uphold power inequalities in their relations with the local non-Mennonite population. The symbolic and material power of the cooperative has played a key role in establishing contemporary inequalities that are crystallized in the relationships between Ayoreo and Mennonites.

The Ayoreo Today

Today, the total Ayoreo population in Paraguay and Bolivia numbers approximately 5,600 individuals. In 2009, Bolivia had a total population of 2,656 people scattered among 29 villages. Of these villages, 19 were located in rural areas, while 10 were in peri-urban and urban areas (Roca et. al. 2011). In Paraguay, according to the National Census of 2012 (DGEEC 2012), there are 2,481 Ayoreo individuals, distributed among 26 villages located in two *Departamentos* of the Chaco Region: Boquerón (1,513 individuals) and Alto Paraguay (968 individuals). Most villages in Boquerón tend to be *Guidai-gosode*,

while the *Garai-gosode* and *Totobie-gosode* are located primarily in Alto Paraguay.[29]

For many decades, the two main mission stations/villages were Campo Loro (Protestants) and María Auxiliadora (Catholics). During the 1990s, it was estimated that Campo Loro reached a population of up to 1,100 (see Chase Sardi et al 1990). In 1992, the Mennonites established the second largest Ayoreo village of Ebetogue, containing approximately 120 families. As mentioned earlier, this village was created to decongest Filadelfia by relocating a group of Ayoreo from Campo Loro that had been living in Filadelfia. Since its establishment, the Mennonites took charge of Ebetogue through the Mennonite-Indian Development Institution (also known as the Mennonite-Indigenous Association for Cooperation or ASCIM), while the New Tribes Mission remained in charge of Campo Loro.

Over time, the Ayoreo experienced an expansion in the number of new villages. Initial spatial arrangements established by missionaries had been for decades the source of internal conflicts among different and sometimes antagonistic groups trying to access and maintain power. Most current villages are the result of group divisions of either Ebetogue or Campo Loro. In the last decade, the number of new villages has increased from eight in 2002 to fourteen in Boquerón by 2012 (more on this below). In a way, these new patterns of mobility resemble a return to the pre-mission modality of spatial arrangements, where several groups of extended households formed a village.

In addition to the villages, the Ayoreo living in Boquerón have two urban settlements: one located in Filadelfia and the other 7 miles from Filadelfia, on the

[29] See Map in Appendix C.

road that links to Loma Plata (main urban center of Chortitzer Colony), known as "Olería"; neither of these settlements are legally recognized and their populations fluctuate. In Alto Paraguay the Ayoreo have three urban settlements located on the Paraguayan river by the town of Carmelo Peralta (all of them located on Ayoreo land).

The current villages in which Ayoreo are settled can no longer sustain their traditional livelihoods. Instead they rely primarily on wage labor for their livelihoods. Ayoreo work mostly as ranch laborers, where they clear pastures and build fences. As of 2014, the daily income for an Ayoreo is 10 dollars. They work mostly for Mennonites, Paraguayans or Brazilian ranchers. Most employers perceive Ayoreo as hard-working people who have good skills as '*hacheros'* or ′axe experts'. Mennonite employers are preferred over Paraguayans or Brazilians because they provide access to the local health insurance system. Ayoreo consider this an important benefit since access to governmental health services in the region is scarce and costly.[30] Since work availability varies constantly due to its seasonal nature, most Ayoreo have between two and six employers in order to secure work on a more 'permanent' basis. Access to job opportunities in the Mennonite Colonies is hierarchical according to the indigenous group to which one belongs. Ayoreo are hired exclusively for doing agriculture-related jobs, unlike other indigenous peoples who have access to a wider range of work

[30] Mennonite health insurance is very attractive to the Ayoreo because it provides clinical visits and access to basic medicines at low costs.However, in order to access hospital services, the employee is required to work on an almost permanent basis (see Chapter 1 for details).In one instance in June 2006, an Ayoreo woman died of complications of pneumonia in *Casa Pasajera*, after being denied admission to the Mennonite hospital because her husband had not completed the minimum required amount of working days needed to access hospital services.

activities, and therefore opportunities for better paying jobs. Many Ayoreo would prefer to engage in other types of work but lack sufficient training; furthermore, by virtue of being Ayoreo their possibilities are already limited. The National Indigenous Census of 2002 revealed this varying degree of access to non-agricultural work activities between the Ayoreo and other indigenous groups. For example, while 14% of the total economically active Nivaclé indigenous population worked in construction activities, only 1% of the economically active Ayoreo did so. Similarly, while 4% of the total economically active Enlhet Norte population worked in commerce-related activities, only 0.4% of the economically active Ayoreo did so (DGEEC 2002b).

Most Ayoreo use their work sites as places to access goods no longer easily available in their villages, such as firewood and *bromelia* plants (used by the women to make threads for weaving). Some also engage in hunting while at their work sites. However, according to most Ayoreo, employers are much more restrictive than in the past in giving permission to hunt on work sites.

As it has for centuries, the extended family continues to play a central role in Ayoreo social and economic life despite Christian values that prioritize the nuclear family. Today, different extended households have different degrees of social influence and power, according to their size and newly acquired sources of prestige (such as having members who are village chiefs, preachers, salaried personnel, etc.). In this context, conflicts between groups of extended households are common.

Despite the commoditization of social relations, as will be discussed in Chapter IV, reciprocity continues to be of paramount value for Ayoreo. Access to money and other material benefits has become fundamental to sustaining leadership positions. In this way, their ability to establish relations and negotiate with outsiders has also become a new source of symbolic power and prestige among their people. Chiefs must negotiate with public institutions and civil organizations to attract benefits for their village, including infrastructure, job opportunities and material donations. To adapt to the changing reality, the drive to secure benefits for their villages oftentimes drives Ayoreo leaders into a bind, considering that in large villages it is impossible to distribute the benefits to everybody, and more often than not, the chief's kinsfolk and close collaborators end up being the beneficiaries. As might be expected, this is a constant source of tension between households.

The symbolic and material power (c.f. Bourdieu 1984) of chiefs that derives from access to money from NGO's development projects—which at times is higher than any potential earnings as a wage laborer— drives many to try to hold on to their position as long as possible. Some have successfully done so by leaving their villages after the termination of their term and forming new villages with groups of extended households to continue their leadership in a new place. Moreover, younger generations now view leadership as an opportunity to gain access to material benefits exclusively for their kin members, as well as an opportunity to shift the established power dynamics vis-à-vis older generations. This is another factor that has triggered the formation of more villages in recent

years. While this *modus operandi* fits pre-mission patterns of residence and makes the *convivencia* (communal living) between extended households easier, many of these new villages are established within already acquired Ayoreo lands. Today there are, for example, five villages located on the property where initially only Campo Loro was established (Campo Loro has a total of 29,650 acres). This speaks to the apathy of local institutions, which obviate the importance of land acquisition for Ayoreo as its population continues to grow. One recognizable consequence of this is that different villages are allocating their resources disparately within the same property, either by selling firewood or making charcoal, which is having a negative impact on the small patches of forest that remain on their land.

The Ayoreo in the Political Landscape of the Chaco

In addition to the Ayoreo there are 19 other indigenous groups currently living in Paraguay. The Chaco is home to 45% of the total indigenous population of the country, which according to the 2012 national census were 115,944 people (1.7% of the total population of Paraguay).

Historically, the Paraguayan state has been absent in the Chaco region. During the twentieth century, its assimilationist policies vis-à-vis indigenous peoples solidified with the formation of the *Dirección de Asuntos Indígenas* or Department of Indigenous Affairs. The institution was formed in 1958 under the presidency of Defense Minister General Marcial Samaniego, having as its main objective to "adopt the necessary measures to gather all indigenous peoples dispersed throughout the country, establish them in colonies to avoid their

extinction, and accommodate them into a sedentary lifestyle" (Bejarano 1965). In this way, the State afforded a prominent role to missionaries in order to help solve the so-called Indian problem.

During Stroesner's dictatorship (1954-1989), the Mennonites, along with other churches in the Chaco region, received a green light to 'civilize' the 'Indians'. Considering that the Department of Indigenous Affairs has never been active in the Chaco region, most missionary groups expanded their roles to provide access to health services and education. However, access to these services depended on adherence to missionaries' rules. In this context, indigenous peoples did not have much room for choosing and actively determining their own lifestyles. By 1981 the *Estatuto de Las Comunidades Indigenas*, a law that supports the rights of indigenous peoples, was promulgated. This law, considered one of the most comprehensive indigenous rights laws in South America, also established the *Instituto Nacional del Indígena* (INDI), which from that point on became the governmental institution responsible for representing indigenous affairs in Paraguay (See Gaska 2012 for an historical overview).

The scenario changed somewhat—at least on paper—after the fall of Stroesner. The new constitution drafted in 1992 officially recognized Paraguay as a multicultural country for the first time. At the same time, the process of governmental decentralization took place, with the creation of governmental institutions in all *Departamentos*. This resulted in redoubled efforts to provide services to indigenous peoples. Moreover, political parties took advantage of their

new roles in the *Departamentos* to strengthen a patronage system in which support is prioritized in exchange for votes."

Today the INDI has only a marginal presence in the Chaco. Ironically, its administration, which is highly bureaucratic and centralized, lacks even a branch office in the region where almost half of Paraguay's indigenous population lives. In addition, the presence of local authorities in Ayoreo communities is usually limited to election periods. This overall absence of support from Paraguayan authorities in the region requires the Ayoreo to travel to Filadelfia or even Asunción (located 283 miles away) when trying to press their claims or make requests. This process is expensive, bureaucratic, and time-consuming, and is not always successful.

The complex relations between public institutions and NGOs vis-à-vis the Ayoreo reveal the power imbalance that typically shapes the relationship between indigenous peoples and State and civil organizations in the Paraguayan Chaco (cf. Blaser 2004). While Ayoreo frequently voice their disagreements about this, they continue to welcome NGOs and governmental institutions to their villages so that they can become beneficiaries of projects, even if only occasionally. They do so because of the material needs and urgencies that go unattended by local authorities. Some essentialist perspectives analyze such Ayoreo responses in terms of their "forager nature" that drives them to "hunt for development projects" (e.g. Von Bremen 2000, Zanardini 2003). These constructions run the risk of simplifying the power-laden relationships that the Ayoreo have to negotiate in the advancement of their life projects within the changing context of the Chaco.

A recent phenomenon in which Ayoreo have come to gain political visibility and participation at the national level is the case of Ayoreo people that live in so-called 'voluntary isolation' in the northern region of the Chaco (see IWGIA 2010, Glauser 2007, for details). In the last decade, they have received increased international attention mostly after a group of seventeen *Totobie-gosode* emerged from the forest in 2004. There is much debate about the exact number of people living in 'isolation', but usually the Ayoreo estimate this as no more than 20 families.

The Ayoreo have furthered the plight of the 'isolated' Ayoreo at the national and international level through their two indigenous organizations: *Unión de Nativos Ayoreo* ("Union of Native Ayoreo" or UNAP) created in 2002 by the *Guidai-gosode,* and OPIT ("Organización Payipide Ichade" or OPIT) created in 2004 by the *Totobie-gosode*. These organizations are supported by two separate NGOs which suffer from decade-long anatagonism as well as shortcomings in their methological approach to working with the Ayoreo. In spite of this, they share an agenda that supports Ayoreo land claims and the rights of the isolated Ayoreo, an important topic considering the current high rate of deforestation in the region.

While engagements through their organizations have—with advances and setbacks—stimulated Ayoreo self-determination, the portrayal of Ayoreo that these NGOs promote to 'make' their case has deepened images of Ayoreo as pristine individuals. In this way, the spaces of participation given to indigenous organizations are rather limited and guided by pre-set agendas. Moreover, this

construction divides Ayoreo into two opposing groups. On one hand, scholars and activists alike tend to see the *Totobie-gosode* as 'noble savages' who continue to cohabit harmoniously with nature. On the other hand, the *Guidai-gosode* are believed to have lost this nexus to nature, and the environmental knowledge that comes with it, due to five decades of intense missionization and engagements in the regional capitalist economy (a process most *Totobie-gosode* also underwent although this is often ignored). Such agendas essentialize the relation between Ayoreo and nature, which limits the possibility of the Ayoreo becoming agents in their own development initiatives outside the sustainability framework promoted by the NGOs (cf. Del Cairo 2012). Nevertheless, the Ayoreo, aware of colliding interests, engage with these institutions on their own terms, seeking to further their participation in an unequal economic and political landscape. Their indigenous organizations are redefining their collaboration with non-governmental organizations, as they seek strategic alliances to advance their goals.

Towards An Ethnography of Chaco Indigenous Women

Most of what we know of the life of indigenous women in the Chaco region during the first half of the twentieth century has been through the work of classic ethnographies (e.g. Metraux 1946; Palavecino 1935; Schmidt 1938). The modernist-functionalist approach of these works explored standard categories that made up a specific 'culture' (such as social organization, economy, life cycle etc.). It was only within these categories that specific references to women were made. Oftentimes these were the result of indirect observations or third party

descriptions. And while many of these ethnographies were rich and descriptive, most of them only give us glimpses of women's lives in the Chaco during that time period. Any focus on women's sexuality, concomitant with the times, considered their practices as 'morally lax' (Grubb 1925:204) and 'shameless' (Nordeskoeld[1912] 2002:2008).

More contemporary work—mostly coming from the Argentinean Chaco—has shifted away from this approach to focus more extensively on women's lives. These studies have looked in more detail into women's roles in diverse realms. Common themes in these writings are sexuality, eroticism, fecundity and maternity of indigenous groups such as the Mak'a and Nivaclé of Paraguay (Chase Sardi 1969, 1986, Chase Sardi et al. 1992) and the Pilagá and other Mataco groups of Argentina (Idoyaga 1981, Dasso 1999). Broader topics include issues of education and socialization among the Bolivian Guaraní (Penner 1998) and the Nivaclé (Regehr 1987) and notions of the body and personhood among the Toba (Tola 2007) as well as other relevant contemporary social and economic issues of women (e.g. Hirsch 2008). In Paraguay, some new work is paying renewed attention to the status of indigenous women. These publications decribe the overall current legal, social and economic situation of indigenous women in broad brush strokes (e.g. Caputto 2014, Franco et al 2008). However, with one exception (Rojas 2004), there is no contemporary ethnography on indigenous women of the Chaco region of Paraguay.

Building on the only two published works concerned with Ayoreo gendered identities (Rojas 2004; Suaznabar 1995), the current project offers the first

ethnographic study focusing on the widespread but as yet unexamined phenomenon of the monetization of female indigenous sexuality in the Paraguayan Chaco. By understanding what is perceived as Ayoreo 'sex work', this research will challenge constructions of Ayoreo as a bounded monolithic group struggling to adapt their ‘traditional culture’ to a ‘modernizing’ Chaco.

Sex Work Reconsidered: Some Theoretical Reflections

In recent decades, scholarship on sex work has significantly expanded its understanding of the topic, which by conventional analysis merely reduces sex worker-client relations to a monetary exchange between two parties and frames this as evidence of wider relations of subordination and marginalization of women within society (Hart 1999, Hoigard and Finstad 1986, O'Neill 2001, Truong 1990). Recent work goes beyond this, paying more attention to the ways in which sex work is fundamentally a reflection of local articulations with global socioeconomic and political processes (Agustín 2007, Altman 2001, Brennan 2004, Murray 2001).

This shift indeed reflects a renewed focus on the ways in which global/local connections are shaped by unequal relations of power; however, with some exceptions (e.g. Hunter 2003), the cultural dimensions of practices related to the monetization of sexuality in non-western contexts continues to be an under-theorized topic. Two additional important exceptions to this are White (1990) and Wardlow (2005), who examined the ways in which the commoditization of sexuality in Kenya and Papua New Guinea, respectively, are embedded in socioeconomic networks of kinship and other local social institutions as well as

larger regional economic processes. The impact of these processes on specific social institutions plays a key role in setting the limits of sexual experience and shaping women's sexual subjectivities.

Building upon these perspectives and by undertaking a rich historical and ethnographic analysis, it is possible to show how the two major forces shaping the sociopolitical landscape of the Paraguayan Chaco—the regional market economy and Christianity— have reorganized spatial and socio/economic relations of Ayoreo people. The process into which Ayoreo were rapidly incorporated since their sedentarization by both New Tribes Mission missionaries and Mennonites triggered the monetization of their 'traditional' systems of exchange. As a result, women's sexuality, which is embedded in these systems, ultimately also became monetized.

In this context, contemporary young Ayoreo women—known as *curajodie*—are monetizing their sexual liaisons with mostly non-Ayoreo men in the Mennonite Colonies. *Curajodie* is the term used to refer to these young women who seek economic benefit from their sexual liaisons with mostly non-Ayoreo men. Their practices resemble that of sex workers in form but not in content and meaning. Rather than being a type of feminine submission or exploitation, it is a unique cultural formation constructed in a web of social relations forged through processes of cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic discipline experienced by the Ayoreo over the twentieth century. Historical patterns of racial discrimination and structural violence towards Ayoreo in general, and women in particular, have deepened over time in the Mennonite Colonies. In such a highly

racialized and hierarchical social space, what is perceived as ‘sex work’ offers one of the few avenues available for Ayoreo women to engage the surrounding society in pursuit of their own interests, configuring a field of agency to negotiate racial, gender and cultural discrimination.

This dissertation therefore comprises a sustained examination of how Ayoreo women dialogically construct their subjective experience with colliding ideologies and practices. The ways in which women understand and live practices of sexuality have been shaped by the interactions between Christian values, pre-mission Ayoreo values, and market ideologies, and this in turn shapes their gendered sense of personhood.

Charles Taylor's (1989) definition of personhood, which is used here interchangeably with the term selfhood, is employed as a basis for referring to the ways in which Ayoreo construct their understanding of what it means to be a person, specifically in regards to what informs their sense of identity. Taylor argues “there are different ways of being a person, and these are linked with different understandings of what it is to be a person” (1989: 276). For him, the factors that condition one’s personhood include not only a sense of agency and consciousness of an agent, but perhaps more importantly, a capacity for self-interpretation (even if partial or incomplete) and purposes that inform one’s actions and one’s self-interpretation. This approach to personhood challenges ideas of individual freedom and autonomy usually attributed to the self. Instead, the self is informed by and continuously involved in dialogical relationships with others: “One cannot be a self on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain

interlocutors. A self only exists within what I call ‘webs of interlocution" (Ibid 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, an historical approach to understand the self is fundamental too. The ethnographic analysis of women’s sexuality provides an engaging context in which to explore this framework in the lives of the Ayoreo.

In recent years, anthropologists carrying out ethnographic analysis of moral and ethical thinking have drawn on Foucault’s conception of ethics (e.g. Faubion 2001, Laidlaw 2002, Hirschkind 2007). This perspective follows the Aristotelian tradition of ethics, also known as positive ethics (Colebrook 1997, Hacking 2002), in which ethics is considered as a set of practical activities unique to a certain way of life (MacIntyre 2007). It 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. For Foucault (1997: 177) "...these practices [practices of the self] are nevertheless not something 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”.

Such an approach has proved useful in considering Ayoreo moral systems not as a monolithic set of regulatory norms and values (a la Kantian style; see Myhre 1998) comprised exclusively of moral codes, but also as moral systems

constituted by actual practices in which each individual engages. In this way, people's choices and practices inform values, in the same way that values also inform people's practices. In the Ayoreo case, women find it necessary to negotiate colliding moral systems shaped by pre-mission 'traditional' values, Christian values, and the values of the market economy. Evidence shows that the Ayoreo customary ethical system, which shaped gender roles and patters of exchange around notions of female empowerment through the initiation of sexual encounters, has persisted despite five decades of missionization. I contend that this is possible because missionaries relegated sexuality to the private realm, leaving room for values related to these practices to continue to be upheld. While missionary discursive practices that condemn 'traditional' practices of sexuality were not strong enough to shift women's customary values, they did cultivate a tension in the older generation of women, a group which experienced missionized life more intensely than current generations. Nevertheless, Ayoreo in general, and women in particular, do not perceive women's practices of sexuality as threatening as long as these practices do not violate Ayoreo principles related to marriage.

The practices of contemporary young women in the Mennonite Colonies continue to shape their moral values, which are in turn shaped by their practices in a dialogical and sometimes contradictory way. Rather than following one preset script of moral codes, young women enact their practices drawing from distinct but simultaneously operating moral systems. As a result, the ongoing multiple and contradictory discourses of gender and sexuality generated by overlapping ethical

systems generate tensions in their practices; these tensions, however, have not yet been strong enough to shift pre-mission values related to sexuality that encouraged women to take the lead in sexual relations, have multiple partners, and allow traditional systems of exchange to permeate sexuality.

From the outset, some of these practices might resonate with liberal progressive notions of freedom that allocate agency in the political and moral ‘autonomy’ of the subject. Young women's sexual practices open a space to rethink the progressive liberal agenda that understands freedom as a ‘universal’ inherent capacity to realize an ‘autonomous will’ (see Rose 1999). While pre-mission Ayoreo ethics of sexuality encouraged women to pursue their sexuality, women's practices were guided by principles of ontological order, formulated by the Original Beings according to Ayoreo mythology. Women's practices, rather than resisting or subverting social norms (Butler 1990), are rooted in the ways in which norms are enacted and the ways in which these norms inhabit particular historical and cultural contexts (Mahmood 2005). This is, their practices are reproduced at the intersection of local notions of tradition and historicities. To point this out, the term "relative sexual autonomy" is used purposely throughout the present discussion in order to emphasize the localized connotation given to the concept of autonomy. Using this term also serves to differentiate its meaning from the 'universal' connotation that might resonate with oftentimes feminist, Western liberal scholars.

The experiences of women, through which they construct their sense of personhood in the contemporary context of the Chaco, are stories stained with

violence. This theme rarely surfaces, and most of the time remains silenced in the narratives of young Ayoreo women. Not surprisingly, this stain of violence runs throughout the current study. Resisting essentialized and universal definitions, violence has a multiplicity of forms and expressions, which shapes the subjective experience of people in numerous ways.

Young Ayoreo women experience violence in multiple forms that run from physical abuse to emotional scars. This violence is due to historical representations that over time constructed Ayoreo as embodying 'dangerous subjectivities' in urban spaces. Such a label has taken away the responsibility of local Paraguayans and Mennonites and ignores larger structural processes that have driven Ayoreo to urban spaces as a result of the economic and ecological transformations of the last five decades. This is erased while the sexuality of Ayoreo women continues to be deployed as a fundamental contemporary class and racial marker implicated in wider relations of power, which further reinforces the colonizer-colonized divide in the Mennonite Colonies (McClintock 1995).

A Personal Note on Fieldwork

This project originated out of long-term collaborative research among Ayoreo-speaking groups and the Fernheim Mennonite Colony. It is based on forty months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2001 and 2011. The structure of the present dissertation reflects the research design and methodologies which evolved during this time. My long-term research engagements began in 2000, first as a project coordinator for an NGO and later as an independent researcher.

The bulk of fieldwork for this dissertation took place between September of 2009 and February 2011. I conducted research mainly with the *Guidaigosode* subgroup although interviews among the *Totobiegosode* also made a significant contribution to the study. The Ayoreo sites selected for this research included one Ayoreo urban settlement and several villages. The urban settlement is a fluid community of up to 200 Ayoreo living under harsh conditions in Filadelfia. During dissertation fieldwork, they changed their location four times as they were repeatedly evicted. The villages included: Campo Loro (about 120 families), the evangelical New Tribes Mission (NTM) mission station/village founded in 1979 and populated by Ayoreo and American missionaries. Campo Loro is the first and largest Ayoreo village established in the central Chaco and has played a key role in the missionization process of the Ayoreo. Considerable time was also spent at Ebetogue (about 80 families), a village that, as mentioned in the introduction, was a community established and supported by Mennonite missionaries in 1992, whose members initially settled in Campo Loro. I also conducted interviews in other Ayoreo villages that included Arocojnandi, Tunocojai, Ijnapui, and Garai. My fluency in Ayoreo allowed me to construct intergenerational narratives through interviews from all of the relevant Ayoreo social groups, including *curajodie*, youth, elders, couples, preachers and political leaders.

Obtaining access to interview NTM missionaries has always been hard for anthropologists. A long history of differences between anthropologists/civil activists and missionaries –differences that are fostered by the Ayoreo– has not left much opportunity for missionaries and anthropologists to engage in

conversation (something I further discuss in Chapter III). This was my status as well until I began fieldwork, at which time I became acquainted with one of the three NTM couples that currently live in Campo Loro.[31] Originally from the States, they have lived in Campo Loro for over 30 years. Slowly we have come to develop a friendship despite our ideological differences and opinions regarding the Ayoreo – a friendship which no doubt has generated some opposition among their colleagues. This has provided me with valuable insight into their lives and work as missionaries in Paraguay. This couple, along with a retired couple from Canada that lived among the Ayoreo between 1967 and 1972, gave me a space from which to further learn about their missionary endeavors among the Ayoreo, as well as the process of Ayoreo Christianization. I participated with them, along with Ayoreo preachers, in church services in Campo Loro, which has further shed light onto my efforts to understand Ayoreo Christianity.

As an active participant and observer of Ayoreo life, a multi-sited ethnographic approach allowed me to map the frequent movements of Ayoreo young 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 Canaan, the main (and only) bar where most *curajodie* go to find 'friends'. This is a bar mostly frequented by Paraguayan workers and non-Ayoreo sex workers, several of whom consented to be interviewed. I also conducted participant observation in nearby Loma Plata, the main urban center of Chortitzer Colony, and two nearby Paraguayan towns: Cruce Villa Choferes

[31] Two of these couples are the children of one of the first NTM to the Ayoreo in Paraguay and were raised among the Ayoreo.

(located 1o miles from Filadelfia) and Cruce Villa Boquerón (located 13 miles from Filadelfia).

In Filadelfia, the main urban center of *Fernheim* Colony, I experienced the hardship encountered by most Paraguayans with limited funds to access housing in the Colony. Due to the high demand and high prices for housing, I was eventually able to find a decent place only after a few months of rejecting the small and overpriced obscure rooms which people are forced to take. In the meantime, I lived with two different families. One was a family of migrants from Parana, Brazil. Having been raised on the Paraguay-Brazilian border myself, my proficiency in Portuguese allowed me to become acquainted with the small Brazilian (Catholic) community of Filadelfia and to learn about their living experiences as a minority in a mostly evangelical social space.[32] I was also able to witness how they furthered their Brazilian identity through diverse social activities promoted by the "Brazilian Womens' Association" in Filadelfia.

I was also hosted on and off by a Paraguayan/Mennonite couple. She, a native Guaraní speaker from the eastern side of the country, met her Mennonite husband during a trip he made to some relatives in a Mennonite Colony from Eastern Paraguay located near her home town. My stays with them gave me insights into the daily lives of young so called 'mixed' couples in the Colony, and the vicissitudes and hardships of having to raise a multicultural family in the Colony.

Furthermore, my fluency in German gave me access to members of Fernheim Colony, with whom I conducted several interviews on the administrative system

[32] Most of the Brazilian families to the region come from the states of Parana and Rio Grande do Sul.

of the Colony; these interviews included Mennonite employers as well as community members. Spending part of my fieldwork in Filadelfia gave me access to conduct participant observation there and experience the hierarchical and differentiated social space of the Colony on a day-to-day basis, a contrast which became more striking as I moved almost daily between the Colony and the Ayoreo urban settlement. I also sporadically attended three different Mennonite Churches in town, one of which had services in German only, thereby automatically excluding non-Mennonites. The other two churches conducted their services in Spanish and were mostly frequented by Paraguayans and some Mennonites married to Paraguayans or Brazilians.

In addition, I interviewed Paraguayan community members and local authorities, and NGO personnel working with Ayoreo. I interviewed members of the *Unión de Nativos Ayoreo del Paraguay* (UNAP), the *Guidai-gosode* organization, and collected audio recordings on Ayoreo history, Christianity, Mennonite relations, and current affairs.

I spent one additional month conducting interviews in an Ayoreo urban squatter settlement called Garai on the outskirts of the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia to learn about the realities of Ayoreo 'sex workers' on that side of the border. A large group of *Guidai-gosode* (who have their relatives in Paraguay) were first contacted on the Bolivian side of the border live in that village, so I took the opportunity to interview several of them on the history of relations. I also attended Church services there and interviewed several preachers to further understand the ways in which Christianity has shaped Bolivian Ayoreo. I visited the New Tribes

Mission village Puesto Paz and interviewed NTM missionaries working there. Finally, I conducted archival research in Paraguay, Bolivia and the United States, which has enriched the historical aspects of this dissertation.

Structure of the Dissertation

The changes in the history of Ayoreo lives in the last fifty years cannot be understood without taking into account the process of capital penetration into the Chaco region. This process installed a capitalistic regime (Escobar and Paulson 1999) that profoundly reshaped spatial and social relations (Harvey 1996, 2006; Soja 1989), fostering unequal power relations vis-à-vis the Ayoreo. These changes, along with five decades of intense Christian missionization, have impacted and continue to shape Ayoreo women's sense of personhood in the rapidly changing and modernizing landscape of the Chaco.

Each of the chapters in this study describes how local configurations of power and histories (Chakrabarty 2007) have conditioned and still influence women's self-understanding in politically significant ways.

Chapter II draws from mythical narratives and remembrances from the lives of women prior to missionary contact in order to examine how their ethics of sexuality were constructed according to Ayoreo ontology. The sexual subjective experiences of women have been shaped by values related to autonomy, reciprocity and desire.

Chapter III examines how epistemologies of sexuality were re-negotiated at the ethical level with the arrival of Christianity. The introduction of Christian values failed to eradicate certain Ayoreo practices related to sexuality, and as a result

contemporary Ayoreo do not conceive of women's sexual practices in a negative light.

Chapter IV focuses on the monetization of Ayoreo women's sexuality. Ayoreo sexuality continues to be embedded in traditional systems of exchange, which, as the analysis reveals, became monetized during the last two decades. This affirms that the commoditization of bodies is not a 'new' phenomenon solely related to practices of 'sex work', but is rather constitutive of young women's sexuality within their own group, a groundbreaking finding for Ayoreo scholarship on gender.

Chapter V shows how Ayoreo practices of sexuality in the Mennonite Colonies offers one of the few avenues available for young women to engage the surrounding society following their own interests and expectations, configuring a unique field of agency to negotiate racial, gender and cultural discrimination. Data analysis reveals that while money is one of the main reasons that attract girls to the streets, it is perceived as important only to the degree that it allows them to construct a type of *persona* able to navigate racialized spaces of the Colonies.

Chapter VI reflects on new emerging trends in practices of *curajodie*, and shows how the practices of these young women challenge long-standing Mennonite social and racial hierarchies; in the process, Ayoreo gender roles are being redefined in unexpected ways. This provides the context for critical commentary on how the social lines of what it means to be a woman are re-inscribed within larger structures of inequalities.

Chapter II

The Ethics of Ayoreo Sexuality

> In the time of the First Original Beings, two birds, *Junguto* and *Damuchare* [*sic*] gathered some bones and beat them together. They made an image out of the bones, and little by little the image began to breathe. The birds sucked on and fanned the bones so that the bones would breathe. When they had finished the whole body, it became a woman. They kept fanning the image and eventually the whole body began to breathe and was transformed into a person. The bones became a woman.
>
> In those days, that woman was a bird called *Pijne* [*sic*]. She flirted with the men at night. She played with other women's husbands, and the women did not like her so eventually they killed her. But the men liked *Pijne*, so they gathered her bones so as to make her into a woman once again, like they did with the first woman. They gathered her bones to revive her. They sucked and fanned, and once again she became a woman. They made her just like before. They made two images. One died, but the other revived just as she had been before.[33]

According to Ayoreo ontology this is how the first woman came into being. This occurred during the time of the *Jnani Bajade* or Original Beings, when animals and plants behaved like humans and had humanoid forms. The first woman was a small bird who liked to flirt with men at night. She was punished with death for playing with other women's husbands. But because men wanted her, she had a second chance to come back alive.

This narrative evokes a salient feature that encapsulates the ethics of Ayoreo sexuality: women as enactors of their own sexuality through their sexual practices; and sexuality as formative of women's subjective experience in addition its procreative role. In this chapter, I trace these and other distinctions to understand how Ayoreo women constructed their sexuality prior to the introduction of Christian moral values by drawing from mythical narratives related to women's sexuality as well as from the stories of women who were born

[33] Source: Renshaw (Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:115-116).

and raised prior to contact with missionaries. In doing this, my purpose is twofold; to describe the Ayoreo system of values related to sexuality, and to explore how these practices have structured women's sense of agency/autonomy in their day-to-day practices. Ayoreo women's sexuality is structure around two different life stages: before and after getting married. The practices of unmarried women vary significantly from that of married women. During the period of being 'single', young women are given the autonomy to explore their sexuality with independence and limited male impositions. As a result, special focus in this chapter is given to the values upheld for unmarried women. They are fundamental to understand because many customary practices related to it continue to be practiced up to the present by young Ayoreo women. Importantly, the sexual autonomy of single Ayoreo women cannot be thought of in terms of a western liberal frame that feminist scholars deploy to construct notions of 'sexual freedom'. Rather, it was constructed and enacted in tandem with a mythical corpus that served as guiding principles for women's actions.

Ethical Selves

In order to reconstruct the system of values related to sexuality during pre-mission times, I take the approach of virtue ethics to reflect on the ways in which people make themselves into moral individuals (cf. Macintyre 2007, Foucault 1997). Rather than following a Kantian approach to morality that puts the emphasis on rules and regulations, virtue ethics focuses on how people develop dispositional capacities to form moral subjects. In doing this, I outline an ethics of sexuality prior to the entrance of Christianity among the Ayoreo. I follow

Foucault's definition of ethics as a "kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, rapport *a soi*, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault 1997:25). For Foucault, this relationship to oneself has four major aspects which together constitute what he has termed an ethical system: ethical substance, which refers to part of the person that is relevant to his moral conduct; modes of subjection, which focuses on the ways in which people are led to recognize their moral obligations; ethical work, which involves the practices that one must do to realize a particular moral dictate and to make oneself a proper subject of morality, and telos, which refers to the kind of being one aims to become by acting in a moral way.

Two constitutive aspects of ethical selves will be emphasized here: modes of subjection and ethical work. It needs to be noted that the limitation of Foucault's moral system lies in his individualistic approach to ethical work (a tension present in his work already noted in the introduction). In the Ayoreo case, I contend that ethical work proves to be more of a 'societal' affair, rather than an individualist one, as this chapter will reveal. However, his approach to ethics as practice opens a space to reflect on ethics as constitutive process rather than a static one.

I draw on the Ayoreo mythological corpus to understand how the realm of sexuality came into existence according to creational myths. From this ontology derives the basis of the Ayoreo ethical system, which is constructed upon the practices of the Original Beings--animal/plant figures with humanoid traits. Here, I refer to ontology, following Povinelli's (2014) definition of it as "an arrangement

of existents at/on/in the plane of existence […] a meta-existence–existence dynamic. Entities and their arrangements are immanent to the plane of existence. But the plane of existence is also immanent in relation to itself and the entities it produces." In relation to ontology, ethics is conceptual, without having an external instantiation (i.e. the principle of instantiation is the idea that, in order for a property to exist, it must belong to some object or substance; the instance is the specific object rather than the idea of it).

These mythical narratives are the modes of subjection upon which contemporary Ayoreo women constructed their subjectivities in the realm of sexuality prior to Christian missionization. The term subjectivity is used here in a late Foucauldian sense—the notion of the subject as constituted by practice (Foucault 1997). The term sexual subjectivities used throughout this study refers to the ways in which people experience and represent themselves to themselves and to others in the realm of sexuality (cf. Biehl and Kleinmann 2007).

The narratives compiled for this chapter are a set of myths collected by several authors between the 1960s and early 1990s compiled by Simemau and Williams (1989); these narratives are relevant because they reveal practices and situations, in which the Original Beings were involved, that refer to women's sexual practices and subjectivities.

The Ayoreo mythological corpus is the ontological basis for Ayoreo's mode of subjection, through which values, beliefs and self-understandings were constituted and expressed from one generation to the other. As shown below, Ayoreo mythological narratives are the foundations from which the Ayoreo ethical system

is derived, which set up the guiding principles for women's practices of sexuality prior to Christianization. The first part of this chapter describes the practices related to Ayoreo sexuality that are embedded in the day-to-day affairs of the *Jnani Bajade* (Original Beings); these practices constitute an Ayoreo ontology of sexuality, which form the basis for contemporary Ayoreo ethics of sexuality. This ethics is responsible for establishing contemporary standards of behavior through individual experiences and interactions. Building on this, the second part of this chapter explores how Ayoreo ethics of sexuality were enacted in their day-to-day lives prior to the contact with missionaries, based on the precepts left by the Original Beings. This is demonstrated with a unique personal perspective by drawing from interviews conducted with women who were born and raised during the pre-mission period. Moral resources established by the Original Beings survived in discourses and practices that shaped Ayoreo ethical conduct, revealing the ethical work of women in constructing their sexual subjectivities.

Unlike many other societies where sexuality is subordinated to the larger sphere of social reproduction through institutions such as bride wealth[34], in the case of the Ayoreo, women's sexuality before marriage is considered a semi-independent possession. This points to a salient feature of this group, which, according to many scholars of Lowland South America working on notions of selfhood among indigenous peoples, defines the sociality of indigenous peoples in the region in terms of personal autonomy (c.f. Santos Granero 2000; Londono 2012).

Leading this work, Overing and Passes (2000) have argued that among

[34] For a case of bridewealth in the Melanesian context see for example Strathern (1988).

indigenous peoples in Lowland South America, the collective per se is dependent on the autonomy of the self. They, along with other scholars, led investigations of selfhood centered around the idea of 'conviviality' which according to them involves "the manufacture and control of the social environment through the creative and communal, yet free and individually autonomous, agency of its members" (Overing and Passes 2004: xiii). In this way, personal autonomy enacted in different aspects constitutes collective indigenous social life.

This perspective has also influenced scholars working in the Paraguayan Chaco. In discussing the moral economy of indigenous peoples of the Chaco, Renshaw (2002) argues that personal autonomy is reflected, for example, in the gendered division of labor organized on an individual basis. In the specific case of the Ayoreo, he notes that the value of personal autonomy has also been constitutive of sociality and community life. Earlier work makes reference to this sense of autonomy as reflected in the respect for the individual among Ayoreo, starting at an early age. According to Fischermann, each person is considered to have an 'integral personality' (2001:56) which is developed and perfected over time. This is evidenced by the fact that members of society individually choose to assume responsibilities according to their own sense of maturity, without feeling obliged by the group to do so. In a similar way, other scholars working on gender relations among Ayoreo, such as Nostras (2009) and Suesnabar (1995), have noted this sense of personal autonomy in the realm of sexuality as well, which according to the latter "gives men and women the right to choose on their bodies and lives" (1995:152).

While all of the above perspectives that acknowledge the personal autonomy of Ayoreo individuals, none of them makes a direct and explicit link between personal autonomy and the Ayoreo mythical corpus that serves as a basis for Ayoreo ethics. It is precisely this link that confirms that prior to Christian missionization, Ayoreo women's sense of autonomy in the realm of sexuality was framed within and operated according to the mythological corpus of the *Jnani Bajade*, which provided abstract guiding principles for people's actions. By exploring this association, it will become clear that the autonomy of women's sexuality exemplified the precepts that originated in the Ayoreo ontological order.

The time of the *Jnani Bajade* or the First Original Beings

According to Ayoreo cosmology, in the beginning of time there was no nature/culture divide. The first Original Beings who inhabited this world were the *Jnani Bajade*, non-human entities with humanoid traits who were considered responsible for conceiving and guiding the current world order which Ayoreo people inhabit. Through different experiences, catastrophes and fights, the *Jnani Bajade* gave way to the current world order which is known by Ayoreo as the time of the *Disi Ejode*, or the current generation (cf. Fischermann 2001).

The Original Beings defined social institutions and rules that guide Ayoreo contemporary lives. All moral principles were established as a result of the experiences that the *Jnani Bajade* collected based on their day-to-day vicissitudes and the problems they encountered in their interactions. Mythical narratives give meaning to how specific ways of behavior came into being and symbolize the reasons for existence of all beings who exist in society and nature. These

narratives serve as a foundation for the moral values placed on contemporary people's actions, which reflect the moral responses of the Original Beings to daily situations and events.

Central figures among the *Jnani Bajade* included *Guede* ('sun') and *Asojna* ('nighthawk'),[35]both powerful and respected figures. *Guede* was identified with the daylight regimes of life and *Asojna* with the nocturnal regimes. The latter was considered one of the most powerful Original Beings, feared but also venerated by the Ayoreo. *Asojna* established Death, as well as some illnesses. Her role was to sanction the breaking of taboos left by her and other Original Beings.[36] The change of seasons was also associated to *Asojna*: her reappearance after hibernation announced the beginning of the rainy season and her absence indicated the beginning of the *sequeré,* or dry season. The latter was a time during which Ayoreo were particularly observant of taboos related to *Asojna,* as any activity that unwillingly led to her awakening could have fatal consequences for an individual and his/her group. The beginning of her time, the rainy season, was celebrated with an important ritual in her honor to assure the renovation of nature and its benefits.

According to Idoyaga Molina (1988) *Guede* was considered a cultural hero, with an important role as a creator. Among his positive traits was the responsibility for sustaining the equilibrium between nature and culture as well as

[35] *Nyctibius eathereus.*

[36] These taboos included a wide range of observances, which ranged from not allowing children to wander alone in the forest and wake up the hibernating bird, to not marrying too early to avoid provoking her to anger. Because her power was so great, talking about *Asojna* in a trivial way was a taboo in itself and as a result, different scholars have been able to gather only fragments of her significance.

the granting of peoples' requests. On the other hand, *Guedé* was also responsible for many sicknesses. Casalegno (2000:21) argues that eventually the role of *Guedé* in the mythological corpus took a "supremacist" turn, which he attributes to Jesuit influence among Ayoreo during the eighteenth century. Jesuits linked the characteristics of *Guede* with the Christian God called *Dupade* who was eventually also incorporated into the myths.

Mythical Narratives

The structure of these narratives involves a protagonist who was a human being taking the form of an animal, plant or other being and revealing specific aspects of daily life and the role of the *Jnani Bajade*. Each episode describes a specific situation in which the protagonist finds himself, either as a result of his own will or because he is forced into it. The episode ends with the transformation of the protagonist and the relinquishing of his human figure for that of an animal, a plant, or another being or artifact. Before dying, the protagonist leaves a prohibition, a precept, or precautions to be considered regarding a specific situation, similar to that in which he found himself and which resulted in his eventual death and transformation. Many protagonists also leave behind healing chants known as *sarode*.

Ayoreo referred to the proscriptions left by the *Jnani Bajade* as *puyak* (plural *puyade*) or "that which is prohibited". These prohibitions surfaced in all aspects of Ayoreo life and were expressed in different ways that included relations to people and relations to things. They even had a temporal dimension; there were times of

the year that were considered charged with innumerable taboos.[37]

For women there were many prohibitions related to artifacts, as these had countless negative potencies. For example, it was forbidden to touch leftover thread from the bags they would make. *Bujote*, the weaver-bird, had declared (through her myth) that any young woman who touched/reused the leftover thread, would have arthritis. The use and handling of other artifacts such as the ceremonial objects and warfare objects were also potentially dangerous (see Bórmida 1973). There were also several prohibitions related to other aspects of life such as food and water intake, especially during pregnancies. In terms of prohibitions related to relationships, *Asojna* established a taboo that prevented women from marrying too early.

Yet another taboo referred to the expected ways of behavior with in-laws (parents and siblings), which involved avoidance of eye contact and minimal talking. In the realm of sexuality it was considered a taboo to have incestuous relationships and sexual affairs with members of the same clan. If disregarded, these prohibitions could lead to fatal consequences for women. Later on in this chapter, I will give several examples of how these practices continue to be observed in present times, despite Ayoreo self-identifying as Christians.

While there were indeed prohibitions in the realm of sexuality, practices related to sexuality were generally constructed less in terms of prohibitions and more as guiding principles and precepts of 'virtuous practices' (Mahmood 2005). Mythical narratives reflect the ways in which Ayoreo sexuality was not constructed in tandem with punitive ways of behavior, but rather in terms of its

[37] For a discussion on the concept of puyak among Ayoreo see Otaegui (2011).

formative character in women's construction of personhood. Rather than stressing specific prohibitions, the narratives outline the ethical efforts of individuals to attain a virtuous lifestyle.

Guiding Principles in the Realm of Sexuality: Desire, Autonomy, Reciprocity

In the beginning, *Asojna* was responsible for the establishment of sexual intercourse and procreation. The creation myth relates this as follows:

> In the beginning, *Asojna* was lord and ruled over everything. At the time of the flood, she and her servant Heron lived in the sky. When everything was dry, *Asojna* came down with her servants. She said, "Let us make an image like us, because everything is in total disorder due to the flood. We know that everything comes from the sun." Then they made images, they made people. They made many of them, and the images came to life.
>
> In those days, people did not know how to go about having children. *Asojna* then explained what they had to do to have children and how women were to give birth. She told the men, "If you want to get married, I will give you women." However, you must run after them, and even if a woman is ugly, you must take her for your wife. If she is young, no matter how ugly, you must take her." So each man took a woman. "Try them out," she told them. "See if you like having sex with them". The men tried it but did not like it, since they had not yet acquired a taste for the women. A way had to be found for them to be fond of women.
>
> At that time, a woman called *Tona* lived there. This was at the time of the flood then there was nothing but water. *Tona* wanted to find a way to be agreeable to her friends and decided that the way to do that was to give them her blood. She drew blood from herself and showed the women how to do it. Once they learned this they became very eager, and all the women were very happy.
>
> A large bird called *Gidosoi Abi* wanted to find a way for his friends to have sexual relations with the women, because up to that point it was practiced but was not pleasing to the men. *Gidosoi* found the remedy when he decided to use salt. He said, "I am going to throw some salt on the women and see if we like them that way. Perhaps then we'll acquire a taste for them". He spat some of the salt from his mouth into the sexual organs of each woman as they lay asleep. After he had finished he went to tell his friend what he had done. "Try them out now", he said. The men began to like women and could procreate more easily. They liked their wives and they had children with them, one

generation after the other. We are these people, the Ayoreo.[38]

In this narrative the value of women's sexual practices is placed in its pleasurable context before its procreative role. As might be expected, *echoi or salt* is an important substance charged with meaning for Ayoreo. Fischermann (2001) has noted that unlike other foods, salt (along with honey) is considered particularly special and valuable by Ayoreo. A key ingredient in their cuisine, salt was traditionally found in the Salt Pans located in the border region between Paraguay and Bolivia, a place considered the center of Ayoreo territory. Men would organize long and dangerous yearly trips to collect it (see Bessire 2010 for details). In this context, the association of women's sexual organs as becoming 'desirable' with the use of salt reveals that sexual desire is an intrinsic component of practices related to sexuality.

Attributes of young, unmarried women

During the original time, unmarried women had humanoid capacities despite having the figure of beautiful trees or small birds with colorful feathers. The narratives of the *Jnani Bajade* depict female protagonists as young, beautiful, seductive and therefore desired by most men. A theme that runs across these myths is that women were enactors of their own sexuality: they had the independence to choose their sexual partners, they would make themselves sexually available to different men until eventually finding a permanent partner, and they took the lead in the process of sexual flirting and courting, without male impositions. The following descriptions from different perspectives reflect these

[38] Source: Califano (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:109-111).

attributes, that taken together, describe the sexuality of Ayoreo young women.

Flirting and Courting

Parakeet[39] was a pretty and seductive girl, buxom and chubby, with her forehead painted yellow. Her colors were beautiful. Because of her beauty her uncles and nephews loved her, they played with her (i.e. flirted) and even had sexual contact with her. Her beauty was such that they disregarded the incest taboo.

When *Sirogabie*[40], the parrot, was still a human, she had many men and would easily move from one to another. She would stay up all night playing and sleeping with young men. Her sexual activity was so frequent that her vulva eventually began to protrude. After she metamorphosed into a bird, she said, "While I was human, I was dedicated to pleasure but never played during the day. I only played with young men at night." After becoming a bird, she said, "If any person dies of pleasure, I shall sing at night."[41]

Kuo[42], the owl-woman, was also a beautiful and seductive individual. She was so pretty and had such a attractive organ that all men desired her. Every night she would play with young men, but she would never show herself during the day, so that men would not desire her so intensely.

In the above narratives, the depictions of these birds in their human form emphasizes some of the values in the realm of sexuality—such as autonomy and

[39] Source: Casalegno (compiled in Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:424-425)
[40] Source: Bórmida (compiled in Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:431-432)
[41] She created a song that helped Ayoreo heal diseases of the blood. She was closely associated to blood because she did not want to give birth, i.e. get pregnant, so that she would always menstruate.
[42]

sexual desire—that Ayoreo uphold in the sexual subjectivities of young unmarried women. Flirting and courting are expressed through the feelings that these single women evoke. The night-time birds mentioned in these stories were responsible for establishing practices of courting and flirting as activities that belong to the realm of the night. Next, I elaborate on these and other values established through the practices of the Original Beings.

Desire

Among the attributes of women as enactors of their own sexuality, desire is a constitutive value of women's sexual experiences. This is especially evident in the narratives of the Original Beings, who through their stories established principles associated with the display and enactment of feelings of desire as a positive female trait, therefore making it socially acceptable. According to Ayoreo, the beauty of some protagonists of the *Jnani Bajade* triggered practices associated with feelings of desire that did not always lead to positive consequences. In this way, the retelling of certain narratives could cause the negative consequences of these narratives to be repeated. For example, *Suaria*[43], the talking parrot, was considered the mistress of pleasure and happiness. She found pleasure almost every day, laughing and enjoying herself. She was so full of joy that when she left her human form, she decided not to make songs to curse people but rather to give pleasure and joy.[44] Desire would drive the *Jnani Bajade* to use different methods to possess such women.

[43] Source: Bórmida (compiled in Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:426)
[44] Her song was used by Ayoreo when not able to defecate.

The tree *Kaujnane* [45], for example, was very much desired by all men when she was a single woman. She would adorn herself frequently and paint her face red. Her hair was so long and beautiful that it reached her hips. Eventually, she decided to become a tree. The men were opposed to this because they strongly desired her; in an effort to prevent her from leaving, a group of them grabbed her forcefully, leaving her skin all scratched. But because her skin was so slippery, they were not able to get a hold of her. After that, she metamorphosed into a tree with scratched bark as a reminder of what had occurred. According to Ayoreo, even after becoming a tree, she continues to have small insects that crawl along her bark, scratching her as a sign of love.

Men also wanted another single woman, *Tibidé*[46], the red stone. She was very attractive and a day did not go by without men constantly watching her walk around. Her mother would advise her to be more aloof because men were always after her, but regardless, *Tibidé* was very nice to everyone. According to her, it was her red color that made men desire her so passionately. She finally grew tired of constantly being an object of pursuit and gave herself over to the men, telling them, "You can tear me to pieces to get my color which is the color of blood. You can then use me to smear on your faces and paint yourselves with me so that your lives will be better." (Wilbert and Simoneau 1989:301). The men took this literally and began to tear off pieces of her body. They said, "We will tear her to bits so that each one of us can have a small piece. Then it will be as though she were a wife to each one of us" (Idem, 1989:301). All the men painted themselves

[45] (*Prosopis Kutzei sp.*)
Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989: 551).
[46]Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:300-301).

with *Tibidé* and their lives soon improved.

Soon after, the women also began to use the stone in order to have her color, as they knew that men would desire them more, in the same way as they had desired *Tibidé*. Before she turned into stone, *Tibidé* told people: "Not everyone can use me, only young people". The transformation of *Tibidé* led to the practice of young and single people painting themselves in red to look beautiful and agreeable to potential partners, something which became the trademark of single women. Unlike unmarried men and women, the use of red paint among married individuals was established as a taboo.

Laughter is a symbolic trademark of desire and sexual availability. Ayoreo men and women display laughter as a way to flirt and reveal sexual availability. The term in Ayoreo language used for laughter -*inganare*, also means 'to play' or ' to fool around'—giving laughter a sexual tone, that signals sexual interest in a potential partner. Its origin lies in the story of Laughter, who lived as a man during the time of the Original Beings. Women were always around him because he was good-looking and painted his face red as a display of his sexual availability. He would laugh (i.e. flirt) with any woman, and women also laughed with him. Despite having no intentions of marrying anybody, in the end he decided to run away with a woman who did not know about his ways with other women. He chose to transform himself and enter people's bodies to make them laugh/flirt. His behavior, while positively sanctioned among single people, also triggered the negatively sanctioned practice of Ayoreo leaving their partners for another.

Desire towards white people has also been incorporated into Ayoreo mythical narratives. In one story, some Ayoreo had visited the camp of a group of white people.[47] In the camp, there were some young white men who wanted to have sexual relations with the visiting Ayoreo girls. The young men consulted with their mothers, asking if they could have intercourse with these Ayoreo girls, but their mothers did not allow this. According to Ayoreo, the mothers of these young men did not give permission, but also failed to explain to their children that in the future they would have the opportunity to marry, although not with Ayoreo women but rather women within their own group [i.e. with white women]. The failure of the mothers to make this clear to the young men drove them to proceed to have intercourse with the Ayoreo women regardless of their mothers' expectations. This is how Ayoreo women began to have children with white men.

By means of this narrative, intercourse with white men was incorporated into Ayoreo mythology as a way to give meaning to contemporary changes in their lifestyles. The following points highlight the connection with present-day circumstances. First, the white mothers did not want their children to have intercourse with Ayoreo girls. Ayoreo, who traditionally did not support group exogamy, supported this decision. However, according to them, this decision was not respected by the young white men because their mothers failed to guide their sons in explaining that they should wait for white women rather than having intercourse with Ayoreo women. This lack of clear guidance caused this observance to be broken by the white men. In this way, 'mixed' sexual relations

[47] Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:146).

were established as a result of a break of taboo on the part of white men, rather than Ayoreo women.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity through exchange is an Ayoreo meta-value that sustains and gives meaning to Ayoreo economic systems (details in Chapter IV). Exchange in the realm of sexuality is a theme with mythical origins in the story of *Suarejna*[48], the red parrot. When she was human, she 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.

Sexual exchange for goods as an accepted practice is also revealed in the following story: *Akuejede*[49] was a *Jnani Bajai* who was never successful at hunting anything. He would repeatedly return home with no game. However, another man, *Arebei,* was known for his hunting skills. Aware of this, *Akuejede* begged his daughters, who were very attractive, to go and live with *Arebei,* the hunter. He would tell them, "Why don't you go and make love to that man, don't you see what a good hunter he is?" (Wilbert and Simoneau 1989:611). But the daughters were not interested in his 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

[48]Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:429-430).
[49] Source: Califano (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:611-612).

try to find a way to marry him myself" (Idem,1989:611). Eventually, *Akuejede* turned into a woman, and his daughters had to leave him to go and live with their mother.[50]

Independent of issues of status and/or honor, parents like *Akuejede* expected their daughters to use their sexuality as a means to assure access to material goods, a practice that was not seen in a negative light. Like *Arebei*, *Munui*[51], when human, was also a skillful hunter. He was a tree of little importance, but was skilled at gathering honey. He always took the honey and painted himself with it, to which people would say, "Isn't that something! He is not at all handsome yet his good looks come from his honey." In spite of not being handsome, women wanted him because of his store of honey. He stood out for his hunting skills and the honey he collected. Other men became envious of him and forced him to leave by saying, "You have to go. You play with our daughters but will not marry any of them. That is why we want you to leave." This led to his eventual transformation into a beautiful tree full of flowers.

Both of these stories reveal the value placed on good hunting skills in men. This was taken as an indication that they would be good providers to their future wives and the household they married in to. The shame and desperation of *Akuejede* for not being able to provide for his family drove him to lose his family and take the extreme measure of turning into a woman. Both stories also treat the sexual exchange for goods as a common practice that was not conceived as

[50] This is one of the few narratives on homosexual relations, a practice that while accepted, is not common among Ayoreo.
[51] Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:540).

morally problematic. As shown in the above myths, it was expected that women would receive forest goods in exchange for sex in their encounters with men. In addition, the myths reveal the positive value of hard work and the ability to hunt as qualities that women looked for in their potential male partners, which brought along prestige for men and therefore their families.

Breaking the Moral Codes

The value of personal autonomy given to unmarried women to take the lead in sexual affairs, a principle that is persistent in mythological narratives, is expressed in a positive light insofar as it does not involve excesses or the breaking of established rules. Personal autonomy is otherwise negatively morally sanctioned, and as a result, women's practices could be punished with violence and even death of the protagonists in the narratives.

A common practice for some unmarried women was to avoid marriage as a way to continue to enjoy their single status. During the time of the Original Beings, this was the case of *Cuco*[52], the bottled tree. She was young and single, and always slept with men, but she did not want to marry any of them. Whenever she saw a young man she had not seen before, she would spend the night with him. If a man 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 with me [i.e. stay in a relationship with me]." She, however, told him, "I am going to take measures not to have children."She did this in order to continue to sleep with as many men as she wanted. She said,

[52] Chorisia insignis
Source: Mashnshnek (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989: 533-534).

"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* was able to get away with her ways and stay single, Ayoreo negatively sanctioned her behavior. Other protagonists from the time of the *Jnani Bajade* averse to marriage, like *Cuco*, were punished with violence and even death for their stance. In this way, while young women were allowed to enjoy their time period of singlehood, refusal to eventually marry was established as negatively sanctioned by the Original Beings.

A similar case occurred with the tree cricket[53]. In the beginning, she was a pretty girl with a marvelous voice. She preferred to remain alone rather than get married. One day a group of young men decided to resort to violence in revenge against her tenacity. They waited for her and when the moment was right, they attacked and raped her. One of these young men was *Namochai*. He was the first to assault the girl. He grabbed her so strongly that she was unable to free herself. Right after him the others came, all of whom raped her too. She became pregnant, but regardless of the circumstances, still refused to marry anyone. This drove a group of men to decide to kill her. They did so by filling her mouth with earth. From then on, she let her singing come from her abdomen as a reminder of what had happened to her.

For the *Jnani Bajade*, lack of passion was also considered a negative trait among unmarried women. For example, *Pujnujna* tree[54], the slandering woman, despite being beautiful, was not desired by men because she was not considered passionate, and did not enjoy being with men. Furthermore, she had another

[53] Source: Casalegno (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:483-484).
[54]Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:546-547).

negative trait in that she was malicious and spoke negatively of men. Lack of a pleasant character was also a hindrance to finding a partner. She was not at all feminine either, which further provoked dislike towards her. She ended up transforming herself into a tree with thorns, so that no one would go near her.

The above myths all emphasize negative values constitutive of women's sexual subjectivities. These include, among others, being averse to marriage, lacking passion, and talking poorly of other people. In contrast, having multiple partners is only seen in a negative light if a woman does not eventually decide on a permanent partner. The Original Beings would resort to group rape and other forms of violence to seek vengeance for these negative behaviors.

From Singlehood to Becoming Married

Once married, values associated with the sexual practices of Ayoreo women change significantly, from when they were unmarried. Foremost, the positive values associated with sexual availability and desire give way to values related to procreation, fidelity, and economic stability. In this way, notions of love shifts from the romantic infatuation and associated sexual desire during singlehood towards feelings of partnership and companionship during married life. This becomes evident in the terms used to refer to temporary partners which is 'the one I desire' ('-iijora') versus the term used to refer to permanent partners, 'the one that accompanies me ('-ijina')

A model for this can be found in the story of the weaver-bird *Bujote* and her husband the bird *Tojo,*[55] a couple that demonstrated some of these principles. They were both hard workers; she was always collecting the edible roots of

[55] Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:294-295).

caraguata[56] and weaving threads while he was out hunting turtles. When she considered her transformation, her husband told her, "You can do as you like. If you transform yourself, you do not need to fear that I will leave you, because you are the hardest-working woman there is. Other women are after me, but I do not love them, I only love you." This is how they decided never to leave each other. But weaver-bird still wondered, "What will happen to us if we transform ourselves?" Her husband encouraged her, "Let's do it. Even if we do give up our human form we'll always remain and work together." Eventually they transformed themselves into two birds that make their home in a nest that looks like a bag. Weaver-bird's story and song were not taboo for Ayoreo. Any person looking to be a hard worker could sing her song. Her husband left a song for lazy people, in order to transform them into hard-working people.

The practices of the couple depicted in this story lays the foundation for the gendered division of labor and also indicates the positive values esteemed in married couples which include hard work, fidelity and loyalty. Such values are also evident in the story of another couple: *Ebédua*[57] the tree and *Camosojnai* the ant's nest. They loved each other and tried to remain faithful to one another despite the repeated but unsuccessful attacks of jealous people who wanted to kill them. Today, the symbol of their union remains in the fact that the ant's nest clings to trees in the same way that *Camosojnai* was always attached to his wife when human.

Values negatively sanctioned among married couples included, among others,

[56] A type of edible *bromeliacea*.
[57] (*Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco).*
Source: Bórmida (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:473-474).

infidelity and the break-up of marriage. The following two stories refer to how these practices came into being and were manifest during the time of the Original Beings.

The negative trait of Ayoreo women leaving their husbands has its mythical origin in the story of *Nguiamia*, [58] a girl-bird who always chased young men and did not let them go until they would marry her. Once married, she would leave her husband for a new adventure. Men would do the same: *Diti*[59] was an older woman whose husband left her after their fourth child in favor of a younger and more beautiful girl. As she was without a partner, her four children were killed by an animal called *dicore*. When this happened, in her sorrow she painted her body red. The paint turned into blood, and her menstrual flow returned. Even though she was old, she became a young woman again. She went to live with a man called *Pamoi*, and they were able to have two children.

In the case of *Diti*, the unfaithfulness of the husband led to the collapse of the marriage, which had a negative consequence for the couple, namely, the death of the children. Practices of unfaithfulness were not uncommon in the forest, and several other myths refer to the negative consequences of this practice (see William and Simeone 1989). The fact that the husband left his wife for a younger and more beautiful girl makes reference to the availability and power that unmarried girls had over men, but also serves as a warning for married men who get involved with them. Although during pre-mission times, separations due to affairs caused major problems among the Ayoreo, the fact that they would break

[58] Source: Casalegno (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:629).
[59] Source: Califano (compiled by Wilbert and Simoneau,1989:626-627).

up in small bands made it easier to avoid problems. Oftentimes, after leaving his/her partner, a person would associate with the group of the new partner, leaving his/her previous group behind.

In the above story, magic operated so that the older woman could become young and available to marry again and procreate despite her old age.[60] This is fundamental to Ayoreo ethics of sexuality, as women, once divorced, were soon considered sexually available again, and were expected to find another partner. Even in today's society it is rare to find older people, mainly widowed, who do not remarry. Such women as described above oftentimes marry divorced or widowed men of their age, but it is not rare to find women who marry younger men as well.

Ayoreo Women: Initiative in Sexual Matters

The narratives presented in this section, rather than focusing on prohibitions, invoke the ways in which Beings in the time of the *Jnani Bajade* dealt with particular situations, revealing how choices and decisions came into being. These stories illustrate specific embedded practices that would come to define the life experiences of contemporary Ayoreo people. The *Jnani Bajade* were responsible for assigning positive and negative values to practices in the realm of sexuality which have become the basis for guiding principles for Ayoreo of the contemporary generation.

Sexual autonomy, desire, and reciprocity through exchange are salient positive values constitutive of women's sexual subjectivities depicted in the narratives. The mythological corpus on sexuality exposed through the stories

[60] This story is told so that women who stopped having children, and want to have again, can have.

presented here stands for what Foucault has termed a specific mode of subjectivation, in that they serve as the abstract guiding principles to the construction of ethical selves among contemporary Ayoreo. Most importantly, sexual autonomy of Ayoreo women cannot be conceived as involving an independent, autonomous will; their practices indeed reveal a degree of independence but are nevertheless always contingent upon the guiding principles of the *Jnani Bajade*.

III. On Becoming an Ayoreo Woman

This following section elaborates on the narratives of Ayoreo women who were born and raised in the forest prior to sedentarization in the mission station. I explore how they constructed their sense of becoming women during that time period, examining the ways in which they lived up to the principles of Ayoreo mythological corpus detailed in the first section of this chapter. Importantly, in their narratives these women do not make any direct link between their experiences and those of the *Jnani Bajade;* this is because these stories are not openly discussed as a result of Christianization (see next Chapter for details). However, the practices of the Original Beings clearly provide the context for many of the practices mentioned by these women, which mirror the original principles and values.

These Ayoreo narratives can be considered a form of what Ziggon has termed 'public discourse of morality' (Zigon 2009) which, for him is one of the three spheres in which morality is articulated (the other two include embodied dispositions and the institutional sphere). The narratives of Ayoreo women act as

public articulations of moral beliefs, conceptions and principles that had not been directly manifested through any established channels prior to the institutionalization of morality by missionaries.

The following narratives are selected from interviews with women whose ages ranged between 65 and 85 years old and who were raised prior to mission life. Their stories encompass diverse experiences of becoming/being a woman at different life stages, starting at puberty.

> After I had my first period, I started dressing with a skirt for the first time. My mother had made that skirt for me. When I began to wear it, I also started to separate myself from the work of my mother. It was our time of laughing [i.e. flirting] with young men. I wanted to be with a young man that was a good hunter. All girls wanted that, as we knew he would provide for us and our families.

This transition away from childhood was symbolically marked for girls by their first period and the use of a *dajudie*[61] fiber skirt. At this time, they became known as *gapu gatoi* (plural. *gapudie gatodé*) or 'girl with hair.' The term–which continues to be used despite the fact that this aesthetic practice is no longer observed–makes reference to letting the hair grow for the first time as they transitioned from childhood to adolescence (up to that age children would shave their heads). This was the stage during which young women began to experiment sexually, although still under parental control. At this time, both sexes increasingly contributed to the economic tasks of the household.

Among Ayoreo, the role of women in the productive sphere was almost equal to that of men. They would accompany their partners on hunting trips, and other productive activities involved looking for honey and collecting *dajudie* plants to

[61] *Bromelia hieronymi.*

make threads out of their fibers. Women were also responsible for the production of common articles such as covers and carrying bags. In the camps, they were responsible for the exchange and redistribution of hunted goods and cultivated the vegetable garden together with their partners. Like men, women could also aspire to be shamans and have other important social roles. While the role of *asute* or chief was reserved for men, women played an important role in communal decisions, and in the absence of their chief-husbands, they would have command over the group.

> I started doing all the things my mother did. As a child, I followed her everywhere looking at all she did. But now everything she did I tried to do too, getting honey, taking out *dajudie* and making threads. She also taught me how to search for *doridie*[62] in the forest. She told me I had to do this calmly, never rushing. I started weaving my first bag too, but it was ugly. Like me, when my brother was old enough, he went around with my father. I remember my father would tell him how to hunt, how to find honey in the forest. He wanted my brother to get to know the forest, so that he would not get lost."

Young men or *jnacare gatodé* relocated in order to spend most of their nights at the center of the camp in the *jnacare iguijnai* or 'young men's hut' together with young people their age. It was here that they received the visits of young women also. During this time, young men started to accompany relatives to learn how to hunt, but they were not yet involved in warfare and killings.

A few years into being a *gapu gatoi*, girls transitioned again into becoming full *gapu* (plural *gapudie*) or young women. During this stage they were allowed for the first time to engage their sexuality in an independent and non-apprehensive way, without parental control. Older generations remember the *gapu* stage as starting later in life than it currently does, (around 20 years old). As a sign of

[62] Bromelia balansae Mez. Used for the edible fleshy leaf bases.

beauty and sexual availability, young women would paint clan designs on their faces in red using the *curude* stone[63]. During this stage, the *gapu* would also start to use this as a sign that they were available and looking for a partner. Symbolic of this new stage, was the use of long hair, considered a trait of beauty in young men and women. Young men (plural *'jnacare'*) would tie their hair with a *dajudie* cord. Like the young women, they would also paint themselves, and in addition, wore feathers glued to their bodies with honey bee-wax to make themselves attractive to females. Both young men and young women marked geometrical ornamental scars on their bodies, such as on the breast or upper abdomen, as a sign of beauty and courage.

> At this time, I started going around with young men. 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 my male friends on hunting trips. During that time, my mother would talk to me about how to raise children and how one had to respect one's husband.

Sexual flirting and courting was, and still is, initiated exclusively by women. While a man could also show interest, he required the mediation of female friends to make himself visible to the potential partner who would finally decide whether to approach him or not. The central role of young women in approaching and engaging men of their preference earned them the label of *boqueré*. This term, which translates as mischievous or playful, has a sexual connotation. Girls would enter into temporary relations with young men whom they called *'ijnora'* (a feminine term). For more permanent relations the term *gajmai* (a masculine term.) was used. While the latter translates as boyfriend/fiancé, its literal meaning refers

[63] A type of red stone.

to the act of claiming someone for oneself. The term was analogous to those used in warfare to allude to a person taken captive. Sexual and emotional commitment to just one person was rare during this time-period. Men expected young women to move from one partner to another, a practice which was seen as neither morally nor socially suspect, but rather constitutive of a woman's sexual sense of self.

> Going around with different men is wrong, but back then this was our mother's way of thinking, which is why we also did it. When we were young, that is what we did: we went around with men and then left them to go with others too until we found someone permanent.

According to the older generation of Ayoreo, marriage did not start as early as it does today. "Young people are no longer afraid of *Asojna*, as we were in the forest". It was a prohibition of *Asojna* to marry too young. There was no ritual associated with marriage other than moving into the spouse's household.

> Back then our parents wanted their children to get married to hard-working women. My mother-in-law encouraged my husband to leave his first wife because she was not a hard worker. This is how I then married *Ichajui*. Back then, the mother-in-laws demanded a lot of their daughters-in-laws. Before finding my husband, I listened to my mother when she told me not to marry certain men.

Ayoreo refer to the act of marrying using the verb *-ijina* ('to accompany'). Residence after marriage is matrilocal. Like most indigenous groups in lowland South America, rather than having a system of bride-wealth or dowry with elaborate exchange of goods, a man's responsibility was to engage in obligatory services—which included labor—to the family of his new wife. In this way, being a good hunter was a key distinction, which single women and their families expected and appreciated in a man, as he would provide not only for his wife but for her family as well.

A distinctive trait of Ayoreo sexuality is that it has been traditionally utilized as a means of exchange. In exchange for sex, young women would receive from men valuable hunting items like *cucha arione* ('meat'), or *iborade* ('harvested items').[64] Young women expected their temporary partners to reciprocate with something in exchange for sex. These types of exchanges were especially common on hunting and warfare trips. Single women would go along with friends or relatives on these trips to help with daily gendered chores such as fetching water and cooking. This help was especially needed during longer expeditions, as married women with young children as well as the elders stayed behind in the temporary camps.

In their work, Nostras (2009) and Suasnabar (1995) argue that Ayoreo named single women who exchanged sex for goods during life in the forest *curajodie*. The complexities surrounding the meaning and implications of this term will be explained in detail in Chapter IV, with evidence to explain how this term in fact developed only later and in a different context, after the process of missionization had already been initiated. Since not all the men taking part in the expeditions were married, this was a good opportunity for unmarried women to experiment sexually and potentially find a partner.[65] Nonetheless, infidelity among married men was also common on these trips. Furthermore, chiefs, for whom polygamy was reserved, would use these opportunities to find a second wife.

At the time, I went on a hunting trip with a girlfriend who was my relative. On

[64] This term for money was initially coined in Bolivia and was incorporated into the vocabulary of Paraguayan Ayoreo only later.
[65] While extramarital affairs were seen in a negative light, these also took place quite often, despite the potential conflicts they were known to foster, as word would no doubt spread back in the camps.

> that trip I wanted a married man and so it happened. The news that we had been together reached the camp before we got back. His wife was really upset and fought with me. His mother-in-law tried to defend him, because she wanted him to stay with her daughter, as they already had children. But he left her and when the group separated he came along with me and my family.

Insofar as single women's sexual practices did not interfere with married couples, these did not have negative moral connotations. However, a pregnancy without a permanent partner (i.e. husband) was considered a major moral flaw. Many young women would use therapeutic chants known as *chubuchu* to avoid getting pregnant. With few abortive methods known to Ayoreo, most would carry the pregnancy and then practice infanticide. They would kill the child by putting him in a *pozo* or hole in the ground soon after birth. This practice was known as *ijóchame jnumi*, which translates as 'to plant in the ground'. Infanticide was not considered ethically wrong; on the contrary, it allowed single women to avoid becoming single mothers, a practice that was morally sanctioned.

Fatherless children were considered *ecaqueo* or rootless as they lacked a provider, and a family to guide their formation. Because of this, they were oftentimes marginalized and stories were not uncommon of relatives of the women killing these children. But there were also people who took these children in as their own. Couples who wanted children would usually do this. Several adult Ayoreo remember being 'saved' from the *pozo* by their adoptive parents. The decision of killing the child was a personal affair, but most of the time, it was also discussed with family members.

It was the bearing of children, and not marriage itself, that would change a young woman into a full woman and also seal the marriage. Until then, leaving a

partner was not considered a moral issue and couples could easily separate. Only after the first child was born would the couple call each other husband ('*abai'*) and wife ('*acote'*). At this time, a *gapu* would turn into a *cheque* (‘full woman’) for the first time.

> I accompanied several men before meeting my husband *Cojane*. My family had joined his group and that is how I met him. I already told you my previous husband had died. On one occasion, I joined my friend *Ingomejei—ne* and his wife on a trip to what is now Bolivia. He is not my relative, but she was, that is why I went with them. Other friends joined us too, and *Cojane* was among them. We walked many days. Once there, some Bolivians told a woman, *Ita*, to marry *Cojane*. But I decided to talk to him, to see if we could marry. He accepted and we walked back with two of his brothers. This is how we got married, but we did not have our first child until much later.

Clan exogamy was observed in marriages. Like incest, marrying someone from the same clan was a major break of taboo. This practice was disrespectfully referred to as *goto tagu dedodie* or "someone who eats her own eyes." [the word eat has a sexual connotation]. This was considered a shameful practice.

> Back then, it was *puyak* ('prohibited') for women to marry someone from her same clan. But some were not afraid of this. These were people with *garósi áyipie* or little knowledge. It brought shame to them but they still did it. If someone got mad at them, they could not say anything, because what they did brought shame on them.

The independence to enjoy one's sexuality while single became totally restricted after marriage. The transition to married life was articulated as *je ore cana* meaning the women ‘can no longer laugh’. Laughter (-*inganare*) alludes to the sexual flirtation and activity allowed while single. However, with marriage a women's role in the group also changed significantly.

> When I was young, I went around with many men, until I met *Yigo*. Soon after getting together, I got pregnant, but we buried that child. I felt sad because I saw the baby alive but I did not want to keep it because we had already made

> that decision. It belonged to someone else, not him. The child was born while he was on a hunting trip. By the place where I gave birth, there was a hole from a *chicori* root,[66] which had been extracted a few days earlier. That was the place where the baby was buried.

Infanticide was commonly practiced with the first child born out of a marriage. It was assumed that the woman had had several partners before establishing herself with a man; therefore there was no certainty that the child belonged to her new husband. Oftentimes this was a joint decision, and assured the male partner that he would not raise someone else's child. Also, it consolidated women's sexual independence, as it had the effect of allowing women to fully engage their sexuality with different men before establishing themselves with a permanent partner. In this way, infanticide was not seen as morally fraught.

> Back then, women would listen to their husbands. They would respect them. There were also women who wanted to be mean to each other, so they could be important. They would often cause trouble between families. But the *dacasute* could kill people in the group. If someone started trouble this was what they did. This is why people were more careful back in the forest and there were not as many problems. Today people are no longer afraid of the Chiefs, only of God.

With the support of the family, a woman could leave her partner. Divorced women were known as *cheque-dago.* This term, which translates as 'a woman who giggles/laughs a lot', alludes to the reinstated sexual availability of these *cheque* (‘full women’) to find a new partner. In most cases, if the woman had children, they would be turned over to the grandparents to be raised, allowing the woman to start a new family with her future husband. Unmarried adults were rare. This was related to the importance of the economic partnership for daily survival

[66] *Jacaratia corumbensis*.

in the forest. Couples would often accompany each other on hunting trips, and would equally share tasks in the productive sphere. Even through late adulthood, male and female individuals who had lost their partner due to death or divorce would remarry.

With old age, women and men oftentimes made the individual decision to terminate their own lives. An individual would do this by asking a member of his/her family to have them buried alive in a *pozo* ('hole') prepared especially for this. They would make this decision aware that their physical limitations could be a hindrance to the group by slowing them down. This was considered a potential problem, especially during times in which the group was exposed to warfare from other groups or otherwise had to be in constant movement. The individual decision to take one's life speaks to the sense of personal autonomy over oneself in consideration of the wellbeing of the group.

Conclusion: Towards an Ethics of Ayoreo Sexuality

The experiences and practices of Ayoreo women during the time prior to Christian mission life resonate with the guiding principles established by the *Jnani Bajade*. However, the narratives of Ayoreo women—with a few exceptions—have muted any links and references to the Ayoreo mythological corpus. This is a result of the Ayoreo process of Christianization, explored in detail in the following chapter. It must be noted here, however, that Ayoreo contemporary collective memory is constructed and expressed through the lens of Christianity. The narratives collected about life prior to permanent “contact” reveal a clear tension between the "old" and "bad" ways versus the "good"

Christian ways of the present. Practices and experiences from pre-Christian times were re-framed in terms of "back then, the time when we did not know anything." This chapter has purposely not focused on or developed this aspect of women's narratives as they will be analyzed in the following chapter, which concerns the introduction of Christianity and the impact this had on the lives of the Ayoreo.

The sexual subjectivities of Ayoreo women were constructed around principles of autonomy, desire, reciprocity and exchange. Independence given to enact one's sexuality has always been a formative attribute of unmarried women. Only once married would sexuality take a procreative focus and be built upon affective bonds and economic cooperation. Practices such as taking the lead in activities related to flirting and courting and making decisions about practices of infanticide, as well as practices to end one's life at old age, distinctly highlight the role of personal autonomy as constitutive of women's sense of personhood. Unlike the Judeo-Christian view that restricts women's practices of sexuality, subordinating it to a patriarchal system that gives importance exclusively to its procreative role, the principles established by the *Jnani Bajade* gave room for women to engage their sexuality with a great degree of personal initiative and independence.

Exchange and reciprocity have also long been defining principles of Ayoreo sexuality. Practices of exchange in the realm of sexuality were expressed and consolidated through mythical origin (i.e. through the practices of the *Jnani Bajade*). Reciprocity was also enacted in the sexual exchange, thereby becoming a value constitutive of sexuality. In this way, sexual systems were linked to

economic and communal processes as well and as a result, women would deploy their sexuality in strategic ways to form alliances and gain prestige. Having the power to choose their sexual partners, women were able to assure access to economic stability (by choosing to marry a skillful hunter for example). They also had the power to decide on the ways that political alliances would be formed and shaped between families in a group. This gave them symbolic power and cemented their role within Ayoreo society.

The ethical framework of Foucault facilitates thinking about the ways in which Ayoreo women constructed their sexual subjectivities prior to Christian life in the missions. The set of values embedded in the day to day vicissitudes of the Original Beings, far from being a set of strict rules with punitive tones, were the basis for a 'mode of subjection'—a set of principles which influenced the day to day sexual standards of Ayoreo women. In this way, the mythical narratives formed the basis upon which an Ayoreo ethical system during pre-mission times was constructed. The guiding principles of the *Jnani Bajade* allowed women to make themselves into sexual subjects aware of the trial and errors of the Original Beings at the time when they were still humans. In this way, all contemporary women's practices are enacted in the footsteps of the experiences of the *Jnani Bajade*, which serve as a moral framework within which women carry out what they consider a 'virtuous' set of practices in the realm of sexuality.

Chapter III

Crafting New Christian Selves: Ayoreo Life at the Mission

As a child, I lived with my parents around *Cucarani* [Cerro León].[67] My mother was named *Asi-date*. One day she and other women went to look for *doridie* [edible roots] close to our camp. Other kids and I went along. All of a sudden, we heard a noise that came towards us, it was a plane. We ran away, afraid of it. We did not understand what the plane was and why it came towards us, very close. A man who was with us got mad so he put on his *cobidie* [fighting adornments] and started shooting arrows at the plane, but none reach it. We, the children, were afraid and ran to our mother, who took her skirt out to cover us.

By the afternoon, back in our camp, we heard the noise of the plane again. When it was very close to us, they threw things that we did not know what they were. No one dared to touch them. Someone made a hole in the ground and threw the items there because we were afraid that those things would make us sick if we touched them. We stayed one more night in that camp but decided to leave by the following day, afraid that the plane would come back.

But the next morning the plane came back very early before we could leave the camp. As we heard the noise, we did not leave my father's house because we were so afraid. I remember women crying out of fear. This time axes were thrown out of it, but we did not take them again because we were afraid. We decided to move to a place called *Pujuate*. There, we found the group of *Chomara-ne* and they informed us that some Ayoreo were already living among the *cojñone* [white people]. *Chomara-ne* and his group were on their way to look for the group of *Ñamocode-gosode*[68] whom they wanted to take to the white people.

Then we moved further, to a place called *Piogoto* since it was the time to make gardens. My father left signals so that my brother, who was away, would know where we were. My father did not get to start his garden because my brother arrived the next day with my uncle *Jnani*. They told my father that they had been among the white people, too. Because of this, some in our group were afraid of getting sick from my brother and his group and a small fight broke out about this. But my father wanted to go with my brother to the white people.

When eventually the white people came to look for us, they brought us bread and slingshots. To cheer us up, my mother told us, "You should be happy that we are going to the white people where we will eat their food." My mother also told us that once among them, we would be able to wear

[67] Cerro Leon is a unique geological formation consisting of a succession of hills within an area 40 km in diameter in the middle of a vast plain in the Chaco region.
[68] An Ayoreo subgroup.

white people's clothes. Back then, my mother did not know that white people did not give anything away for free. So we started walking towards the white people. We reached a place called *Odocobui*[69]. We found some cows on the way and we were afraid, since it was the first time we saw them. An uncle of mine considered killing them, but someone that had already been among the white people told him that was not a good idea because he said that the cows had owners.

We then got to a place called *Ingoi'ne Ugutadie*, where we camped for the last time before reaching the white people. Now we were closer to them. My parents and the people in the group were so anxious to see the white people, that they did not much enjoy having to camp again before reaching them. We were pretty hungry by then, because all we did was walk for days. When we got to the white people, *Ikevi Posorajai*[70] was already with them. He showed my father how to greet white people with the hand, something my mother refused to do. Many people died among the white people because of the disease that most had.

After a month of living among them, my father and other people got sick. It was not like in the forest anymore, where everyone was cheerful. When they started getting sick, they were sad and no one took care of them. There were many sick women and men at the white people's camp. There were also many dead children and women who would cry for them. My father decided that our group had to leave that place, and return to *Cucarani* because so many people were dying among the white. My sister named *Ijaro* also got sick and died. Her husband called *Ichajnui* buried her.

When we returned to the place called *Ingoi'ne Ugutadie*, we found a group of *Garai-gosode*[71] but they did not want to receive us. They were afraid of us due to diseases. My father seemed to be doing well but was also sick. Unexpectedly, a few days later, he fell and died on our way to *Cucarani*. We cried because we were sad about my father's death. I was also sick and thought I would die too. My arms were skinny and my belly seemed to have something inside because it grew.

As we camped further along the way, *Ikevi Posorajai* reached us on a tractor with a white person that we later learned was a doctor on a tractor. He told us to go back to the white people's camp. He explained that they were looking for us. They took us back to the white people on a tractor. My mother explained to me that we were going back to the place where we had already been. She was so afraid of the tractor that it made her sick.

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[69]This place is known as *Madrejon* by Paraguayans.

[70]Ikevi Posorajai was 'hunted down' by Paraguayans in the area of Ingavi as a child in 1956.He was later used as translator by Catholic missionaries as well as by NTM missionaries for contacting the Ayoreo (for the history of Ikevi, see Escobar 1988 and Amarilla 2004).

[71]An Ayoreo subgroup.

> From then on, we did not try to go back to the forest. My mother died soon after. She thought she would live forever among the white people. I was about ten years old and I was left without parents. I missed them all the time and I never thought I would reach the age I am now. I thought I would die too. This is the story of when my parents came out for the first time to the white people, and how they died from their diseases.

Introduction

Since the 1950s, different religious missionary groups—Silesians, Mennonites, South American Indian Mission, and the New Tribes Mission—sought to contact the Ayoreo in Paraguay. They were considered the ultimate 'fiery savages' of the Paraguayan Chaco who needed to be Christianized. Like in other countries of the region, initial contact was done with the explicit support of the Paraguayan State, which saw in missionaries an alternative to solve 'the Indian problem.'

The above story is one of the many stories of the so-called first contact of Ayoreo people with Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the early 1960s. These are the memories of *Ichai*—a man now in his early sixties—who was a child at the time of contact. Through his recollections of the events, he traced the devastating effects of disease through contact that most Ayoreo underwent. He belonged to a group that lived in the area of *Cucarani*, also known as Cerro León, a region where members of the largest subgroup, *Guidai-gosode,* were living at the time of contact. This was the same place where the New Tribes Mission, an evangelical group, would later establish their first mission station. The same anxiety that drove some to "walk for days" in order to get to know the white people later also triggered the desperation of many to leave the missionary camps after people started to die.

Catholics, like Protestants, used different methods to attract the 'savages'. They left gifts as decoys, tracked their location with planes, and even used a previously contacted Ayoreo to establish initial contact with the 'savages'.[72] Embedded in these practices were western religious ideologies that constructed the Ayoreo as needing to be Christianized and civilized. While for missionaries the history of contact has been one of enduring faith and salvation under harsh conditions, for Ayoreo it has been a story of disease, violence and trauma. The civilizational crusade brought unexpected chaos. Stories abound of diseases taking the lives of innumerable Ayoreo in the missionary camps, of still un-contacted Ayoreo dying of diseases carried by their contacted fellows, and stories about Ayoreo individuals "losing their minds" (known as '*urosoi'* among Ayoreo) at the camps and going back to the forest in solitude.[73]

In Paraguay, the first group to establish permanent contact with the Ayoreo was the Catholic Church in 1962, founding a mission station soon after. The Evangelical New Tribes missionaries—with the support of the Mennonites—contacted Ayoreo and established their first mission station four years later in 1966. Due to the different geographical locations of both missions, each contacted different subgroups. In this way, most *Garai-gosode* or 'the people from the fields'

[72]Missionary Buchegger reported that an Ayoreo named *Diromene* went to live with groups in the forest for two years earlier to convince them to come to the mission station (Brown Gold 1971: 12/71 – 29 – 8). See also Buchegger 2003. A reference about this methodology was also mentioned in Mayburry-Lewis 1980)

[73] Many deaths of Ayoreo were reported in 1962 at Cauce Indio, the temporary Catholic mission station. By 1969, these were still ongoing as a Salesian priest reported having to carry dead people in a wheelbarrow to bury them. Later in 1972 another big epidemic of chickenpox broke out at the mission station María Auxiliadora. Bartolomé (2000:120) estimates that over a hundred Ayoreo died during the initial years of the missionary endeavor. NTM missionaries experienced flu epidemics that hit Cerro Leon (see Buchegger 2003:62).

were contacted by Catholics, while most *Guidai-gosode* (who are the focus of this dissertation) or 'the people from the villages' became evangelicals.

My aim in this chapter is to trace the process of missionization of the *Guidai-gosode* by the New Tribes Mission to understand how customary practices were re-negotiated at the level of ethical values as Ayoreo transitioned into Christian mission life. While approaches to the study of religion focus mostly on aspects of resistance to the incorporation into Christianity (e.g. Comaroffs 1997), the practice and ethics approach focuses on the cultural logic of conversion to Christianity to understand processes of missionization (see Errington and Gewertz 2001; Harding 2000; Keane 2007; Robins 2004).

Historical processes of ‘modernization’ and ‘secularization’ of the West re-arranged the categorization of ‘religion’ as belonging to a private sphere. The aim of certain powerful sectors was to create new modern subjects. Asad (2003) has called secularization a Western ‘political project’ that aimed at redefining particular and different practices of the self, articulated through class, gender, and religion. In this process ‘religion’ became compartmentalized into the private sphere (see Conolly 1999). In the same way, the project of modernity, central to secularism, also aimed at institutionalizing a number of principles such as moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, consumerism, and freedom of the market by employing technologies that created certain types of subjects (Foucault 2007, Mitchell 2002).

Fergusson (1999) criticizes how the secular narrative of modernity is conceived as an economic evolutionary ladder towards progress, which proposes

a rupture from the past and expectations of progress into a better future. According to Keane (2007:42), this perspective facilitated the globalization of Protestant Christianity. Like modern constructions of the self (Rose 1999), Protestantism privileges the construction of a subject that is individually capable of self-awareness and action (agency) as a condition for attaining salvation (freedom for the 'secular' subject).

My aim is to trace the establishment of the New Tribes Mission among the Ayoreo to show how the process of missionization has also been a project of 'modernization'. Religion became one of the fields of disciplinary practice through which the modern civil subject was to be produced. Missionaries did this by introducing Ayoreo to the regional market economy. Fostering a teleological notion of time (c.f. Fabian 1983), they incorporated associations of both faith and work with progress. They aimed at establishing a 'civilized conduct' at the level of daily practices, which ultimately sought to inculcate new Christian values.

This process also impacted different spheres of Ayoreo life and played out at the ethical level, as Ayoreo transitioned into missionized life. The Christian paramount value of 'life' was established in opposition to traditional practices such as infanticide and warfare. For women, this shifted the ordering of gender roles as they were forced to stop practices of infanticide. Households became larger and women were relegated to childrearing and household chores rather than continuing to have a prominent role in the productive sphere with men. With the process of missionization, women were expected to adopt accepted (Christian)

models of sexual behavior, which focused on sexual chastity for single women and procreation for married women.

Paradoxically, the value of personal autonomy, which unmarried women expressed through sexual independence, continued to be practiced in tension with Christian values. I argue that this was possible only because missionaries shifted sexuality from the public to the private realm, making women's practices less 'visible'. I will end the chapter by reflecting on how this process has shaped Ayoreo construction of themselves as Christians. The appeal of Christianity to Ayoreo lies in its apocalyptic nature, which for Ayoreo will bring change and provide an alternative to the hardships and discrimination they experience.

"Moros for Christ": Initial Encounters with Missionaries

During the 1950s, different missionary groups attempted to contact and 'civilize' the 'Moros'.[74] While all initial efforts had failed, around 1960, a missionary from the evangelical South American Indian Mission reached a group of Ayoreo near the Salt Pans—the center of Ayoreo traditional territory—by the Paraguayan/Bolivian border. He spent several weeks with them but eventually the group left and contact ended (cf. Wagner 1967).

Later, in 1962, a group finally emerged at a military post, *Fortín Teniente Martínez.* Catholic missionaries who had been trying to contact the Ayoreo since 1957 were soon notified of the event. They reached them immediately and established a temporary settlement with twenty-seven Ayoreo in a nearby location

[74]Pejorative term of Spaniard origin, which originated during the Reconquista and referred to Moors, or Muslims. In Paraguay used contemptuously to refer to the Ayoreo. .

called *Madrejoncito.*[75] Members of that contacted group visited the Mennonite Colonies for the first time that same year. This was the earliest peaceful encounter between Ayoreo and Mennonites after several attempts of the latter to contact them since 1947. A second group of individuals from the same group reached the Colonies by the beginning of 1963. The two groups left after several weeks, when the Salesians bought a property—*Puerto María Auxiliadora*—by the Paraguayan River, which became the main Catholic mission station for Ayoreo.

Meanwhile, the Mennonites prepared themselves for further eventual visits of the *'Moros'* to the Colonies. The Mennonite plan, which reveals their paternalistic ideology of conversion and assimilation, included providing food, shelter and a missionary-linguistic 'protector' for them.[76]The goal of the program was to apply the same pattern of settlement that they had previously used among the *Enhlet* and the Nivaclé indigenous peoples who settled in the outskirt of Fernheim Colony, so that their labor could be easily accessed when needed. The colonists expected to put the Ayoreo in a camp near the Mennonite Colonies where they could live and search for employment. After a period of 'education' they would be able to qualify for their re-settlement in farms (see Graber 1964).[77]

[75] From there they were later moved to other settlements due to lack of water (these included Fortin Batista, Fortin Teniente Martínez, Fortín Teniente Montanía and Cauce Indio).Finally, in December 1963 they were taken to Puerto *María Auxiliadora*, where the Salesian missionaries bought 20,000 hectares to settle the Ayoreo (see Bartolomé 2000).
[76] The funds for the project were provided by the MCC in Akron Pennsylvania (Graber 1964).
[77] As expected, by November of 1966 a third group of Ayoreo returned to Filadelfia. They were 45 people led by Ikevi Posorajai, and this time they said they were there to stay for about two months (Wiebe *In* Hein 1990:131).

By 1966, the New Tribes Mission (NTM)[78], a US-based group of Anabaptist missionaries, decided to reach the remaining 'savages' of Paraguayan Chaco. They had already been working in Bolivia since 1948 Christianizing Ayoreo. The news of Ayoreo presence on the Paraguayan side of the border triggered their interest in expanding their missionary endeavor, as one of the missionaries noted:

> South of the railroad and reaching down into Paraguay are groups of the Ayoreo tribe who are feared as the fiercest of the entire tribe. Some of the Ayores have told us that one section below the railroad has as many as 400 men who fight. These have always been feared because in tribal wars they have killed and plundered among all the other groups of the tribe. It is evident that the time is drawing near when the continuous effort should be launched to contact the remaining groups […] Sometimes we hear that such Indians are nothing but unregenerate savages, more like animals than men, and are not worthy of our interest or love' (Brown Gold 1955:10).

Trained with language methodologies from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and with accumulated work experience among Ayoreo in Bolivia, the NTM missionaries came to Paraguay prepared to convert members of this 'savage tribe'. The Mennonites, having failed to contact the Ayoreo themselves, decided to collaborate with the NTM.[79] With their support, the NTM missionaries settled in Filadelfia. From there they organized their trips to contact the Ayoreo. According to one of the missionaries who would later participate in the first contact, they already had a plan for their missionary work among Ayoreo:

The most practical way we can see to reach them and gain their confidence is

[78] The New Tribes Mission is an evangelical missionary society composed of born-again Christians who are dedicated to the evangelization of 'tribal groups' .It was founded in 1942 by Paul Fleming and is based in Florida. Currently, they have more than 3000 missionaries working in 25 countries. For details seee www.ntm.org.

[79]The initial relationship between these two religious organizations dates back to the mid 1950s, when the Mennonites learned that in Bolivia, missionaries had already established missions among the Ayoreo living there. Fernheim colony sent representatives with the aim of getting information that could facilitate the contact and settlement of the Ayoreo in Paraguay. During their trip, they learned about the NTM and visited their office, which was based in *Cochabamba.* They returned to Filadelfia with several materials on the Ayoreo language (Franz *In* Hein *1990:51-53*).

> to set up a trading post where they can come and go as they wish, exchanging their products for things that they need. There will no doubt be some who will want to settle down at the station. These can be supported by hiring them to work in building the station. We believe that once this trading station is financed and operating it will not only pay its own way but will finance the development of colonization and social improvement of the Moro tribe, which is a “must” in the thinking of the Paraguayan government" (Goddard *In* Hein 1990: 133-137)

The first contact of NTM missionaries with Ayoreo took place in April 1966 at Cerro León—located 410 kilometers north of Filadelfia. The initial contact was facilitated by *Ikevi Posorajai*, who had previously served as translator for the Catholic missionaries. Immediately, they surveyed the place for water and other resources and two months later they established their first mission station there.[80]

Cerro León

The site of the mission station was strategic, as the area had been the region where a large number Ayoreo, mostly *Guidai-gosode*, were living at the time. The Ayoreo arrived at *Cerro León* in different groups. Initially they came guided by missionaries, but soon, the 'contacted' Ayoreo would go back to look for their relatives. The constant movement between the mission station and the forest had a negative impact for those still un-contacted, as disease quickly spread from one location to the other.

Ayoreo memories of contact point to the group of *Ñacamai Chiquenoi* as being the first to be reached by American missionaries Goddard and Keefe. Goddard described the event as follows:

> We passed by a bridge when *José* [*Ikevi*] discovered the footprints of the Moros. We followed him for about five kilometers. 'There they are' he finally screamed. *José* went up to them calling them in their language. Finally they

[80] Their first trip to contact the Ayoreo lasted altogether three weeks, of which 19 days were spent on the road. (Goodard *In* Hein 1990:137)

> started to reply. Soon we saw them running towards us completely naked. We stayed about 100 meters from them while *José* talked to them. Then, one of them made signals so that we would come closer to them. Four hours later the chief Vacamat (sic) [referring to *Jñacamai*] came with four women. He got close to our cart and sat about 20 meters from us, looking at every movement we did. Later, slowly, the rest of them came until there were about thirty people around us (Goddard In Hein 1990:135).

A few months later, a larger group arrived but this time already at the mission station. This group was led by *Uejai Picanerai*, the most important political and spiritual leader of the *Guidai-gosode* at the time. The group of chief *Idaide Etacore*, who was second in importance to *Uejai,* did not make it to the mission station until two years later. Some of the people from his group would move back and forth between the mission and their camp in the forest at *Cucarani* where they had their gardens at the time. According to Ayoreo, there were different reasons that drove them to establish contact with the white people. Some argue it was out of curiosity, a decision not always welcomed by everybody (especially older people in the group). Others argue that they were deceived by *Ikevi* who told them that they would be attacked by other white people if they stayed in the forest (cf. IGWIA 2011).

Once the mission station was established at Cerro León, the American families of Keefe and Goddard moved to live there. The mission was located 410 kilometers north of Filadelfia in a very isolated place with no Paraguayan population in the area other than some isolated military posts. The only link that the missionaries had with 'civilization' was a plane bought by the mission which transported them and their food provisions back and forth between there and Filadelfia. The living conditions at the mission station were precarious for the

missionary families (to the point that one of them left a year after establishing themselves there). In addition to the harsh living conditions, during the initial years, the missionaries lived in a constant state of fear because their perceptions of the Ayoreo as fiery killers made them insecure about what could happen (cf. Buchegger 2003).[81]In such a context, sacrifice and faith were guiding principles that played a fundamental role in justifying their Christianizing efforts.

Faro Moro

By 1968, the missionaries moved the mission station 220 kilometers south. The change of location was due to droughts they experienced at Cerro León. They also took into consideration the fact that many of the Ayoreo subgroup *Totobie-gosode*—mortal enemies of the *Gudai-gosode* —were located in the area of the new mission, which was hoped would facilitate their eventual contact.[82] The new mission station was named Faro Moro [Moro Lighthouse] meaning 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" (Buchegger *In* Hein 1990:120). Missionaries and Ayoreo would live there until 1979, when they moved closer to the Mennonite Colonies.

Two years after the mission was established, a Mennonite visitor to Faro Moro described the place as "an oasis in the desert" (Klassen *In* Hein 1990:149). The missionaries had well-constructed houses, a church, a landing field and stable Ayoreo "huts". They also had a schoolhouse built of wood, which had been a donation of Fernheim Mennonite Colony. But the work conditions were not

[81] This fear was also fed because in Bolivia five NTN missionaries had been killed by Ayoreo as they tried to contact them in 1943 (cf. Johnson 1966).
[82] Eventually a first group of *Totobie-gosode* was contacted in 1979.

'stable' at the beginning. More than once, missionaries had to request the support of authorities in Mariscal Estigarribia and the Colonies to intervene at the mission due to stealing of food provisions on the part of Ayoreo. This type of events would reinforce views of Ayoreo as "stealers" and "liars" (Buchegger in Hein:142). Missionary ability to 'survive' among the 'savages' despite the occasional threats, made them in the eyes of the Mennonites selfless people and deserving respect for their work. In this way, the Mennonites supported the NTM in every possible way they could. Overtime, *Mennoblatt*—the Mennonite periodical—would become the main link between Mennonites and missionaries, where the later would share and update the Colony on their missionary work among the 'Moros'. An example of this is expressed below in a letter from missionary Buchegger to the Colony:

> The missionaries among the Moros are very thankful to the Mennonites from Filadelfia and the other Colonies for their help and any other type of support. Our brothers from Filadelfia gave us a prefabricated house that will be of great value at our new place. They also financed a well that will give us potable water for the missionaries. The neighbors from Hohenau gave us bags of peanuts that are a delicacy for the Moros. Even from Germany we received clothes for the Moros. God bless all for these donations (Buchegger *In* Hein 1999:141).

During its initial years, the mission sustained itself mainly through the economic support of fellow churchgoers in the United States. Mennonite donations also played a key role in the missionary economy during this time. As will be shown later, missionaries were quick to introduce Ayoreo into the labor force of the regional economy, and as a way to sustain their missionary endeavors. In time, the mission would expand to become a cattle ranch employing Ayoreo as its main labor force. Beyond sustaining the mission, the efforts of

missionaries from the time the mission was established were focused on providing "employment" for the Ayoreo; this reveals the work ethic closely tied to their Protestant faith, something which is not as evident in the history of Catholic endeavors among the Ayoreo.

Over time, many Ayoreo would seek to become Christians; however, in the beginning many converted, but hardly understood what the missionaries were doing among them. The biggest barrier was the language. An elder, *Chidode,* remembered his conversion experience as follows:

> I was first baptized as a Catholic when I was about to die from chickenpox. After I got well, I went on a trip to Puerto Suárez [Bolivia] with some friends. We left from the Mission station María Auxiliadora where I was living at the time, and we did the whole trip on foot. This is what we young people did back then; visit our people from one place to another. Coming back, I went to Filadelfia. There I heard that *Oronei* [a Bolivian Ayoreo] was visiting Faro Moro from Rincon del Tigre [a Bolivian Ayoreo village]. I listened to his preaching there, and not long afterwards, I was also baptized at Faro Moro.

Chicode first converted to Christianity by Catholics in an act of desperation as he thought he would die. He then moved to Faro Moro where he met his wife and decided to stay. By then he dropped Catholicism, in his own words "not to have any trouble at *Faro Moro*", and became evangelical to avoid problems with missionaries. It was not uncommon during the late 60s and 70s for Ayoreo to move back and forth between Faro Moro and María Auxiliadora as the *Guidai-gosode* had again peaceful relations with the *Garai-gosode* after a long war between both groups. In this context, many Ayoreo became Christians soon after contact, and some like *Chicode* even twice. But these conversions did not involve an understanding and acceptance of the Christian ideology *per se* on the part of Ayoreo. Aware of this, later on the NTM had to stop the conversions by baptisms

to avoid having large numbers of people becoming Christian without firm conviction.

But Ayoreo understandings of missionary presence started to shift with the arrival of NTM missionary Henry Buchegger. An Austrian-born Canadian citizen, he came with his wife and family to Paraguay after working for twelve years among the Ayoreo in Bolivia.[83] He played a pivotal role in preaching and converting Ayoreo. Up to the present most remember him as the one who first taught them about the words of Christ. During the time at Faro Moro, every day he would gather Ayoreo men around the house of chief *Uejai* to preach to them. An elder remembered his experience with *Asigué-de* ('the father of *Asigué*) as he was called by Ayoreo.[84]

> *Asigué-de* told me he would teach me to believe in God. Like every day, he started preaching at *Uejai's* house. I went again and he tried to engage me by doing something, like reading the bible, but I felt embarrassed. After teaching to the people, *Asigue-de* talked to me again, and told me to believe in God. But I told him, 'I don't want that because I am embarrassed of my people'. He told me not to be embarrassed of praying and told me he would teach me how to pray. He asked me to repeat after him and I repeated what he said. After that, *Asigué-de* told me I was already a believer in God because I repeated the prayer. But I did not know Christ at that time yet; did not understand what he meant. Only later would I know.

While missionaries needed the approval of elder men in the group, their target was younger generations. In this way, like the narrator of this experience at the time, young men were inculcated to open themselves to the teachings. Eventually they were the ones who started new practices such as praying out loud or reading

[83] They came with seven children and established themselves in Faro Moro in 1969.
[84] His eldest daughter was called by Ayoreo Asigue. For Ayoreo, once an individual becomes a parent, he/she drops his/her name to become "the father/mother of…".
Asigué translates as flower bud.

the bible. This would later shift power dynamics between older and younger generations as younger men became preachers, weakening the leadership of older generations.

By 1969/1970, Ulf Lind, a German anthropologist doing research at Faro Moro, already perceived a "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 argued that if the intensity of the missionary endeavors kept up the way it was going, soon Ayoreo traditional beliefs would 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" (Lind, 1974:83).

Crafting New Selves

The missionary project of the New Tribes Mission—holding an ethnocentric perspective—sought to convert Indian souls first by eradicating all 'satanic' aspects of their 'traditional' culture, which they considered a hindrance to their religious enterprise. As in other contexts, the missionary enterprise was also a civilizing one, which ultimately aimed at incorporating the Ayoreo into Paraguayan society. In this way, the NTM missionary enterprise resonates with projects of "modernity" that seek to transform people by tearing them away from a 'traditional' past and position them for a 'better' future (cf. Robbins 2004, Keane 2004).

The following sections outline the different spheres of Ayoreo social life that were impacted by the process of Christianization and show how Christian values were constructed in opposition to Ayoreo 'traditional' culture. Over time, this fostered a shift towards the inculcation of 'new' values, without this entailing an eradication of all 'traditional' values. Despite this, Ayoreo were indoctrinated to discursively construct their culture as backward and meaningless.

From Foragers to 'Civilized' Subjects

The Ayoreo, who had always lived as foragers in small groups, had to adapt to the new spatial arrangements of the mission. This brought drastic changes to their lifestyle. For the first time, this involved the co-residence of large numbers of extended families in the limited physical spaces of the missions. This altered not only their settlement patterns but also their social structure since previously antagonistic groups were forced to reside together. This eventually led to tensions in leaderships and fractioning of sub-groups which continue to shape Ayoreo social dynamics to date.

The new spaces of the mission also shifted Ayoreo economic structure. In 1962, Slovene anthropologist Branisvala Susnik documented the gender tensions triggered by this new arrangement. She visited the Catholic temporary camp soon after contact. On that occasion, she noted frictions in gender relations which one day led a group of women to grab their belongings and leave without their men. They later returned at the request of the missionaries but were apparently frustrated by their men's lack of interest in hunting and gathering as they were receiving food provisions from the mission (Susnik 1963).

This episode was an early prelude to the changes to come in Ayoreo economic spheres. The NTM played a pivotal role in introducing Ayoreo to the capitalist logic of production of the region. As early as their first encounter, they were 'hired' by missionary Goddard to clean a road that linked a nearby oil company camp to the mission station in Cerro León. In exchange for their work they were to receive axes (see Keefe *In* NTM&ISB 1977). On the same trip, missionary Goddard left *Ikevi Posorajai* with twenty traps to teach fellow Ayoreo how to use them. This was the first step towards incorporating them into the fur trade that was booming at the time in the Chaco region.

Initially, missionaries bartered material goods (such as food and tools) with the Ayoreo in exchange for work. Soon they introduced them to the cash economy through the implementation of so-called work programs. These involved activities such as trapping and logging, which reflected the extractive logic of the region. In a brief period of time, the missionaries developed an organized trapping enterprise which became their main source of income and which helped sustain the mission economically. The missionaries were the exclusive providers of supplies (i.e. rifles and traps) and closed the deals with buyers. The skins of *gato onza* (*Felis pardalis*) and *gato montes* (*Felisgeoffroyi*) provided an important income to the mission, as they took 50% of the profits made by Ayoreo. That income supported the work-programs and was used to invest in the mission's infrastructure.[85]

Another economic activity included the logging of *quebracho colorado* trees (*Schinopsis quebracho-colorado).* The mission arranged for a tannin factory

[85] They had 100 Ayoreo employed in the trapping venture by 1973. This economic activity ended abruptly in 1975 as a result of the bust in prices in the global market.

located in *Loma Plata*, a Mennonite town, to buy the logs.[86] Ayoreo were also put to harvest buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare)* seeds for sale, and were employed at the mission's saw mill and factories (for brick and adobe production). In addition, with funding from trapping and financial support from the Mennonites and US-AID, a cattle program was established, for which Ayoreo cleared pasture lands and installed fences.

The missionaries argued that they wanted Ayoreo self-sufficiency and independence. However, their actual proceedings contradicted this rhetoric, since no Ayoreo was involved in administrative and decision-making processes. Their participation was limited to being deployed as the labor force for the mission, revealing how unequal power relations were established and economic dependency took root. All the economic activities in the mission took place in the context of a patron-client relationship through which the missionaries became employers of the Ayoreo, and also the exclusive provider of services. The mission owned a store where they sold basic food staples and utensils to the Ayoreo with a 30% mark up. They also opened credit accounts by which, according to the missionaries, Ayoreo individuals were "taught" to save money and or/ spend it over a more prolonged period of time (NTM& ISB 1977:7).

By the mid-1970s, their dependency on marketed goods had increased substantially at Faro Moro. During dry seasons, 70% of their food was store-bought. This dependency was a direct consequence of the increased amount of time taken up by wage labor activities, which partly hindered the pursuit of

[86] By the mid-1970s, some 50 Ayoreo men were employed in logging and extracted approximately 700kg/day.

subsistence activities.[87] The decline of subsistence activities in turn shifted the balance of gender roles in the productive sphere.

Gender inequalities grew as Ayoreo were introduced to wage labor since it was established as a male-only sphere. Colonial Mennonite discourse about Ayoreo women as 'dirty' and 'uncivilized' fostered a stigma that resulted in their exclusion from the work force. Women became dependent on male family members to get cash for the daily needs of their families. These politics triggered not only women's economic dependency on men but would later also create historical patterns of structural violence (i.e. violence that fosters economic and social inequalities), reproduced through discrimination and exclusion in urban spaces (c.f. Das 2007, Green 1999).

Overall, the economic activities missionaries implemented served not only to financially sustain the mission but also to give coherence to their missionary enterprise of 'civilizing' and 'Christianizing'. Moreover, the creation of a 'missionized' Ayoreo subject through the inculcation of European values would later facilitate the Mennonite project of economic expansion, in which the Ayoreo would also be deployed as a labor force.

Along with the introduction of wage-labor activities, the missionaries also tried to institute changes in Ayoreo conceptions of time. As missionary Norman Keefe noted, the Ayoreo were not used to work by the hour (NTM&ISB 1977). According to him, they would only work for a few hours and then stop. He stated, "Our desire was to teach them that work for the civilized would be rewarded in

[87] One of the main problems was that the rainy season coincided with seasonal work in the colonies, so only those that remained at the mission could cultivate their plots.

proportion to the amount of work put into it." Over time the Ayoreo increased their work hours but they expected to be all equally rewarded, regardless of the amount of hours they had worked individually. Because of this, missionaries found it more convenient to switch from hourly wages to a system of piecework in which the Ayoreo were paid according to the task completed, regardless of the time spent on it (NTM&ISB 1977). This system allowed them to intensify labor and minimize daily wages, even as it seemed more attractive to Ayoreo who reportedly preferred to accommodate labor activities established by the mission and other still relevant activities such as going on hunting trips or warfare trips.

Not all changes brought to them by missionaries were passively incorporated. Ayoreo crafted their own spaces for maneuvering according to their own needs and desires. The use of the piece-work system, for example, was used by Ayoreo as a way of contesting the new time-discipline imposed on them. They did this by engaging in other activities, such as hunting at times when they were expected to be working for the missionaries. Also, against missionary desire, many of them would temporarily leave the mission to work in ranches in the Mennonite Colonies rather than staying and working at the mission.

Becoming Christians

To achieve their conversion goals, missionaries resorted to dichotomies of good/bad and Satan/God to inspire fear among the Ayoreo and accelerate their conversion. The way to do this was to establish their 'traditional' culture as 'bad' in opposition to Christianity, which was constructed as 'good'. Eventually, this duality invaded all aspects of Ayoreo life and was also transferred to the new

spatial arrangement of the mission that was constructed in opposition to the spaces of the 'jungle'. The latter was conceived as the place of 'darkness' where Ayoreo continued to engage in killings and other practices that were prohibited on mission grounds.

The NTM constructed Ayoreo religion as "witchcraft" and their culture as belonging to the realm of the satanic/evil. This view of indigenous peoples is revealed in the following text by a NTM missionary, which she wrote to justify and give meaning to their Christianizing intervention:

> Most primitive tribal people are steeped in cultural practices initiated and motivated by superstition and fear. 'Religion,' usually the cultural hub from which almost all aspects of the native cultures, is generally a spiritist form of worship which is energized by satanic forces. Consequently, it is common to find practices such as infanticide, murder, witchcraft, etc as a way of life. Have you ever had to murder your newborn infant as an act of worship or religious practice? Have you ever had to observe the slow decay of a loved one's body over a period of days? Are you getting a pretty picture of a happy people? But even more serious than these areas are the empty hearts and lives left unfulfilled and without hope beyond the grave. […] For us 'civilized' people death is only an occasional inconvenience to our lives as we have so many things to occupy our minds from such thoughts. Not so with the forgotten native in the last frontiers, as his environment leads to frequent death and unfortunately the lack of hope to sustain him through it. No, the native is not a happy person merrily romping through the jungle in perfect harmony with nature as many anthropologists would try to make one believe. He is a person lacking true purpose and fulfillment in life. Only in Christ is there real happiness and peace"(Brown Gold 1955:3).

According to this view, 'traditional' cultural practices are 'satanic' and can only lead to unfulfilled and unhappy lives for indigenous peoples. The Eurocentric values embedded in this Judeo-Christian world-view were strongly rooted among Ayoreo by missionaries at first, and later by Ayoreo pastors themselves. Three decades later the same discourse has been appropriated by self-identified

Christian Ayoreo who today describe their 'old' practices as "shameful", therefore as having to be forgotten. As an Ayoreo put it to me, "The lives of our forefathers had no meaning. They only did bad things. But we are no longer like they were. We are Christians now". This is a discursive trope commonly heard among Ayoreo today.

During the initial decades, missionaries devoted their work to transform Ayoreo into 'new people'. The initial step towards achieving this was to introduce the logics of Christianity to the Ayoreo on a conceptual level. To do this, they re-appropriated Ayoreo religious terms and concepts to re-inscribe their meanings, associating them with Christian figures and ideas. In this way, the deity *Guede* for example, to whom Ayoreo would worship and ask for favors, became associated with *Dupade*, the Christian God. Eventually, *Dupade* started to permeate myths of *Guede* to the point that today, the term *Dupade/Guede* is used interchangeably. Another important figure, *Poji* or lizard[88], which for Ayoreo was a powerful Being associated with negative powers, was related to Satan. In addition, some Ayoreo terms were also re-defined to acquire Christian meanings. *Pujopie* for example, which Ayoreo used to refer to an inherent power associated with shamanism, was re-introduced to invoke the power of the Holy Trinity. In a similar way, the term *Jnani Bajade* shifted from being used to refer to the Ayoreo forefathers to name the protagonists from the Old Testament.

At the level of praxis, missionaries engaged in disciplining mechanisms that they expected would establish a new normative identity and foster Christian values among the Ayoreo. As in most colonial contexts, the body became the

[88] *Tupinambis* sp.

primary target of such disciplinary techniques (cf. Comarroff 1991). The spaces of the mission were expected to be 'free' of old practices such as dances, shamanic activities, and other practices that could interfere with the process of conversion.

Practices such as the habit of standing and looking in the direction of the Sun to request favors with screams, was requested by missionaries to be done silently and without having to be in front of the sun. The main Ayoreo ritual related to *Asojna* or the God-bird was prohibited on the mission grounds. This was problematic, since the breaking of this taboo was believed to have negative consequences for Ayoreo. Aware of this, the missionaries replaced the time of the ritual with a festive day, which according to Lind (1974:82), involved" the cleaning up of the mission, the use of party clothes and a Church service as a way to reduce the anxiety for not doing the ritual."

Missionaries discouraged Shamanic activities by prohibiting the use of the shamanic pipes necessary for trances. To counter the influence of shamans, numerous young preachers-to-be were recruited. The degree to which missionaries focused on destroying Ayoreo traditional symbols and values is also revealed in the emblematic book about NTM missionary Bill Pencille and his missionary work among Ayoreo in Bolivia. The book, called *The Defeat of the God Bird* (Wagner 1967) recalls his innumerable attempts to convince Ayoreo that their God-bird *Asojna* was an "insignificant", and "vindictive" bird incapable of having power to kill any man.

While missionaries introduced schooling for everyone, Bible study became a male-exclusive sphere. This not only relegated women to second place, but

older men as well, since as mentioned above missionaries recruited mainly younger generations for Bible study. Anthropologists David Maybury-Lewis and James Howe noted this in a report they prepared for Cultural Survival following a trip to Faro Moro in 1978:

> The traditional leader with whom we spoke told us that he himself was a devout Christian and still a chief. But, he added, the old chiefs never met anymore these days. Decisions were taken by the new chiefs, younger men who could read the Bible (Maybury-Lewis and Howe:1980:70).

In this way, church adhesion became fundamental to sustaining one's leadership role. Missionaries therefore had a great deal of influence on Ayoreo leadership. From the beginning their goal was to eradicate all "witch-doctors." This automatically excluded older, more traditional leaders from remaining in power and eventually led to tensions between generations. Over time, being a pastor would become an important source of social prestige for Ayoreo, and as a result, Christianity was seen as a "new" and "appealing" alternative to access power and social standing. Christian pastors eventually formed a new social stratum previously occupied by shamans. Unlike other existing traditional leaders, pastors received special training in speaking, writing, and reading Spanish, which added to their status because it allowed them to engage non-Ayoreo people. Women were not given access to these skills (other than through regular schooling), and this predetermined their future role vis-à-vis missionaries, Ayoreo, and non-Ayoreo society. The traditional participation and support of women in their husbands' decision-making processes or specific events is not active in the realm of Christianity. These are responsibilities exclusively delegated to men. Only men have the training and preparation necessary to speak

publicly about the Bible and deliver sermons. Ayoreo women never actively participate in these activities; for the most part they constitute the church chorus.

Along with changes in practices that sought to shape 'new' people, missionaries simultaneously introduced new hygiene regimes, which were considered a priority.

> Even during the early stages of the friendly contacts with the missionaries, these tribes' people were dirty, unkempt and plagued by disease, in some cases brought on by their contacts with civilization. (Brown Gold 1953:6)

Paternalistic discourses of missionaries and outsiders alike constructed Ayoreo physical bodies as involving excesses that needed to be contained. A Mennonite who visited them shortly after they were contacted portrayed them as follows:

> 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 (Giesbrecht *In* Hein 125).

Missionaries believed it was their duty to administrate Ayoreo bodies, adjusting them to what they perceived as 'acceptable' standards that would help inculcate Christian values. In this way, even the most trivial cultural practice came to be seen in negative light and as a justification to their civilizing project.

> One of their means of subsistence was honey gathered from the hives of wild bees scattered through the jungle. Since they had no knives or forks, the honey was gathered in their fingers and put into their mouths, with liberal droppings on their chests and other portions of their bodies. They became filthy because they did not wash but rather to avoid the stickiness dirt was rubbed on the honey which remained on their bodies and a thick coating was gradually built up over the year. […] While our primary purpose was not to change their habits and customs, this was an incidental but very necessary part of the change wrought in their lives when they came into contact with the message of salvation (Brown Gold 1953:7).

Missionaries framed their conversion efforts in terms of the Ayoreo's own interest in change. According to one missionary, "they seek with great persistence the way towards white people's civilization and they have understood that they have to adapt themselves" (Klassen *In* Hein, 1990:159). Such naïve perception denies the unbalanced power relations between Ayoreo and missionaries at the time of contact, which forced them to settle in mission stations and eventually convert to Christianity. Ayoreo entered into a subordinated relationship with missionaries, depending on them first for access to food supplies and then for cash. As mentioned earlier, a patron-client relationship was established, which implicitly forced Ayoreo to be on good terms with them to access material goods and eventually acquire symbolic power vis-à-vis other Ayoreo.

New Ethical Values

Missionaries fostered the cultivation of Christian values of life, of individual inwardness, sexual chastity, fidelity, and humility. In order to inculcate such values, 'sinful' practices such as killings and warfare, infanticide and sexual practices of women outside of marriage had to be eradicated. Missionary Buchegger noted this in referring to the growing numbers of baptized Ayoreo over time:

> [By] 1972, there were over two hundred believers and 180 baptized Christians. This was a good percentage out of approximately 500 Ayorés (sic) that were in the camp then. To bring this about there was daily witnessing, counseling and teaching, sometimes correcting things in their lives that clearly were contradictory to the Word of God, such as witchcraft, polygamy, burying unwanted babies and old people alive, killing, lying, cheating and stealing (Buchegger 2003:79).

For Ayoreo, killings were closely linked to bravery, which is considered one of the most appreciated Ayoreo cultural values, essential to the construction of a sense of male virility. Along with prestige and potency, courage was acquired exclusively through killings. The leadership rank with the highest social prestige attached to it was the *asute*, a position reserved for those who achieved a significant number of killings (mainly of humans). They were given the honor to guide the killing raids and achieve even more killings that way. According to Ayoreo elders, in order of importance, killing a white person brought the maximum prestige, followed by the killing of jaguars, men, women and children (cf. Califano 1976).

In this context, the public display of anger was conceived as a positive value constitutive of courage. Not only men, but also women who displayed anger at the right time and in the proper amount, were seen with respect. But missionaries considered this a negative value and a hindrance to the submission and conversion they sought from Ayoreo. While Ayoreo used the term *ajningare* to refer to courage, missionaries re-defined it to mean anger, indignation, or rage, giving it a negative 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 given to courage. Over time, Ayoreo themselves started to re-define killings according to the same negative tone as missionaries:

> Before [during life in the forest] my parents killed white people. If a white person arrived, they would always kill him. If they did not like another Ayoreo, they would also kill them. They killed without reason. Before, I was very bad too because I did not know anything. I almost killed other people

> too. It was hard. But then I started to believe in Christ. When someone believes in Christ, our inside gets clean and our thinking becomes clean too.

The analogy between a new Christian life and being "clean" in the inside is no coincidence, but the result of years of mission doctrine that denigrated their 'old' ways. In a similar way, women's practices of getting mad to deserve respect, was devalued and women were expected to show humility towards their friends and family. An Ayoreo woman told me:

> Before, I wanted to be mean to be important in front of other women, so that they would respect me. Before we were baptized, we were all with Satan. Even when we already were with *Dupade*, Satan did not want to leave us soon. He wanted us to be with him. That is why it took me time to leave the bad ways.

While the missionaries hoped that after contact life in the mission would be pacific, for several years Ayoreo continued to be involved in ongoing raids to kill the remaining "savages", as missionaries as well as Paraguayans and Mennonites referred to non-sedentarized Ayoreo.[89] Ayoreo trips to the forest, which could be masked as hunting trips, were actually organized killing raids, mainly of *Totobie-gosode.* Some of these episodes were documented by missionaries who justified such undertakings of the newly-converted, arguing that Ayoreo were 'afraid of being killed' (Buchegger in see Hein 1990). They were aware that the rifles provided by the mission to engage in the fur trade were used instead for killing enemies. As a result of this, the sub-group *Totobie-gosode* dramatically diminished in population during that time.

[89] See Buggecher 1990:143

In 1975, an Ayoreo group of evangelical preachers from Bolivia visited Faro Moro. Interviews with elders revealed that this trip to teach fellow Ayoreo about *Dupade urode*, ('the words of God'), marked a new beginning for many Ayoreo who until then did not conceive of themselves as believers. A few years later, missionary-wife Margaret Lattin asserted that the Ayoreo "no longer lived in darkness, but in the light and because they lived in the light they wanted to have communion with the other groups, according to Saint John 1,7. This also included their enemies" (Lattin *In* Hein 1990:162). This later triggered the organization of the first "missionary crusade" of the *Guidai-gosode* (with the support of the missionaries) to take the gospel to their mortal enemies the *Totobie-gosode* who were still 'uncontacted'. In 1979, this led to the search and contact of eleven of them with their respective families. Despite their firm denial of support for this endeavor, the missionaries were nonetheless severely criticized (cf. Escobar 1989, Holland 1975).

In 1986 the story would repeat itself again, as a new group of *Totobie-gosode* was reached and contacted by the *Guidai-gosode*. Five of the latter died as a result of the encounter—becoming, in the eyes of *Guidai-gosode* and missionaries, 'Ayoreo martyrs'. At the time, in response to the criticisms that missionaries received again, the director of the NTM in Paraguay, Fred Sammons, told the press:

> There are people who like to say that the Ayoreo were happy in the forest: 'Leave them alone' they say. However, if you ask anybody from those who have lived in your civilization if they want to go back to their previous life the response is always a NO. Why then knowable men allow themselves to force indigenous peoples to live a life that they do not wish? (Vysokolan 1989: 296)

Another form of killing that was embedded in cultural practices of Ayoreo was infanticide. Ayoreo refer to the act of being born as *basui* which translates as "to fall."Usually, a spot was prepared for the newborn child to "fall" on the ground, and a hole was dug nearby to move the child into it if he was not going to be kept. This decision, made by the mother with the support of family members, depended on several factors. Premature infants and children with any types of deformities were killed. The birth of twins was considered a taboo and therefore they were not kept. Unmarried women who were not prepared to have children would abort, as well as women who underwent a recent divorce or death of husband. Finally, it was also common to kill the first newborn child in a new marriage because men were not able to be certain of their fatherhood (see Chapter II for details).

Bugos and MacCarthy (1999) conducted research on infanticide in Ayoreo villages in Bolivia. A large proportion of the cases of infanticide in their data occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They corroborated that infanticide rates were exceptionally high during this period in Ayoreo history (compared to the immediately preceding and following time periods). The reason given to Bugos and MacCarthy by Ayoreo women was that b they were "frightened" by the new missionary presence, so few kept their babies. Ironically, the missionary presence had a negative impact on the reproductive cycle of women, triggering the latter to practice infanticide at higher rates during the period of contact.

In Paraguay, this coincides with Susnik's (1963) observations at the Catholic missionary camp soon after contact in 1962. She noted that in that group there were no breastfeeding children and very few pregnancies. Abortive practices were

a common practice for Ayoreo women, especially when staying in temporary locations. In *Faro Moro,* infanticide became no longer socially accepted. In discussing this with a woman who lived in Faro Moro, she argued:

> Back then I already heard the teachings, but I still did not forget our old ways. It was hard for me to forget those things. Back then I thought about Christ, but I still behaved in a bad way. I went around with men and also buried my first child. Before, I would do things that were not good, but now I have left those ways.

Missionary-wife Violeta Buchegger established a temporary orphan house for children who were to be killed. Missionaries also fostered adoption of unwanted children as an alternative to infanticide. This brought as a consequence an increase in the family size that also had an impact on the ordering of the domestic sphere for women. Ayoreo productive practices, which during pre-contact focused mainly on food gathering and production, now shifted almost exclusively to child rearing.

Courting and Sexuality Reconsidered

During the trip of Dr. Susnik[90]to one of the temporary Catholic settlements of Ayoreo in Teniente Martinez, her attention was called to the "freedom in their relations" [of women]. Her records portray women as so invested in their sexual relations with men that she thought they were not respecting the clan exogamy taboos and she perceived them as having "no consideration of the group of the new partner" (Susnik, 1963:3).

This portrayal echoes chauvinistic Western notions of Ayoreo sexuality, shared by Paraguayans and Mennonites alike. They perceived Ayoreo sexual practices as

[90] A renowned anthropologist of Slovenian origin who migrated and settled in Paraguay after World War II who did extensive ethnographic and ethnohistoric work on indigenous peoples of Paraguay.

promiscuous and therefore saw them as morally fraught. Concepts of virginity and Christian values of sexual chastity and submission of women were not advocated by Ayoreo women who, on the contrary, (and as shown in the previous chapter) traditionally encouraged young women to initiate sexual contact and actively engage their sexuality from early puberty until finding a permanent partner. With the process of missionization, women were expected to adopt accepted (Christian) models of sexual behavior that focused on sexual chastity for unmarried women and procreation for married women. As an Ayoreo woman put it, "*Asigué-de* told us that we should not do bad things. If someone wanted a man, one could no longer leave him to go with another man afterwards. Those were the teachings of *Asigué-de*."

The sexual availability enjoyed by unwed men and women as expressed through facial and bodily painting soon came under the scrutiny of missionaries. Dances, such as the *erai* dance, that served as triggers for sexual encounters (in these dances women would approach and engage men that they liked) *erai* were soon prohibited. The tension between the customary practices of youth and the new Christian teachings is revealed in the following statement by an elder man who referred to his younger years at Faro Moro:

> I heard about God, but I did not want to leave my life of *ajacare* [young man]. Every afternoon *Asigue-de* would follow me and my friends around because we would paint ourselves every day. He would tell us: 'You are good looking kids, but in front of you there will be eternal fire. If you do not accept Christ, you will fall into it'. No one explained to us when that would happen. We thought it was about to happen.

In this way, practices such as dances and the use of traditional adornment and body paintings—all of which were associated with practices of flirting and

courting— were soon abolished. These prohibitions, I argue, are part of a larger trend in Protestantism, which as Keane (2004) has claimed, has an anxious concern to distinguish subject from object, i.e. the de-materialization of the person and a focus on inwardness.

But despite missionary public control over such practices, the independence of Ayoreo women to engage their sexuality continued to survive despite Christianity. This was possible because missionaries shifted sexuality from the public to the private realm, making women's practices less visible, which allowed them to survive over time. The establishment of sexuality as a private matter replicated 19th century Victorian bourgeois society that confined issues of sex to the private realm in an effort to establish a new, controlled relation of the self to sexuality (cf. Foucault 1974). The Christian ideology of sexuality, which constructs a woman´s sexual role as submissive and her sexual practices devoted exclusively to purposes of procreation, never quite permeated Ayoreo sexual subjectivities. Up to the present, the practice of unmarried women having multiple partners and independently engaging their sexuality, continues to define Ayoreo sexuality and is not considered morally fraught. Nevertheless, due to pressure from missionaries, Ayoreo have adopted a moralizing discourse that constructs these practices as negative. This discourse, however, still contradicts young women´s practices related to sexuality.

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, the initial missionary project of 'salvation' and 'civilization' did not take root immediately, despite the strict conversion

methodologies introduced by missionaries. Mainly in the beginning, Ayoreo made use of the mission stations according to their own convenience despite missionary expectations. They did this, for example, by constantly moving between the two established missions (one Catholic and the other Protestant), sometimes even being baptized twice to benefit from material goods that each mission could provide (as well as to avoid problems with missionaries). They also used the spaces of the forest to engage in activities prohibited at the mission, and as a way to avoid engaging in the obligatory 'work-projects' of the missionaries at Faro Moro. Moreover, during the initial years, rather than using the mission as a ground of 'spiritual salvation,' they deployed it to plan and conduct killing raids.

Over time, social control customarily acquired through taboos, shamans, and the leadership of the *asute* ('chief') shifted towards the observance of social rules established by *Dupade* and missionaries. Slowly, Ayoreo assimilated Christian values and with time 'traditional' practices which were considered a threat to Christianity were eliminated, some of them at least in the eye of missionaries. Values related to sexuality, in contrast, survived despite decades of inculcation of Christian values. Although adoption became a substitute to infanticide, this has not stopped young women from actively engaging their sexuality. Ayoreo women no longer practice infanticide, and since abortive methods are rarely used, adoptions have become the primary alternative

In recent years, the high percentage of unwanted pregnancies has also increased, and the increasing occurrence of adoption is becoming a major social problem, as Ayoreo families do not have the economic means to support many of

these children. Practices related to other values, like courage, were re-signified and adapted to new situations as killings became prohibited and were eventually stopped altogether. In the new Christian context, being a preacher became a new source of prestige and authority for Ayoreo men. Other practices, such as those related to values of charity, were equated with practices of exchange and reciprocity that did not demand a big change in Ayoreo customary practices. However, the monetization of women´s sexuality (the exchange of sex for money, something I discuss in Chapter IV) has become a major social problem in the eyes of missionaries. Ayoreo, in contrast, have incorporated this practice without moral issues attached to it, which strongly suggests that Ayoreo customary ethical values related to sexuality continue to function in tandem with Christianity.

Leaving the 'old' ways and having to accept the 'new' ways was a constant source of anxiety for Ayoreo during the initial period of conversion. Eventually Ayoreo learned to accommodate different colliding ethical practices, revealing that, as Robbins (2004) has also argued of the Huli in Papua New Guinea, they selectively function according to different ethical systems—the Christian one and their Ayoreo system of values derived from the Ayoreo ontology of sexuality. Women´s practices in the realm of sexuality reveal the continuity of pre-mission values embedded in the principles of the *Jnani Bajade*. The specific focus of missionary conversion methods drove some practices to survive over others. Nevertheless, the intense process of missionization has marked Ayoreo discursive production of themselves in relation to their pre-contact practices in a negative way. Today, most Ayoreo use the same rhetoric as missionaries do, which is

based on dichotomies of 'old bad ways' versus 'new good ways' to refer to their present life versus their own past. They construct their pre-missionary life as the time of "not knowing anything" of "being without meaning in life."

Since the missionaries focused on the erasure of specific aspects of Ayoreo customary culture, they perceived the role of anthropologists as precisely the opposite of theirs; i.e. as 'rescuers' of that 'traditional' culture they were trying to erase. As a result, the latter were constructed as a threat to their civilizing endeavor. The following statement is an example of this perception:

> We believe that any attitude or trend to thwart the furtherance of the Gospel to any people by any means is a satanic move to interfere with the building of God's church and must be dealt with unreservedly (Escobar 1989).

Anthropologists interested in aspects of Ayoreo 'traditional' culture were regarded by missionaries as people belonging to the realm of the bad and evil. The position of the NTM against anthropologists concerning the working methodologies of the latter among Ayoreo grew even more severe following official denunciations they received from anthropologists (cf. Arens 1978). Despite this, there have been instances of collaboration between anthropologists and missionaries that transcend their differences.

The perceived antagonistic position between missionaries and anthropologists was also inculcated among the Ayoreo, who rejected the presence of anthropologists among themselves for many decades. Ayoreo refer to anthropologists as *abuja*, a person with a lot of money, with no religion and interested in the 'old ways' of Ayoreo.

Sidi: You are a bad person that is why you will not go to heaven. You are good to the people, but bad because you do not believe in God. Your heart is not clean.
Paola: What is going to change in me if I believe in God?
Acai: You will stop being an anthropologist. You will read the bible and will know everything.
Paola: Why would I stop being an anthropologist?
Acai: Because Jesus Christ does not want that.
Paola: Where is that written?
Sidi: In the bible, if you read it, you will find it. Christ loves anybody; he loves you too, so that you can believe in him.
Paola: If I am a believer and an anthropologist at the same time. What will God think?
Sidi: It is like with Zaccheus in the Bible. He was a very bad person, but then his life changed and he received Christ too.
Acai: Paola, it seems that missionaries work like you do, doing a book for the Ayoreo but they do not ask Ayoreo bad things, that is why their work is good. The missionaries do the same work, but don't ask bad things.
Paola: What are bad things?
Acai: I heard that Rosa María [another anthropologist] wanted to work with the people from Chaidi [another village] on topics related to sexuality, like things that go on between couples and those are bad things.

Ayoreo antagonism to anthropologists comes not only from the fact that many anthropologists seek to learn about what Christian Ayoreo consider taboo topics, like sexuality. This animosity is also related to the fact that many anthropologists do not tend to accept the incorporation of Christian ideology as an important part of the contemporary Ayoreo sense of personhood. In this way, anthropologists are inevitably denying what has come to be an important aspect of Ayoreo lives, according to the Ayoreo themselves.

Over time, Ayoreo individuals have come to develop their own version of Christianity. For them, conversion means changing the place of their hearts/minds ('*ecare ayipiei*') a profound process that inevitably has devalued their own customary practices to a certain extent. However, they have undoubtedly also

incorporated their own cultural nuances into their Christian practices. The appeal of Christianity lies in its apocalyptic nature, which for Ayoreo will bring change and provide an alternative to the hardships and discrimination they experience.

According to Ayoreo, current signs that the end of the world is near include, among others, the increasing disregard for authorities and parental teachings, the high prices of food, and earthquakes. They construct heaven as a place with money and gold where things will be free and not for purchase. For believers, heaven is a place where they will no longer suffer hunger, sickness and the sadness that they experience in their daily lives. This is how one Ayoreo put it to me:

> If I don't have food I feel sad. If I do not have clothes, I feel sad. If somebody talks bad against me, I feel sad. Some days I am happy, but other days this changes again. But they say these things won't happen in heaven. According to the Bible no one will suffer in heaven anymore. There, people will have tears in their eyes, not from sadness, but from happiness. This is because people will have full stomachs. Nobody will be hungry or sad.

In the current context of the Chaco, discrimination towards indigenous peoples is rampant and economic hardships are the rule, and to a certain extent Ayoreo continue to depend on missionaries to access material goods and work. Being Christian seems to be one of the few attractive paths to follow.

CHAPTER IV

Rethinking 'Sex Work': The Monetization of Ayoreo Women's Sexuality

Introduction

In this chapter, I show how the commoditization of Ayoreo social relations over time has triggered the monetization of young women's sexuality. I contend that despite the monetization of this sphere, women continue to understand their sexuality as a relational strategy embedded in pre-missionary systems of exchange. Drawing on the concept of commoditization I argue that the process of monetization of the sexual exchange—as the Ayoreo case reveals—does not necessarily involve the commoditization of women's bodies.

Accounts of nineteenth century social theorists, despite their evolutionary frameworks, already took into account the role not just economic but also of social factors in shaping the introduction of general-purpose monies (Marx 1967; Polanyi 1944; Simmel 1957). This framework was later adopted by anthropologists who emphasized the eroding effects of 'capitalist' money as it began to circulate in previously non-monetized 'traditional' societies (cf. Taussig 1980 and more recently Lee and LiPuma 2002). One limitation of these perspectives is that they stress two characteristics of money: its commodifying role and its universal and uniform scale of valuation (cf. Harvey 1982). Drawing from the Ayoreo case, I aim to destabilize these taken-for-granted characteristics. Rather than assuming money's role as disembedded and depersonalized from social relations, I question the assumed commensuration of the value ascribed to money. Building on recent scholarship in the anthropology of money that

challenges the universalism of economic models (Bloch and Perry 1989; Maurer 2006; Constable 2009), I show how Ayoreo do not see the intersection of intimate relations and money as socially or morally fraught. Money, rather than eliminating traditional systems of exchange, continues to function as a means of exchange in these very systems. In the Ayoreo case as long as this system is not disrupted, the exchange of money for sex is not regarded as problematic. This is best illustrated with the story of *Gieja*, an example that shows how colliding ethical practices regarding the monetization of sexuality shape the subjective encounters between young Ayoreo women and white men.

Gieja[91] met Santiago while her family was staying in the capital city of Asunción for her father's surgery. An Ayoreo fluent in Spanish, *Gieja* served as her parents' translator and navigator through the city. She was nineteen years old at the time, and Santiago was thirty-eight. He worked as a night guard at a body shop in front of the Catholic NGO that was hosting *Gieja* and her family. She told me that they first crossed paths the evening she went for a walk with her mother around the neighborhood looking for used clothes, as they did every time they visited Asunción. A few days later, 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[92], but she did not agree to it before having her father's permission. He approved of it "as long as he's not a married man"—this was

[91] All the names were changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees.
[92] The terms used by Ayoreo as well as people living in the region to identify different social groups will be retained here. Despite the fact that Ayoreo people are recognized as Paraguayan nationals, they refer to themselves as Ayoreo and not Paraguayans. They refer to non-Ayoreo white and mestizo people—excluding other indigenous groups in the area—as "Paraguayans." Mennonites-descent immigrants self-identify as Mennonites vis-à-vis "Paraguayans."

precisely the first thing *Gieja* asked him on their first date. As he confirmed he was not seeing anybody else, the relationship began. Each time they had sex, she requested money from him, and according to her, "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 'prostitution' with the approval of her parents. When I asked about the incident at the NGO, the employee who introduced *Gieja* to Santiago told me that he knew Santiago to be married and that it was obvious to him that *Gieja* was behaving like a "prostitute." When I shared my opinion that her parents had honest expectations about her relationship with Santiago, he laughed, unconvinced. Later, when I discussed the incident with *Gieja's* father, he minimized the fact that the NGO personnel expelled them from the compound, and instead emphasized his satisfaction at seeing *Gieja* happy with a Paraguayan man. He described Santiago as a generous man and talked proudly about the money and presents he gave to his daughter. He also mentioned that Santiago promised to buy a new chainsaw for the family—an expensive and important work tool for most Ayoreo.

After returning to the Chaco, *Gieja* continued to stay 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 trip with her to the city and drop her off. By then, her parents were enthusiastic about the possibility of their daughter marrying Santiago, despite being aware that Ayoreo-Paraguayan couples rarely lasted. Santiago was seen as a great source of economic support for the family, whose finances had been strained due to *Gieja's* father chronic illness. When I

returned to the Chaco the following year, I found out that *Gieja* became pregnant during one of her visits with Santiago, and when he declined to support her and the child, she and her family decided to give the child away. Evidently, *Gieja* and her family as well as Santiago had different understandings not only of their relationship, but of relationships in general.

For non-Ayoreo men, young women like *Gieja* are considered 'prostitutes.' Ayoreo, in contrast, do not consider sexual practices like those described above as ethically fraught. Instead, they are constitutive of young women's gendered personhood, as I perceived during the months I spent with many young women during fieldwork. Colliding moral values regarding Ayoreo women's sexuality foster competing expectations and generate unequal power dynamics in these subjective encounters. To non-Ayoreo men, the fact that young women request money in exchange for sex is immediately indicative of 'prostitution' and all the associated moral implications. For young women like *Gieja*, these encounters can be complicated, involving outright deception as well as symbolic and physical violence.[93] As divergent moral registers meet, conflicting expectations and practices take place and are reproduced, shaping young women's sexual subjectivities in new and unexpected ways.

Redefining the Commoditization of Bodies: The Value of Sex and Money

Feminist scholars have paid particular attention to the connection between money and intimate relations. Sociologist Arlie Hochschield's influential writings on service work (see Hochschield 2003, 2012) focus on the expansion of what she terms the 'commodity frontier' towards the private realm. She argues that as

[93] Physical abuses and unwanted pregnancies are not uncommon.

intimate tasks become increasingly monetized, they also become impersonal in nature and in the process bodies become commoditized. Such a view assumes that, because of money's depersonalizing 'power,' there is an 'emotional detachment' produced as people enter into market relations. As a Marxist feminist, her perspective is in tandem with the Marxist concept of commodity defined as an item that loses the personal value attached to it once it its is produced for the market. Many feminist scholars of 'prostitution' hold this same perspective, as they conceive the sexual transaction for money as dehumanizing in this way (see for example Barry 1996, Pateman 1990).

While influential, these approaches have not gone uncontested. Another group of feminists argue that sex work can be a form of labor, which can also coexist with affective processes (e.g.Bernstein 2007, Kempadoo et al 2005). Distancing themselves from moralizing discourses, they contend that money and affective relationships are intertwined and in the specific case of sexual liaisons, these also involve, beyond 'pure' monetary transactions, the affection and obligation of social ties. Such processes are discussed in detail in scholarship on sexual monetized liaisons in the tourism industry, where travelers and locals develop emotional ties beyond the sexual exchange; these ties can develop into long-term relationships, marriage and even outmigration (see Dozema 2004; Gregory 2007). Another similar type of monetary sexual arrangement, which has not received much attention in the feminist literature on sex work, is the "casa chica" phenomenon (see LeVine and Correa 1986). This sexual/emotional arrangement involves a long-term commitment to an extramarital affair. In addition to the

sexual liaison, the woman provides domestic labor (cooking, washing clothes, etc), and even bears children. This type of arrangement is common among men who work away from home, and it is not uncommon that they end up forming a 'second' long-term household (cf. White 1980, for a similar case in the African context). For women, these liaisons provide a source of semi-stable support from the male partner. The intricacies of arrangements such as this and those in the tourism industry make it difficult to encapsulate them as sex work. In this vein, a group of scholars exploring these types of sexual monetary transactions avoid using definitions of sex work altogether (see Cabezas 2009, Katsulis 2008, Wardlow 2006). While the sexual arrangements of Ayoreo women do not neatly fit the above discussed categories, this chapter seeks not to label Ayoreo women's sexual liaisons in exchange for money as sex work, but rather to analyze the historical and cultural contexts which have shaped the monetization of young women's sexuality in today's Chaco region.

My work departs from some feminist perspectives on sex work and other forms of 'tactical sex' in that most scholars treat the monetary exchange of sex for money as involving a process of commoditization. I argue that monetization does not necessarily involve the commoditization of bodies as defined by Marx. According to Marx's model of the labor process, an item becomes a commodity when its production involves labor surplus, "that which is extracted by the owner of the means of production" (Marx, 1967:74). As mentioned above, scholars of the care industry and sex work invoke this model, assuming that as bodies become monetized, they become commodities. However, a closer reading of Marx

indicates that in order to become commoditized, a product needs to derive from the provision of surplus labor. In this way, I argue that while Ayoreo bodies become monetized in the sexual exchange, there is no surplus labor to be extracted from the labor process. This is in contrast to contexts where women negotiate the exchange of sex for money through intermediaries (pimps). In such case, pimps are extracting the surplus value by keeping part of the money the sex worker's labor produces. This does not apply to the Ayoreo case.

Classic ethnographic accounts of Ayoreo have only superficially touched on sexuality as a category of analysis. Treated in broad terms and mostly described in the ethnographic present, they have oftentimes portrayed Ayoreo sexuality as a monolithic category bounded from other aspects that make up people's lives (e.g. Bórmida and Califano 1978, Fischermann 2001). To avoid such pitfalls, in this chapter, I outline the intricacies of Ayoreo sexuality in its multiplicity, and reject using a model that could imply a linear temporality to their practices (for similar approach see Bessire 2011). Pre-Christian depictions of Ayoreo sexuality and gendered practices do not pretend to serve as to essentialized representations of Ayoreo women, implying that their practices in the present might have 'lost' important aspects of their 'culture.'

In the last decade, a new wave of scholars has offered a more nuanced contribution to contemporary gendered relations among the Ayoreo (see for example Rojas 2004, Roca 2007). Most of these works refer to the monetization of Ayoreo sexuality. However, they treat it as a new phenomenon exclusively linked to the onset of practices of sex work (e.g. Nostas 2009, Suesnabar 1995). I

challenge these approaches by contending that the monetization of women's bodies is not a new phenomenon nor exclusively related to practices of 'prostitution.' Rather, this has been constitutive of youth sexuality for over two decades now. Through twelve years of fieldwork with the Ayoreo in the Chaco region of Paraguay, I found that this phenomenon is linked to larger processes of the commoditization of social relations, in which money has entered Ayoreo systems of exchange. Such understanding challenges the applicability of the category of 'sex work' to the sexual practices of these young women.

In the following sections, I first provide an outline of contemporary Ayoreo ethics of sexuality. To do this, I begin by focusing on practices of girls in two particular stages of the process of becoming Ayoreo women – *gapu gatode* and *gapu* – to explore how gendered practices of sexuality are constructed in conversation with and in opposition to customary and Christian values. Then, I explore how Ayoreo negotiate colliding ethical systems through gendered practices. Subsequently, I outline the ethics of exchange and the process of commoditization of social relations among the Ayoreo, to show how this has affected the realm of sexuality for their youth. To conclude the chapter, I focus on the monetization of sexuality in Ayoreo villages and in Filadelfia – exploring in the latter the *curajo* phenomenon by which young women monetize their sexuality with non-Ayoreo men in the Mennonite Colonies.

Becoming Young Women

Late one late afternoon, as I was driving along a rarely used forested path linking two Ayoreo villages, I spotted *Gata* walking with her youngest child. As I

approached, I saw her 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[94] to look for their daughter *Toque* and added, "She escaped today from the village with *Eri*. Her father and I are very upset especially because *Eri* is older and she can be a bad example for my daughter, but her mother is also looking for them." I nodded without quite understanding what was 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 'escape' of the girls. A few weeks later when I asked *Toque* and *Eri* themselves, they told me the story (in the Ayoreo language):

> *Paola*: So, what happened that day that you both escaped?
> *Toque*: [laughs - looking at *Eri*] She knows it too…
> *Eri*: Who told you, Paola? [they laugh]
> *Paola*: I found *Toque's* mother on my way from Campo Loro. She was looking for you guys [*Eri* and *Toque*, both laugh loud making short screams in between] Then, once I got to Tunu [the village Tunocojai] I heard that you both reached Filadelfia [By now I laugh too] Why did you go? What happened?
> *Eri*: I am sure you know the truck that comes every once in a while, with the guys that sell ice cream and watermelons.
> *Paola*: hmm, 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 *Toque*; so we left with them both in the truck [laughs]
> *Paola*: Were you not scared of what your mother [meaning her reaction]? [to *Eri*].
> *Eri*: No [laughs].
> *Paola*: What about you, *Toque*?
> *Toque*: I was very scared of my mother [laughs really hard].
> *Paola*: and what about the guys, were you scared of them?
> *Eri*: No, but she was a little [pointing to Toque] because she does not know

[94] The path links Campo Loro with Tunocojai. Campo Loro is the main and largest Ayoreo village, founded by New Tribes Missionaries in 1979. Tunocojai was founded in 1998, after a group of 40 families left Campo Loro due to internal conflicts. The two villages are located about 31 miles from Filadelfia.

white men yet [both laugh again].
Paola: 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. [Now the three of us are laughing very hard].
Paola: What did your mother say?
Eri: She did not say anything. She did not say anything because she found us. My father thought she would not find us.
Paola: So you did not 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. However, my mother was quicker and found us first there [Both laugh].

Toque, who is 14 years old, is a *gapu gatoi* (plural *gapudie gatode*) or 'girl with hair.' Nowadays, girls reach this age group between the ages of twelve and thirteen. The *caraguata* skirt, which marked the transition to becoming adolescent has now been substituted by Pakistani-imported nylon skirts or skinny jeans, make up, and high heels. In conversations with older women, they characterized the age-group *gapu gatode* as "those who already know sexual things about men" ('*Je ore chiraja jnanione unerai*'). Beginning at this time, girls are expected to start exploring their sexuality while still under parental control—mostly because parents perceive this period as starting earlier than in previous generations. While during daylight adolescent girls and boys are rarely spotted together, they are socially active during nighttime.[95] The gather in small groups to hang out, listen to music and talk, carving in this way their own social space separate from that of older people and married couples who oftentimes meet around the fire at the compound of the village chief.

During this period, a girl's sexuality becomes a public matter, co-constructed

[95] This practice resembles that of the Original Beings. See the practices of the small nighttime birds in Chapter II.

within the public sphere. Parents and family members, mostly female, have a public role in reinforcing codes of expected behavior for young girls. Frequently, after instances such as *Eri* and *Toque's* 'running away' story, mothers will openly scold their daughters in front of other people—usually around the fire which is one of the main communal spaces of village life. A mother may start out by recounting her daughter's actions, and contrasting it with how they expect her to behave. Older female family members or close friends contribute to the conversation with comments and advice. Oftentimes, this takes place in dialogue with anecdotes of similar events, which 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. In addition, parents, by publicly displaying their anger and preoccupation towards their daughter's actions, are openly reasserting their views and the values they uphold about young women's sexuality. Ayoreo have also found new spaces where they publicly negotiate issues related to gender and sexuality (mainly marital problems) through access and use of electronic media such as VHF radios, cell phones, and local radio stations. More than once Paraguayan radio hosts have reacted with shock and anger to hear Ayoreo discuss what they consider 'intimate matters'—such as affairs and cheating accusations—on radio stations that uphold Christian values.[96] While Ayoreo do not perceive these practices as ethically fraught, non-Ayoreo find that discussing in public what they perceive as

[96] *Paí Puku* and ZP 30 are the two main radio stations in the region. The former belongs to the Catholic Church and the latter to the Mennonite Church.

belonging to the private realm is shameful and dishonorable.

Around age seventeen, a *gapu gatoi* turns into a *gapu* (plural *gapudie*) or young woman. During this period, young women have room to engage their sexuality in an autonomous way. During this time, women—and not men—initiate sexual flirting and courting. *Gapudie* can wander around the village at night without parental restrictions and fully explore their sexuality by establishing temporary sexual partners with the opposite sex.

While some enter temporary relations with young men whom they call *gnamai* or 'boyfriend', sexual and emotional commitment to just one person is rare during this time-period. Men expect young women to move from one partner to another, a practice that is not seen as morally nor socially suspect, but rather constitutive of their process of becoming adult women. These practices are instances key to the formation of young women's gendered personhood. Unlike conceptions of flirting and courting in other cross-cultural contexts (see for example Hirsh and Wardlow 2004) Ayoreo do not construct relationships as an evolving process that reach their peak with sexual intercourse, which is usually considered the ultimate goal of relationships in other contexts. Moreover, Ayoreo women do not uphold virginity as a 'virtue' as considered by the mostly Christian population that surrounds them. For them, sexual intercourse is rather integrated into the broader process of flirting and courting.

Marriage

Young people consider parental permission and acceptance when choosing a permanent partner, since that person will become an integral part of the extended

household. Parents expect their children to tell them about this ahead of time and while some may not agree with their children's choices, most accept their decisions. There is no ritual associated with marriage other than moving into the spouse's household. It is common for young couples to marry and leave their partners several times before staying permanently with someone. While parents and family desire that newlywed couples stay together, most marriages of young people undergo an implicit trial period. As long as the couple does not bear children, the marriage can be terminated without being socially sanctioned, as the following case reveals:

> *Chicoi* was sixteen when he met his wife-to-be during his visits to a neighboring village. While his parents considered he was too young to get married, they accepted his decision to do so. With the approval and permission of his parents-in-law, he moved into his wife's household at her village. Soon after, he started working with his father-in-law at the brick factory from the mission-station. The relationship did not last because the new wife was jealous. Added to this, it was hard for him to adapt to the new household. As a result, in less than a year, they separated. His parents did not see this in negative light and supported his decision. Soon after, he married a second girl, from still another village with whom he has been together for over a year.

The relative sexual autonomy women enjoy while single becomes restricted once they are married. Although both partners expect fidelity, affairs are a rising phenomenon among young couples, which lead to frequent separations before having children. Nevertheless, during married life, all aspects of women's sexuality—including a couple's problems—continues to be a public matter belonging to the public sphere. The following narrative, provided by *Dutue* who is now thirty-five years old, throws light onto some of the aspects that shape the contemporary process of courting and marriage for most Ayoreo:

When I was seventeen, I had just returned to *Campo Loro* [his home village] from boarding school. I remember noticing how girls wanted me. I think it was because my skin was so white after having spent so much time inside the classroom. I had many girlfriends back then. I planned to go back to boarding school to continue my studies once the summer was over, but a girl approached my father, to ask permission to marry me. My father did not want me to marry somebody that would leave me afterwards, because at the time I enjoyed studying and thought about continuing with school.

I did not talk to her parents. She was the one who talked to my father. My father told me that she could marry me if she did not plan to leave me. That is how we, the Ayoreo, get married. Just like that. We do not get married in churches. After we got married, my father built a small house for me, next to his house. We were married for about four years, but we did not have children.

One day, I found out that every time I had to go work away from the village, she would go around looking for other guys. My father recommended that I leave her. But she was the first woman I had, so I loved her very much and it was hard for me to leave her. She continued to look for other men. After a while, I respected my friend's advice and finally left her. She was not sad, as she wanted to be with other men, not me.

After that, I was a bachelor again, I could go visit any place [i.e. village] whenever I wanted. One day I went to Ebetogue [an Ayoreo village] to visit some family, and met *Chise*, who would become my second wife. I met her through a cousin of mine. My cousin interceded between us to tell me that she wanted me. We saw each other for about a week and decided to get married. She talked to her parents, and I talked to my parents. My father told me, "if she wants to marry you, she can." After that, we decided to get married. We also decided to stay and live with my parents because I had work in my parents' village.

She already had a child from a previous marriage. Some Ayoreo do not like to raise those children, but I was ok with it. Regardless, she decided to give it to her mother because she had already been raising him for a while. We started having children a year later. Her mother continued to help us raise our three children by taking them with her occasionally. That made things easier for us.

Unlike marriages between Ayoreo, unions with non-Ayoreo women are non-existent at present, and unions with non-Ayoreo men are still few, although the latter is on the rise in recent years (details in the next Chapter) and regarded with suspicion as Ayoreo do not consider them *yocurasade*, or 'our people'. When I

inquired into how they differed from Ayoreo men, women said that white men cheat on their Ayoreo wives, and sometimes have a parallel family. Moreover, they decline to be responsible for their children after getting a girl pregnant. Lack of commitment is the main negative trait that drives Ayoreo not to approve of their daughters having relations with Paraguayan men. This is how an Ayoreo woman put it, “Paraguayan men are different than the Ayoreo. They do not really want Ayoreo women, so when they take them in, after a month or so, they leave them again. Paraguayans have different customs ('*ore mapiedie care*')." However, younger generations of parents seem more open to 'mixed' marriages despite the repeated failures that most Ayoreo women experience in their relationships with Paraguayans. This I noticed one day as I took a pregnant teen, *Dasuja,* at the time sixteen years old, and her mother to a doctor’s appointment.

> *Paola*: So, your husband is Paraguayan, right? What's his name?.
> *Dasuja*: Yes. Ricardo.
> *Paola*: How old is he?
> *Dasuja*: Twenty-eight.
> *Paola*: How long have you both been together?
> *Dasuja*: About seven months. I only see him every two months in Filadelfia, because he works at a ranch near the border with Bolivia.
> *Paola*: So, he does not have another family where he comes from, right?
> *Dasuja*: No, he is not like most Paraguayans. He is very nice and does not lie.
> *Dasuja's Mother*: He is a hard working person, Paola. I see that he loves my daughter.
> *Paola*: That is good. [*Dasuja* laughs].
> *Dasuja's Mother*: Yeah, and *Dasuja* is not like other Ayoreo girls, she is clean and knows how to cook and clean a house. I can assure you Ricado will not leave her.

Due to ongoing discrimination towards Ayoreo, some individuals like *Dasuja's* mother have an implicit longing for acceptance by white people that drives them as parents to approve and encourage such relations. In describing her

daughter's 'traits' of a good wife, she was implicitly trying to cancel out the derogatory 'qualities' that Paraguayans usually use to refer to Ayoreo women. Later, I learned that relatives criticized her for approving the relationship and in a negative tone some Ayoreo mentioned that she was trying to emulate the life of white people by allowing her daughter to marry one of them. The following year that I returned to the Chaco, Ricardo was still around Filadelfia, but had left *Dasuja*, who was now in the streets of Filadelfia while the child was being raised by her grandmother.

Colliding Values of Sexuality

The fact that young women initiate sexual relations and are socially allowed to have temporary sexual partners until finding a permanent one is a major point of contention for non-Ayoreo people, who label these practices as ‘prostitution.' This is in particular more distressing for local Paraguayans and Mennonites who expect that Ayoreo as Christians, uphold Christian virtues of chastity. Ayoreo, despite self-identifying as Christian, do not condemn unmarried women's sexual practices. Such a *priori* contradictory stance of Ayoreo in this and other realms of their social life have driven scholars to often claim that they only hold Christian values superficially, and that they continue to hold their ‘traditional' beliefs as the basis of their ethical system (see Von Bremen 2000, Bartolomé 2002, and Fischermann 1988).

Ayoreo sexual ethics are more complex. Ayoreo ethical practices are co-constructed at the juncture of values derived from Ayoreo ontology of sexuality, colonial violence and Christian moral norms. Ayoreo in general and women in

particular take multiple subject positions in regards to the enactment of what they perceive as ethically correct. They do this by deploying a range of discourses and social practices according to the context in which they find themselves. In this way, women's sexual subjectivities are constructed by adopting different subject positions, a process which Moore has argued helps to 'highlight' the agency of the subject" (Moore 1995:65).

From Infanticide to Adoption

Ayoreo consider getting pregnant without a husband a source of shame for most girls and their families. Christian values, like Ayoreo customary values, morally sanction pregnancies outside of marriage. After missionaries prohibited infanticide, these practices stopped and most women shifted towards adoption, which was first introduced and inculcated concomitant with the Christian paramount value of life at the Faro Moro mission station. The following exchange reveals the ways in which contemporary women negotiate pre-marital pregnancies. The girl, in her mid-twenties, got pregnant from a Paraguayan:

> *Edua*: I was sad when I first found out I was pregnant because it was the first time it happened to me.
> *Paola*: Did you talk to your family about it?
> *Edua*: I talked to my mother and my mother's friend, *Ebedua*. They told me I had to take care of my body from that time on. *Ebedua* told me "if you marry the father of the child, you have to take good care of him"
> *Paola*: Did you talk about this with Rafael?
> *Edua*: I talked with him and he asked if the baby was his. I said "yes", but he did not say he wanted to come back to the Chaco and stay with me.
> *Paola*: How did you decide what to do with the baby?
> *Edua*: My mother told me that *Ugui* and his wife were looking to adopt the baby. She asked what I wanted to do. I said it was up to them [her parents]. They told me that if I wanted, I could give it away. And we decided to do so.
> *Paola*: Did you really want to give the baby away?

> *Edua*: Yes, because Rafael would not take the baby as his. If he would have accepted to take care of the baby, I would have kept him and we would not have left each other. I felt sad, but my mother told me "*Edua*, you should not be sad, because he was not willing to support you with the baby." Still, I thought about him for a long time.

Like *Edua*, unmarried women expect to keep the child only for a few months, until a kin member or close friend decides to adopt it. While the mother and grandparents make sure the child receives all the care needed during this time, women try not to attach themselves emotionally to the child. Seldom do grandparents keep the child, as it involves an extra economic burden, which not all families can afford. On the other hand, adoption can also put an extra burden on families receiving the child, as expenses related to the child's wellbeing can be high considering the typical income of the Ayoreo.

Observance of Moral Codes Related to Sexuality

In the present, young women constantly experience their sexuality in tension with Christian values. Non-Ayoreo people criticize women's sexual practices as lacking moral guidance (and therefore 'uncivilized'). They are unaware that the enactment of Ayoreo sexuality involves a complex set of negotiations of expected ethical codes of behavior on the part of girls. While young women have the independence to change partners, they can also run the risk of being labeled *dipote*. This is a derogatory term that makes reference to an 'insatiable sexual appetite' that a girl who changes partners too often cultivates. Such a label can be a source of severe criticisms—not only towards the girl in question—but to her family as well. As a result, young women carefully negotiate how they handle their sexual liaisons, to avoid creating problems between households.

The fact that Ayoreo now incorporate some Christian moral registers to guide their practices does not imply that feelings of shame and embarrassment related to previous moral orders have disappeared. While younger generations no longer explicitly guide their marital decisions based on taboos established by the Original Beings, shame that involves breaking some taboos, like the clan exogamy taboo for example, continues to be present and shape people's practices. On repeated occasions, I have heard people make jokes about this in relaxed ways. However, when serious fights break out, this becomes a source of insult and critique between families. A Christian churchgoer explained it like this to me: “If a person is not able to observe that rule, this means they are most likely not going to respect anything.”

Because women’s sexuality *per se* is not the target of moral scrutiny for Ayoreo, it is common to see daughters of Ayoreo Christian preachers engaging in monetary sexual liaisons in the streets of Filadelfia (a phenomenon I analyze in the following section). Families that have female members engaging in sex exchange for money in the city usually discursively construct their girls as "bad" when they are around missionaries and outsiders alike, people whom they know perceive those practices as morally fraught. Despite such discourses, their families and villages do not socially ostracize these girls. This is evidenced in that they are welcome each time they visit the villages. Moreover, their practices are not a hindrance to them in finding an Ayoreo husband. When they find a marriageable partner, they reintegrate into village life (this in the cases of girls living in Filadelfia).

While the exchange of sex for money is not seen as a moral issue, violence, unwanted pregnancies, and drinking that most of time go along with practices of monetizing their sexual liaisons in Filadelfia, are considered major social problems for most Ayoreo. In recent years drinking has become a major problem among Ayoreo youth in the city. As a result of this, it is common to see Ayoreo girls fight against each other due to jealousy over Paraguayan 'boyfriends'. These fights can be very rough and oftentimes trigger fights between families that try to defend their relatives. Abia, a *curajo,* narrated one such experience:

> I got in a fight with Naka over Juan, the truck driver. She was sleeping with him too. I wanted to give her what she deserved, for doing that. I called some girlfriends and we attacked her and her group of friends one night. I was already pregnant back then. I almost lost my baby because I was kicked very badly in the stomach. I also got hit with a heavy stick in the head, and was in the hospital for a few days afterwards.

Such incidents bring shame to young people as well as their families. These events, mostly triggered by the abuse of alcohol, lead to negative consequences for the parties involved. Non-Ayoreo in Filadelfia take advantage of these violent encounters to justify that all Ayoreo should leave the city and move back to their villages. Such instances of violence not only occur between Ayoreo, but also in interactions with non-Ayoreo men. Many young women experience violence on the part of 'clients', a taboo topic among girls and not discussed among local Mennonite and Paraguayans in Filadelfia either. (I discuss this in detail in the following Chapter). There is a growing trend in which most Ayoreo girls have their first sexual encounter in their early teen years with white men. This increases the chances of the girls being exposed to potential violent situations, especially if they are in Filadelfia. Concerned about their daughters' safety with non-Ayoreo

men, many would prefer that their daughters hang out in their villages, where they can be in a safe environment.

In contrast to such violence, young women's practices of sexuality are not considered a taboo topic. While contemporary Ayoreo do not refer—with few exceptions—to the social codes established by the Original Beings, many of these are still observed and enacted as shown earlier. Some customary Ayoreo values mingle with Christian values, as these are analogous in some ways (for example, the expectation of fidelity in marriage). In this way, Ayoreo do not experience tensions in the enactment of some moral codes. However, there are also pre Christian values that collide with Christian values. A case in point is the permission given to young women to engage different men sexually before marriage. In cases like this, Ayoreo continue to observe customary values that do not condemn but rather further the sexual exploration of young women. The same occurs with the treatment of sexuality as means of exchange and reciprocity (now a monetized practice). While practices such as these are morally acceptable, transgressions in the realm of sexuality can lead to criticism of the person and his family, affecting the household as a whole. This shows how the disjuncture in social codes related to women's sexuality is not an individual affair but a family one.

Part II

The Morality of Exchange: Money and the Penetration of Commodities

By the 1960s, the capitalist development of the Central Chaco region had taken off. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the Ayoreo were settled in

mission stations by American evangelical missionaries and were quickly exposed to the market economy, a process which was concomitant with the introduction of Christianity (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2001).

For scholars like Von Bremen (2010), the incorporation of Ayoreo into the market economy should be analyzed in terms of their belief system. He linked Ayoreo "curiosity" towards learning about money to the fact that they had no myth associated with money in order to explain its origin. As a result, money was seen as an “object with a being which would only become active in dealing with whites.” According to him, this was so much so, that the market economy remained a male-only sphere for a long time as it was seen as a “rather hostile environment to which women should not be exposed” (2010:34).

I wish to challenge this essentialized construction of the Ayoreo relation to money and the market economy. Rather than seeing it as an obscure object of ‘curiosity’, the Ayoreo relationship to money was much more pragmatic and less romantic than perceived by other scholars like Von Bremen. In fact, as I have shown in Chapter III, missionaries exposed Ayoreo to the commoditization of their labor power from day one of their contact. Ayoreo quickly learned the value of money to access goods and incorporated it into their own lives. Soon, it became central to the reproduction of their livelihoods. Their dependency on money was such that a few years after missionized life started, the lack of economic opportunities at the mission station drove them to start migrating seasonally to the Mennonite Colonies in search of wage labor opportunities.

Two decades later, by the 1980s, most Ayoreo were deeply embedded in the

regional economy of the region as wage laborers (see Canova 2011).[97] The fact that women were not included in the local/regional economy as laborers was not a response to 'the hostility' of money because of its lacking an origin myth, but was instead related to the patriarchal nature of mission life, in addition to gender discrimination that they faced in the Mennonite Colonies. At the mission station, women were relegated to the domestic sphere exclusively, while in the Colonies, constructions of them as 'dirty' and 'savages'—in addition to the language barrier— did not open a space for them to engage in work activities among Mennonites. Evidence of this is that other indigenous women in the region were given work opportunities as domestic servants or factory workers in the Mennonite factories, unlike Ayoreo women.[98]

Rather than focusing on the negative impact that "commoditization" has on so-called 'traditional' societies, a growing scholarship in anthropology has explored the function of money and the impact it has on preexisting networks of exchange (Akin and Robbins 1999, Appadurai 1996, Bloch and Parry 1989). I build on this scholarship to contend that in the case of the Ayoreo the advent of money is not seen as a threat to practices of exchange and redistribution, rather it has been incorporated into these networks allowing them to keep functioning rather than to disappear.[99] I do not mean that this process has occurred in a completely smooth manner with no alterations to Ayoreo social relations. On the

[97] In the last decades, the ongoing economic expansion – of mainly cattle ranching – has brought rampant rates of deforestation, which is affecting not only weather patterns but also soils conditions of an already fragile ecosystem. These circumstances have made it impossible for Ayoreo to engage in any type of subsistence agriculture in their villages.
[98] For the case of Angaite women see Scapinni (2012).
[99] See Villagra (2009) for a similar argument on the Angaite indigenous people of the Paraguayan Chaco.

contrary, money often creates internal problems and tensions, but rather than money itself being the problem, it is its class distribution where access to it is limited for some which oftentimes leads to problems.

Over time, money deeply permeated Ayoreo social relations at all levels. Despite this, practices of reciprocity and re-distribution continue to be the two paramount values for the reproduction of social relations between families and larger households. In this sense, the *jogasui* or extended household continues to be the primary sphere of reciprocity and redistribution in any Ayoreo village. This takes place mostly between either kin members united by consanguinity or clan affiliation. Sharing items that range from food to working tools occur on a daily basis. Women make decisions on how to re-distribute and/or reciprocate goods, with the endorsement of the husband.

At the present time, the two most common forms of exchange that continue to be in place among Ayoreo are *mejai* and *doi oredie*.[100] *Mejai* is a delayed type of gift exchange, voluntarily initiated by one party, which 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 far away villages or in Bolivia, where a large group of them also resides.[101]

The *mejai* type of exchange plays an important role in sustaining social

[100] Another common but now discontinued type of exchange is known as *ñacaranipise*. This is a performance where one person praises another publicly. One does so by telling all the good skills that this person has especially as a good hunter and warrior. In expression of gratitude, the person receives food or other goods. This practice was particularly common among older people, who were no longer physically able to engage in providing for the household. In this way, they were able to benefit from the exchange.

[101] A group of 2000 Ayoreo lives in lowland Bolivia.

relations. Every time someone plans to visit family on the other side of the border, there is a lot of expectation regarding *mejai*. The gifts vary from store-bought goods to forest-gathered items. Bolivian Ayoreo enjoy receiving items like leather-wrapped thermoses and yerba mate (*illex paraguayensis*), which are uncommon and therefore expensive in Bolivia. *Bromelia* plants are also highly valued to make handicrafts because they are in short supply in Bolivian villages. On the other hand, Paraguayan Ayoreo people like *mantas* or wool covers and *jnui*, a wild pepper which is scarcer in the Paraguayan Chaco landscape. These exchanges take place not only between close relatives; 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 in the future.[102]

Doi oredie is another common form of exchange. The term *oredie* derives from the word *ore,* which translates as image/likeness–*cho oredie* refers to 'similar value'. During the pre-mission period, it referred to an intentional exchange between two parties for the acquisition of a specific good needed. Someone who wanted to acquire a specific good would initiate this type of exchange. So, if an Ayoreo needed a rope for example, he would go to the person known for his expertise in making good ropes, and express what he could offer in exchange for one. The exchange, unlike *mejai*, was immediate. *Orerane* ('those things which have value') included tapir sandals, honey receptacles, ropes, and food bowls among other things. However, access to cash and the growing dependency on industrial items led to a decline in the production and exchange of

[102] While these exchanges are also common within Paraguay between people of different villages, the ritual is more elaborated in exchanges that involve Bolivian Ayoreo.

such items. With the monetization of the economy, nowadays Ayoreo use the term *doi oredie* to refer to a monetary transaction–which is to acquire an item in 'exchange' for money.

Store-bought goods and money were incorporated into existing networks of exchange without posing a threat to the networks themselves. This is so because it continues to serve the same basic purpose of reproducing social relations (cf. Robbins 1999). However, it is important to note that the lack of access to cash is a constant source of anxiety among Ayoreo as most feel that they do not have "enough" to reciprocate; as one man in his forties explained:

> We the Ayoreo know that if we give something to a white person, what they will give us in return is just a 'thank you.' We know this. However, among us, if I receive a present for example, I feel bad and worried if I do not have something to give back, or the money to buy something to give back. Still, we Ayoreo always remember that we have to give something in return.

The seasonal nature of wage labor cannot assure families a permanent income throughout the year. Filadelfia is one of the most expensive cities in the country, where access to food, housing, transportation and other basic services are significantly higher than elsewhere. Under such circumstances, it is particularly hard for Ayoreo households to exchange and redistribute, but also for the same reasons, they depend on the support of each other— through exchange and reciprocity— to survive.

Sex as Exchange

As I have shown in Chapter II, Ayoreo systems of exchange are intricately connected to the realm of sexuality. During pre-mission times, women received valuable hunting items from men in exchange for sexual liaisons. These hunting

goods were the main means of exchange, which included things like *cucha arione* [meat], or *iboradie* [harvested items].[103] Ayoreo also called harvested items *pajoningai;* which literally translates as 'the things that fall from trees.' In the present, they use that term to refer to money.[104] Over time, these exchanges became monetized. Some scholarship on Ayoreo argues that single women who exchanged sex for goods during pre-mission life were known as *curajodie* (see Nostras 2008, Suasnabar 1995). However, I contend that this term developed later, after the process of missionization was already initiated, and in a different context.

As Ayoreo transitioned into mission life, sexual exchanges for goods continued. However, over time, with the decrease in hunting and gathering practices, sexual exchanges transitioned to involve store-bought goods. With money increasingly permeating the Ayoreo system of exchange and other social realms, it is not surprising that in the last twenty years they have also monetized sexual exchanges. This is now an ongoing practice for a whole generation of Ayoreo who are below the age of thirty.

Despite the monetization of the sexual exchange, the sexual encounter continues to be treated in terms of an act of exchange/reciprocity. Young people do not frame their discourses about the practice in terms of a market transaction. Rather, they construct them as involving displays of generosity and gift giving (which can include money and/or presents). Moreover, young Ayoreo discuss this practice as an ingrained ritual integral to courting, flirting and sexual intercourse.

[103] Couples would also exchange seeds-necklaces.
[104] This term for money was initially coined in Bolivia and was incorporated in the vocabulary of Paraguayan Ayoreo only later.

Comai, a young man in his twenties, explained this to me in an interview:

> *Comai*: Nowadays, if a man wants to be with a girl, he will give her some money.
> *Paola*: Why money and not other type of presents?
> *Comai*: This is so because nowadays girls know about money too, and they are aware of the needs they have. Before they did not see it. If I give money to a girl, it is because I want to be nice to her.
> *Paola*: And do you think girls like this?
> *Comai*: They will tell their girlfriend that a guy is nice if he gives money [in exchange for having sex]. If he does not give anything, they talk about him, and everybody will know he is not a good person. If they think you are a good person, girls will come up to you.
> *Paola*: What happens if you do not have money to give away?
> *Comai*: If a girl really wants me, she will not mind, but I have to get her something [i.e. present] when I see her again.
> *Paola*: Do you think that this is something the Ayoreo copy from white people [paying women to have sex with them]?
> *Comai*: No, this is the way of doing things that we, the Ayoreo, have.

The conversation illustrates how the sexual exchange for money is framed primarily in terms of values of generosity and reciprocity. As such, this exchange completely converges with Ayoreo cultural principles about exchange in general. Just as a chief's reputation is at stake if he is not generous, in this case, a single man's prestige also depends on his generosity at these sexual encounters. Couples do not openly discuss the amount one will give to the other, but there is an implicit expectation to give and receive. While the sexual exchange involves a monetary transaction, people do not frame it in terms of a market transaction. While money, as shown, is an intricate aspect of the sexual exchange, the Ayoreo define it as exchange of generosity, not as sex work.

In this context, young men need access to cash, something that is limited for most Ayoreo youth due to the few job opportunities available to them. In the villages, if any work position opens, married men have priority. The only viable

alternative is for single men to find occasional temporary labor opportunities in Filadelfia.[105] An Ayoreo friend, in recalling his limitation in accessing money to give to his now current wife, said:

> She was *Omeja Chiqueño*, the daughter of *Isaac-de*. She must have been fourteen or fifteen years old at the time. We had been seeing each other for a month or so, before we got married. At the time I did not have a job and therefore no money, but my father would always give me some pocket money on the weekends. I used that money to give it to her every time we had sex. While we courted she would ask for money, but after we got married, that stopped. This is because she knew that I would always buy stuff for her every time she asked.

This statement reveals how money and intimacy do not represent contradictory principles as some scholars suggest (see Zelizer 2005 for a similar approach). While in Western or Christian contexts monetary transactions and intimacy are seen as morally unbridgeable, for Ayoreo, this is constitutive of the process of courting and marriage.

The economic dependency of women on men to access cash is notably high among Ayoreo young women with no work opportunities available to them. Partly, this is a consequence of historical structural discrimination towards Ayoreo women in the Mennonite Colonies. As show in the previous Chapter, the labor market has been traditionally a male-only sphere for Ayoreo since the beginning of Ayoreo participation. In the present, Ayoreo women continue to have no job opportunities available to them. Ranchers, for example, prefer to hire other indigenous women rather than Ayoreo to do the household chores. When discussing this with a young female friend, *Toje*, she mentioned that while several

[105] In the city, they are hired for a few hours a day to download bricks or rocks from trucks in construction companies. This is an activity that only young men are willing to do, as older men need more hours of work/day to be able to sustain their families.

Ayoreo girls would enjoy having the opportunity to work as “house-maids,” they do not have that chance available to them. She interprets the discrimination towards them in terms of their sexuality, “The problem is that Mennonite women are jealous of us. They think that we will steal their husbands."

Without work opportunities, most young women depend on their parents for access to pocket money to buy clothing, shoes, and other consumer goods. This can also be a burden for families, especially as young people are increasingly exposed to conspicuous consumption. A father of five put it this way:

> Nowadays when kids go to Filadelfia they see all these things and they want it too. I make very little money from my work doing charcoal.[106] While I can buy enough food for the whole family, it is hard for me to buy the things my children request, like new clothes and shoes.

While the monetization of sexuality is not treated as an economic transaction, the money that one can get from the sexual exchange is seen as an important means to engage in conspicuous consumption, a growing trend among Ayoreo youth in the Mennonite Colonies. While *gapudie* ('young women') generally receive some money from their sexual encounters with Ayoreo men, the amount is not enough to engage in conspicuous consumption in the Mennonite Colonies. However, the money is enough to cover monetized leisure activities within the villages, such as playing cards or volleyball, or buying candies and other sweets.

In the last decade, *gapudie* have been increasingly involved in sexual exchanges with non-Ayoreo men. These men are interesting to girls because they are considered to be “different.” The fact that they most likely have more money

[106] Charcoal production is one of the main labor activities available to Ayoreo in their villages. This is a controversial activity because it is having a negative impact on Ayoreo forests. The product is marketed by the Mennonite Cooperative in Germany.

than Ayoreo men to reciprocate the exchange is also very appealing for most young women. When discussing this with a group of girls, most of them agreed that while money is important, it is not the only factor that triggers their interest in non-Ayoreo men. “Getting to know them” was an important reason for meeting them. While parents do not usually oppose their daughters’ sexual encounters with non-Ayoreo men, they do feel more comfortable if girls meet them in their villages, where it is thought that they will be out of harm’s way. Other chances to meet white men can occur when girls accompany their parents to work sites (in ranches) or when they go to the city with members of the family who look for work. According to interviews with Ayoreo youth, most girls living in the villages have at least once had a sexual encounter with a non-Ayoreo man in Filadelfia.

In the following section, I focus on a group of young women who in a semi-permanent way have sexual encounters and emotional relationships with non-Ayoreo men in Filadelfia. Ayoreo refer to these young women as *curajodie*. Their practices differ from that of girls in the villages and resemble that of sex workers, despite not conforming to the conventional connotation of sex workers.

Exchanging Sex for Money in the Mennonite Colonies

Sexual liaisons with white men are not a new contemporary phenomenon for Ayoreo. Soon after settling in mission stations during the 1960s, young women started to have sexual encounters with non-Ayoreo men. Although these sexual liaisons were sporadic, these involved mostly men who came to the mission station and nearby ranch workers. Later, women would often travel back and forth to Filadelfia where they would also have sexual encounters with Mennonite men,

as older women still remember. A grandmother in her late 60s told me, “I had sex with the Mennonites. We were good-looking and our parents did not mind that we approached them.” These liaisons were only fleeting and instead of money, ‘presents’ were exchanged for sex.

By the 70s the first 'mixed' babies were born. These were rare occurrences, not approved by Ayoreo, as women were expected to have permanent partners in order to bear children and group exogamy was still strongly observed. That these non-Ayoreo men would not make themselves responsible for their children quickly earned them a negative reputation among Ayoreo. While sexual liaisons with white men were not as common back then, as long as women did not get pregnant, these practices did not marginalize them within their own group. Most of the women who engaged in sexual exchanges with non-Ayoreo men during their youth in the 60s and 70s moved on to marry Ayoreo men, revealing that their encounters with them were only temporary and they were not socially ostracized for it. Their sexual liaisons with these men in the Mennonite Colonies earned them the label of *curajo* (plural *curajodie*).

For a long time, I was intrigued about the etymology of this term. As mentioned earlier, scholars from Bolivia have argued that Ayoreo used the term during pre-Christian life to refer to young single women who exchanged sex for hunting goods. I asked several Ayoreo about this, but no one was able to tell me the etymology of the term. Most would just refer to such girls as “*boque*” or mischievous. One day, I decided to ask about it to my friend *Sidabi*, an older man in his late fifties. 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, with whom one afternoon he was sharing the sad news of the death of two young women from his village over VHF radio. This is the story he shared:

> The two girls, who were seventeen and nineteen years old respectively, were *curajodie* who usually hung out in Filadelfia. There, at a bar, they met two Paraguayan ranch workers in their late twenties. After a few days in town, the men were leaving to go back to their work sites on the border with Bolivia. The girls, excited about their new 'friends,' decided to accompany them. From the ranch, one of the girls called her mother to tell her she was there and doing well. After a week of being at the ranch, the four of them went to a nearby town on the property's tractor. They decided to return to the ranch late that same night, despite all of them being drunk. On their way back, due to a bad maneuver of the driver, the tractor crashed, instantly killing both girls. The only forensic doctor for the region did not make it to the site to report the reason of death. He alleged 'budgetary limitations', which did not allow him to leave his office, located 250 miles away from the site of the crash. As a result, the death certificate and corresponding notifications were never prepared and no one informed the families of their daughters’ death until weeks after it occurred.

The sloth of local authorities towards the death of both girls was such that the police went ahead and decided to bury both corpses on public land on the outskirts of town without trying to locate their respective families. Kin members only learned about the incident after an Ayoreo working on a nearby ranch found out about it. As my friend *Sidabi* told this story to his relative, she reciprocated with a similar story, which according to her, happened in Bolivia during the 1960s:

> Two young Ayoreo girls who lived in an Ayoreo village by Puerto Suárez—a small town near the border of Bolivia and Brazil—suddenly went missing. The people from the village immediately suspected two non-indigenous Bolivian teachers, who ran the school at the village. These two

> *gapudie* were being*"boque"*, and like any teenage Ayoreo, they constantly flirted and courted with these two teachers. The last thing that some people remembered was that apparently one day the teachers took the girls for a ride. Since that time, the girls never returned to the village. The Ayoreo assumed that the two teachers drugged and abducted the girls. For a long time, the village people would hear news that the missing girls were seen somewhere in the area of a hill slope known to local Bolivians as Cuacoco, located near the Bolivian town *Rincón del Tigre*. The hill where the girls were last seen gave them the name "*curajo."*

Since that incident, the term *curajo* has been widely used to refer to women who have sexual liaisons with non-Ayoreo men.[107] The term does not have any negative moral connotation, although at times Ayoreo use it in a derogatory way to refer to the violence and vices (i.e. alcohol and tobacco use) associated with these girls. Today, the number of *curajodie* in the Mennonite Colonies is high.[108] It is so high, that this has become one of the major concerns of local public and private institutions who perceive the practices of these young women as 'prostitution.' *Curajodie's* ages range between fourteen and thirty five years old. While in previous decades, any girl who had a sexual liaison with a non-Ayoreo man was called a *curajo*, today the term refers exclusively to young women who sexually engage white men *in* Filadelfia. What makes someone a *curajo* is not the monetized sexual exchange *per se*, as this is also a common practice for most Ayoreo girls in the villages as well. What characterizes them is that they spend most of their time in Filadelfia and exclusively prefer white men over Ayoreo men (although they also have sexual liaisons with Ayoreo men as will be

[107] 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. Ayoreo girls who have sexual liaisons with white men are associated with this little bird, because like them, girls go out at night.

[108] Between 2009 and 2011 there were approximately forty-five *curajodie* on and off in Filadelfia.

explained be detailed in the following Chapter).

The Curajo Phenomenon

A *priori*, non-Ayoreo people perceive *curajodie* as sex workers. What makes their practices resemble that of sex workers is that they engage in streetwalking to solicit sexual liaisons with 'clients' and most of their sexual exchanges involve monetary transactions (cf. Nencel 2001) . Their practices, while similar in form, are different in content and motivation than that of most sex workers in the anthropological literature. While practices of Ayoreo *curajodie* are very complex, in the reminder of this Chapter, I focus exclusively on the economic aspect of the activity.

Curajodie do not see the sexual encounter as a 'job.' While they enjoy making money to engage in conspicuous consumption, they do not think of it in terms of a work activity as is the case among most professional sex workers. This means, they do not think of having to go out every night and see a certain amount of men to make a certain amount of money. Unlike most sex workers who engage in the activity to sustain their families, these girls mostly depend on their families to sustain their livelihoods.

Some patterns of *curajodie* are consistent with Ayoreo ways of flirting and courting which involves having different sexual liaisons until finding a stable partner. As shown in previous sections, the exchange of sex for money is not a practice exclusive of *curajodie*; rather, most young women in all villages exchange sex for money. Both of these groups, despite some differences in their practices, see their sexual practices in terms of exchange and reciprocity. For

curajodie, this is evidenced on several fronts: most start out by not asking for money to white man in exchange for sex, rather they 'wait' to be given something. 'Price negotiation' is a rare practice and only reserved for a few girls who have spent many years soliciting in the streets (more on them in the following Chapter). In addition, if a young woman develops emotional attachments with a 'friend,' she might decide not to 'charge' him. But she still expects him to give him presents or money. There are also instances in which a girl buys "presents" for the 'boyfriend' she is seeing.

As a *curajo* friend put it, "When a man gives me money to have sex with him, I do not think it is work because I am not doing anything. He is the one who is helping me by giving me the money." Because Ayoreo women's sexuality is embedded in networks of exchange, they do not see their exchange as a pure economic transaction. In this vein, I argue that sexual liaisons with white men are conceived above all in terms of a relational strategy, which helps them navigate highly hierarchal and discriminative spaces and social relations. Access to money is one of their means to do this.

Most girls I interviewed discursively constructed their narratives of being in the streets and asking for money in terms of a temporal rupture between past and present. "*Je yiaja cuchaique naniquee*" ('I did not know anything in the beginning'), and '*Ñajengome'* ('I was embarrassed'), were the two most common phrases I encountered in young women's narratives that described the beginning of their sexual liaisons with white men in Filadelfia. Such statements closely resonate with Ayoreo narratives of becoming Christians. Ayoreo Christians used

these same terms as they recalled their pre-conversion time. With such expressions, *curajodie* tried to convey their lack of experience in understanding the amount of money they could obtain from white men when they started their sexual liaisons with them. Most said they could have gotten more money out of white people from the beginning if they were aware of the 'rules of the game.' To a certain degree, young Ayoreo women are constructing their identity in the city in parallel terms to how Ayoreo construct their Christian sense of self. In both cases, they link things associated with the past, (i.e. their culture) to ignorance, and lack of expertise.

Counter to how they discursively construct their past, *curajodie* talk about themselves in the present time as being savvy in knowing how to get money from white men. In this vein, ‘clients’ are mapped according to how much money they are thought to have. Stories about how they got a lot of money from doing ‘a few’ tricks abound. The weight given to money in their discourses, reveal the tension of having to understand and access money in a context of commoditized relations, not only among Ayoreo themselves but also with outsiders, in a context where colliding ideologies are at play.

There is a symbolic power associated with knowing money. It gives *curajodie* a sense of pride to discuss with friends about the amounts of money that they can get from their male ‘friends,’ or 'boyfriends.' While numbers are oftentimes inflated, their earnings are significantly smaller than what most claim. One thing that happens frequently, is that ‘clients’ will pay less than agreed or sometimes not pay at all. As girls hardly talk about these issues and never report such

incidents to local police, such instances go uncontested. That girls do not solicit on a regular basis and move in and out of the streets, also translates into a fluctuation of the amount of money they can get. Despite these factors, if considering daily standards of income for indigenous day laborers in Filadelfia, *curajodie* can make as much as three times as any Ayoreo laborer would in a full day of work. This trend is significant as it is slowly shifting women's roles within their group, a topic I discuss in Chapter VI.

But money has also an important material component. Most young women are not using that money to cover basic access to their material needs and that of their families. Girls sometimes give part of the money earned to parents. This responds exclusively to the fact that *curajodie*, like all Ayoreo, observe social rules of reciprocity and sharing and they give this money as gifts. Outsiders mistakenly see this as pimping on the part of the parents. Rather, the bulk of the money earned goes into conspicuous consumption (details in Chapter V).

Curajodie do not treat the solicitation of sex as a steady activity. It is common for a *curajo* who lives with her parents in Filadelfia, to accompany them to their work site or back to their villages, leaving the streets temporarily. Their mobility is not only dependant on their parent's work, but also on the prospects of finding a permanent Ayoreo partner/husband, which might take them away from Filadelfia for months or years, or permanently in many cases.

The disparate practices of *curajodie* make it misleading to fit them into the category of sex work. According to the literature on sex work, the two main reasons that drive sex workers to engage in the activity are that it is seen as an

alternative to low-paid jobs, and as an opportunity to access money to sustain their families (Chapkis 2010, Agustín 2005, Rubin 1994). These two reasons do not motivate the practices of Ayoreo women. A growing scholarship on sex tourism resists using the term sex work to describe women's complex negotiation of intimate sexual and emotional liaisons (e.g. Padilla 2007, Brennan 2004). While these studies do not deploy the term sex work to refer to intimate relations in exchange for money, the Ayoreo case also differs from them in that the ultimate goal of women in the tourism service industry is to develop long term liaisons, and if possible marriage and out-migration. This is something that most Ayoreo women do not even contemplate (although this trend has started to change over the last three years, details in Chapter VI). Most *curajodie* prefer to marry within their group. Very few entertain the idea of marrying white men, as most are aware of ongoing discrimination towards them, which makes it almost impossible for them to envision marring non-Ayoreo men.

Young women understand the monetization of sexuality not in terms of sex work, but rather as a set of practices co-constructed in tandem with Ayoreo ontologically based ethics of sexuality.

In the following Chapter, I show how practices of *curajodie* are one of the limited paths that young Ayoreo women have to relate to non-Ayoreo men in a highly discriminative context towards indigenous women. The growing trend of young Ayoreo women engaging non-Ayoreo men through sexual liaisons in Filadelfia is a consequence of their growing contact with non-Ayoreo men in the urban spaces of the Colonies. The number of families who temporarily move to

Filadelfia in search of work opportunities has been steadily rising in the last decade. Most of these girls belong to families that had a history of having lived for several years on and off in the urban spaces of Filadelfia while having family members working there. Living in the city opens more opportunities for young women to meet Paraguayans or Mennonites than in their villages. Another important factor that drives them to engage white men is money. While these girls treat the sexual encounter as exchange, money they can get from non Ayoreo men allows them to engage in conspicuous consumption and party habits, something their parents or Ayoreo boyfriends in their villages cannot afford to support them with.

In the past years, the number of *curajodie* has risen steadily in Filadelfia. Despite this trend, some girls prefer to be *curajodie* in their villages. Some do this aware that in Filadelfia they expose themselves to violence while in their villages they feel in a more protected environment. However, this also means less access to money and to the party habits that the city offers them.

Conclusion

The monetization of Ayoreo young women's sexuality took place in the context of Christianization and the commoditization of Ayoreo social relations. In this way, I outlined the contemporary ethics of Ayoreo sexuality at the juncture of these two major processes, which have profoundly shaped the lives of the Ayoreo people during the last six decades.

Women guide their practices in the realm of sexuality according to pre-mission ethics of practice as well as according to Christian values. As part of this

process, sexuality is still embedded in systems of exchange and reciprocity, which became monetized in only the last two decades without this being a threat to their Christian values. In this way, Ayoreo women enact their sexuality in tension with Christian values but not in radical opposition to Christianity.

Curajodie are Ayoreo young women who have ongoing sexual liaisons with white men mostly in the Mennonite Colonies. This phenomenon is not new but in the contemporary context is changing traditional patterns of access to money. Until not long ago, access to money focused exclusively around men. While the practices of young women resemble those of sex workers, it would be misleading to frame them as such. Rather, a complex set of negotiations is involved which is shaping in unexpected ways their gendered practices and relations to outsiders.

CHAPTER V

Bodies that Matter: The Production of Gendered Subjectivities in Urban Spaces

Introduction

Everyday, just before dusk, girls walk past empty lots on the outskirts of town to a nearby cow-pond where they bathe. They go there because the one-hectare lot where Ayoreo families live in Filadelfia does not have access to water or other basic services. The Ayoreo call their settlement *icadie*, or 'cow intestines,' for its tangle of plastic tents - a synecdochic mapping of a part of the adjoining Mennonite-owned slaughterhouse onto the Ayoreo settlement. The Fernheim cooperative runs the largest milk and beef production operation in the country, making it one of the wealthiest corporations in the Chaco.

Once back in their tents, the girls make phone calls and discuss plans for the night as they apply make-up and dress in miniskirts and brand new tight jeans, carefully selected to match their high heels. As they get ready to leave, the whistle-blow of the cooperative announces the change of work shifts and the end of the working day. Expensive trucks and motorbikes begin to fill Hindenburg Street, the main artery of town.

As this goes on, the girls make their way to Canaan, a hostel and bar owned by an excommunicated Mennonite preacher who named the place after the biblical land of Canaan. A teenager riding past on his bike screams, "¡*Putaaas*! ¿*Cuánto cobran? ¿Diez mil*?" ('Whores! How much do you charge? A dollar?'). Canaan is frequented by men who come to the Chaco as ranch workers because it

is the only local alternative to the high-end cooperative-owned Hotel Florida. The hostel is unique, too, in that it has the only bar in town that welcomes indigenous peoples. Ayoreo girls go there to drink, have fun, and sometimes meet their sexual liaisons. Some Ayoreo girls prefer to hang out on Habinner Street, which suits Mennonite men better because of its dim and discreet character.

Late at night when the bar closes down, the girls meet again at the roundabout that welcomes outsiders to the city—called *cheque date* or 'large woman' in reference to its shape. There, they continue drinking, playing around and chatting with their new, mostly Paraguayan, friends. The roundabout has a monument, constructed in honor of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Mennonite Colony. A small plaque next to it reads, "Coexistence and Development."

For locals in the mostly Christian community of Filadelfia, the public presence of young Ayoreo women is considered a major social problem. The girls' confident and visible self-presentation and their engagements with non-indigenous men disturb local stereotypes of indigenous women. In this chapter, I explore the practices of young Ayoreo women known as *curajodie*[109] and the social space in which they construct their gendered subjectivities and sexuality in Filadelfia. I draw on Kristeva's notion of the abject to reflect on local representations of women's bodies in urban spaces, and show how the practices of these young women resist definitions of sex work as a work activity, as has been proposed in other contexts (Agustin 2005, Katsulis 2008). Furthermore, I reveal the complexities of the sexual liaisons they craft with men, which go beyond a pure monetary transaction for sex. In the process, their sense of self in urban

[109] Singular *curajo*.

contexts is constructed.

The Politics of Exclusion: Abject Bodies

In Filadelfia**,** Ayoreo are constantly perceived as challenging and transgressing the boundaries of the 'civilized.' Here, Mennonites and Paraguayans alike regard Ayoreo women's bodies as something to be excluded. This exclusion allows Mennonites to preserve a coherent imaginary identity that differentiates them in relation to indigenous peoples. This constitutive exclusion is also used to sustain and naturalize a 'normative' Christian and Mennonite identity. In this context, Ayoreo sexuality is perceived as out of place in the city.

Such gender and race anxieties became obvious to me soon after I started fieldwork. On one occasion, a municipal officer invited me to join Filadelfia's committee on morality. They wanted me to help solve the so-called 'Ayoreo problem.' She explained to me as follows, "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 Ayoreo girls." In the same vein, a medical doctor once told me, "People might criticize me, but I told the Mennonite Colony several times, we should do a whore-house, get them all inside, and get them controlled every week. Right now, we do not even know who they are."

Such discourses are common, and they resonate with 19th Century Victorian constructions of the 'prostitute body' as a category that needs to be medically and spatially surveilled and contained (c.f. Levine 2002, Walkovitz 1980). As seen in previous chapters, the repulsion and disgust fostered by Ayoreo women's bodies

in Filadelfia is not a new phenomenon exclusively related to their sexual practices, but rather one with historical roots.

In this way, Ayoreo bodies in the Mennonite Colonies resonate with Kristeva's concept of the abject. In her words, “It is that which does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” (Kristeva 1983:4). For her, abject embodiment is a state in which bodily boundaries erode and the self has little control over the leaking of what Kristeva calls repulsive bodily liquids: blood, urine, feces, vomit, and pus. Grosz (1989) suggests that abjection is necessary because some aspects of our bodily experience must be excluded in order to allow for a coherent construction of the ego and body image. Abjection of the self is therefore a process constitutive of the subjective being. Kristeva suggests that things that cause abjection are those that disturb an identity or a system. According to her, the abject is constantly excluded, although it is never really eliminated altogether; it resurfaces continually, unsettling the boundaries of inclusion. Here I extrapolate this idea to contend that Ayoreo bodies are constructed as 'abject bodies' in the urban spaces of the Mennonite Colonies.

Today the exclusion of Ayoreo from Filadelfia is reproduced in myriad ways. Not long ago, Mennonite authorities closed all public faucets in an effort to force Ayoreo out of town (lacking access to water in their urban camps, public faucets were one of their few alternatives to access clean water). The exclusion is also evident in the differentiated treatment that Ayoreo young women receive in the city; unlike other indigenous women, *curajodie* do not benefit from free access to

health care. As a medical doctor put it to me, "They are prostitutes who make a lot of money and therefore have to pay." Locals also ban them from renting rooms in motels in the city because they are not considered 'civilized' enough by locals. Moreover, Ayoreo are the only indigenous group not allowed to have a neighborhood in Filadelfia by the Mennonite administration of the Colony. Because of this discriminative stance, they have to move from one temporary camp to the next as the Colony's bulldozers literally wipe out one settlement after another.

The camps where they live literally epitomize abject spaces and are treated as such. Sporadically, after Sunday church services, Mennonite women pass by to leave leftover food or goods at the entrances to the camps. I witnessed this one day as I was interviewing people in *Casa Pasajera*, one of the many camps they had in the city. A car approached the site and two Mennonite women in their fifties got out of it with a few bags of used clothes. They murmured something to an Ayoreo by-passer and soon some men were screaming, "*Yocaii! Mennonita ore chukue ura eee*!" (*Yocai!* someone is looking for you!'). A man in his forties got out of his plastic tent, where he lived with his family, to receive the bags which had to be shared with "everybody" as I overheard one of the women saying in broken Spanish. As the women tried to get into the car to leave, several Ayoreo reached out to them, talking loudly in an incomprehensible mix of Spanish and Ayoreo. Not being able to understand what was going on, and with a growing number of Ayoreo surrounding them, the women reacted in panic and fear and rushed to get into the car. In the confusion, they did not notice that their car had a

flat tire, and that the Ayoreo were trying to warn them not to leave under such conditions. The preconceptions of these two women about the people and place nourished by locals who construct Ayoreo urban camps as dangerous and violent places—triggered their automatic reaction. Several Mennonite and Paraguayan institutions, such as the Municipality and the Administration of the Colony, avoid entering these camps altogether, and only speculate as to what goes on inside, which further feeds these preconceptions.

According to Kristeva, one can also feel drawn to the abject with the same intensity that one is repelled by it—something which produces a sense of joy. Nineteenth century European cities were sites were the relation between exclusion and the production of desire emerged with force. For example, the clear separation of slums from suburbs fostered at the same time an obsession to transgress the slums and dwell in what was considered the space of "the Other" (see Stallybrass and White 1986). In a neo-colonial context, Filadelfia the site where Ayoreo bodies, despite being perceived as ‘polluting,’ also trigger a powerful local imaginary that desires them in incongruent ways: as sexual as well as moral objects.

Ayoreo women's bodies are eroticized objects for local men. These men range from ranchers to truck drivers, and even church preachers. Despite discriminating against women, portraying them as 'dirty Indians,' they obsessively seek them out at night and endlessly speculate on their 'feminine attributes' in beer rounds. At the same time a religious discourse on compassion also circulates—mainly from Paraguayan and Mennonite women—which draws them towards Ayoreo people

as objects of Christian charity. Ayoreo women become the target of a pull between repulsion and desire exercised by locals. This complex and contradictory relationship, which constructs Ayoreo as the 'Other' while seeking its inclusion, also reinforces their exclusion from the social life of the Colonies. This same exclusion is a critical component for Mennonites and Paraguayans to construct a shared imagery of their dominant culture vis-à-vis the Ayoreo and other indigenous people living in Filadelfia. In this context, Ayoreo women's subjectivities are constructed amidst the fluidity of feelings such as fear, disgust, and desire that shape the power dynamics of their relations with non Ayoreo in the Mennonite Colonies.

Against the Odds: Crafting New Social Spaces in the City

From the beginning of my stay in Filadelfia for dissertation fieldwork, *curajodie* insisted on taking me to Villa Choferes for dance parties. In the last decade, this town, located nine miles from Filadelfia, has turned into the main bedroom community for Paraguayans working in the Mennonite Colonies. Also, it has become controversially known for its weekend dances. These social events, which mostly attract Paraguayan workers, are 'famous' for involving a lot of drinking, loud music, and sex.

The nightlife of the town has symbolically become an escape from the curfew and prohibitions that Filadelfia imposes on its population. Although in recent years Filadelfia has opened up to incorporate "Paraguayan neighborhoods," the high prices and limitations established by the Mennonite administration to access properties by non-Mennonites makes Villa Choferes the largest hub of

Paraguayans in the region. In the Mennonite view, Villa Choferes is the place where the transgressions to the norms of the Colonies take place. It is no coincidence also that a dance club exclusively for Mennonite youth opened in the outskirts of Villa Choferes. In addition, members of the Colony, the so-called 'outcasts,' mingle with Paraguayans and 'Indians' in Villa Choferes.

Most Ayoreo living in the villages oppose the party habits of *curajodie* in Filadelfia and its surroundings. In one of the villages, a long-time female friend now in her fifties advised me several times to be careful about ‘partying’ with *curajodie*. She argued it was dangerous, as those girls often drink and fight. Also, I was not a single woman to behave as such. She said news could reach my partner that I had been out "laughing" with *curajodie*. “That could get you into big trouble with him,” she told me. She recommended that, if I went, I did not wear makeup, so as not to signal "sexual availability."

The girls were excited the night I decided to join them for the first time to go to Villa Choferes, especially because I offered to drive them there. One of them even suggested that I could make money taking *curajodie* to parties and charging them for the rides (something I did not end up doing, however). *Jidabia* was one of the seven girls who rode with me. She seemed shy and her soft voice concealed a strong character, which I would only discover later. Once at the party, she did not leave my side the whole night. Without saying so, she decided to look after me. I did not realize this until late into the night, when she still did not leave my side even as her friends were dancing and meeting men. She rejected anybody who approached her to invite her for a dance. If anybody tried to talk to me, she

would cut in front and abruptly declare in Spanish, "*Déjenle en paz, no habla español*" ('Leave her alone, she does not speak Spanish'). That night, I realized I had met her father earlier at a church service. Renowned for knowing how to "speak to God," he was invited to pray during a church service for two sick people in the village where I was staying, one of whom was a *curajo* who was very sick at the time.

As the night progressed, a fight broke out because one of the girls I took with me got mad at a Paraguayan woman who showed up to the party with her ex-boyfriend. Revealing how Ayoreo women are a constant target of discrimination, the fight ended with the police expelling—in a humiliating way—all and only Ayoreo girls out of the place, regardless of who was involved in the fight or not. The police pushed the girls to the gate like animals and two of them received several kicks.

The next time I ran into *Jidabia* was when she asked me to donate blood for her convalescent brother, *Ugui*. At the time, he was a young man in his late 20s whom I had spotted several times at the bar Canaan in Filadelfia. A few days earlier, a Paraguayan had shot him at the entrance of town, believing he was going to steal his backpack. Due to the urgency of the case —the bullet had ruptured one of his lungs—they took *Ugai* to the local private Mennonite Hospital. There, they rejected him for not having health insurance, so the police took him to the governmental hospital in Villa Choferes. However, this place did not have the necessary infrastructure to attend to the gravity of the case and urged the Mennonite Hospital to take him; otherwise he was expected to die. By a miracle,

he survived the back and forth trip in the back of a police truck, and they admitted him to the hospital. There, he stayed for several weeks until his condition slowly improved. *Jidabia* and her family mobilized support for her convalescent brother. It was during those weeks that I learned more about her and got to know her better.

The above experiences among Ayoreo youth in Filadelfia reveal the discriminatory spaces within which they live and construct their sense of personhood in urban spaces. Space is crafted in a hierarchal fashion resembling colonial contexts where the native/settler divide is obvious. Within this schema, multiple levels of discrimination crisscross even the most fleeting interactions. Fanon has rightly argued, "Confronted with a world ruled by the settler, the native is always presumed guilty" (Fanon 1961:47). In such a context, and aware of this, most Ayoreo in the villages oppose having their youth inhabit the city. They perceive urban spaces as dangerous and unsafe, especially for young girls. As an Ayoreo friend explained to me, "White people, they all think we look the same. If they think an Ayoreo did something bad, they might try to take revenge by killing any of our people. That is frightening to us."

Challenging these patterns of discrimination towards Ayoreo, through their practices, *curajodie* construct their own social geography in the city in unique and creative ways. Unlike other indigenous peoples in the city, they have become comfortable moving between the main urban spaces of the district: Filadelfia, Villa Choferes and Loma Plata.[110] Their sexuality has become the only 'accepted' point of entrance to relate to the local population that discriminates towards them.

[110] All located within less than 15 miles from each other.

In the following sections, I focus on the *curajo* phenomenon: young Ayoreo women who have monetized sexual liaisons in the streets of Filadelfia. I explore their practices and show how these practices shape their sexual subjectivities, affecting these women's sense of personhood in urban spaces.

To be a *Curajo*

One day as I was chatting with *Jidabia* at a truck pit stop at the entrance of town, she told me how she started "walking the streets":

> I was 13 years old the first time I had sex with a white man. 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 girlfriends who had been walking the street for a while already. 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 escaping and going back to Filadelfia to keep playing with men. My mother used to get angry with me and she would look for me each time I left the village. She and my father were afraid something bad would happen to me in Filadelfia, as we had heard bad things happened to other girls. As I became older, they stopped looking for me. Back then, I did not know much about money so at the beginning, men would not pay me to be with them, and I did not ask for money either. I just went out, met them and had sex with them, and if they were nice, they would give me some money.

Streetwalking is one of the most common forms of soliciting clients for sex work (see Altman 2001, De Meis 2002). This practice among Ayoreo girls leads to an *a priori* assumption that they are sex workers or 'prostitutes' as locals refer to them. *Jidabia* also started soliciting men in the streets. However, she did not think of what she was doing in terms of a work-activity with a specific income, as would most sex workers in such a context. Rather, her goal was to get to know men and "play" with them. She 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 only played a marginal role for her at the beginning. Her practices—like that of most *curajodie*—resemble that of sex workers in form but not content and meaning.

At age fifteen, while in the street, *Jidabia* became pregnant by a Mennonite. She did not want to keep the child, so soon after its birth, she gave the child away to a couple who were relatives of her mother. Although her pregnancy was a shameful episode for her parents, they supported her throughout the process. Her father, being a *Dupade anguesone* ('preacher'), continues to be critical of her spending most of her time in Filadelfia. He told me in a separate interview that while he does not share her *adode* ('ways'), he argues that he cannot do anything about it, as she is old enough to make her own decisions. Being a Christian and discussing this with a white person (me), he used a negative discourse to refer to his daughter's practices, something most Ayoreo do with outsiders when talking about the girls in Filadelfia. They automatically do so because they know that Ayoreo 'prostitution' is a topic perceived in a negative light by white people. There seems to be an implicit sense of embarrassment for not being able to share 'Christian' values on the matter with most outsiders, who condemn the girls' practices. Because of this, they either make an effort to pretend they agree with the views of outsiders or stay quiet when the topic arises. The topic has in part become taboo among Ayoreo because of this tension it creates.

But an inquiry into parental perceptions of their daughter's practices revealed that having multiple sexual partners or initiating sexual liaison and getting money for it is not condemned, as this resonates with customary practices related to

sexuality. Rather, what worries and dishonors most of them is the heavy drinking and the consequences it has for girls in Filadelfia. Sexually transmitted diseases have also become a major problem. As one father told me, "What I worry the most about is that they have access to too much alcohol and all these new diseases that they can get in the street."

Despite *Jidabia's* father's perception of her practices, he still welcomes her every time she goes for visit to the village. Three years ago, she started seeing a young Ayoreo man she met in Filadelfia. 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. This was something she never considered doing with any of her non-Ayoreo sexual liaisons. When I asked her why not, she said, "*Je yuasade ore gu*" ('They are not our people'). After getting married to him, she moved to his worksite; but they only lived together for a year-and-a-half. With no children on the way, she left him when she found out he was seeing other *curajodie* in Filadelfia.

Since then, *Jidabia* has returned to the streets of Filadelfia. Altogether, she has been in the streets on and off for six years. She frequently moves between the city and Campo Loro[111], where she spends two to three weeks visiting her sister twice a year. At times, she also accompanies her brother to his worksite in Laguna Porã.[112] Although her father can provide access to basic needs for the household, she prefers to be in Filadelfia. "*Yiase jeti ñisoi calle uje ñingana nga pata deji to*" ('I like to walk the street, because I have fun and there is money too'), she told

[111] An Ayoreo village located 28 miles from Filadelfia.
[112] Laguna Porã is located at 124 miles from Filadelfia.

me. She said that if she eventually meets an Ayoreo man, she plans to leave the streets. However, she wants to take her time, because she is having fun for now.

Most Ayoreo are frightened of what can happen to their daughters in the streets of Filadelfia. A couple living there, whose daughter went out every night, decided to accompany her and hang out close to her, as they were worried that something could happen to her in the streets at night. Oftentimes I spotted them in street corners or at Canaan, allowing their fifteen-year-old daughter to interact with non-Ayoreo men. To outsiders, what this couple did—like a few others—was perceived as pimping. To the parents, however, this was the only way to keep their daughter from being exposed to violence and drunk men. Such reactions of parents also reaffirm the fact that they do not see their daughters' sexual practices as immoral or something to be ashamed of; rather they focus on making sure their daughters are in a safe environment. Local NGOs and governmental institutions, unable to morally conceive of parental involvement in such terms, assumed that Ayoreo parents were actually involved in 'child prostitution' as they voiced in the local community. This further fed local constructions of Ayoreo as sexually 'degenerate.' While having parental control when out at night is an exception, *curajodie* in general find different ways to protect themselves at night when going out. They tend to take care of each other. A typical way of doing this is by never being alone, neither in the streets nor with men, but always staying together in pairs. It is common to see girls try to stop drunken friends from leaving with unknown men.

Money is one of the forces that drives young women to have sexual liaisons with non-Ayoreo men. However, it is only important to the degree that it allows them to embody a *persona* able to inhabit and navigate racialized urban spaces. Goffman (1963:31), in his work on stigma, has noted how the desire for a dignified sense of self drives people to construct a self to which others can "attribute positive social value." In this sense, body, self, and social interaction become interrelated processes deployed to achieve such goals. In the case of Ayoreo women, my experience indicates that sexual intimacy and conspicuous consumption are two interrelated ways through which Ayoreo women negotiate their selfhood in a social space where indigenous women face intense discrimination.

Aesthetics and Conspicuous Consumption

Filadelfia, being the largest urban center in the region, is a hub for consumption. The city established the largest supermarket in Paraguay during the mid 1990s, long before any appeared in the capital city of Asunción. A visit to Fernheim Cooperative Stores feels like briefly stepping out of the Chaco and into a European setting. The vast locale has a modern look, with large glass windows, central air conditioning and white tiled floors. Upon entering to the left there is a shop that resembles a smaller version of a Home Depot store, where affluent ranchers and Mennonite farmers shop. To the right is the supermarket, with ample corridors and aisles that carry an infinite selection of products. Homemade and imported European specialty foods abound.

While for decades the Cooperative has held the monopoly over smaller

businesses in town, this has changed significantly in the last fifteen years as the city began to open up to outsiders. Today, Filadelfia has several such supermarkets, dozens of small clothing stores and boutiques, car dealerships, major banks, and even a new shopping mall. The commercial facilities that one encounters there are not typical of most Paraguayan towns and starkly reveal the way in which capital circulates in this region. Since the small food kiosks in Ayoreo villages do not have much selection and overprice their products, the Mennonite Colonies are the place where most Ayoreo go to do their shopping.

Curajodies' patterns of consumption in Filadelfia are part of the larger process of shaping their own sense of personhood in urban spaces. Aesthetics is a major marker that defines them in the city. Their trendy and modern dress puts them in unambiguous contrast to most indigenous women, who almost in a uniform style dress in long skirts made of imported colored cloths and wear flip-flops. *Curajodie* not only spend money on clothes but also handbags, shoes, fragrances and makeup, products that most Ayoreo in the villages do not use.

While there are non-Ayoreo sex workers in the city, including other indigenous women as well as Paraguayans (more on this below), white men prefer *curajodie*. As a *curajo* friend once put it to me, "Men like us better than other indigenous women because we are not only younger than those old women, but we dress better." *Curajodie* see aesthetics not only as important for being able to interact with white men, but also as a way to inhabit the city. "We like to buy nice clothes so that white people do not look down on us in the city," one woman told me. Such statements are not rare in a social space where locals construct

indigenous women as 'dirty' and 'backward'. Access to money enables young women to engage in conspicuous consumption, which allows them to cultivate a type of persona that can navigate the hierarchical and racial inequalities of the Mennonite Colonies.

For these young women, to be modern is to be able to navigate the spaces of the city without being discriminated against. For them, one of the means to achieve this is conspicuous consumption. In this vein, the bulk of money received by 'clients' goes into buying clothing and accessories. One of the major influences on the aesthetic style of *curajodie* are music videos, which in the last several years have been setting new standards of beauty and female behavior among Ayoreo youth. Every night, not only in Filadelfia but in every other village, numerous teens pay to sit in small, smoky and crowded rooms to watch on-stage music performances on old TVs powered by electrical generators. They spend hours listening to lyrics 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 on *curajodie*. Having access to money gives them the possibility to emulate the dress code of female dancers in the videos. Like in the music videos, *curajodie* wear tall boots, short skirts or tight jeans, revealing blouses and accessories such as handbags and make-up. They copy the style of dress so well that teenagers in the villages now call the female dancers in the videos *curajodie*. In addition to emulating clothing styles from music videos, they also copy ways of interacting with men. Dancing, drinking and conspicuous public displays of affection have all become part of their new social repertoire in

the city.

Influenced by social media, the use of makeup has become very popular among teenage Ayoreo. Facial painting has always been a fundamental form of social expression for women during pre-Christian times. As shown in Chapter II, young and single women would wear red facial painting as an expression of beauty and sexual availability. Although now they have switched to make-up, its symbolism continues to be tied to sexual availability, and therefore Ayoreo regard in a negative light the use of make-up among pre-teenage girls or married women.

Conspicuous consumption gives young women a sense of being able to participate in the social scene of the city without being discriminated against. In an environment where indigenous women are highly disregarded, being a *curajo* allows them to be part of social spaces which otherwise marginalize them. Unlike most Ayoreo or even village chiefs—the ones who often go to the city to interact with local officials—*curajodie* know the codes of the city. They map and follow the social spaces of their 'clients,' and money gives them access not only to material goods, but also allows them to circulate through the public spaces of the city as consumers. At nighttime, social rules invert, and as *per* Stallybrass and White (1989), 'that what is socially peripheral, becomes central.' They go to shops and bars, and people who during the day discriminate against them now become 'friends' who flirt and court them, even forging relations of obligation through monetary sexual exchange.

Crafting Intimate Relations: Sexual Liaisons with Men

There are different dynamics that shape the encounters and dynamics between

curajodie and their male 'friends' in the city. The complexities of these relations—despite the monetization of the sexual liaison—make it hard to define them exclusively in terms of a client-sex worker relationship focused only on accessing money. The relationships they construct in turn shape their practices and expectations, re-inscribing in this way Ayoreo women's sexual subjectivities.

Among the men who solicit *curajodie* are Paraguayans, Mennonites, Brazilians and indigenous men (including Ayoreo). Most Paraguayan 'clients' are between twenty and fifty years old and are either workers who come into town at the end of every month, or people living and working in Filadelfia and its surroundings. Mennonite ‘clients’ vary in age, although most are older men in their fifties and sixties belonging to diverse social strata of the Mennonite community. Younger Mennonites only rarely seek out these girls.

Young women employ terminology from Ayoreo kinship to refer to their ‘clients.’ Specifically, they use the word *ñijoa* or 'my friend', which is used to refer to close relatives. At times, they will use the term *gnamai* (‘boyfriend’) to refer to their partner. They differentiate between ‘boyfriends’ and ‘friends.’ The latter involve more stable relations that can last from months up to a few years. The former, although they might see each other more than once, involve mostly fleeting encounters. Young women engage men with whom they would otherwise have no link or way to approach them in other social contexts, due to the hierarchical social structure of the Colonies. Young women deploy their sexuality to access money, and craft a sense of self that allows them to inhabit the city and mingle with locals. They tailor their sexual liaisons in unique ways, not

exclusively focused on making money.

As they re-enact customary practices of sexuality in a non-Ayoreo context, colliding expectations and tensions arise which give way to unequal power dynamics between them and their sexual liaisons. This leads to the reproduction of systemic patterns of violence and discrimination. In the narratives of the girls, there are striking silences and lacunae, which speak to taboos, mixed feelings, hardships and the discrimination they experience. It is not hard to see how these silences give evidence of an implicit internalization of colonial violence by the girls, which shape their expectations and aspirations as they relate and interact with non-Ayoreo actors. By examining the relations that *curajodie* craft with Paraguayans, Mennonites and Ayoreo, the similarities and differences among each of these relations become evident.

Relations with Paraguayans 'Boyfriends'

The nature of the work activities of most Paraguayans in the Chaco takes them far away from their places of residence in other parts of the country. Away from their families for long periods, these young men seek female company and sexual liaisons when temporarily in the city.

Several Paraguayan 'clients' in interviews expressed interest in having Ayoreo women accompany them to their worksites in an effort to engage them in domestic activities as well as being their sexual liaisons. While some girls do choose to travel for a few days to work sites with these men, for safety reasons most do not take up such offers. This would be an option if they were married, but marriage is not even contemplated with these men.

Until not long ago, marriage to white men was a taboo topic for most Ayoreo women. Despite the occasional desire of girls to marry these men, oftentimes this is a theme either silenced or touched upon in a humorous way only. I contend that these reactions reveal internalized forms of colonialism, mentioned above, which hinders them from thinking of themselves in such terms (as potential marriageable partners to white people) and which therefore does not allow them to talk openly about such possibilities. These reactions further support the fact that Ayoreo in general still regard group exogamy in a negative light. In part, this is because they are aware that white men do not tend to commit in a serious way to Ayoreo women.

Most Paraguayan men prefer *curajodie* to indigenous or Paraguayan sex workers who live in Filadelfia. The latter, unlike *curajodie*, are sex workers. They solicit in dark corners and are seen in Canaan, but during the day, they are nowhere to be spotted. One of the Paraguayan sex workers, Lucía, explained to me how her practices differed from that of Ayoreo girls:

> I am not like them. They are like pigs. They have sex in any corner or bush. All they need is a dark spot. I am not like that. I do not like to be in the street. When I meet someone, that person has to be clean and I wait until the end of the night to go and have sex with him. I do not rush into men. I also charge a lot. Those poor things [referring to Ayoreo girls], have many infections and are dirty. Yuck…They charge little money and all they want to do is to drink, so what men do is get them by buying them beer.

Despite frequenting the same bar, and even the same men, the Paraguayan sex workers I interviewed in Filadelfia made an effort to construct themselves in stark opposition to Ayoreo *curajodie*. They considered themselves "nothing like those Indian women" who had "no morals" as one twenty-eight year old told me. Fights

over Paraguayan men were common between both groups.

By 2010 there were only about five Paraguayan sex workers who were streetwalkers in Filadelfia, although there were rumors that several Paraguayan young women were escort girls (the way in which these girls operate is discretely through acquaintances and phone calls). All of the Paraguayan sex workers came from other parts of the country and their discourses about this activity contrasted with those of Ayoreo girls. When I asked them about the activity, most claimed to be engaged in sex work only for a temporary period of time. They were in the activity exclusively for money, and their families did not know what they were doing for a living. Unlike Ayoreo girls, they did not think of what they did in terms of partying or having fun, but rather in terms of work, and some even felt ashamed by their actions.

Paraguayan sex workers referred to *curajodie* in derogatory terms, utilizing a moralizing discourse to differentiate themselves from them. However, most Paraguayan men I spoke to preferred Ayoreo girls to Paraguayan sex workers. One truck driver explained it this way, "Ayoreo girls are much younger, prettier and more open to hang out with us." While *curajodie* are indeed younger and more attractive than Paraguayan sex workers in Filadelfia, men prefer sexual liaisons with them not so much for this reason as for the fact that they charge less or even nothing at times. In addition, unlike local sex workers who focus exclusively on the monetary aspect of the activity, Ayoreo girls seek to craft intimate relationships with these men. *Curajodie* spend time making men feel special and showing themselves more invested in their liaison, something that is

not considered a priority for Paraguayan sex workers. This sparks the interest of Paraguayan men.

"*Que paso de vos mi amor, sabes, 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 *Gesa* by Simón, a Paraguayan truck driver who had been seeing her on and off for a year. She referred to him as *ñijoa* 'my boyfriend' when she talked to me about him. She was seventeen years old when she met him, and he was forty. Originally from the greater Asunción area, he was one of several truck drivers employed by the Mennonite cooperative to pick up cows from different ranches in the region to be later slaughtered at the cooperative.

They met in Filadelfia, and as soon as they got together, he requested sexual exclusivity by asking her to be his girlfriend. This flattered *Gesa*, and although she agreed to it, she did not take the proposition seriously. Like most Ayoreo girls, she knew from previous experiences that Paraguayans do not make serious commitments with Ayoreo women. As she put it, "*Je ore cae, je ore adode gu.*" ('They change partners, those are their ways'). Aware of this, she kept seeing other men as well, although she admitted thinking of Simon as someone "special."

Once, she decided to accompany him on a trip to Asunción where they stayed together for almost a month. At the beginning, she was excited because she would have the opportunity to explore Asunción and go out dancing, something she was looking forward to. Soon after arriving in this unfamiliar setting, however, she began to miss her family and friends, and wanted to be back in Filadelfia.

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 the 'friends,' boyfriends provide semi-permanent access to money and in some cases in greater amounts depending on the attachments that might develop between couples. Most such men support young women's party habits. For girls like *Gesa*, sexual encounters are "safer" with men who become 'boyfriends' than with strangers. Despite this, these relationships do not involve sexual fidelity on either side. For Ayoreo women, seeing more than one man while single is a pattern that is consistent with their customary courting patterns, where they engage different partners for a period until finding a stable one. This practice reinforces the perception of them as 'prostitutes' by Paraguayan men. Ironically, these men are usually married, and more often than not, also see other women as well (which becomes a constant source of fights between the women and the men).

Like *Gesa*, most young women do not see white men as potential marriageable partners (although this trend is changing in recent years, details in Chapter VI). Paraguayan men have a reputation for leaving their wives with children, a major social problem in the eyes of the Ayoreo. Most *curajodie* are aware of this and avoid getting "too serious" with Paraguayans. When girls attach themselves emotionally to these men, the relationships tend to be fraught with unequal power dynamics. This is so because once emotionally attached, most girls do not charge their 'friends' for the sexual encounter. Rather, they try to establish a stronger sense of bonding through exchange which they do by spending a lot of

their money buying presents for their ‘boyfriends'. Instead of reciprocating—as Ayoreo men do in such situations—Paraguayans tend to take advantage of the situation, seeing it as a ‘good deal’. In exchange for a little money and some beer, they can have sexual liaisons with women who, in addition to making themselves sexually available to them, also give them presents and attention. Most Paraguayans only take advantage of such situations temporarily until moving on to other relationships.

Queneja was affected by one such relationship. At the time I met her, she was sixteen years old. By then, she had already been a *curajo* for three years. She met Tomás, a twenty-two-year-old Paraguayan, at a party at the Misión Guaraní.[113] Her friends would often make remarks about how she had fallen for "an Indian" and in addition was over-spending her money on him. When I mentioned this to her, she said “*Mu yicacome ute Paola nga jeti ute doi uyu, chisiome ñu patadie*” (‘But I have feelings for him, and if we have sex, he is also nice and gives me money at times’). Later, I heard that she had found him holding hands with a Paraguayan woman at a party. When she tried to confront him, he never returned her calls. The emotional recovery was hard for her and took a long time. The last time I talked to her, a year after the event, she said she still missed him at times.

She had set high expectations about the relationship, something common among young girls who are engaging Paraguayans for the first time. Unaware that these men look for merely fleeting relations—treating them as casual relationships and even as prostitutes—she had honestly invested her feelings in this relationship. Men like Tomás often take advantage of such situations, especially if

[113] One of the indigenous neighborhoods of Filadelfia.

the girls are emotionally attached to them. The rapidity with which he left *Queneja* for another woman, and the fact that he refused to give her any explanation, reflects colliding expectations and the lack of respect towards the relationship, which more often than not leaves feelings of deception and other emotional scars.

Such emotional distress is often embedded in the silence of these young women. While histories of physical and emotional abuse abound, girls tend not to talk about them, mostly because of feelings of shame and trauma. This silence is also forced, as girls do not want to reveal 'defeat' or 'weakness' in front of friends and family (Ayoreo consider both negative traits). Some governmental institutions in the area have programs that target issues related to gender. However, none of them has an integral program that specifically supports victims of violence.[114] Violence against women is still a taboo topic in the Colonies, and coupled with the preconception of Ayoreo women as 'prostitutes', automatically leaves them unprotected and exposes them to increased chances of being abused by 'clients.'

Relations with Mennonites 'Friends'

> *Mennonite Employer*: "I see that you are bringing a woman to the ranch. Who is the one you brought last?
> *Paraguayan Employee*: Yes, I am…
> *Mennonite Employer*: You know I do not like you bringing any *puta* ('whore') here. Is she indigenous? What group does she belong to?
> *Paraguayan Employee*: Do not tell me you do not know this…

This exchange, recounted to me, captures the double standard which

[114] The recent establishment of a *Secretaría de la Mujer* (Ministry of Women's Affairs) has been a step in that direction, however, it is too new to fully engage these cases.

characterizes sexual liaisons between *curajodie* and Mennonite 'friends.' While during the day Mennonites publicly dismiss Ayoreo women as 'shameless' for their actions, at night they are their highest-paying customers. To sustain that double standard, they are highly discrete and never let themselves be seen publicly picking up Ayoreo women in their trucks. To this end, they go out later, usually after ten o'clock, when most of the city has already quieted down. These are middle-aged and older men, and most of them are married. Mennonite clients can range from local pastors to so-called 'social outcasts' within the Mennonite community (those who have either divorced or have been excommunicated from the church). As a *curajo* friend described them:

> They want to be with us just for a little. They are afraid of their wives discovering them. That is the main reason why they like to look for girls on the first side road of town, at the entrance of town. You have been there, you know that street has no lighting. It is dark. That is where they like to look for girls. Seldom do they come to look for us on the main street. They are mostly the kindest, because they are old and give us good money, too.

Because Mennonites prefer to avoid being seen in Filadelfia with *curajodie*, they oftentimes take them to their ranches for a few days. Another strategy that they use is to take advantage of their roles as employers. They use Ayoreo workers as intermediaries to solicit girls and make them come out to their ranches. While these Ayoreo do not act as pimps by accepting money from either party, they do contact *curajodie* who are relatives. This is also a common way in which these girls meet up with Mennonite men.

It is also common to hear about Mennonites who seek out Ayoreo women who are accompanying their husbands, fathers or brothers to work sites. Only a small number of women usually agree to sexual liaisons under such

circumstances, as they risk fights between Ayoreo couples and families. *Chise*, a woman in her twenties, told me of what happened to her brother's wife at his work site:

> She accompanied him, like always, to the ranch of this Mennonite, who is our neighbor. Every day, after my brother left to go to work in the field, the rancher would look for my sister-in-law. My brother was not aware that she was spending time together with this old man. He even bought her a new denture as a present. My brother was suspicious, but she told him his boss was just being nice. We knew this was not the case. The next time a new job came up and he came to look for my brother in the village, he asked him about his wife, to see if she was going to accompany him again. That was when my brother got mad at her. He was so mad at her, that that same day he punched her very hard in the face, so hard that her denture broke.

This type of situation is one of the leading causes of marital problems between young Ayoreo. While this woman consented to have a sexual liaison with the Mennonite rancher, such encounters take place in a context of sustained power differentials, which implicitly makes women feel obliged to submit themselves to their husband's employers. Some of these situations can be traumatizing, and are often not denounced to the police, as Ayoreo feel dependent on Mennonites to access work opportunities.

Such was the case of an Ayoreo young woman in her early twenties, *Ome*, who approached me during my stay in Filadelfia. She asked if I could help her file a complaint against a Mennonite who got her pregnant. Now, seven years after the event, she heard that a branch of a governmental institution that supports the rights of children had opened in Filadelfia. She was looking for the Mennonite to pay child support and wanted me to help with the process. This is how she told me her story:

My family and I were staying at the farm of a Mennonite employer of my

> father. The wife of the rancher hired me to clean her house. 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 did not know about it, and they thought the money was coming from cleaning the house. This went on for a long time. One day, I realized I was pregnant. I was afraid and did not tell my family. Not long after this, he paid my father and told him he they did not need him anymore at the farm. I think he was afraid his wife would find out. I was afraid of my parents and did not say anything until they realized I was pregnant. They got mad at me. My father was mad at the Mennonite too, but he did not file a complaint. Later, everybody knew I was pregnant, even his wife.

Ome's parents kept the baby and raised him, common in cases when Ayoreo cannot find someone else that will adopt the child. In the last four years, some Ayoreo single mothers have filed complaints for child support at the local CODENI (*Consejerías Municipales por los Derechos del Niño, la Niña y el Adolescente, Municipal Counseling for the Rights of Children and Adolescents*). This institution, which seeks to reach settlements between the couple before having to file legal complaints, has had mixed results for Ayoreo. *Ome* heard about it, and wanted to give it a try.

For the most part, abuse of underage girls like *Ome* goes uncontested among Mennonites, who are the main providers of work in the Colonies. As an Ayoreo man told me, "If I file a complaint against one Mennonite in the Colony, all of them will find out about it. They will tell their friends, and none of them will give me work anymore." This is a common discourse among Ayoreo that prevents them from filing complaints and denouncing anything from intimate matters to work issues.

Mennonite men who live or work on nearby ranches sometimes look for Ayoreo girls in the villages. The chief of one of the villages I often visited

prohibited outsiders from stepping too far into the village. He treated with suspicion all non-Ayoreo visitors who came for visits, along with their Ayoreo girlfriends. On one occasion, one Mennonite who tried to solicit a girl was “fined” by the chief and a group of older men. Some people stopped his car, he received a complaint from the village chief and was forced to pay in order to leave. Although this was the case of a chief who could be considered more "traditional", most chiefs use the spaces of the village to display authority towards Mennonites, a position that chiefs lack in Filadelfia.

Despite the active involvement of Mennonites with young Ayoreo women, local authorities in Filadelfia tend to blame Paraguayan and Brazilian men for the presence of *curajodie* in the city. However, many of the pregnancies of *curajodie* unmistakably show that Mennonite men are also involved in these sexual liaisons. It was common for girls on the street to pinpoint to me who the father of their child was, something they were clear about despite urban myths that they do not even remember who they most recently slept with. Paraguayan sex workers prefer Mennonite over Paraguayan clients mostly due to money and to the prestige involved (and, as one sex worker told me, because they are easy to blackmail). Ayoreo girls, unlike Paraguayan sex workers, do not seek to establish emotional ties with Mennonite men. The tone with which they refer to these men is different than when talking about Paraguayan men. Their liaisons do not involve flirting nor courting and I never heard stories of *curajodie* 'in love' with Mennonites, as was the constant theme when talking about Paraguayans.

According to some interviewees, interactions with Mennonites are very

limited, as they do not seek anything beyond the sexual liaison. Some make arrangements over the phone, and unlike encounters with Paraguayans, their meetings are short and do not take place in public spaces, leaving little room for flirting and courting. The age gap between Ayoreo girls and Mennonite men is often significantly greater compared to younger Paraguayan men, which does not foster the girls' interest in building relationships. This leads girls to treat the sexual exchange exclusively in monetary terms, as one *curajo* put it to me: "Whatever money Mennonite men give us, we spend it all to buy beer to hang out with Paraguayans." Mennonite men are known to pay much more than Paraguayans and this keeps girls attracted to them. There are a few cases of Paraguayan women married to Mennonites, but these are exceptions (more on this in Chapter VI).

As a unique thread in the complex social fabric of Filadelfia's urban space, it is worth mentioning that there is only one known case of homosexuality among *curajodie*. The young man, a transgender, was linked to the death of a Mennonite 'client' in Filadelfia. With the support of local police he was arrested without much evidence against him and after being denied access to a lawyer, the case eventually made national news. What was not publicized, however, is that the brother of the dead man had begun to 'avenge' his brother by intimidating any Ayoreo he found in the streets. The situation became so threatening for most Ayoreo that a group of chiefs from the villages filed a complaint at the prosecutor's office. Other emblematic cases occurred in 2002 and 2004 when two *curajodie* were killed in the Mennonite Colonies. These cases were never resolved

and those responsible have yet to be apprehended. Cases such as these further fuel the fear of parents of having their young daughters hang out with strangers in Filadelfia.

Rethinking Relations with Ayoreo Men

> I never sleep with Ayoreo men, only white men. They are the ones that have money. Unlike the Ayoreo, they receive a check at the end of each month. But if you ask me who would I marry, I say an Ayoreo, of course. They are our people.

It is common to hear *curajodie* brag about how they reject Ayoreo men on the basis of having too little money. At the same time, if an Ayoreo men gave a *curajo* a lot of money for their sexual encounter, that would also be a big topic of discussion among girls, since such episodes were rare. The economic discrimination that Ayoreo people suffer in the Colonies by being poorly paid is picked up by *curajodie* and used as an excuse not to sleep with Ayoreo men. I use the term “excuse,” since most Ayoreo *curajo* find Ayoreo men the most attractive and would eventually like to marry them. Although *cujarodie* do not talk about this among themselves, it is common for them to have sexual liaisons with Ayoreo men and not charge them anything.

Their reluctance to talk about this is triggered by the girls’ embarrassment towards white people if they were to be seen in the streets of Filadelfia with their "own people." This is not considered "cool", as I was told by them. But this lack of 'coolness' is rather intimately related to the sustained discrimination against indigenous peoples in the Mennonite Colonies. Unlike Ayoreo men, for the cujarodie there is prestige associated to being seen with a white man, which is fundamental to the construction of their sense of self in urban spaces. Unaware,

these young women are reproducing this discrimination with their own practices when they reject Ayoreo men.

Avoiding Ayoreo men on the other hand speaks to the women's sense of integrity as related to their sexuality, as one girl put it, “They are *youcurasara* (‘our people’), it makes us feel embarrassed to have sex with them, especially because they mostly know each other, and men could easily talk about a girl and her ‘ways in bed’ to other men.” According to a *curajo*, “This is something that does not matter to us with white men.” Such reactions reveal how Ayoreo young men are seen as potential life partners, and in this way, women have to sustain a profile—as portrayed in Chapter III—in order to be able to marry within their group. This also shows the moral tension that girls experience between seeing men and finding a stable partner. White men are considered outside the social realm of Ayoreo lives. Therefore, involvement with them is not seen as having a negative repercussion on life among the group. Despite having little money, Ayoreo young men are considered the most ‘handsome’—unlike Paraguayans and Mennonites—and seen as potential permanent partners.

The practices of young women with Ayoreo men reveal how, while money is considered important, it is not their ultimate motivation. Beyond simply receiving money from men, they seek to establish links and even emotional relations. While most of these girls engage in practices that resemble sex work, these cannot be defined as such.

Conclusion

Ayoreo women's sexual subjectivities in urban spaces are crafted at the

juncture of colliding practices, feelings and expectations. To use Foucault's image of 19th century Victorian discourses of sexuality (Foucault 1974:18), the sexual practices of Ayoreo women become "dense transfer points of power" in the Mennonite Colonies. The commoditization of their sexuality provokes anxieties and their bodies are epitomized as excesses. However, young women use their sexuality and self-presentation in public spaces to actively challenge Mennonite norms of private sexuality and intimacy. In the same way, Mennonite and Paraguayan men use women's sexuality to reinforce and justify their perception and treatment towards Ayoreo as 'matter out of place.'

I have illustrated how women's bodies—and Ayoreo bodies in general—are constructed as 'abject' in the intercultural spaces of Filadelfia. Although Ayoreo pre-Christian ethics of sexuality continue to be observed, the monetized form it has taken drives white people to treat them as prostitutes—further discriminating against them. At the same time, the practices of *curajodie* allow them to occupy precisely the same social spaces that marginalize them. People who would never set eyes on them during the day become 'friends' and intimate partners at night, and even enter what Ayoreo perceive as relations of obligation by giving girls money. In this way, *curajodie* are not only redefining the social spaces of a highly racialized city, but in the process, are also retracing new lines of what it means to be an Ayoreo woman in such contexts. The way in which young women use their sexuality to access and cross into Mennonite public spaces and 'expected' ways of relating to white people is shifting their interactions with the 'white world' and shifting established gendered roles among Ayoreo (see details in Chapter VI).

Nevertheless, in the same way that their practices can be empowering, they also expose young women to violence by non-Ayoreo through physical abuse and unwanted pregnancies. Despite elaborate aesthetic performances to find their own space in the city, the practices of *curajodie* reinforce a view that treats most indigenous women as marginal and immoral, unworthy of inhabiting the social context of the city. The same power that gives *curajodie* a sense of self in the city also reproduces historical patterns of discrimination towards women in new forms. Despite this, the monetization of women's sexuality persists in the realm of exchange, rather than being solely a form of feminine submission or exploitation. In this context, practices of young women become a unique cultural formation constructed in a web of social relations, forged through the cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic discipline experienced by the Ayoreo during the greater part of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Two years after finalizing my dissertation fieldwork, I returned to the Chaco. I wanted to make a trip to Faro Moro, the old and abandoned NTM mission station 130 miles north of Filadelfia. I had heard that the infrastructure was still in place, despite it now being part of a ranch owned by an American entrepreneur who raises jaguars and organizes 'sustainable' hunting trips for mostly American visitors. On my way up, I took the main road going north towards Bolivia. On this road are located seven of the newest Ayoreo villages.[115]

I made a quick stop at Kilómetro 17. Ten years ago, this location was nothing more than a few scattered houses on the side of the main and only dirt road that goes to the north of the Chaco, towards the border with Bolivia. There was one kiosk where indigenous villages from around the area bought their food supply. Now the road has been widened and according to the season, it can be as smooth as any paved highway. This is because it is privately managed by a group of ranchers who own large properties in the north of the country. Being the main access road to the north, its maintenance is fundamental to assure the successful transportation of the cattle that represents the main business of the region. As part of this continuing maintenance, Kilómetro 17 has grown significantly in recent years. It now has several food kiosks and bars, more houses, and two large volleyball courts, and has become a "must stop" for all truck drivers passing through this region.

[115] This road divides the *Departamento* of Boquerón from that of Alto Paraguay. See Map in Annex 2.

As I stopped to buy some food, the owner of one of the new kiosks—a friendly man in his forties—greeted me with surprise. He remembered me from a visit I had paid him a few years earlier during fieldwork. My research topic had somehow stuck with him, and he was eager to update me on the 'goings-on of the Ayoreo girls.' He proudly told me that these days the Ayoreo girls all choose his bar over the others to party on the weekends. Giggling, he murmured to keep his wife from listening, "You know, I'm even looking for an Ayoreo girlfriend now! I've heard so many things about them!" He added, "They no longer go to Filadelfia to party. Everything happens right here." As I was chatting with him, one of the neighbors spotted me and called me over. I recognized her as the wife of a truck driver who has been making money off Ayoreo as an intermediary for years and I went over to say hello. Trying to confirm what I had just heard from the kiosk owner, I inquired with her:

> *Paola*: "So, do the Ayoreo always come here now?"
> *Carolina*: Oh, it is so sad to see these Ayoreo women come here and get drunk every weekend. But you have to come and see what goes on. You have to see it with your own eyes."
> *Paola*: hum…really?
> *Carolina*: Yeah, you won't believe it, but it is their own men who bring their wives to give the Paraguayans. I have seen them negotiate with Paraguayans, and get money from this. You know what I mean... This is how they make money.

Sexual liaisons of married Ayoreo women with non-Ayoreo men—a new phenomenon on the rise—open up space to reflect on the rapidly changing context of the sexual practices of Ayoreo women in today's Chaco. In this concluding chapter, I start by focusing on this new arrangement, which significantly differs from practices of *curajodie*; unlike the latter, the practices of these married

women do in fact fit scholarly categorizations of sex work. However, I contend that these practices do not involve a process of commoditization in the Marxist sense. In the rest of the chapter, I reflect on the impact of practices of *curajodie* on Ayoreo in general and Ayoreo women in particular. I show how their practices are shifting Ayoreo gendered roles, in both in Ayoreo villages as well in the city, and how this in turn is having an impact on women's constructions of self in the contemporary landscape of the Chaco.

A New Trend: Married Sex Workers

Tona is a beautiful, robust woman in her mid-thirties, with an oval face and long black hair. She lives with her husband in a rented room in Villa Amistad, the Filadelfia neighborhood where mostly Paraguayans and Brazilians live. She rents one of the many motel-type places that have sprung up like mushrooms during the last seven years. These rental buildings consist of rows of small and shoddily constructed rooms that have poor lighting and shared bathrooms. While they are very expensive, they are also much in demand by Paraguayan and Brazilian workers who work in Filadelfia and do not want to commute from Villa Choferes or other nearby towns every day.

Tona and her husband are one of the few Ayoreo couples that have the economic solvency to rent such a place. The daughter of a devoted Christian, Tona started walking the streets as a *curajo* in the early 1990s when there was hardly a handful of them in the street. At the time, Tona had been introduced by a Paraguayan friend to the only *casa de cita* (‘brothel’) in Filadelfia. Since its closure in the late nineties, no other has been opened. She was curious about the

ambiance and spent more time there than with Ayoreo friends of her age in the streets.

Eventually, Mennonite authorities closed down the place and she went back to the streets. There, she met an Ayoreo man, whom she decided to marry. Aware that they could make money through her sexual liaisons, however, she convinced her husband to let her return to the street. At first, he was wary of the idea for its negative moral connotation. Because she already knew many Paraguayans, she knew she could operate out of her house, making much more money than any other Ayoreo *curajo* who were in the streets only temporarily. In addition, her fluency in Spanish, along with her good looks, make her come across as a Paraguayan, which allows her to make a lot more money, as some 'clients' discriminate against indigenous sex workers.

Unlike *cujarodie*, Tona's practices are the same as a typical sex worker in the contemporary literature. While she started the activity as a *curajo*, her experiences with Paraguayan sex workers drove her to engage in sex work as a viable long-term economic activity. Her parents, like most Ayoreo, did not approve of her lifestyle given that she is a married woman and that her current sexual practices are considered taboo for married women. As explored in previous chapters, the sexual availability enjoyed by women while single becomes totally restricted once they are married. Tona, being a married woman, is expected to observe fidelity. Due to her strained relations with her family, she hardly visits her parents back in her village, but has relatives who visit her when in Filadelfia. Several times she has tried to give her parents part of the money she earns for them to buy food, but

they have rejected it, as they do not approve of her ways.

The case of Tona had been an exception for many years until approximately 2005, when this trend began to take off in Casa Pasajera, the urban Ayoreo settlement. During that and the following year, the settlement reached its peak of families living in Filadelfia. Most likely related to the fact that many men were unable to find work, some women started engaging in practices—unlike sexual liaisons of *curajodie*—-that typify sex work. In these few isolated cases in 2005, these women, unlike curajodie, felt ashamed of their practices because they were married. Having the approval of their partners did not take away the shame of breaking the moral norms associated with sexual practices of married women that Ayoreo uphold. During the time I conducted fieldwork (2009-2011), these women were still few (no more than six). Despite the fact that this practice continues to be morally sanctioned, the number of such women has grown significantly in just a few short years.

Couples like Tona and her husband are perceived as "wanting money too much", as an older Ayoreo woman told me of married women that engage in sex work in Filadelfia. Unlike Tona, who operates from her rented room, the other married women solicit men in dark corners on the outskirts of town, as Paraguayan sex workers do. They are only rarely spotted at the local bar or parties that *curajodie* attend. And unlike *curajodie*, they feel ashamed of their practices. Ayoreo men with wives in this activity denied any requests for interviews. Ayoreo in general refer to the ways of these couples as *'poritai'* ('wicked'). Some have said these are men who "if they could, would avoid working", as one Ayoreo

man put it to me. However, I learned that many of them—like most Ayoreo living in Filadelfia—do in fact lack access to permanent job opportunities.

This phenomenon has steadily been on the rise since I left fieldwork. Ayoreo refer to the practice of Ayoreo men receiving money from their wives' sexual liaisons with white men as "*ore tera dacotedie*" ('they sell their wives'), a term that I had never heard back during dissertation fieldwork. In the last three years, the number of married couples who have one partner engaging in monetized sexual liaisons has grown from six to over twenty. While this is not considered a permanent source of income for couples, it is deployed as a strategy for obtaining 'extra' money.

In these cases, despite these women's practices being similar to cases of typical sex work in other context, I still contend that there is no commoditization of women's bodies (likewise in the case of *curajodie*). This is so because when husband and wife share resources, it is hard to claim that surplus labor is appropriated by someone (i.e. in this case the husband alone). Rather, both share the money earned from this activity. While these women are engaging in sex work, this does not constitute a Marxist type of exploitation. In this way, these new trends have not yet made it to commoditization in a Marxist sense.

The following story is that of the wife of *Pajei*, a young married man in his mid-twenties. I first heard it from a *curajo* friend, who called me to tell me the news shortly after my recent return to the Chaco:

> *Lisabia*: Do you remember *Pajei*? He lives in Filadelfia.
> *Paola*: Kind of… what happened to him?
> *Lisabia*: Nothing to him. Not to him, but to his wife. You might not know, but she walks the streets at night. A guy almost killed her on that road that

> goes to Villa Choferes and now she is at the Mennonite Hospital in Filadelfia.
> *Paola*: What happened? Does her husband know that she is in the streets?
> *Lisabia*: Yes, he knows, but allows her because he wants the money. This Paraguayan guy, I think he is crazy, because he almost beat her to death with a large palo santo wood stick. You know those things can be heavy.
> *Paola*: When did this happen?
> *Lisabia*: Mmm… just a few days ago. *Pajei's* boss is paying for everything at the hospital. I've heard the bill is already up to 10 million guaraníes [approximately 2,000 dollars]. And *Pajei* is in trouble. He didn't want his Mennonite boss to find out that his wife was walking the streets, because he wouldn't pay for the hospital bill, so he told him that his wife fell from a truck.

Pajei's wife—a young woman in her mid-twenties—was almost beaten to death after a sexual liaison with a Paraguayan man. The man not only abused her, but also severely injured her as he apparently was drunk and violent. She did not press charges, pressured by her husband who did not want his boss to learn that she was in the streets at night. When I further inquired into this, I found out that she was only sporadically doing this, as they were hoping to buy a motor bike with the money.

The need to access cash—a result of growing Ayoreo consumer demand—is increasingly driving couples to engage their wives in this commodified form of sexual exchange with non-Ayoreo men. The practices of these couples—usually between their mid-twenties to their late-thirties—are considered by mostly elder Ayoreo in the villages to be the result of the "little knowledge" (*'garosi ayipirei'*) that younger generations have, and some point out the 'weakness' of Ayoreo in regards to money (*'seria yoque ome pajnoningai*'). Occurrences such as that of Pajei's wife quickly reach the public sphere. Following Ayoreo ways, it is in that

sphere that these events are discussed and condemned. However, this has not stopped other couples from persisting in it.

These new dynamics are having a direct negative impact, felt mainly by women like *Pajei's* wife, as they become targets of violence. Ayoreo leadership has also been criticized for not being able to stop such practices from occurring within their villages. However, if a village chief has a family member involved, this automatically excludes him from being able to criticize these practices. In Filadelfia, the lack of a solidified leadership in the urban settlements allows these practices to be cultivated even further. Until now, there have been no reported cases of women being forced into this practice, but this does not rule out the possibility.

The Impact of Practices of *Curajodie* on Ayoreo Lives

The overall practices of *curajodie* in Filadelfia, which have been expounded on in the two preceding chapters, have triggered new and changing trends in Ayoreo lives, impacting primarily the role and positioning of Ayoreo women. This process is redefining the role of Ayoreo women both within their society as well as vis-à-vis outsiders. Furthermore, the practices of these women are having a direct and indirect impact far beyond the immediate realm of the women themselves.

Shifting Ayoreo Gender Roles and Marriage Patterns

One of the spheres in which the practices of *curajodie* in Filadelfia are having a direct impact is on marriage patterns and marital relations among Ayoreo. While the money 'earned' from sexual liaisons is not always significant, sexual

arrangements in Filadelfia are giving young women an emerging economic as well as emotional independence. As shown in this study, the patriarchal model, within which access to labor opportunities were structured for Ayoreo in the Mennonite Colonies, has excluded women from participating in the economic sphere (other than through the sporadic sale of handicrafts). In the contemporary context, this has therefore fostered dependency on male partners for access to cash. However, the sexual liaison of *curajodie* in Filadelfia—which is giving them access to cash—is reducing this economic dependency on men. This changing social climate is in turn triggering several new and unexpected situations discussed below.

Delay of Marriage

Many of the *curajodie* interviewed for this study stated that they would like to eventually get married. However, most decided to postpone it since they were, in the words of one of them, "having a good time."Access to money, which in turn means access to conspicuous consumption and increased opportunities to party in the city, is delaying the customary women's priority to find a permanent partner to settle down. While *curajodie* do not make up the majority among Ayoreo youth, they marry later than most non-*curajodie* girls. It is expected that if this trend continues, the marriageable age of young Ayoreo women will also shift.

Concomitant with this, there is also an increase in the number of trial marriages. Young women are generally more prone to change partners if the relationship fails, knowing that they can always find someone in Filadelfia. This is partly related to the practices of *curajodie*, as the simple mention of Filadelfia

connotes an opportunity to meet not only non-Ayoreo men, but also potential Ayoreo partners. In this way, young women feel that they can always find a potential partner in Filadelfia, as one young woman told me, "If things do not work out."

Changes in the power dynamics of married couples

Some divorced women I interviewed viewed streetwalking as an 'alternative' to asserting themselves in front of abusive or cheating husbands. In this way, sexual liaisons in Filadelfia gave them a certain degree of independence, in part economically (although not significantly) and in part emotionally. An initial motivation to go out with non-Ayoreo men also included making ex-partners or boyfriends 'jealous.' At the time of my fieldwork, there was a small but notable number of divorced women who had unsuccessful marriages, and after breaking up with their partners, turned to the streets with the ultimate goal of finding a new husband. In the meantime, their monetized sexual liaisons helped them sustain themselves (and their children) until a new husband could be found.

Unlike younger *curajodie,* who at some point might have also been temporarily married and separated (i.e. undergoing trial marriages without children), what differentiates these women is that they already are *cheque* or 'full women'. This means that they had children and had been in a stable relationship for several years before separating. This in turn caused their practices in Filadelfia to be perceived as a disruption of Ayoreo moral norms, and therefore widely condemned. As showed in previous chapters, the practices of *curajodie* are socially accepted for young and unmarried women, but not for divorced women.

Aware of this, these women are never spotted partying with *curajodie*. Instead, they occupy dim street corners—like married sex workers. They are driven to the streets of Filadelfia out of a mix of disdain for their partners, economic necessity, and the desire to find a new partner.

Bajebia, 38 years old, tall and full-figured, is one such woman. Her story is a case in point. She was living in a village with her husband, who was working as a schoolteacher there. Like other Ayoreo teachers, they decided to send their child to study in Filadelfia. The generous salary teachers receive makes them one of the few Ayoreo able to afford schooling in Filadelfia. They prefer that their children go to Paraguayan schools so "they can learn Spanish faster," as one of them told me.[116] Since her husband could not leave his job, they arranged for *Bajebia* to stay with her child in the Ayoreo settlement in Filadelfia while he attended school. About a year after returning only sporadically to her village, *Bajebia* was told by friends that her husband was sleeping with a *curajo* who usually moved back and forth between her village and Filadelfia. Eventually, he left *Bajebia* and married the *curajo*. Emotionally distressed about the situation, she sent her child back to his father and stayed in Filadelfia.

Remaining on her own in Filadelfia, *Bajebia* one day decided to 'walk the street.' She told me that this was to get to know Paraguayans. I asked her, "How come you never tried that earlier, since you lived for so many years with your family in Filadelfia before getting married?" She said that when she was younger,

[116] While the public school system is free, it involves expenses to buy school materials and uniforms.
With the multilingual reform of the schooling system, Ayoreo are required to learn in Ayoreo until third grade, and only from then on in Spanish.

she used to be afraid of all the things she heard about Paraguayans. Although she argued that money was not the reason why she started walking the street four years ago, the activity has given her material independence and an income to sustain her lifestyle. For many years, she was married to a teacher who had a fairly good income compared to most Ayoreo, so her lifestyle changed dramatically when she and her husband separated.

Upon my return to the Chaco after fieldwork, I learned that *Bajebia* had indeed found an Ayoreo husband, left the street and is now back in her village. I also learned about two other divorced women who were in the streets in 2009 but are now are back in their villages with Ayoreo husbands. However, this is not the case for all *cheque* or women. There are some *cheque* who have been in the streets for several years now. While they have tried to establish permanent relations to leave Filadelfia, they have not been able to do so. This speaks to the negative social connotation that being a *cheque* in the streets has for Ayoreo (unlike *curajodie*).

Another case in point is *Acoya* about 30 years old. Her husband had been cheating on her, and she had tolerated this for almost a year. She has three children and told me that she still loved her husband. However, the fact that he would not change his ways drove her to finally leave him. Her parents were at the time working in Filadelfia, so she went to stay with them there. After a month or so, she started going out at night. She explained to me that sexual liaisons in Filadelfia were not "all about money." While she took advantage of the money she could get, her main goal was to make her husband jealous. She was on and off

in the streets for about five months until she met a Paraguayan whom she decided to marry. They have been together for two years, and live in her parents' village. In addition to her three children (who now live with the father), she has had two more children with her new husband.

According to some women interviewed, they go to the streets with the aim of making their husbands jealous, while other women see this as a form of accessing money to support their families while they look for a new husband. While the practices of divorced women differ from that of *curajodie,* it is not completely accurate to frame them as sex workers, as the dynamics that underlie these situations involve complex negotiations beyond a simple exchange of sex for money. During the time fieldwork was conducted, this group included no more than seven women. It is important to note that none of their marriages were restored.

Increased Infidelities

This is an external impact that practices of *curajodie* are having on Ayoreo married couples. The increasing trend of infidelity with *curajodie* was already evident during dissertation fieldwork. There were cases, primarily of young men, who cheated on their wives with *curajodie,* as well as cases of women who, while having their husbands away on work, would cheat with non-Ayoreo men (some emulating practices of *curajodie*). While these practices took place mostly between young 'trial marriages', they still were a source of fights between families, and are considered morally degraded. While infidelity is not a new phenomenon among Ayoreo, the social space of Filadelfia—outside the realm of

communal life—allows such situations to take place more easily. Furthermore, easy access to alcohol and ingrained party habits can also trigger infidelity, despite these practices being socially sanctioned.

Marriages with non-Ayoreo men

As showed in earlier chapters, marriages between Ayoreo women and Paraguayan men have always been a rare occurrence among Ayoreo. Deeply rooted discrimination towards women has never allowed these men to contemplate such relationships. In the last two years however, this situation has quickly shifted and today the number of Ayoreo women marrying white men is steadily rising. This is a remarkable phenomenon considering that Ayoreo, since sedentarization, and unlike many other indigenous groups in the region, have been strict about the observance of group endogamy in their marriages.

However, this new trend was especially evident during my return visit to the Chaco and the Ayoreo. On a trip to one of the villages, I was surprised to find three young Paraguayans living there. When I asked the chief who they were, he proudly told me; "They are my family, Paola. They married my three daughters." These men were three friends working in nearby ranches who came from eastern Paraguay to work in the Chaco. I remembered hearing the news of the elder daughter marrying a Paraguayan a few years ago, but I assumed that like most Ayoreo-Paraguayan marriages, they would be separated by now. Contrary to my expectations, there were now three 'mixed' couples in one village!

The men had brand new wooden houses—which contrasted with the older Ayoreo houses—with faucets and showers. I was drawn by the fact that they were

in the process of fencing their houses, a practice common among Paraguayans but never among Ayoreo. At night, one of the couples brought their child in a fancy stroller to the fire at the house of the chief where we were gathered. When I asked where they had met, one of the girls told me, "*Iji fiesta iji Kilómetro 17*." ('At a party at Kilómetro 17'). I realized that by now, the number of places in which Ayoreo *curajodie* are meeting non-Ayoreo men has expanded to include places like *Kilómetro 17* close to their villages, as well as in their own villages, where outsiders working in nearby ranches come for weekend visits. This practice is not yet common in villages with elder or more traditional leadership.

One Ayoreo friend explained to me that he was suspicious of his ex-wife's new Paraguayan partner. His 12 year-old daughter had complained to him that the Paraguayan did not like her and her brother (both my friend's children), and usually mistreated them. Such situations are not easy to control, and children are frequently exposed to the physical and psychological violence of these men, who are known to openly consume alcohol in the villages; this is something the chiefs try to ban in all villages, but is not always managed successfully.

During the period 2009-2012 there were a maximum of eight 'mixed' marriages. As of 2014, that number has risen to twenty-five, if not more. All Ayoreo villages—with a few exceptions—have at least one Paraguayan man married to an Ayoreo woman. What is problematic about these relationships is that, with a few exceptions, they do not last for long. In addition, they involve an influx of outsiders (friends, workers, etc.) to the village. These cases need to be

further explored in order to understand how the presence of outsiders is influencing and changing social and economic dynamics within villages.

Shifting Youth Patterns of Consumption and Notions of Desire

Access to money has given *curajodie* access to consumer goods previously inaccessible to most Ayoreo youth. Friedman (2004) has rightly argued that consumption is a process rooted in the dissolution of fixed social identities. It is therefore not unreasonable to contend that *curajodie's* acts of consumption are the expression of a desire to find an adequate representation of self in a highly discriminatory space. Through conspicuous consumption, they seek to express a modern sense of self that challenges long-standing stereotypes of indigenous women. Women are constructing themselves as modern subjects in a context from which indigenous women have been historically erased.

Consumption thereby opens a space for Ayoreo women to participate according to their own terms in the social scene of the Mennonite Colonies, despite this participation being only marginal. The preceding chapter has explored how *curajodie* have found a new way to relate to non-Ayoreo in the Mennonite Colonies through new consumption habits. It is through this process that most of their money is invested, disregarding other outlets for their money. They exercise their sexuality to access money and then re-invest these 'earnings' in their image and party habits, which in turn allows them to flirt and have emotional relationships with non-Ayoreo men.

In this process, the consumer practices of *curajodie* are having a direct impact on Ayoreo youth in general. Most youth want to emulate their dress code and

have access to their consumer items such as tall leather boots or new cell phones. Filadelfia, with its trendy stores, has become the 'hub' to access and display these goods. Moreover, drinking and party habits are also an integral part of displaying this 'modern' sense of social self. In this vein, drinking problems are now becoming a major issue among Ayoreo youth.

In addition to fostering new consumption patterns, *curajodie* are setting the pace for new standards of beauty and at the same time are re-inscribing definitions of desire in relationships. Among other reasons, young women now prefer Paraguayans over Ayoreo men because the former engage in public displays of affection, while the latter do not. In addition, hanging out with Paraguayan contributes to young women's sense of feeling modern, as it implies that they can navigate and successfully craft relations with non-Ayoreo people.

The attraction to Filadelfia as a social space in which to enact one's sense of self through consumption and party habits became clear to me when I asked *curajodie* if they would think of returning to their villages if a food kiosk were available to them there (food kiosks are considered a safe source of income in the villages, as access to store-bought goods are limited there and the owners of these stores usually price up their goods). The response was categorical, "No." This reveals that beyond discriminatory stereotypes that portray Ayoreo as 'trapped' in consumerism, consumption patterns of *curajodie* and Ayoreo youth in general are part of a larger project of seeking and crafting a social space from which to participate vis-à-vis the local population, amidst and in spite of ongoing discrimination.

Challenging Established Hierarchies

Young women use the space of the city to break free from village social hierarchies, which are mostly vertical. In the city, they do not have to respond to their village's authorities and are able to avoid some of the social rules of communal life that families observe in the villages. By engaging in monetized sexual liaisons within the spaces of the city, young women are indirectly defying the hierarchical and unequal structures of village life wherein the head of household monopolizes power dynamics and access to resources and prestige. In the city, these power dynamics are disrupted as there is no leadership and therefore no direct submission to powerful households. A *curajo* in Filadelfia once framed this tension in the following way, "The problem with *Umusui* (a village chief) is that he does not want us in Filadelfia. He prefers that we all go back to his village, so that we buy food from his kiosk. He cannot make money on us if we are in Filadelfia."

Social power that *curajodie* are carving out for themselves in Filadelfia is also having an impact on other aspects of leadership in the villages. A good village chief can intercede for his people with outsiders. Outside their villages, chiefs are commonly the ones who are most knowledgeable regarding the role of institutions in the city, as they are the ones who approach and negotiate with urban authorities. Today, Ayoreo women, as they are starting to become familiar with the city, also become familiar with local players and local authorities that include public prosecutors, social workers, medical doctors and police. Some of them might even become 'friends' with the girls at night. This gives Ayoreo girls a

symbolic power and a sense that they are part of the social context of the city in a unique way not accessible to village leadership.

The practices of young Ayoreo women in Filadelfia are also transgressing the established perceptions of what it means to be indigenous women in the city. "They are not like other indigenous women," I was told by personnel from a local public institution. Ayoreo women break the stereotype of indigenous women as quiet and shy. *Curajodie* do not think twice about interceding for family members with local institutions when they have requests and openly speak their mind.

For example, in several of the evictions from Ayoreo settlements in Filadelfia, the most outspoken people against police officers and local authorities have been the *curajodie*, assuming a position usually reserved for male leaders. In one such incident, one *curajo* told a Mennonite police officer, “If you want to take us back to our villages, you should also go back to yours, Germany, because unlike us, you do not belong here." Such statements are common among older male leaders when they engage outsiders in their villages, but the direct confrontation of Ayoreo women with outsiders–in Spanish–signals a significant shift in their gender roles.

The above practices reveal how women are shifting the hierarchical social structure of Ayoreo community life and that of the Mennonite Colonies in unexpected ways by inverting or shifting roles outside their villages. This trend is also concomitant with the greater picture of Ayoreo moving to urban spaces in search of work opportunities. From outside the communal space, women are slowly taking over new roles traditionally reserved for Ayoreo men.

Re-defining Ayoreo Sense of Christian Self

Practices of young women in general reveal how pre-Christian ethics related to sexuality continue to remain in place despite intense Christianization. Ayoreo women enact their practices of sexuality in tension with Christian moral discourses that sanction these practices. While Ayoreo public discourses of morality adhere to an institutionalized missionary moral framework, women's embodied dispositions subvert these, as they continue to enact pre-mission values of sexuality. In this way, Ayoreo ethics of sexuality are constructed and enacted in continual tension with Christian values.

However, new sexual practices that run against some Ayoreo customary ethics of sexuality, such as that of married Ayoreo women exchanging sex for money, force Ayoreo to rethink Ayoreo ethical values. Ayoreo are eventually experiencing instances of what Ziggon (2009) has termed 'moral breakdown', which are moments in which an event forces a person to consciously reflect on the appropriate ethical response to a situation. According to Ziggon, "Once one has experienced this moral breakdown, he works on himself by utilizing certain ethical tactics to not only return to the unreflective and unreflexive disposition of morality, but in so doing, to create a new moral dispositional self." (Ziggon 2009:255) Rapidly changing practices of sexuality will eventually force such a re-evaluation of the Ayoreo moral system. Ayoreo Christianity will also have to be considered in light of these new experiences.

Crafting a Space to Gain Visibility

Like never before, *curajodie*—through their practices in the city—are

unknowingly pushing out the boundaries of open spaces in order to gain visibility. This is an unprecedented phenomenon for Ayoreo women, borne out of spontaneous situations triggered by urgency and necessity in light of new experiences.

Curajodie, for example, initiated the trend of filing complaints for child support at the local CODENI. As explained in the previous chapter, this office seeks to reach a settlement between both sides of a disagreeing couple before resorting to formal legal complaints. *Upase*, a *curajo* in her mid-twenties, was the first one to do this in 2009, shortly after the regional office opened in Filadelfia. She approached them when she learned she could denounce her Paraguayan 'boyfriend,' a truck driver, who left her pregnant and was not willing to support her. While the Paraguayan office personnel soon categorized her as 'prostitute,' the support they provided was conditioned with expectations that she "change her ways," Regardless, she did not desist until reaching an agreement with the father of her child. After her, several other girls did the same. Following in the footsteps of *curajodie*, in the recent years there have been several cases of non-*curajo* women who have filed complaints against Ayoreo ex-husbands.

In a similar way, there are incipient cases of Ayoreo women—*curajodie*—who are denouncing cases of abuses towards them. This was the case of *Juse*, an outspoken *curajo* who has been living in Filadelfia for many years. She told me the story of how she had decided to file a complaint at the local police station because a Paraguayan 'friend' did not pay her what they had agreed upon and in addition had stolen her phone. This is how she put it to me:

> 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 vendor, and I spent the night with him. We slept in his truck. I did not even realize until later that he had stolen my new cell phone. He did it while I was sleeping. I realized 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 fuck you in the ass, because that's that you deserve."

Juse's decision to file a complaint at the police station is not common among *curajodie*, and even less so among Ayoreo women in general. The two main limitations are the language barrier and the lack of interest and discrimination by institution personnel, which make women feel uncomfortable to denounce these things—precisely due to previous discriminative experiences such as that of *Juse*.

A few days later after *Juse* called me, I was at a village hanging out with a group of young people listening to the local radio station. Casually, she happened to call the program that we were listening to. She told the radio host exactly what she had told me a few days earlier, denouncing not only the traveling vendor but also the police. This took the shy radio host by surprise, who seemed amazed that *Juse* was revealing these 'intimate' matters on the radio. He murmured something and hung up the phone on her, quickly moving to the next call.

One of the young men in the group I was sitting with nodded with disapproval at what had just happened. He told me, "Paola, it is a shame that she is calling the radio station to repeat all the obscenities that the police told her. This is all her fault, because she should not be in Filadelfia in the first place."

This reaction reveals the anxiety that male Ayoreo in the villages experience by having young Ayoreo women in the city. While Ayoreo women do in fact have

a prominent role in village life by publicly voicing problems and injustices, this is not the case when dealing with outsiders; in this realm men have the main role. This anxiety drives Ayoreo men to discriminate against their own women in cases where they should be providing support.

Juse's impotency after being silenced in a discriminative way by the police drove her to call the radio station, which also promptly muted her. Despite this, the fact that she voiced her complaint represents a further step in the role of Ayoreo women in asserting their own rights and denouncing instances of violence. Such cases are still not common, which is in part the result of increased direct interactions and exposure to white people as well as local institutions in the city, something they do not have access to in the villages, as men have traditionally been the main interlocutors. In addition, the fact that *curajodie* are more exposed to speaking Spanish also facilitates communication in significant ways, as language has traditionally been a major barrier to the participation of Ayoreo women within the larger community.

However, the reactions of state and private officials towards Ayoreo women reveal how access to services for Ayoreo women is being defined in terms of women's moral worth. This further exposes the way in which social institutions have become the sites where Ayoreo women are introduced to the expected ‘rules and rights’ of behavior in local society.

Rethinking Theoretical Perspectives

This study has aimed to provide a novel interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the contemporary conditions of indigenous women in lowland South

America, while advancing wider theoretical debates relevant to sexuality, sex work, ethics and Christianity. An exploration into the cultural meanings of the monetized sexual liaisons of contemporary young Ayoreo women in the Mennonite Colonies of the Paraguayan Chaco allows for a re-examination of the following theoretical arguments.

This dissertation opens a space to reassess longstanding binary models of love versus money and intimate versus impersonal which are central to accounts of dignity in the West. This study has shown that the sexuality of contemporary youg women is embedded in Ayoreo customary systems of exchange, a practice which became monetized in the last two decades as a result of the wider commoditization of social relations among Ayoreo. With the monetization of this system, exchanging sex for money has become constitutive of women's sexuality. For the Ayoreo, the exchange of sex for money is not seen as morally fraught, but rather constitutive of intimate relationships.

In a related context, the monetized sexual liaisons of young women in the urban spaces of the Mennonite Colonies problematizes conventional Western feminist categorizations of sex work. While the practices of Ayoreo women resemble that of sex workers in other contexts, their content and meanings are not the same. Money is one of the main factors that drive girls to the streets; however, it is seen as important only to the degree that it allows them to construct a type of *persona* able to navigate racialized spaces. Specifically, Ayoreo young women are engaging in conspicuous consumption, as they seek to express a modern sense of self that challenges long-standing stereotypes of indigenous women. I contend

that *curajodie's* acts of consumption are the expression of a desire to find an adequate representation of self (i.e. by being 'modern') in a highly discriminatory space. In this way, what is perceived as 'sex work' is one of the few avenues available for Ayoreo women to engage the surrounding society following their own interests in the hierarchical social space of the Mennonite Colonies, configuring a field of agency to negotiate racial, gender and cultural discrimination.

I have additionally shown how the exchange of sex for money does not involve a process of commoditization as classically defined by Marx, and as argued by most scholars of sex work. In order to become commoditized, a product needs to derive from the provision of surplus labor. While Ayoreo bodies become monetized in the sexual exchange, there is no surplus labor to be extracted from the labor process. This is in contrast to contexts where women negotiate the exchange of sex for money through intermediaries (pimps). The monetized sexual liaisons of young unmarried women and married couples do not constitute a Marxist type of exploitation. In neither case, is surplus labor appropriated by a third party. Pimps, however, extract surplus value by keeping part of the money the sex worker’s labor produces. This does not apply to the Ayoreo case. Recent trends among the Ayoreo of wives monetizing their sexuality can be thought of in terms of sex work. However, I contend that it cannot be constructed in terms of commoditization of bodies since in Marxist terms only labor power, the portion of labor for which the laborer is remunerated, becomes a commodity not the

laborer's body. The question remains open as to whether or not in the near future there will be a move toward a generalization of the pimp model.

future.

The Ayoreo ethical system conditions the motivations and cultural logics behind practices of 'sex work' in cross-cultural contexts. Contemporary Ayoreo ethics of sexuality give evidence to support the way in which Ayoreo women construct their sexual subjectivities in tension with colliding moral values and practices. Women´s practices in the realm of sexuality reveal the continuity of pre-mission values embedded in the principles of the *Jnani Bajade*. I have given examples of how the specific focus of missionary conversion methods drove some practices and their associated values to survive over others. This challenges traditional feminist perspectives founded mainly on the idea that only Western precepts of morality are valid. Such perspectives exclude the possibility that other cultures may have their own moral constructs based on different ontological conceptions and different rules of conduct. The Ayoreo mythological corpus is the ontological basis for Ayoreo's mode of subjection, through which values, beliefs and self-understandings were recognized, constituted and expressed from one generation to the other. Today, despite having incorporated Christian values, customary values continue to shape women's practices and views of sexuality.

In this way, Ayoreo agency has led the Ayoreo to accept Christian strictures against infanticide but not Christian strictures against premarital sex. This reveals an indigenous modernity that does not simply imply Western domination of tradition. This case opens a space to re think our critique our own western views

of 'Christianization' and 'Westernization' within our scholarly production.

Along this line, the practices of Ayoreo women challenge Western ethnocentric conceptual ideas that sexual relations primarily involve male impositions on women. As the Ayoreo case shows, women's agency in taking the lead in sexual matters is not considered morally fraught or problematic, contrary to chauvinistic notions in European tradition, which continue to shape the work of contemporary scholars.

Foucault's theoretical framework of ethical systems has proven useful to examine contemporary Ayoreo ethics of sexuality, highlighting the ways in which people's choices and practices inform values, in the same way that values also inform people's practices. In this way, Ayoreo moral systems are conceived not as a monolithic set of regulatory norms and values comprised exclusively of moral codes, but also as moral systems constituted by actual practices in which each individual engages. However, a limitation of Foucault's framework lies in its individualist approach to the ways in which members of society construct themselves as ethical selves. The Ayoreo case shows how, in multicultural contexts, it is the society and not the individuals that helps decide which ontologies to believe and which ethical systems to implement, and this is done in real time and in the context of changing local circumstances (history). This is a communal affair, rather than an individual task as presented by Foucault.

In summary, the sense of personhood among young Ayoreo women is fashioned at the juncture of ongoing multiple and contradictory discourses of gender and sexuality generated by overlapping ethical systems. This, in practice,

leads to ongoing tension. Despite intense Christianization, pre-mission values related to sexuality that encouraged women to take the lead in sexual relations, have multiple partners, and allow traditional systems of exchange to permemate sexuality, are markers that continue to define the sexuality of contemporary Ayoreo women.

Becoming Ayoreo Women: Crafting an Ethical Sense of Personhood in the Chaco

Even though only two years had elapsed since the conclusion of my fieldwork, the scenario in Filadelfia had clearly changed dramatically by the time I made my recent return visit. The pace of the economic and social changes in the Chaco is having a direct impact on the sexual practices of Ayoreo women; these in turn continue to shift gender roles and male-female relations, mainly between Ayoreo, but not excluding other groups of people.

Ayoreo bodies in general are constructed as 'abject' in the intercultural spaces of Filadelfia. This representation was historically forged in the context of Ayoreo-Mennonite relations, Ayoreo participation in the political economy of the region, and the intense process of missionization. At the same time, the bodies of Ayoreo women have become a central focal point for negotiating the terms by which meaningful definitions of gendered subjectivities are co-constructed around competing notions of sexuality, monetization, and Christian values.

Ayoreo pre-contact values of sexuality continue to be enacted in a new Christian context. However, changing practices, such as that of married *curajodie*, which are seen as strictly market transactions, will to continue to push the

boundaries of Ayoreo ethical selfhood; otherwise, there will eventually be a shift in women's values related to sexuality. It is in such a context of pull and push, of opposing and competing ethical systems, that Ayoreo women are defining themselves vis-à-vis Ayoreo men, their wider communities, and the surrounding non-Ayroeo society.

While practices of *curajodie* challenge essentialized categories of what it means to be an "indigenous woman" in today's Chaco, they also reinforce historical patterns of exclusion and discrimination. Discourses of Western moral imperatives are used as a way to justify discriminative practices towards Ayoreo women that deflect the participation of indigenous women in the Chaco proposed by NGOs and the State. There is ample evidence for this in the case of *curajodie:* during the time of my dissertation fieldwork, two of them died of untreated breast cancer. Over six of them had unwanted pregnancies and gave their children away. One gave birth to a baby with syphilis. Two of them continue to complain of repeated health issues as a result of untreated sexual transmitted infections. One had her Paraguayan partner physically abuse her child, and yet another complains that her Paraguayan husband beats her and threatens to leave her. Many more cases remain untold.

The changing practices of sexuality in Filadelfia leave imprints in the lives of many young women. While most return to their villages and make their lives with Ayoreo men, the impact has been negative and hard for many of them. This is an undeniable reminder that the structural patterns of violence and discrimination continue to actively shape the lives of Ayoreo women.

Despite this, women 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 this by reworking their relationship with their villages and with the larger society, expanding the range of possibilities available to them to craft their own life-projects.

As I began the trip back home from my recent visit, I turned onto the same main highway that many decades ago—when still a slim path in the middle of the forest—took missionaries and Mennonites towards their encounter with the Ayoreo. This is the same highway that initially supplied, and continues to feed, 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 the field reminded me of how much I still did not understand. The lives of Ayoreo are deeply embedded in the larger changing landscape of the Chaco. Perhaps more rapidly than ever, the lives of these multifaceted communities continue to change, with Ayoreo women in particular at the heart of some of the most dramatic shifts. If so much could change in just two years, I couldn't help but imagine what new and unanticipated changes the coming years would bring.

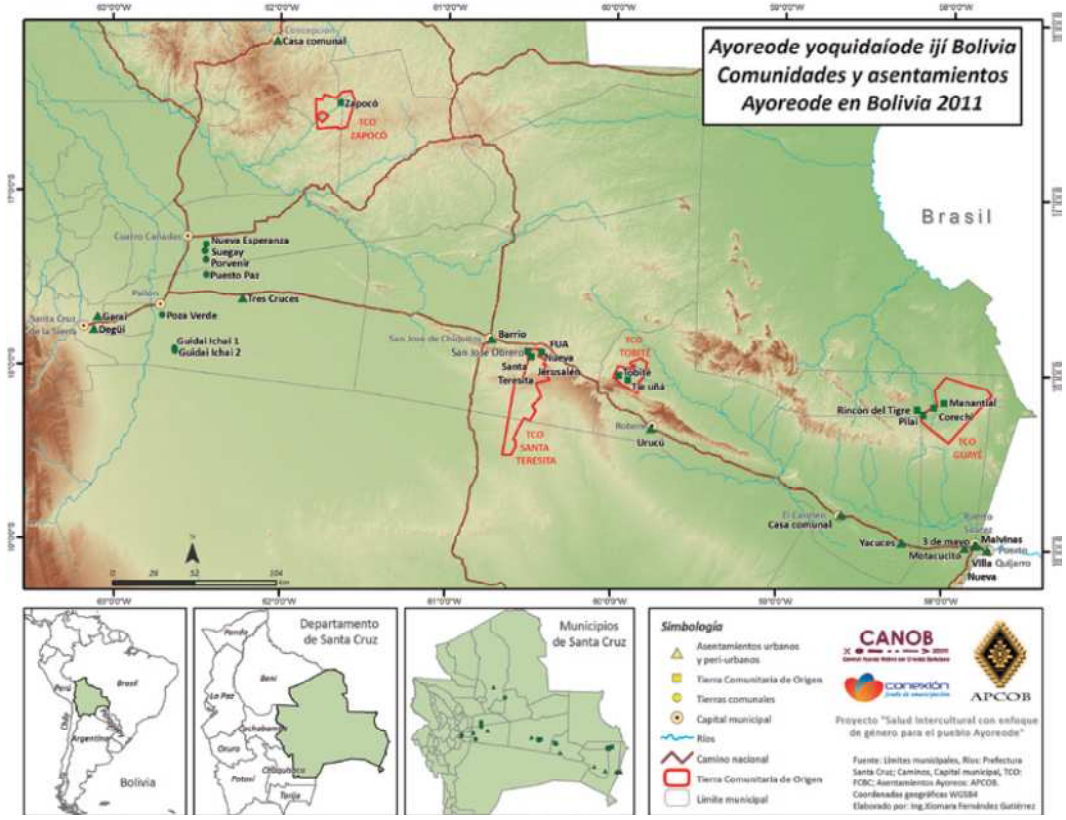
APPENDIX A

Illustration 1. Geographical Distribution of Indigenous Groups in Paraguay

Source: Bejarano 1981.

APPENDIX B

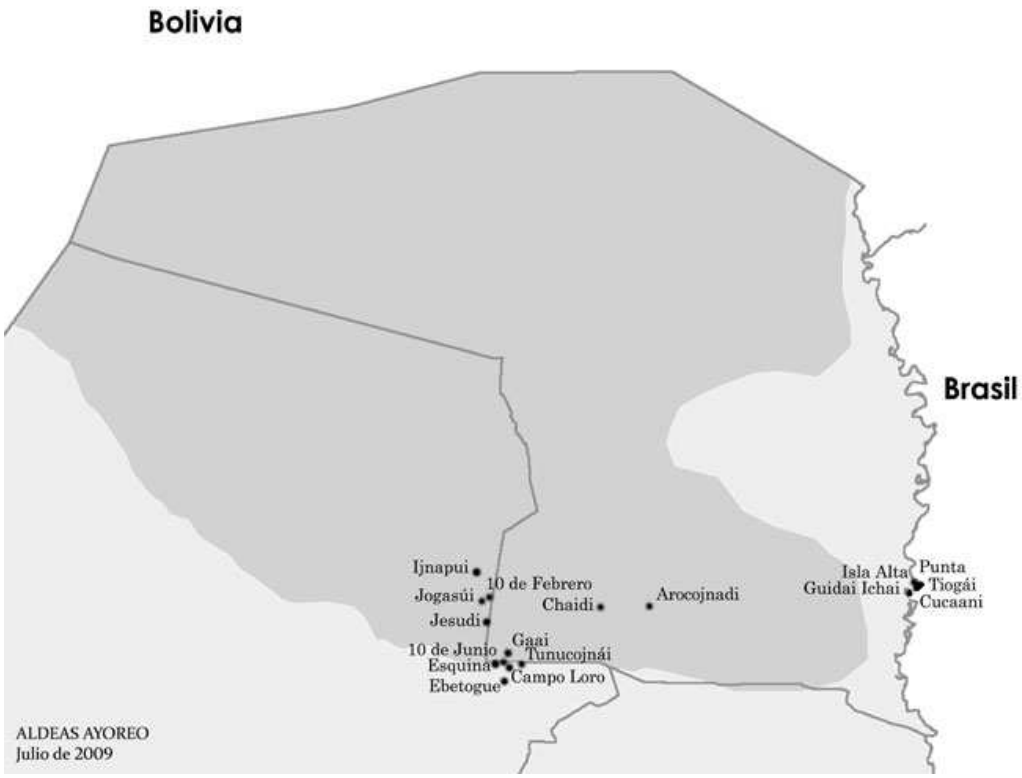
Illustration 2. Geographical Distribution of Ayoreo Villages in Bolivia



Source: Roca et al 2012.

APPENDIX C

Illustration 3. Geographical Distribution of Ayoreo Villages in Paraguay



Source: IWGIA 2010.

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