

Hands on the Green Leaf

Labor, Resistance, and Bittersweet Dwelling in Argentina's *Yerba Mate* Country

by

Jennifer S. Bowles

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)
in the University of Michigan
2015

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Ruth Behar, Co-Chair
Professor Stuart Kirsch, Co-Chair
Professor Tom Fricke
Professor Lorraine Gutiérrez



Mapa de la Provincia de Misiones / RUTAS

© Jennifer S. Bowles 2015

DEDICATION

Para

*La buena gente de Misiones quienes siguen luchando en su querida tierra colorada...
tranquilo nomás.*

y

FedeIrisLuna

Remembering

My father, who practiced a singular agrarian citizenship

My sister Melissa, whose best years were on that farm, though this she would never know

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although this dissertation bears my name as single author, it is actually a collective effort built from countless collaborations of people scattered across the globe and of those who have passed on since. How to begin this long story... It took decades for me to return and linger in an agrarian place because of years of running from my own old wound of rural exodus. Going way back to my first thirteen years in Hamilton County, Texas, I thank all the people who were kind, open-minded, and worked together with others in times of need. They were musicians who played music together with my parents, teachers, and neighbors who provided me with a moral compass that I have never lost. When we moved on from the farm, I will always be grateful to Patricia Thompson, Margaret Palmer, and Bernadine Leal at Samuel Clemens High School in Schertz, Texas for believing in me. Professor John Lamphear from the History Department at the University of Texas took their place later as a wonderful mentor.

Many moons later, the Department of Anthropology at Michigan has been a wonderful home to me, which I have not easily left in our move to North Carolina. I first thank Julia Paley for the Anthro-Social Work seminar way back in 2005. Julia later provided critical support for my application to the joint doctoral program in Anthropology and Social Work. My wonderful dissertation committee has been with me from the very beginning—Ruth Behar, Stuart Kirsch, Tom Fricke, and Lorraine Gutiérrez. From responding to all my letter requests over the years to talking with me by phone from North Carolina when I was on the job market, just knowing they

were there for me was an important source of strength that helped me tell this story. I cannot thank each of them enough for making space in their lives and schedules for one more graduate student.

I knew before I started the program that I wanted to work with Ruth Behar. I took her Ethnographic Writing Class in the Fall of 2008 so that I could have her voice in my head when pressured to write in a way that went against my inner self. Having already been hazed as a lawyer, I trusted Ruth would help me practice anthropology with a soul, and that trust was well placed. Rather than stifling my voice, she always asked to hear more. Thank you, Ruth, for understanding the spirit of what I wanted to do from the beginning, for supporting me through the years, and for blazing the trail to talk about self and emotions. And thank you for being steadfastly dedicated to the vulnerable observer—I know that is not easy.

Stuart Kirsch has been an incredible mentor. So much of what I know about anthropology, I learned from him. Thank you, Stuart, for always pushing me (although sometimes you got a push back!), for teaching me so many dimensions of anthropology, for taking that phone call that day from Argentina, for supporting Ethnography as Activism and shepherding us through our first publication, and for always being there in every way, even by phone from North Carolina. If only all graduate students could have such a dedicated advisor in their lives.

Tom Fricke was a tremendous source of support from my very first steps in the halls of Michigan. For years, I knew I could always knock on his doors and step into a wonderful world. Thank you, Tom, for keeping talk about the land alive, for lighting up everyday life in so many ways, and for being an example of something that rarely exists—of duty, of the deeply moral act of doing the right thing. And thank you for the coffees in Espresso Royale State and those

conversations where we both learned about the limits of many things. You will always represent for me the best of what Michigan Anthropology offered.

Lorraine Gutiérrez was always a grounding force, being fundamentally flexible and facilitating the possible. Thank you, Lorraine, for being a model of humility and inclusion and keeping the bridge to social work open. Two other folks were important readers in the final stages: After I came back from the field, Sarah Besky helped me become aware of the many turns in the rocky road ahead. She read chapters and provided advice for all things related to academia. Thank you, Sarah, for helping out so much and orienting me in so many ways. Also David Frye kindly stepped in for Tom Fricke in my dissertation defense. Thank you, David, for the supportive comments and the belief that these stories would be something undergraduate anthropology students would want to read. Thanks also to Javier Auyero for sending me on to Pablo Lapegna who has proven to be a great collaborator on contemporary rural Argentina, Jun Borrás for inviting me into the Food Sovereignty conference at Yale, Peter Benson for encouragement on writing humanistic anthropology, and Paige West and Alex Nading for reading a draft of *Presencia*'s story at the Anthropology & Environment Working Group of the 2014 AAA Meetings.

I am privileged and grateful for the financial support that made this project possible: At the University of Michigan this included the School of Social Work, the International Institute, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Eleanor Wray Foundation, and the Rackham Graduate School for travel support. I was so fortunate to have been awarded external funds through the NSF's Graduate Research Fellowship Program. Those three years of funding especially helped me to reach families living far off the grid in Misiones by allowing me to afford such luxuries as a rented vehicle. The Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship gave me the privilege of

writing as a full time job. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers at both NSF and Mellon/ACLS who believed in this project, trusted that I could realize it, and believed that it “would make a difference”. Having had such amazing support, I hope that I can make good on my promises to make this dissertation matter.

What would my family and I have done without all of the kind spirits that helped us in Misiones? I am deeply indebted to all of those across the province who welcomed us into their lives, if even for a one-time conversation, and helped us understand what everyday life was in *yerba mate* country. As a family, we have made lifelong friends who have become part of our family. First and foremost, I thank Rogelio and María for all the beautiful moments we shared and for teaching us what life was like for *tarefer@s* in the countryside. Thanks to Eugenio Kasalaba and the folks with MAM and the Cooperative Paraná for orienting us in the beginning, Birgita Holgrom in Guaraní for her continuous welcome on her beautiful farm and for modeling humility and inclusion of those who have less than her or are of a different ethnicity, Nancy and family in Campo Ramón, Elena, Eugenia and family in San Pedro who welcomed us onto Elena’s farm and taught us much about life far off the grid, Juan Kubovy in Dos de Mayo who welcomed us and taught us so much about the return to the countryside, and to the folks at Hotel Cuatro Pinos who helped us settle in with little Iris between trips back and forth to the countryside. I am so grateful for having gotten to know the beautiful family of Isaías Carré, who passed on in 2013, including his widow Pepa, Isaías’s son Roberto, daughter-in-law Marisa, and granddaughter Verónica who helped us reconnect with him and showed us the spirit of agrarian cooperation. Thanks to Pepa for the wonderful welcome and for inviting us to your 50th wedding anniversary, a beautiful celebration we will never forget. Thank you, Verónica, for letting me know about your *abuelo*, and for helping establish the scholarship at the EFA Dos de Mayo.

Thanks as well to Ofelia and her beautiful children Flavia, Fanni, Fabian, Graciela, and Griselda, to Aldo Cukla *el colono roquero* and friends, as well as his wonderful parents Alfredo and Rosa Cukla for hosting us and showing us a better way of doing things in the *yerbales* of Andresito.

In our year in Montecarlo, we made lifelong friends. I am deeply indebted to all who helped us so much in our daily life and shared their lives with us. First, enormous thanks to the Cuba Maciel clan in Guaraypo, including Celia for being one of the most brilliant, funny and beautiful people I know, Cándido for his gentle integrity and inclusion, and to Mari, Virginia, Claudio, Claudia, Jorge, Carolina, and all of the extended family. As I was finishing this dissertation, beautiful twins were born to Claudia. Thank you, Celia, for being the most wonderful friend—for so many moments of *tereré*, *chipa*, good stories on the patio, and good times in the *yerbales*. So too am I forever grateful to Rubén Ortiz for inviting us in to many spaces, for his dedicated teaching, absolutely fierce defense of others, his friendship, and for all of those wonderful times in his home. Most of all, thank you, Rubén, for your trust and for sharing all of your vulnerability. Thanks also to Iris Schmidt who welcomed us so many times and did much behind the scenes work and to the wonderful group of teachers in the MPL, especially Mariette, Miriam, Luján, Carlos Duarte, Ariel Sanchez, El Gordo Benitez, and Rudi Giménez. Thank you, Rudi, for helping realize the dream of the photomurals. I will always remember our talk on the asphalt; your father will not be forgotten. Finally, I am so grateful for all of the *tarefer@s* who let me into their lives in the Montecarlo union, especially Sonia, Liliana, las Marías, Mónica, los Galeano and family, Don Portillo, Don Villalba, and Maidana to name a few; your struggle will not be forgotten. And special thanks to Federico “Chila” Chilavert for being indispensable for so many.

Our life as a family of four in Montecarlo and Guatambú had many hard moments, but good people both helped us make our way and soothed our wounds. Thanks to Margot Eber for all of her hospitality and concern, to her husband Juan, to Titina in her *panadería* for her beautiful spirit and all the bags of bread and treats for us and the girls, the wonderful Mónica and Graciela at Photo Rollei who were so interested in *tarefer@* life as they developed photos, Berta Ehrfurth, and our wonderful neighbors Veronica Herman and Roberto Aicheler (who sadly passed in November 2014). I will always be thankful to Roberto for inviting me to his *tarefa* in 2012 and for Veronica's warm spirit. Thanks to Mikaela, Carlitos Todt and family for helping us feel normal, Edith Aicheler for the moments on her beautiful farm, Mariana and Jorge for good times at Club Guatambu, and to Miguel Chilavert for the horn beeps at town on the way to town past our house, for all of his solidarity, and for inviting us into all spaces. Thanks to Santos Villalba for sharing so much of his life with us, to Doña Hija for sharing her stories and for being the remarkable person she is, to Machado for all the good talks, and to *mi hermana postiza* Anita Hahn, a wonderful human being who helped save us on many occasions, taught me how to laugh in spite of the pain, and cooked countless good meals. Thanks too to Freddy, Miriam, and the memory of Leroy Hertzfeld, an angel who left too soon. Thanks to all the farmers at the Feria Franca of Montecarlo who welcomed us including Enrique Clausen, Víctor Samudio and Roxana, Marta, Berta, Ana, Jesús, and others; to Claudio and Luisa of the Indiecito for the artisan ice cream and newspapers; to Iris's teacher at Carlos Culmey, Carina, and Natalia, her teacher in Guatambú; to Elsa and family, and to Mari and family, who helped us so much with Luna and with cooking; and to Guillermo Aicheler for helping me understand local history. Finally, I don't know what we would have done without Martín Pinazo, Gabi Maida, and

daughters Guadalupe y Galatea who provided shelter from the storm in so many ways and helped us and the girls survive. Thank you.

Buenos Aires was always my launch point for work in Misiones, and in the years before, during and after the formation of this project, friends and family have provided invaluable support. Special thanks for all the hospitality from my wonderful mother-in-law who I would exchange for no other, Beatriz Ballester, as well as to my always flexible and ready to help father-in-law Enrique Pous and partner Patricia Cotón. Thanks to the wonderful Deida and Elsa. *Siempre te voy a recordar en el yerbal, Deida.* Thanks to my wonderful *cuñados* Alejandro for his love of rivers and trees and Guille *por su militancia*. Thanks to Noelia Énriz for being a sister anthropologist early on regarding the landscape of Misiones, Fabio Szteinhendler, old friends and their families Sergio and Alejandra, Jorge Camaño and Nati, Gustavo and Elvira, Julieta Parente, Hernan Ronsino, Javier Caramía, Ana Heras and David Burrin, Sergio Gomez, Claudio Rigamonti, el negro Ariel, Tocada Moviada for the visit to Misiones, and Mariana our *remisera* friend.

Many others in the Michigan Anthropology department made my experience a wonderful one. Thanks to Erik Mueggler, Rebecca Hardin, Alaina Lemon, Liz Roberts for her read on my second NSF proposal, and to Michael Lempert for being the honorary graduate student professor. Huge thanks to Laurie Marx, a force greater than life, who helped me lots early on and to Darlinda Flanigan and Debbie Fitch for their help and great conversation. I will forever miss my graduate student community at Michigan, especially my comrades in Ethnography as Activism who kept the spirit alive (and still do) of practicing a more humane anthropology: Chris Estrada, Bruno Renero-Hannan, John Mathias, Davide Orsini, Katherine Fultz, Heather Tidrick, Elana Resnick, Kelly Fayard, Jack Taylor, and Gabrielle Koch to name a few. Also thanks to the

wonderful Purvi Mehta, the best of all late friends in graduate school, for all the laughs and good talk, Federico Helfgot, Esteban Rozo for being Uncle Steve, Jennifer Tucker for being there and for the visit to Argentina, Shana Melnysn, Luciana Aienasoie, and Perry Sherouse for helping us get a good start in North Carolina. Special thanks to friends Lamia Moghnie and Linda Takamine who burned the midnight oil those days back in the Fall of 2013. You know what I am talking about! Thanks also to Geoff Hughes for specializing in solidarity and colleagues ahead of me in graduate school who became kind mentors and friends over the years--Ana Gemini, Xochitl Ruiz, Tam Perry, Purvi Mehta (again!), and Dan Birchok and family. Others lit up the day in various ways throughout the years: Achirri Ismael, Ujin Kim, Alison Joerz, Deborah Jones, Lindsay Ahalt, Jeff Albanese, Elizabeth Koomson, Hoda Bandeh-Ahmadi (special thanks for the skypes from India!), Smadar Brack, Matthew Chin, Jessica Lowen, Georgia Ennis, Alysa Handelsman, John Thiels, Prash Naidu, Stuart Strange, Mike Prentice, Chip Zuckerman, and Sandyha Narayanan (for all the good cooking and conversation).

At the Michigan School of Social Work, I thank Bret Seabury, now retired, for being a model for how to honor dissident voices in social work and Frank Maple (now retired) who changed forever how I listened to people. Thanks to Orli Avi-Yonah and Mary Ortega, social worker advisors from my clinical training at the University Center for Child and Family, who encouraged my work and for me to be a fierce advocate for clients. And thanks to Eli Rosenberg, also a beautiful role model for how to be an empathic practitioner always. Karen Staller keeps the dream of the kind engaged intellectual alive, Rich Tolman was a kind and early advisor during my years in the doctoral program, Dan Saunders taught me much about social work research, and Berit Ingersoll-Dayton and Ruth Dunkle welcomed me into aging studies and taught me about the field. Special thanks to Berit for understanding all my needs on both sides of

the street. Thanks to my fabulous social work colleagues including Elana Busch, Ellen Block, Laura Heinemann, Tam Perry, the late Katherine Luke, Michalangelo Trujillo, Jessuina Perez-Terán, Amy Krings, Athena Kolbe, and Alice Gates, who welcomed me to her social work world at the University of Portland.

Friends from the Romance Languages Department at Michigan have been part of our family for so many years; I don't know if I will ever get over losing you all, although so many have already moved on. For all those wonderful beautiful times of good food and conversation, playing with Iris and Luna, dancing, and dreaming of a better life many thanks to: Rachel Tenhaaf and Erika Almanera, Matías Beverinotti, Lucía Nasser, Mara Pastor, Ofelia Ros, Ana Ros, Noelia Ciriogliaro and Seba Díaz, Alejandro Quin and Talía Dajes, Marcelino Viera and Leyre Alegre, Cristian Kroll Bryce and Heidi Liere, Jaime Rodríguez-Matos and María Dolores Morillo, Anna Mester, David Collange, María Robles, Roberto Robles, Andrea Fanta, Gabriel Horowitz, Gustavo Verdesio, Brian Whitener, Martin Vega, Robert Wells, Diogenes Costa Curras, Carlos de los Santos, Laura Herbert, Andrea Dewees, Elizabeth Barrios, Daniel Noemi and Louise Walker, Kate Jenckes and Tom, Javier Entreambasaguas and Diana, Javier Castro and Maite Green-Mercado, Roberto Vezzani, Ludmilla Ferrari and Juan Leal, Priscilla Calatayud Fernandez, Pedro Alguilera-Mellado, Shannon Dowd, and Joy Collman and Sebastian Ferrari. Nothing can replace the good times with Ofelia Ros who we will always thank for being there the night Luna was born. Enormous thanks to Susana Coll for being there a thousand times, having such a communitarian spirit, and for being such a good friend. And to Isaac Tapley for garden talk. Finally, special thanks to Cristina Moreiras and Gareth Williams for countless late nights in their home filled with great food, intellectual musing, and friendship. Thank you, Gareth and Cristina, for bringing us all together.

Ann Arbor will always be a home for us. Eternal thanks to Kathleen Irvin for saving us a thousand times, especially during those difficult days when Luna was born, to Bonnie Flanders and Bob, Paul Johnson, and to all the wonderful folk I met over the years at Café Verde, especially Rosemary and Terry. Thanks to wonderful neighbors Max (who passed from cancer in 2011), Kairos Marquardt and Dan, Paul Breck and Andrea, and Claudio Turrón and Marolyn Valenzuela who we miss so much. Thanks to all the wonderful folk from Iris's Ann Arbor Learning Community, including Debbie Bergin, Katie and Daniel, Rachel Tewari from Kids' Club, and Chloe Duke who passed on in June 2014. And to Peretz, Jessie, Jamie, Jenny, and Jessica in particular for Luna at the Jewish Community Center. Thanks to wonderful mother and psychology/social work friends Hilda Halabu and Peri Stone-Palmquist, and to dear social work colleagues at MAP, especially the incredible Terri Wadsworth. Thanks also to the wonderful folks I worked with as a therapist up to 2010 who helped me as much as I helped them.

Moving to North Carolina this last year was hard. We are absolutely indebted to our dear friends Gustavo Furtado and Gracie Beeler who filled the aching gap from Ann Arbor in their wonderful home in Hillsborough, to Liz and Perry Sherouse who helped get us started, to our wonderful neighbors on Carol Street Olivia Davis and Tim Carless and Melissa and Barnie Kolhut, to Martin Sueldo, Carmen Mónica and Marco del Fuego who helped us fill our Latin American void, to Miss Tona, Luna's teacher, who provided that roots connection and made us feel that everything would be all right, to Carmen Betts and Señora Yeli who kept Iris delighted, Mia and Raymond, and Melissa Gjestvang-Lucky, my companion in daily commiseration at Carrboro after school.

Many thanks also to the folks in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke, particularly Orin Starn, Rebecca Stein, Charlie Piot who welcomed me so warmly and gave me

the status of Visiting Scholar. Thanks to Louise Meintjes for her beautiful writing advice and my dissertation writing group including Tamar Sharinian, Yasmin Cho, and Layla Brown. To Yasmin, my dissertation completion partner, I will always remember “do you want to print?”—I don’t know what I would have done without you. Thanks also to Katya Weslowski and the folks in the Thompson Writing Program who had confidence in my work and welcomed me into their community, particularly Márcia Rego and Denise Comer. Larry Williams at North Carolina Central University helped keep me alive by warmly welcoming me to co-teach his MSW class. Thanks also to Catherine Faver at UTRGV for her incredible support and modeling of social work.

Old friends helped provide joy and strength: Marta Cruz Sojo and partner Ramón, Norberto Martinez and Karen, the fierce bestiole Stephanie Sechler, Jennifer Guerin, Rick Robeson and Gene Venture, and Lori Stayton. More than others’ writing, I have been moved by the roots music, I am thankful for so many musicians whose music provided the soundscape for my writing over the years including Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch, John Prine, Marc Wopfler, Dolly Parton, Allison Krauss, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn, Chango Spasiuk, Chavela Vargas, Atahualpa Yupanqui, Mercedes Sosa, León Gieco, Víctor Heredia, Violeta Parra, Lila Downs, Marc Antonio Solís, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, Maná, and Silvio Rodríguez.

Connecting music to thought is a family tradition. In spite of the hard life we lived growing up in the farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, I was so lucky to have hardheaded thinkers as parents. Passion for roots music (German and Czech), the land and the many beings who inhabit it comes from my late father, William Bowles, who taught as he lived and schooled me in agrarian dissidence. My mother, Patricia Bowles, still provides a fiercely independent model for how to be your own person and how to endure just about anything. My paternal grandmother’s

concern for the next generation saved our life during the farm crisis. I will always be grateful for this. I thank my stepmother Willa for trying her best to help us turn out right, in spite of what she inherited. My brothers and sisters, Beth, Karen, Ben, Amy, and Moses help me remember what it is like to both laugh and suffer together as we did back in those bittersweet days on the farm.

Twenty-four years ago when I swore to contribute something to fight against the forces that took your life, Melissa, I had no idea it might come in this strange form. But here it is, made by farm hands. My promise to you continues.

Finally, to my most intimate family circle, my partner Federico, and daughters Iris and Luna. Iris was only a year and a half the first time she set foot in *la tierra colorada* and was there to experience the magic of visiting those wonderful families deep into the green space. Luna was only six months old when we arrived in Montecarlo in 2011, learned to walk on the red dirt roads lined with *yerbales*, and nursed through the highway blockades of March 2012. They have experienced both the magic of this project and borne the burden of all their mother's distractions twenty-four hours a day for years. From so many moments of "I'm just about to finish, I promise!" to "Finally, truly done!", I know this has not been easy. Iris and Luna, just know that your gentle and fierce ways of being in the world inspire me every moment toward being a better mother and not giving up on this world. And finally, for Fede, who has been with me at every step, *incondicional, somos uno para el otro. Gracias, siempre. Para ustedes y para tod@s l@s compañer@s en Misiones...hacia este mundo mejor.*

Preface

A First Leaf

When I was around nine years old, I planted a tulip bulb underneath the kitchen window, outside the back wall of our 1910 farmhouse. I already had spent years working in rows and patches--hoeing, seeding, weeding, picking. As the fourth child of seven, one of the only things I was told I was good at was working in the garden. I planted a tulip, because it was the most exotic flower to me, nowhere to be found in the hot Central Texas landscape where we lived. One night thereafter I dreamt I saw the germinated bulb break soil as green leaf, unfold slowly into the air, and stand up toward the sky. I remember that the next day I went out to see that this was actually true. But was this all just a dream? Both the dream and the memory that I had kneeled at the birth site, watching this unfolding happen in real life? It seems now that the green leaf could not have moved so quickly. Perhaps I had been influenced by those science films we saw in school that showed the life of plants via sped up film.

No matter the reality, that green leaf still has a hold on me. This hold involves the sweet sentiment of working to create and sustain life together with affection for that life. Seeing a plant *move* reminded me that we were both alive. But there is more to this hold: It symbolizes dreaming and redreaming within the emancipatory sphere of imagination that flows when one is alone, at work in the natural world. In order to bear the stigma and inequality I experienced at school in small town Texas, I hid my free lunch punch card together with the sunflower resin stains on my forearms from weeding in the field. I weathered the incessant stream of innuendo

that I was inherently less, because my family was poor. Never mind that in our back-to-the land world, we were musicians, avid readers, and organic farmers.

Working alone under open sky, my hands mixed with the material matter of soil, leaf, rock, and water. Small lives accompanied me—lizards, horned toads, cottontail rabbits. This contact triggered within me an imagining to which no outside intruder could gain access. No scorn could be cast in final force against the dreaming that took place inside. In this way, the green leaf I touched listened unconditionally. For many of the good people who shared their lives with me in Misiones, Argentina during the long days and years of my fieldwork, I suspect we all knew something of this same force that slips away when we try to chase it down to pin words onto it: We know, in our own way, that “hands on the green leaf” is an emancipatory state, far beyond what some can imagine.



**Figure 0: Celia Cuba & lifetime partner Cándido Maciel at Cuatro Bocas, Misiones Argentina
(Photo by Author, June 2012)**

Protagonists

Celia and Cándido

Rogelio and María

Los mensú

Los colonos

Unidentified Women and Children Disappeared in Forest Harvest

Mari

Margot

María

Claudio

Márcia

Santos Villalba

Ramona

Rubén Ortiz

Carlos Ortt

Da Silva

Fariña

Pedro

Margot

Guillermo Aicheler

Federico “Chila” Chilavert

Sara

Leo

Presencia

Sapo

Don Pedro

Isaías Carré

Alfredo Cukla

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Preface A First Leaf.....	xv
List of Figures.....	xxii
Glossary.....	xxiv
Abstract.....	xxvi
Introduction.....	1
Mapping the Unrecorded Sky.....	3
Part I: A Fetishized “Friendship Drink”: <i>Yerba Mate</i> in Argentina.....	5
Beyond the “Paris of Latin America”: Unveiling Infusions of the Indigenous.....	9
Interrupting the Sacred Power of Fetishization.....	12
The Site of Green Leaf: Misiones, Argentina.....	15
A Bittersweet Dwelling: “Appearing” <i>Los Tarefer@s</i>	18
A Historical Overview of <i>Yerba Mate</i> Extraction in Argentina.....	24
Part II: Ethnography of Connectedness: Defetishizing <i>Yerba Mate</i>	30
Beyond a Mere Commodity: The <i>Yerba Mate</i> Economy as a Working Agriculture.....	36
Roots and Relationships: A Feminist Ethnography of Connectedness.....	39
“Defetishization” and Bittersweet Memory.....	42
A Social Worker’s Approach to Another in the Field: An Affective Politics of Storysharing.....	44
Hearing Stories Off the Grid.....	48
On Being a Mother in the Field.....	49
Note on the Use of Photos.....	51
Memory and Solidarity.....	52
Chapter Progression.....	55
Chapter One: Ethnography of the (Dis)Appeared <i>Peón</i>	58
Part I: La Casa del <i>Peón</i>	58
Enter <i>Los Mensú</i>	61
The Founders.....	67
Ethnographic Seduction, a Circle of Patriarchs, and Cascading Shadows.....	75
Part II: Appearing <i>El Peón</i> and Family.....	78
An Official Story of Men.....	81
<i>El Conchabo</i> : The Hiring of a <i>Peón</i> for the Alto Paraná.....	84
Up the River and the Fugitive <i>Peón</i>	92
Bookbinding: <i>La Libreta del Peón</i>	94
In the <i>Yerbal</i>	96

Home in the Forest.....	100
Down the River, Back in Posadas.....	103
Part III: Cascade of Shadows to Light.....	103
Chapter Two: <i>La Tarefa</i>	110
Defetishization: The Labor of <i>Tarefer@s</i> Exerts Itself.....	110
Arising.....	112
<i>La Tarefa</i> : A Working Agriculture.....	119
<i>Atando el raído</i>	125
<i>Sacando el raído</i>	127
Weighing.....	128
Loading.....	132
Going Home.....	134
Refuse Exposed.....	138
Pay Day.....	140
Interzafra.....	142
<i>Tarefer@</i> Personhood: The “Thing” of <i>Yerba Mate</i> Falls Apart.....	143
Another <i>Yerbal</i> is Possible.....	157
Conclusion.....	159
Chapter Three: A Bittersweet Dwelling: I Left My Life in the <i>Yerbal</i>	161
Bodily Suffering and Stigma.....	163
<i>La Capuera</i>	167
Poison in the Bad Grass.....	171
Machetes and Mochilas.....	173
Setting Foot in <i>La Tierra Colorada</i>	177
Waters in Place.....	181
The Body Punctured in the Sun.....	186
The Trees Fight Back.....	188
The Beginning and Ending of Life in the <i>Yerbal</i>	190
<i>Aire Libre</i> (Free/Fresh Air).....	193
Wooded Circles, Rest, and Sweet Tangerines.....	196
Jokes: <i>Hablado Pavadas</i>	198
Conclusion.....	200
Chapter Four Interlude: Crossing into the Heart of Flame.....	204
Into the Heart of Flame.....	207
The Intersection of Biography and Protest.....	209
Chapter Four: The Taking of the Green Gold Highway.....	214
Part One: The Politics of Green Leaf.....	218
Part Two: Organized <i>Tarefer@</i> Resistance and Patronage Politics.....	223
The Formation of the Montecarlo <i>Tarefer@</i> Union.....	228
<i>El Galpón</i> : The Union Barn.....	230
Charged Silence and Historical Trauma.....	233
Part Three: The Taking.....	235
Space, Time and <i>Tarefer@</i> Power in the Taking.....	240
Asphalt Democracy.....	243
Part Four: Double-Crossing and the Joint Taking.....	246

Savage Cuts.....	246
Radios, Rumors, and Pickup Trucks: The Coop’s Turnaround.....	248
Together: An Affectively Charged Space.....	298
s	
Contradictions and Hardships in the Taking of the Green Gold Highway.....	257
Part Five: A Life Under Threat.....	262
Epilogue The Tangerine Girl in the Childhood Garden of Che.....	269
Chapter Five: Everyday Litigants: The Culture of Work in <i>Yerba Mate</i> Country.....	273
“The Culture of Work is Being Lost”.....	273
Fine Grains of Working Agriculture.....	277
A Dialectic of Labor Rights and Food Sovereignty.....	280
Workers’ Rights and Harvest <i>En Negro</i>	280
Zero Hunger.....	280
A Welfare State that Wreaks Havoc.....	284
The Other Side of Severance Pay.....	288
The Cunning of Seasonal Work and Welfare.....	290
Everyday Labor Inspections.....	295
The Fraying of Working Agriculture.....	297
Everyday Litigants.....	299
! <i>Ojo!</i> I Know Where You Live.....	302
The Labor Lawsuit and the Many Grains of Truth.....	309
Peeling Onions.....	314
Conclusion.....	315
Chapter Six: Presencia Dispossessed: How Dry Love Heals.....	318
A Woman Like Her in a Place Like This: Gender, Place, and “Embodied Matieralism” in <i>Yerba Mate</i> Country.....	320
A Motherless Child in a Green World.....	324
The Bitter Feminine: What is a Commodity’s Gender?.....	329
How Dry Love Heals.....	332
Girl to Woman –The Pain of the Fertile Life.....	336
A Poisoned Embodied Fertility.....	339
<i>La Cabeza de Vaca</i>	341
The Dialectic in the Production of Life.....	346
Conclusion.....	347
Conclusion: Here We Are, Who We Were: The Making of <i>Tarfer@</i> Pride.....	352
Beyond Total Suffering: A Feminist Ethnography of Connectedness and an Empowering Subjectivity.....	355
The Bittersweet in Working Agricultures: Contributions to Social Work, Agrarian, Labor, Women’s and Commodity Studies.....	361
A <i>Tarefero</i> Sings: Labor Solidarity and Contributions to Collaborative Anthropology.....	366
<i>Ayeres y Mañanas</i>	369
Bibliography.....	371

List of Figures

Figure 0: Celia Cuba & lifetime partner Cándido Maciel Cuatro Bocas, Misiones Argentina (Photo by Author June 2012).....	xvi
Figure 1: Pope Frances and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at the Vatican in June of 2013 (Internet Commons).....	15
Figure 2: <i>Mate</i> reaches the world stage with Pope Frances as Celia drinks <i>mate</i> toward the end of a harvest day (Internet Commons and Photo by Author, June 2012).....	35
Figure 3: Entering the town of Los Helechos, 2009 (Photo by Author).....	109
Figure 4: Celia Cuba at work in the <i>quebranza</i> (Photo by Author, July 2012).....	121
Figure 5: <i>Atando el raído</i> : Top left, Eugenio and Cornelio, Celia’s nephew and brother-in-law, top right, Mari and Cornelio, wife and husband, and bottom, Celia and Cándido, wife and husband (Photos by Author May-July 2012).....	126
Figure 6: Rogelio Matoso, the first <i>tarefero</i> I ever met, was a master teacher of <i>la tarefa</i> . Here, he demonstrates how he positions himself to hoist a raído onto his back so that he can carry it out for loading.....	128
Figure 7: Weighing in Guatambú at Roberto Aicheler’s farm (Photo by Author March 2012).....	131
Figure 8: Celia records the weight of green leaf for each <i>tarefer@</i> in her <i>cuadrilla</i> (Photo by author July 2012).....	132
Figure 9: <i>Tareferos</i> in Campo Ramón lift the <i>raído, al muque</i> , into the truck in 2010 (Photo by Author).....	133
Figure 10: Loading with the motorized pulley system at Roberto Aicheler’s farm in Guatambú (Photo by Author, March 2012).....	134
Figure 11: The high <i>capuera</i> (weeds) dwarfs the <i>yerba</i> in this <i>yerbal</i> close to Montecarlo where Don Villalba and his <i>cuadrilla</i> worked (Photo by Author 2013).....	170
Figure 12: A <i>yerbal</i> heavily treated by herbicide. (Photo by Author).....	170
Figure 13: Celia’s shows how <i>la tarefa</i> takes its toll on her fingernails (Photo by Author).....	190
Figure 14: As Don Fariña of Guatambú waits for the truck to be loaded, he converses with a <i>madre de víbora</i> (praying mantis) (Photo by Author).....	195
Figure 15: Members of Don Villalba’s <i>cuadrilla</i> on a tree trunk on a late summer day (Photo by Author).....	195
Figure 16: A <i>raído</i> doubles as dining table with a spread of manioc, <i>reviro</i> , fried meat, and <i>fiambre</i> sandwiches (Photo by Author July 2012).....	196
Figure 17: Cándido Maciel and Celia Cuba drink <i>tereré</i> on a break near Cuatro Bocas (Photo by Author July 2012).....	200
Figure 18: The Heart of Flame (<i>Bromelia Balansae</i> Caraguatay) (Internet Commons 2013).....	213

Figure 19: Women of the <i>tarefer@</i> union of Montecarlo in <i>el galpón</i> . María is on the top row, second from left, with her daughter to her right. (Photo by Author May 2012)	240
Figure 20: A <i>trío of tarefer@s</i> holds the union banner in the moment of the taking of the green gold highway in the rain (Photo by Author, March 2012)	246
Figure 21: This proud group of <i>tarefer@s</i> with whom I had worked in Roberto Aichelero's <i>yermal</i> usually wanted nothing to do with highway blockades, until their bosses took the highway (Photo by Author, March 2012)	251
Figure 22: Gathered together in <i>asamblea</i> on the asphalt (Photo by Author March 2012)	254
Figure 23: Rubén Ortiz (middle) with the Agrarian Federation's Orlando Marino (right) and labor contractor Eladio Barretto (left) as decisions are made in the middle of the Route 12 (Photo courtesy of Natalia Haasis)	256
Figure 24: Hugo Sand (left) and Carlos Ortt (right) of APAM address the links between small producers and <i>tarefer@s</i> at a May 12, 2012 forum in the <i>galpón</i>	256
Figure 25: A view of the 2012 highway blockades waged by farmers and <i>tarefer@s</i> for increase in the price of green leaf (Photo courtesy of Natalia Haasis)	262
Figure 26: Ruben Ortiz in the March 2012 taking of the green gold highway (Photo by Author)	269
Figure 27: On the road (Photo by Author 2012)	272
Figure 28: Javier late in the day's work... then freshly showered, off to night school to learn to read (Photo by author, Montecarlo May 2013)	316
Figure 29: Presencia gathering medicinal plants (Photo by Author 2012)	339
Figure 30: Presencia with <i>la cabeza de vaca</i> (Photo by Author 2012)	343
Figure 31: Presencia in her garden (Photo by Author, 2012)	351
Figure 32: Don Santos Villalba performs while Federico Chilavert provides support	368
Figure 33: A photo mural of <i>tarefer@</i> empowerment hangs on the wall of the <i>galpón</i> (Photo by Author May 2014)	368
Figures 34: Celia Cuba at rest in the <i>yermal</i> near Cuatro Bocas, Misiones (Photos by Author, July 2012)	370
Figures 35: Celia's tools and work product in the <i>yermal</i> near Cuatro Bocas, Misiones (Photos by Author, July 2012)	370

Glossary

<i>Asemblea</i>	Community meeting
<i>Cuadrilla</i>	Field crew for <i>yerba mate</i> harvest
<i>Colono</i>	White Farmers
<i>Corte de Ruta</i>	Highway Blockade
<i>Curandera</i>	Healer
<i>El conchabo</i>	Hiring/Contracting
<i>El mensú</i>	Debt peon
<i>Juicio laboral</i>	Labor lawsuit
<i>La quebranza</i>	Hand-threshing of green leaf
<i>La tarea</i>	<i>Yerba mate</i> harvest
<i>Obrero/a</i>	Worker
<i>Hoja verde</i>	Green Leaf
<i>Peón</i>	Rural wagedworker
<i>Pilón</i>	Scale for weighing
<i>Plan</i>	Welfare Benefit
<i>Ponchada</i>	Nylon/Burlap square
<i>Puntero Político</i>	Political point person
<i>Secadero</i>	Drying mill for <i>yerba mate</i>
<i>Sindicato</i>	Labor union
<i>Raído</i>	Tied up bundle of <i>yerba mate</i>

<i>La selva</i>	Forest
<i>El Tarefero/La Tarefera</i>	Male and female <i>yerba mate</i> harvesters
<i>Reviro</i>	An everyday meal of fried flour eaten alone, with beans, or meat
<i>Tereré</i>	Cold <i>yerba mate</i>
<i>Trabajador/a</i>	Worker
<i>Villa (miseria)</i>	Poor shantytowns
<i>Vivienda</i>	Rural housing project
<i>Yerbal</i>	<i>Yerba mate</i> plantation
<i>Zafra/Interzafra</i>	Harvest

ABSTRACT

Hands on the Green Leaf is an ethnographic homage to the men, women, and children called *tareferos* (*tarefer@s*) who labor to produce *yerba mate*, the naturally bitter, green tea that is both symbolic drink and staple food in Argentina. No ethnographic account exists of everyday life in *yerba mate* country while the vast majority of written work on the tea has focused on consumption. Focusing on *tarefer@* personhood at the production site in Argentina's poor Northeastern province of Misiones, this dissertation captures views of the first temporal, material, corporal, and affective spaces of the commodity chain from which 21st century agrarian alienation springs. I construct a "feminist ethnography of connectedness" which both links the lives of producers and consumers in order to 'defetishize' commodities and builds bridges between the disciplines of anthropology, agrarian studies, social work and psychology, as well as studies on labor, law, gender, and environment. I practice ethnographic "appearing" by tracing the history of *los mensú*, the workers who harvested *yerba* in the Paraná Forest up through the first part of the 20th century, bringing to light the role of women and children. I write on contemporary subjectivity in the *yerbales* unveiling a "bittersweet dwelling" in which *tarefer@s* fight weed cover and unfair labor practices to get to the green gold even as they experience the joys of camaraderie and the natural world in the *yerbal*. The second half of this dissertation contains accounts of *tarefer@* resistance including historical highway blockades waged to improve the price of green leaf. I argue that *tarefer@s* forge temporary spaces of power and

democracy on the asphalt. Contributing to legal anthropology and labor and agrarian studies, I analyze too the “culture of work” at play in the everyday labor conflict that jeopardizes food sovereignty. I argue that gender violence undergirds the *yerba mate* economy by writing the life of Presencia in which I demonstrate the critical value of women’s everyday practices of sustaining life. This dissertation closes with an account of my collaborative work with *tarefer@s* in Misiones, drawing on theories of empowerment from social work, community psychology, and collaborative anthropology.

Introduction

By the time the state inspectors left the field, the sun had moved to the middle of the sky. There was no escaping it now. I fell in line to help Celia, for I could see sweat rolling down her temples as the heat began to take its toll. Our work was to take as much green leaf from each tree as we could, leaving enough for the plant to bear the frost and sun to come. Having labored all her life harvesting *yerba*, Celia approached each tree without pause. She knew exactly which branches to sever with her handsaw and which to leave for the plant's future growth. Meanwhile, I worked to break them up onto the four-cornered tarp spread across the weed cover between the lines of trees. I had learned to toss the biggest branches to the side and to break up the tender branches just enough so that the load would not be rejected once it was trucked to the *secadero* where it would be roasted, ground, cured, and later sold as *yerba mate* in supermarkets around Argentina.

We filled the tarp with leaf until it was overflowing. Then we spread out another one on the ground. Celia moved on to the next tree. Paid by the kilogram, the faster she worked, the closer she got to ensure that she could put food on her table. Two tarps later, we stopped and went back to tie up the ones we had left behind so they could be carried out of the line. This is where Celia's incredible strength mattered. She positioned herself at one corner and I on the opposite as we stepped in toward one another, pulling the four corners in together diagonally. With all our weight and strength, we used our knees to push the bulging tarp in further, just

enough to tie two corners together at a time. We then let go, and the one hundred kilogram *raído* rocked to a standstill. It would sit there until it was weighed, hauled down to the end of the line, and loaded onto the truck.

All around us in the other lines, men and women worked doing the same. Some worked alone, others worked in pairs as Celia and I did. The heavy, wet air was punctuated with a crackling, the sound of the breaking of branches, *la quebranza*. Laughter, song, shouts for a helping hand, conversation, and silence came and went together with the sound of an occasional truck passing by on the red dirt road that lined the far side of the *yerbal*.

After an hour or so, the heat had gotten to Celia. In her youth, she would have been able to gather one thousand kilograms a day or ten *raídos*. Now in her early fifties, she suffered from high blood pressure, and her body could not cope with the heat like it once could. I too had started out with vigor, for I actually liked the rhythm of *la quebranza*. But as I looked down the line, a whole day's work was beginning to look different; there was a long distance between what we had collected and what was still to do. To make matters worse, we had just hit a patch of scrawny trees that had been injured either by drought, frost or a bad cut from a previous year. Their wiry, hard-to-break branches rendered very little green leaf, thus very little weight. Yet the owner of the *yerbal* would still want them pruned in order that they continue to produce green leaf.

We worked a bit longer, and then Celia suggested a break. We headed to the tree line along the *yerbal* so we could sit in the shade. Celia prepared the *tereré*, the cold *yerba mate* drunk in this part of Northeast Argentina to cool the body down in the subtropical heat. She pulled out a gourd, the *mate*, and poured it with a coarsely ground tea from the kilogram sack of her favorite brand of *mate*, *Buen Día*. She then poured the first round from a five-gallon thermos

stained with red dirt fingerprints. As we passed the *tereré* back in forth between us in the shade, we talked of the state inspectors' attitude toward the crew of *tarefer@s*, those who harvest *yerba mate*. Celia was incensed that they had taken so long. She felt they had talked down to her and her fellow *tarefer@s*. They had come with pamphlets that explained certain labor rights. A large bellied engineer had come along too, giving a lecture on how best to cut *yerba* in order to protect the tree and render more yield. He then told me out of their earshot how lazy and resistant *tarefer@s* were: They were not interested in doing a good job and were more interested in sitting around and drinking *tereré* or talking on their cells.

But Celia knew her rights, and she knew how to cut *yerba*. After all, she had been working in the *yerbales* since she was thirteen. The inspectors had interrupted those crucial morning hours when the body was fresh and the green leaf was still crisp from the night cold, making it easier to break up. And the truth was that Celia had a singular passion for cutting green leaf. Along with her husband, children, and grandchildren, it was one of the great loves of her life. In fact, I had never heard her lament about discrimination or how she disliked her job. She actually scoffed at the *tarefer@* union activists who took to blocking the highway to demand better pay and treatment. But looking out over the field at what was left to do that day, she said to me: "The truth is: *El tarefero* has always been treated like an animal." And with that, we went back to work.

Mapping the Unrecorded Sky

Although Argentines deeply love their *mate* and have written abundant poems, songs, and tributes to the tea, the lives and working conditions of harvesters like Celia have not been the subjects of such tribute. In fact, they have been erased from all things *yerba mate* in Argentina. While the tea is promoted vigorously to international visitors as a friendship drink that was first

drunk in communal form by a homogenous group of indigenous Guaraní, the vast majority of *mate* consumers do not know that those who make their consumption possible today are descendents of multiple indigenous groups who struggle in the day-to-day, dispossessed by centuries of conquest. Indeed, the various groups of Guaraní that remain are not part of a romantic past, but rather part of a painful present (Rau 2012; Wilde 2009; Lagier 2008; Clastres 1993). They, like Celia herself whose ancestors were part of this dispossession, labor in precarious conditions in a sharply unequal landscape where most land is owned by white farmers of European descent. Even the word *tarefer@s* is not generally known in a city such as Buenos Aires where a third of Argentina's population lives. And the small farmers called *colonos* who constitute the majority of *yerba* producers in Argentina remain largely unknown as well.

Importantly, no ethnographic work has ever been produced on the daily life of *tarefer@s* like Celia. Nor does any written account of the contemporary harvest in the *yerbales* exist. In this dissertation I work to fill this gap by building an ethnographic homage to people like Celia who labor to produce *yerba mate*, the bitter green tea that is the beloved, everyday drink of Argentina. To do so, I draw on fieldwork I conducted since 2008 throughout the poor Northeast province of Misiones, the place where the vast majority of *mate* is produced in the country. From the *yerbales* across Misiones, I gathered the raw materials to work in these pages toward dismantling the commodity fetishism that stalks all things *yerba mate*, resulting exactly in what Celia told me that day—that those who work hardest to bring the drink to Argentines have been historically, and are still today, treated as animals (Marx 1977). I do so by crafting what I shall call “a feminist ethnography of connectedness” in which I work to “appear” people like Celia, bringing hers and others' life and labor to the forefront of Argentine history. But this story goes beyond the *yerbales* of the Alto Paraná; I mean to place workers like Celia at the center of discussions

concerning ‘working agricultures’ and the survival of humankind in the context of the massive rural exodus, environmental degradation, and pervasive human suffering that stalk the globe in this 21st century (Williams 1973; Shiva 2012; Davis 2007). Throughout this dissertation, I construct a politics of memory in which I make those who are most vulnerable the protagonists of a story that is fundamentally about *relationships* and the connecting of lives in order to combat alienation. (Williams 1977: 212; Mintz 1985). A critical component of connectedness means writing across the disciplines of anthropology, social work, and studies on gender, labor, law, and the environment in order to bring together our multiple understandings of the lives of the globe’s most vulnerable (Farmer 2005).

In the first part of this Introduction, I analyze the role of *yerba mate* in Argentine culture and history as well as within the regional context of Latin America. I set up the province of Misiones as a site of dwelling and begin the work of “appearing” the subjectivity of *los tarefer@s*. I provide an overview of the labor and production history of *mate* that informs the chapters that follow. In the second part, I lay out the theoretical foundation for this dissertation, including the methods that I deployed to work toward “defetishization”.

PART I A Fetishized “Friendship Drink”: *Yerba Mate* in Argentina

The trees that Celia stripped of their green leaf that day in the *yerbal* are of a variety called *ilex paraguarienses*, a relative of the holly tree and native only to subtropical South America.¹ The green leaves are dried, crushed, and most often steeped in hot water. Here, they gain power as *yerba mate*, for they have ‘magical’, stimulating properties that both get the body moving and open the mind up like a flower, spreading a feeling of hope through the person who

¹ As of this writing, *yerba mate* could not be produced outside of this area, but due to constant genetic engineering and plant breeding, the possibility that it could be cultivated eventually in other geographical areas should not be foreclosed.

² Mostly the water for *mate* is served just before the boiling point. Many people throw the water 5

takes in the tea. *Mate* consumption differs from the single serving commodity of coffee or other teas in that it often is consumed in groups by passing around the *mate* gourd. This ritual only adds to its fetishism.

In spite of the fact that *yerba mate* is heavily consumed in neighboring countries, *yerba mate* has come to be considered as Argentine as the tango: It is the national symbol of friendship; it is the drink that gets so many Argentines off to work each day; and it is introduced to throngs of international visitors as a symbol of Argentine culture and hospitality. Highly cherished for the intimacy it brings when people consume it together in *rondas* (circles of friendship), some drink their tea *amargo* (bitter) while others prefer it *dulce* (sweet). Some are addicted to *mate dulce*; others swear they would never contaminate their *mates* with such an impurity as sugar or artificial sweetener. Long conversations are held about how to prepare water so that the perfect *mate* might be served.² Some are known for preparing the best *mates*, while others can never get it right.³

Indeed Argentines have made *yerba mate* a part of their everyday life for over a century, at least, and today it is consumed in almost 100% of households (INYM 2013). The tea is as fundamental to the Argentine diet as bread.⁴ In fact, it has long been part of the government-designated *la canasta familiar* (basic food basket), alongside such staples as sugar, oil, and flour.

In the morning, millions of Argentines across the country drink *mate* to get them going for the

² Mostly the water for *mate* is served just before the boiling point. Many people throw the water out if it boils and start the kettle anew.

³ See Christine Folch's excellent historical work on *mate* consumption, particularly in the context of Paraguay (2010).

⁴ I leave to another writer the cases of *mate* fetishism in Paraguay, Uruguay, and southern Brazil, where it also is an everyday drink. Fetishism is most intense in Uruguay where no *yerba* is produced. Uruguayans are famous for carrying their thermoses under their arm while they ride buses or go about their business in the public sphere. Ironically, Uruguay is not a producer of the tea due to its geographical distance from the subtropical redlands where *yerbales* thrive.

workday ahead. Many have more *mate* in the afternoon together with cookies or pastries in order to get through the final push of the day. Students rely on *mate* to get through their exams. Dieters skip meals with the help of the tea's appetite diminishing properties. And although Buenos Aires is famous for its cafes and coffee mostly imported from Brazil, it is equally famous for the tradition of families, friends, and sweethearts gathering in public parks to drink *mate* together. Moments of sharing the tea are fetishized as the best moments for family, friendship, love, and even intellectual production. Just as coffee inspires writers to develop eloquent prose, so too does *yerba mate* inspire creativity. It just seems to make everything right, its consumers say. Even the iconic figure of the *gaucho* in Argentine history enfolds both the symbolic and sustenance roles *mate* has played in Argentina's history: As essential as beef was to the *gauchos* in surviving the hard life on the frontier of *la pampa*, so too was *mate*. The tea was drunk in large quantities in the ubiquitous *cimarrón*, the large gourd from which it was consumed (Slatta 1992).

For generations, Argentines have relied on the fact that they could readily find their *yerba mate* and do so for a reasonable price. Indeed the green leaf Celia and her crew cut that day would be trucked to the *secadero* where it would be flash-fired, slow roasted, ground, cured, placed in bags, and sent on to grocery shelves around the Republic. The term *hoja verde*, green leaf, would disappear as the raw material became less important, and the term *yerba mate* will take over in groceries stores and supermarkets. The further the green leaf traveled from the hands that first took it from the tree, the more value it gained as a value-added commodity. The acceleration sped up in the North-South corridors that lead to the great capital of Buenos Aires. There, people would carefully pick out their favorite brand or buy what they could afford with no knowledge of the life of Celia or others like her.

At the retail level, packages of the tea line shelves of the giant supermarket chains such as Carrefour and El Día, neighborhood grocery stores mostly owned by Chinese entrepreneurs, as well as gas stations. Consumers of *yerba mate* in Argentina choose their *yerba* based on price, taste, and brand. In this moment, the reality of commodity fetishism takes on an iconic form: *Tarefer@s* like Celia are starkly absent in the material culture of the marketing of the tea. And this has always been true. In an ironic twist, the visual images used to attract consumers to *mate* brands over many generations now are largely designed to invoke a view and feel of *el campo*, the countryside and all things pastoral. In the supermarket, the icons attached to the bag are fundamental to the marketing of what is inside. There are hundreds of brands throughout the country, with more emerging regularly. New brands come and old brands go, but marketers depend on icons and packaging to make their profit. As consumers stand before a selection of *yerba mate* in a grocery aisle, they are inundated by scenes of sunsets, sunrises, horses, landscapes, kettles, leaves and once in a great while, a stereotyped view of a person of Guaraní origin to invoke the roots of the tea (Folch 2010). In fact, references to a stereotyped image of an indigenous figure are more likely to appear on labels than is the figure of a *tarefer@*. Consumers are both influenced by these labels and rely on them. They invoke the flavor of a rural world on which Argentina historically has depended to build its fortune.

While some consumers are fiercely loyal to particular famous national brands such as *Rosamonte*, others explore different brands by taste and price. People also choose their *yerba* based on flavor and depictions of what the *yerba* contains. Some prefer *más palo* (more twig) and others *palo fino* (fine twig). Others prefer *yerba* that contains a smoked flavor from the drying process known as *barbacua*. Still others prefer a greener leaf. The amount of *palo* affects the value of the tea, for *palo* at the *secadero* is mostly removed, bagged, and then poured back

into the fire to roast newly arrived green leaf. The more *palo* a bag of *yerba* has, the more potential profit for the company, which sells the brand. There is tremendous manipulation in the commodity chain around this issue and the degree to which consumers can be manipulated to ensure maximum profit for the large supermarket chains, which eat up twenty-five percent of the price that a consumer pays per kilogram of *yerba mate*.

Perhaps one of the most ironic twists in the fetishism of *mate* is this: Deeply embedded in the real rather than folkloric reality of the tea is the fact that *yerba mate* is the drink that poor Argentines rely on in the everyday to get them through food scarcity. When there is nothing to eat but bread in the house, there is sure to be *mate*—it will be passed around in circles of consumption long after the flavor and stimulating properties have been extracted from the tea. And paradoxically, the hands that harvest the tea consumed in these urban and rural poor neighborhoods throughout the country, belong to some of Argentina's most poor and exploited workers, *tarefer@s*. Therefore, the links between these two poor households to *mate* fetishism connect Argentina to larger historical labor patterns in Latin America and defy the role of the country as the 'European exception' of the continent (Rau 2012; Pigna 2005; Brass 2003).

Beyond the “Paris of Latin America”: Unveiling Infusions of the Indigenous

While other Latin American commodities like sugar and coffee became part of the global market centuries ago, *yerba mate* stands out for having remained mostly a regional commodity. This is in part because its flavor never took hold in the same way (Folch 2010; Mintz 1985). But while using indigenous labor in the production of some commodities became impossible in Latin America, this was not the case in the triple border area where *yerba mate* is produced. Unlike the production of global commodities like sugar, which relied on the transport of slave labor from far away places, harvesters of *yerba* historically have been the multiple indigenous groups living in

the region of the Alto Paraná who have been continuously dispossessed over the centuries (Mintz 1985; Rau 2012). It was through them, after all, that Europeans first learned of the magic of *yerba mate* and how to consume it (Rau 2012; Folch 2010). Somehow, in spite of high consumption in the neighboring countries of Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil, Argentina often manages to both market and appropriate *yerba mate* as uniquely Argentine.

This cultural appropriation takes place in a long history of the country being considered a Latin American exception. And, at the core of the exceptionalism is the perception that Argentina is a white, rather than indigenous, black, or even *mestizo* country (Pigna 2005; Clastres 1993). This exceptionalism has its roots in the Campaign of the Desert during the nineteenth century in which the Argentine state murdered and displaced countless numbers of indigenous people in an effort to confiscate large tracts of the land for the country's elite (Pigna 2005). At the same time, the country welcomed millions of immigrants from Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly from Spain and Italy, and this changed the ethnic face of Buenos Aires in particular. Today, Buenos Aires is often referred to as “the Paris of Latin America” for its European air, culture, and cuisine. Even the powerful elite of the provinces often leads a dual life in the capital. Not only do a third of all Argentines dwell in Buenos Aires, but also historically, it has occupied a disproportionate role in the economy of the country: Most roads of commerce and political traffic lead to the port of Buenos Aires to export commodities (mainly meat and wheat) to the world (Pigna 2005).

Overall, the focus on Buenos Aires city as the “Paris of Latin America” has led to much misperception that the capital somehow *is* Argentina, as opposed to the other provinces beyond it. This dissertation challenges that exceptionalism. While it is true that those of Spanish and Italian descent have significant cultural influence in Buenos Aires and that the city has many

similarities with European capitals such as Madrid and Rome, the same city is surrounded by vast *villas miserias* (shantytowns) that are populated by many people of mixed descent who have come from the provinces. Increasingly in the last decades, migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru have joined them in these *villas miserias*. Furthermore, the indigenous pasts of many Argentines have been erased over the generations even though the masses of Argentina are of mixed heritage, descending from crosses with Europeans, multiple indigenous groups dispossessed over the centuries, and Africans. Indeed the use of the term *el negro* or *la negra* can be a nickname used with great affection throughout Argentina, while *los negros* most often carries with it a negative connotation as does the term *los cabecitas negras* (little black heads) which for decades was a derogatory term used to refer to the brown-skinned masses who are not considered to be European (*See e.g.* Luongo 2014; Karush 2012; Alberto 2011; Rozenmacher 1962).⁵ This quagmire of identity embedded in contemporary terminology reflects Argentina's troubled past and present in which there has not been a cultural re-working of identity that takes into account the mixing that occurred between Europeans and the variety of indigenous groups that populated the area at the time of European conquest (Pigna 2005; Clastres 1993).

Apart from the reality that it is not a white country, Argentina has multiple indigenous groups who still struggle for both autonomy and survival (Gordillo 2008). Although Argentine anthropologists long have been focused on the multiple indigenous populations in Argentina, this approach has only recently emerged in anthropological literature in English publications (*See e.g.*

⁵ There is a growing interest on this issue in Buenos Aires. Paulina Alberto has forthcoming publications on AfroArgentines and blackness in Argentina. See http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/travel/argentina-rediscovered-its-african-roots.html?_r=0 (Accessed September 15, 2015). The term *cabecitas negras* was used for generations, but today the term *los negros* is mostly used in derogatory terms, often to refer to the poor masses in the shantytowns who are forced to rely on welfare to survive.

Lanza and Valeggia 2012; Gordillo 2008). In response to my own research in Argentina, I have had colleagues suggest to me that I work in a more privileged white country, not a ‘real’ Latin America like Mexico or Guatemala. This misperception is fed by the abundance of anthropological production in countries like Peru, Mexico and Guatemala that host large indigenous populations who still remain intact in terms of culture and language. Even more so is the fact that ethnographies on Argentina have tended to be rooted in Buenos Aires rather than other provinces where one is forced to confront and reconsider Argentina’s indigenous present and past (See e.g. Taylor 1998).⁶ Hence, these layers of racialization and whitewashing are imbedded in the fetishism of *yerba mate*.

Interrupting the Sacred Power of Fetishization

About a year after I worked with Celia in that *yerbal* near the Paraná River, *yerba mate* made a historical debut on the world stage. In 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, an Argentine Jesuit Cardinal, became the first Latin American Pope. Pope Francis, as he elected to be called, carried with him to the Vatican his favorite drink—*yerba mate*. The new populist pope was photographed with his cherished *mate* in hand, taking long sips from the *bombilla* among throngs of supporters whose visages were captured in expressions of awe, joy and disbelief. Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner made her way quickly to the Vatican to take advantage of the moment, in spite of the fact that the two had been sworn enemies up to this historic moment.⁷ A photographer captured the pair preparing the ritual, the president’s pinky-ringed

⁶ For an excellent ethnography that avoids the Buenos Aires dominance, see Elana Shever’s work on oil in Patagonia (Shever 2012).

⁷ The Pope had been an archrival of Kirchner due to both his opposition to such progressive changes as gay marriage as well as to his criticism of corruption.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/27/christina-fernandez-de-kirchner-pope-francis>
Accessed April 20, 2015.

hand on the *mate* together with the Pope's. A large cross hung from the Pope's neck in the background. The photo meant to showcase the beloved ritual as well as to suggest that sharing *mate* could bring the two together politically; all could be forgiven over a few *mates* and new bridges could be built.⁸

The power of the “friendship drink” holds a sacred place in the Argentine heart. Just as its consumption has been a site charged with intimacy, so too has drinking *mate* involved a near total erasure of the conditions of production under which the tea is grown, harvested, and brought to consumers' hands throughout history. The photos which captured the Pope drinking *mate* on the world stage contained an additional symbolic layer: Pope Francis was also the first Jesuit Pope, representing the very same order which first domesticated *yerba mate* in the 16th century. The Jesuits built multiple missions throughout the triple border area of what is today Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. In fact, the name of the province of Misiones comes from this legacy.

In this sense, the marriage of church and state captured in the photo of Pope Francis and President Fernández de Kirchner has long roots in the Argentine history of *yerba mate*: While the church was the first to domesticate the *yerba* plant, the rising nation state stepped in to control *yerba mate* production in the twentieth century, playing a fundamental role in the supply and demand of the tea (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007). By the time Pope Francis made *yerba mate* world famous, the commercialization of the tea was in the middle of great flux, for it had begun to circulate in the international market more than ever before. Not only had Syria become the

⁸ I am grateful to a friend and colleague at the University of Michigan, Roberto Vezzani, for alerting me to this cinematic moment.

largest consumer of *yerba mate* outside of South America, but the niche market of *yerba mate* in the United States and Europe also was expanding.⁹

With the fetishization of *yerba mate* taking the world stage, the tradition of erasing the labor of *tarefer@s* endures. Moreover, the European profiles of both the Pope and the President further promote Argentina as a white European, rather than indigenous, place. But by focusing the ethnographic lens on Misiones, I mean to interrupt the sacred power of this fetishization in several ways. First, Misiones contradicts the misconception of Argentina as a Europeanized exception in Latin America both because of its multiethnic mix and due to the way labor practices in the province fit into historical patterns of labor and capital in the production of other commodities in Latin America (Rau 2012; Reichman 2011; Brass 2014, 2003). Second, by shifting the lens from the giant capital of consumption in Buenos Aires to Misiones, a space that *porteños* often refer to as *el interior*, I both “appear” local struggles and aspirations and link them directly to the present and future welfare of those who live in poor urban spaces, including the *villas miserias* of Buenos Aires (Robbins 2013). An third, by writing an ethnography of connectedness, I unveil the direct connections between residents in rural and urban areas not only through the continuum of production and consumption but also through routes of migration. Indeed so many *misioneros* ultimately end up fleeing low wages and corruption in the province to look for a better life in Buenos Aires, only to find themselves with another set of problems

⁹ Guayakí, a partnership between an Argentine and an American who met in college, blazed the trail of niche market *yerba mate* in the U.S. By 2012, they had begun to use college campuses as sites for the marketing and sale of a watered down version of green leaf, what they called *tereré*. In reality, what is sold in the U.S. is the Argentine equivalent of *mate cocido*, which is *yerba* brewed as a watery tea. Importantly, this uses much less green leaf and hence enriches Guayaki all the more. Ecoteas was another main source of *yerba mate* in the U.S. This is a partnership between a single farm family (Krauss) in San Ignacio, Misiones, and two American partners in Oregon. Other unsourced *yerba mate* was being sold in supermarkets such as Trader Joes, for example, as of this writing.

that links directly to those they had back in the green spaces of their home province. In effect, the story I write in the following chapters is largely a story about brown-skinned people who defy the myth of Argentine exceptionalism.



Figure 1: Pope Frances and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at the Vatican in June of 2013 (Internet Commons)

The Site of Green Leaf: Misiones, Argentina

Misiones lies far off the cultural and economic grid of Buenos Aires. It is a liminal border province that is known mostly for the huge international tourist attraction of Iguazú Falls. Both Argentines and international visitors speed up Route 12 from Buenos Aires to get to the falls where they usually spend a day or two and return to the capital. At the falls, they will be introduced to the indigenous Guaraní via small groups that are allowed into the tourist site to sing songs and collect money. These open-air concerts take place only yards from shops which promote the “friendship drink” through the sale of expensive *mate* sets and the promotion of the drink as a magical commodity with mystical indigenous roots. On the way to and from Misiones, most have contact with *yerba mate* country only through panoramic views of the countryside from a car or plane window. Tourists with more resources might have a longer, more

comfortable stay in one of the growing number of luxury ecolodges located in ‘untouched’ parts of the endangered Paraná Forest. There they go to relax and become one with nature, but usually within the comforts of starched white sheets and insect-free suites.

Those who do spend time in Misiones often speak of a great affection for the people and the beautiful subtropical landscape whose *tierra colorada* (redlands) takes a kind of sentimental hold over the heart. They also remember the astonishing poverty that they encounter and the way it contrasts with the luxury hotels in the town of Iguazú. And one of the traditions people may be introduced to while they are in Misiones is the tradition of drinking *tereré* (cold mate) as the intense subtropical heat endures for many months out of the year making hot *mate* unpalatable. Especially in the heart of *yerba mate* country, people prefer the tea overwhelmingly to coffee. Either as *mate* or cold *tereré*, it is a fundamental part of everyday life.

Misiones is one of the poorest and smallest of Argentina’s twenty-three provinces. Although the Argentine government has controlled the territory since the first decades of the 19th century, the end of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870 marks the moment that the government begins to exert more control over the province (Pomer 2008). From that point on, Argentina began to find ways to replace what was a dwindling hodgepodge of indigenous groups with European settlers. This process was in full swing by the early part of the 20th century when immigrants began to arrive from Europe. Today the province is a multiethnic mix that shares 90% of its borders with Paraguay and Brazil. Those countries continuously influence its economy, even as contraband comes and goes across all borders.

One feature that stands out in Misiones is the plethora of small farms that still dot the landscape. With these farms comes a lively history of agrarian organizing which is what first attracted me to the province. Early on in my fieldwork, I worked around the central highland city

of Oberá that is surrounded by *yerba* plantations and is home to MAM (The Agrarian Movement of Misiones). One Sunday afternoon, I drove into the countryside and encountered a house set at the corner of a red dirt road crossroads where a man sat on the wooden porch of his house playing a guitar. The afternoon conversation that took place was the beginning of the first relationship I formed with a couple that worked in the *la tarefa*, Rogelio and María. Over the years, my experience with them alerted me to the intense discrimination they faced, and each of their life stories helped me understand the degree of hardship that poor and landless families experienced in the countryside.

These early conversations led me to see a stark reality. Jovita, a young mother working in a bookstore in Oberá who was not from the province, and had experienced the brunt of this reality as a newcomer to the city, summed it up perfectly: “In Oberá”, she lamented, “*Sos lo que tenés,*” you are what you have. Certainly a reality in many places, material wealth was especially critical to having any kind of social power in Oberá. I found this to be true throughout Misiones where levels of education were among the lowest in Argentina. It is common to find people in the countryside who have not even finished elementary school while many others attended school sporadically. I learned over the years that the stigma of being poor was so painful that some people resorted to absolutely anything to get more, or *something* in order to be seen as *someone*. I saw this in the tragic cases of young girls from the country who became prostitutes in order to have income for which to purchase clothes that erased signs of their poor rural roots. This also was fueled furiously by the way a move from country to city enhanced social prestige, because one left the dirty life of the farm behind. As most *tarefer@s* had no land and few material possessions, they had no social power. Increasingly they lived in urban *villas miserias*

or poor areas at the edge of provincial towns and relied on the welfare plans that the Peronist government in Argentina made available to the poor and unemployed in the 2000s.

Many people who know Misiones agree that it incubates pain for the spirit. As beautiful as the province is, the pain that lurks in the landscape somehow reaches those who spend enough time in the countryside. That pain is inescapable both in the poverty that endures in the countryside and the corruption that manifests in everyday life. As a clinical social worker, I often found myself analyzing the way historical trauma manifested itself at the family level which I discuss at more length in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Each family is a world and has a world. The term ‘rural exodus’ is a hollow term that doesn’t do justice to what it is supposed to define, for each family splintered by exodus creates waves of pain that penetrate into the future. In writing an ethnography of connectedness, I mean to “appear” those who struggle on in the countryside in their bittersweet dwelling.

A Bittersweet Dwelling: “Appearing” *Los Tarefer@s*

Perhaps no one consumes as much *yerba* as do those who harvest it. *Tarefer@s* themselves historically have been heavy consumers of the tea; they drink it in the morning and throughout the day in order to maintain stamina throughout the harvest day in the *yerbal*. In fact, throughout my fieldwork, I never met a *tarefer@* who did not consume *yerba mate*, most consumed it multiple times a day, both at home and in the *yerbal*. In great contrast to the conversations about how to prepare the perfect *mate* that I heard in Buenos Aires, I actually never heard *tarefer@s* talk about how to perfect *mate* preparation even though the tea was ubiquitous. A visit to a home inevitably led to folks pulling out chairs on the porch or under a tree to form a circle in which we sat and drank *mate* or *tereré* together. Here, at the production site there was no fetishization of the drink.

From the spaces of green leaf that *tarefer@s* inhabit, the world looks so much different. As Celia and I worked together that day, clouds moved over our backs, as a constant unrecorded sky. This moment we shared in the shade in which Celia, a non-union member, finally made an utterance about the historical treatment of someone like herself, contained the converging and collapsing histories of people and landscapes which produced the most fundamental affect expressed by Celia--exhaustion and bitterness. For her, this moment was unbearably dense due to the history it contained: The labor inspector signaled the history of overseers, of people telling *tarefer@s* what they should do, not taking into mind how this wears spirits down. The pine that lined that particular part of the *yermal* that day invoked the history of trees and their hierarchies, with pine being a preferred tree to plant in the 21st century because it both required significantly less human labor and because it provided sure raw material for the paper mills in the province. The weeds we walked through were full of histories too: For their overgrowth meant that they took green leaf from the *yermal*, their height meant they made it more difficult for each harvester to get to the tree to take its green leaf, and the fact that the weeds had been allowed to grow meant that the owner had not paid laborers to remove the weed growth, nor keep it under control. The shade of the trees we sat under were mixes of native and exotic species, but the history of rest beneath the tree and the conversations and dreams that transpired underneath them had passed as the clouds in the sky above us.

Indeed unlike the countless photos of *mate* consumption and paraphernalia that circulate in the domain of fetishization, the role of *tarefer@s* like Celia and her family in bringing the beloved drink to *rondas* around the country rarely has been photographed. Nor does it fall into view of the throngs of international tourists who take *mate* sets home as *recuerdos* of Argentina. Even in the provincial capital of Misiones, Posadas, *mate* consumption occurs with little

knowledge of the labor conditions involving its production. Much less has the vital role of *tarefer@s* in *yerba mate* production in Argentina risen to iconic status similar to that of the *gaucho*. Rather, their liminal status as the poorest of the poor in a poor province together with their brown skin means that their presence has been erased resoundingly from Argentine history.

In this dissertation, I make *tarefer@s* the protagonists of the story for they are the ones who sacrifice the most so that Argentines in all corners of the country can have their morning and afternoon *mates*. The truth is that the *tarefer@* spirit dwells in every moment of *yerba mate* consumption ever to occur. In their own memory, they most recently descend from *los mensú*, the workers who labored in a cruel system of debt peonage deep in the Paraná Forest for generations before *yerba mate* was domesticated as a plantation crop. Very few now can recall the time before that period called the Extractive Front which took hold of the triple border area in the 1870s in what is today Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. But we know that for centuries, *yerba* was extracted from the Paraná Forest, and those who did this work are surely the ancestors of many who still labor in the *yerbales* today.

In reflection of the *mates*, both *dulce* and *amargo*, bitter and sweet, the actors in this dissertation live out their lives in what I shall call a “bittersweet dwelling” in the midst of and around what remains of the vast Paraná Forest, a subtropical landscape mired in crisis and bitterly segregated between white farmers of European descent and the mixed heritage mostly brown-skinned population who are the descendants of those dispossessed over centuries of conquest (Harvey 2003; Rau 2012; Wilde 2009). I use the term ‘brown-skinned’ because, as I have said, the erasure of Argentina’s indigenous past means there is no real positive term used in Argentina for this population. Today some use the word *criollo* to talk about anyone who is not of Northern or Eastern European descent. At the same time, the use of the word *indígena*

(indigenous) in Misiones refers to those Mbya Guaraní who live on the forested reserves in the province, and they are from one very specific ethnic group. The use of the very problematic, racist and classist term *los negros* is applied in Misiones as it is in Buenos Aires. Therefore, I adopt the word “brown-skinned” for this dissertation as an inadequate term, but the only one I feel captures who *tarefer@s* mostly are.

Importantly, although many *tarefer@s* in Misiones speak Guaraní because they either come from Paraguay or their parents did, they do not identify as being part of the ethnic group Mbya Guaraní. Those who are considered to be indigenous live on the forested reserves under the traditional system of the *aldea* (village) that is governed by a *cacique*. While people from those reservations do work in the *yerba* harvest, most *tarefer@s* do not consider themselves to be indigenous. They do recognize that they are not coded as white, and many regularly refer to their skin color and develop jokes and commentaries around the skin color of others. As the following chapters show, some refer to themselves as being *negro* while others reject the term. What is clear is that the *tarefer@s* of today descend from families that lived in Misiones and neighboring Paraguay before the arrival of European immigrants in the early twentieth century. Given that the historical record documents many centuries of *yerba* harvest together with many different indigenous groups’ existence in the Alto Paraná, I draw the conclusion that the mostly brown-skinned *tarefer@s* of today come from centuries of mixing of various indigenous and European groups. Unfortunately, there is no way to distinguish which groups those might have been, because this history has been lost.

Part of the legacy of this racialization of *tarefer@s* means that they face intense discrimination and stereotyping. In circles of *mate* consumption throughout the Misiones countryside, white farmers especially characterize them as dishonest, lazy, delinquent, and dirty.

More recently, these circles are alive with repetitive chatter that blames *tarefer@s* for draining the nation's coffers due to their use of state-issued welfare plans meant to provide a safety net for the longterm unemployed and those who endure precarious employment.

Indeed in my fieldwork throughout Misiones, I observed little historical understanding of the way that land and labor developed in the *yerba* harvest up through the first decades of the 20th century. White farmers rightly remember their fore-parents' incredible suffering in the early days of twentieth century homesteading, but they do not typically acknowledge that the land they worked so hard to tame had been inhabited by others up until their arrival. Rather, much like other subjects of colonial regimes around the world, *tarefer@s* are expected to approach everyday labor and living by embracing a set of universal values which presuppose that every person has the same opportunities. Were they to work hard enough, the logic goes, they could acquire any fortune they desired. Stigma, together with ahistorical narratives, forges a highly exploitative working environment for *tarefer@s* that also reinforces ongoing exclusion from everyday spaces of social power.

Since 2009, the plight of *tarefer@s* and their resistance has made it to the national stage via an effort to bring an end to labor rights violations. The *tarefer@* union based in Montecarlo, Misiones with which I conducted fieldwork from 2011 to the present has as its slogan: *El placer de tomar mate no debe descansar en la esclavitud de los tarefer@s*, 'the pleasure of drinking mate should not rely on enslaved harvesters'. And it is no accident that the visionary behind the union, Rubén Ortiz, is a history teacher whose roots lie in a rural Paraguayan and Guaraní past. *Tarefer@s*, those unemployed by the forces of neoliberalism, and progressive teachers struggle mightily against the forces that historically have permitted the *tarefer@* to be rendered 'an animal'.

But writing a homage to *tarefer@s* that unravels the dark history of the *yerba mate* economy does not only uncloak a dispossession based on ethnicity and economic class. So too has the *yerba mate* economy relied for centuries on the un-free labor of women and children who have themselves in turn been subjugated by the patriarchal structure of multifarious Guaraní (and perhaps other indigenous) social systems (Ortiz - forthcoming; Rau 2012; Wilde 2009; Brass 2003). Indeed for centuries, women and children have played a vital role in the harvest. Yet they have largely been erased from the scant history that has been written on labor in *yerba mate* production. In fact, by beginning my account of the *yerba* harvest with Celia, a woman, I mark a radical departure from historical depictions of the *yerba mate* harvesters, which were understood to be male. As I approached subjectivity in my fieldwork, I considered gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability *all together* in order to understand how playing fields were oriented, and made even or uneven (Collins 1990, 2009; Crenshaw 1989, 1991).¹⁰

For this reason, I now use the @ sign, to create a gender neutral version of *tarefer@s*, in order to appear women and children who have played a primary, not secondary role in *yerba mate* history.¹¹ The word “*tarefer@*” comes from the Portuguese word *tarefa*, job. Although the

¹⁰ This is inspired both from theory in law and Women’s Studies as well as my training in clinical social work.

¹¹ In news reports on *tareferos*, the general term is always *tarefero*. When women are spoken of, they are often done so as a special category and then the word *tarefera* is used. I must note that the form I adapt for this dissertation is not written anywhere in Argentina; rather it is a style I have borrowed from work in literary studies where “queering” of language is more widespread. This decision had consequences for my writing for it made me contemplate gender each and every time I had to consider the *tarefer@ as* the subject(s) in a sentence. The more inclusive keystroke @ requires a tad of additional labor in the finger stretches on the keyboard, a necessary energy spent to create a more equitable and inclusive text. I do not use the term worker or farm worker, for in this context, I find it equivalent to lumping all teachers at all levels into the generic term education worker; it washes out all the specific skills needed to impart knowledge in specific instances and at certain levels. I found instead the need to redeem the skill required to be a lifetime *tarefer@*.

initial campaigns of the Montecarlo union too often represented the *tarefer@* as a masculine figure, this dissertation also reveals political collaborations with multiple parties (including myself) that have led to a more inclusive role of women as both participants and leaders in the contemporary *tarefer@* rights movement. I write on this issue extensively in Chapter Four.

Historical Overview of *Yerba Mate* Extraction in Argentina

The recorded history of the *yerba mate* economy reveals a dramatic story of brutal extractivism. From the time of the European conquest onwards, efforts to extract *yerba mate* from the subtropical forest seems to have taken a brutal turn. The historical record contains very little mention of the vital role of the men and women, glossed over historically as “*peones*”, who helped bring the tea to circles of consumption throughout the centuries. This glossing over comes from both the male-dominated body of scholarship on *yerba* and their promotion of a single masculine figure as the harvester of *yerba* as well as a society which privileges the male worker. By most historical accounts, when Europeans first came into contact with the Guaraní and other indigenous groups who consumed *yerba*, they took fairly readily to the habit when they realized its attributes (Rau 2012; Wilde 2009). Like other Latin American commodities such as sugar, they realized early on, that *mate* helped people work longer and harder (e.g. Mintz 1985). Early on, Europeans found ways to get people to extract the tea for them, and this more likely than not involved un-free or slave indigenous labor (Mintz 1985; Peyret 1881; Ambrosetti 1891; Rau 2012; Brass 2010). Given that *yerba mate* trees could be found in abundance in the Paraná Forest that extended inward from the Brazilian coast to Paraguay, getting to the patches of *yerba* deep in the forest was definitely a challenge. Finding people to harvest and cure it from this hostile climate created problems that stalked most of the industry’s history.

As I have shown above, the actual domestication of the *yerba* plant goes back to the 17th and 18th centuries in which the Jesuits built *reducciones* or settlements throughout what is today Paraguay, Northern Argentina, and Southern Brazil. During this time, they figured out a way to plant *yerba* themselves, using indigenous labor and their know-how to produce a *yerba* supply outside of the hostile forest environment (Peyret 1881; Ambrosetti 1891; Rau 2012). The status and life of the Guaraní under this system has been written about in greater detail (See Wilde 2012). But certainly at least one fundamental aspect of Guaraní willingness to be involved in this labor system was that they sought protection by the Jesuits from the *bandeirantes*, or Portuguese slave traders, who tracked down indigenous groups and forced them into slavery (Rau 2012). After the Jesuits were expelled from South America by the Spanish crown in 1767, the history of *yerba* lapsed into a period of silence due to the fact that those who were involved in the production and harvest scattered in all directions for over a century (Rau 2012; Wilde 2012).

But in 1875, several years after the catastrophic War of the Triple Alliance (1864-70), the Forest Accord was made in which certain indigenous leaders (*caciques*) consented to letting white people come into the forest to harvest *yerba mate* trees (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007; Ambrosetti 1891). This was a significant change, because before *yerba* contractors and workers had been subject to raids by indigenous groups, making the industry of extraction both difficult and dangerous. The furious production that ensued in this Extractive Front relied on a brutal system of debt peonage known colloquially as *la época de los mensú* (the times of the *mensú*), which mirrored the un-free labor systems of the day throughout Latin America and even the world (Rau 2012; Brass 2010, 2003).

In a corrupt system of labor contracting, crews of men, women, and children were shipped up the Paraná River to labor deep in the forest, felling whole trees in the huge

manchones of *yerba* trees that existed at that time. This system was legendary for its brutal exploitation, the disappearance of workers, and for the riches that it provided those who worked at the top of the hierarchy (Ambrosetti 1891; Niklison 1914; Rau 2012). But it had limits. First, it did not ensure a steady supply of *yerba* even as the demand for the tea steadily increased with the growing population. Second, there was mounting concern that the system of extraction would lead to a total annihilation of the Paraná Forest. Both public and private expeditions over several decades led to the conclusion that this system of extraction could not be sustained (Peyret 1881; Ambrosetti 1891; Niklison 1914).

For the handful of labor historians of *yerba mate*, the most detailed and important of these trips occurred in 1914, when a progressive era Argentine administration dispatched José Elías Niklison from the Department of Labor to investigate troubling rumors of the conditions of workers in the *yerba mate* harvest. Although Niklison did not ever observe the actual forest harvest in detail, as did naturalist Juan Bautista Ambrosetti in his 1891 expedition, he wrote a report calling for fundamental reform in a system he documented as brutal and exploitative toward the harvesters (Niklison 1914). This report provided sustenance for the government's effort to begin to support and sponsor a formal colonization plan via private companies (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007).

By the first part of the twentieth century then, the Argentine government embarked on a campaign to colonize the then federal territory of Misiones. A critical part of the plan was to settle once and for all the dilemma of *yerba mate* supply for Argentina. Besides ensuring a more stable supply of *yerba* to the Argentine population, it also meant to stave off non-white immigration from Brazil and Paraguay. As a condition for buying cheap land in Misiones, the diverse groups of European settlers, many of whom came from humble conditions in Europe,

were required to plant *yerba mate* on their farms in order to ensure a constant supply for Argentina (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007). The exponential growth in cultivated *yerba* is seen in the number of hectares planted over the next decades: In 1903 there were only 16 hectares of cultivated *yerba*, but by 1920, there were 4,000 and by 1937, 58,500 hectares of *yerba* had been planted throughout Misiones (Rau 2012: 66). By 1930, many accounts have the extractive economy becoming a rarity and, in the same year, extraction from the forest was officially prohibited (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007; Bolsi 1986; de Segatizabal 1984).¹²

Yerba harvesters who labored for those companies that first pioneered the industrialization of *yerba* production were exploited heavily. But it appears that there was much less reliance on the contractors that had made the forest harvest so oppressive. Workers were still paid in *vales* (coupons that have limited value), which could be spent only at company stores. They also worked *de sol a sol* (from sunrise to sunset), did not enjoy Sunday rest, and were paid very low salaries (Rau 2012: 57, citing *Bandera Proletaria* 1926-1928; Gortari 2007).

Nevertheless, a different labor market developed during this time that incubated a class of rural workers that would come to look quite different than the class that suffered so extensively during the extractive period of *los mensú*. Importantly, the *yerbales* that were first cultivated lay along the Paraná River and what is today the Route 12 corridor that extends from Posadas to Iguazú Falls. The town of Montecarlo, which lies along that route 120 kilometers south of the

¹² However, given the scant amount of documentation that exists on labor in the *yerba* economy, I would not leave out the possibility that deeper into the forest near the borders of Paraguay and Brazil, slave-like or bonded labor conditions still existed during the early decades of colonization. Indeed to this day, there is much more known about and much more scrutiny of the Route 12 corridor which runs along the Paraguayan border and the Paraná River than there is in areas such as Andresito and San Pedro toward the Brazilian border. These lie much further from the main veins of transport of the province, which are the north-south corridors of Route 12 and Route 14. Indeed there is a high probability that exploitative unfree labor systems existed for much longer, as they still do today (Rau 2012; Brass 2010).

Falls, was where I conducted a year of fieldwork from 2011-2012. And it is at that same site that Celia offered up for contemplation the historical plight of *tarefer@s* and their treatment as ‘animals’.

During the first part of the twentieth century, a vibrant network of small farms grew throughout the province until a cycle of overproduction generated crisis for both producers and workers. In response to the crisis and producer protest, the Argentine government created a regulatory body, the CRYM (*Comisión Reguladora de Yerba Mate*). Hence, from the 1930s on, *yerba mate* was to be regulated by the state, and this coincided with increased conservation efforts to preserve what was left of the Paraná Forest (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007). Regulation worked well enough that farmers prospered over those decades, benefiting from moments of regulated booms of the “green gold” in which, by many accounts, a single year’s *yerba* harvest was enough to buy a farmer a brand new pickup truck. What this meant for harvesters, however, was another matter that has only been scantily documented. A survey taken in the 1970s revealed that only 17% of *tarefer@s* interviewed at that time owned land, and of those, 17% of that land was owned in Paraguay (Rau 2012: 12). But for the most part, there is very little written about *tarefer@* life during this period except that they continued to experience social exclusion based on race and class discrimination. The fact that they were prevented from owning land meant that they were condemned to a marginal existence and were at the mercy of precarious employment as well as unrelenting class and race-based discrimination (Ortiz -forthcoming).

The system of relative control of booms and busts by the Argentine state functioned until the 1990s when Argentina became the model case for neoliberal reform in Latin America. Deregulation spanned many industries in Argentina, and the *yerba mate* economy was no exception. The CRYM was abolished, generating a sheer deregulation that created chaos in the

yerba mate market (Rau 2012; Gortari 2007). This period of crisis was short-lived but intense: Its destructive fallout included a return to the labor contracting system, increased concentration of land in the hands of even fewer, ensuing rural exodus, and a dramatic decrease in the amount of farmers producing *yerba* as well as the number of drying mills operating in the province. In the early 2000s with economic crisis having brought Argentina to its knees, a mass protest occurred in Misiones, which is historically referred to as *el tractorazo* in which hundreds of farmers drove their tractors to the provincial capital of Posadas in a protest of low prices and crisis (Gortari 2007). After months of crisis and farmer occupation of the central plaza of Posadas, a final agreement was reached which ushered in a new era of regulation under yet another government regulatory body called the INYM (The National Institute of *Yerba mate*). In the present day, regulated production continues under the INYM, but the organism is heavily criticized for being mostly ineffective and for favoring large producers of *yerba* over small farmers. *Tarefer@* activists consider the single individual on the board who supposedly represents rural workers to be a farce, for the representative comes from the rural workers union UATRE, which is widely perceived to be almost entirely inactive in any meaningful campaign to improve *tarefer@* rights throughout Misiones.¹³

These periods of *yerba* production reveal two distinct features of the economy. First, that *yerba* is a high demand product, considered a necessity for the tens of millions of people who consume it. Second, that the history of booms and busts together with failed attempts by the state to regulate them have created intensive fallout for the lives of those involved in the production of *yerba mate*. For the most part, Argentine consumers have generally been blind to these

¹³ UATRE stands for Unión Argentina de Trabajadores Rurales y Estibadores (Argentina Union of Rural Workers and Longshoremen).

consequences even as they enjoyed a steady and cheap supply of *yerba*. However, in recent years labor rights organizing by *tarefer@s* has forced a reexamination of their erasure from the historical record. This dissertation speaks largely to this contemporary phase of labor rights organizing in the context of the everyday climate of work and culture in *mate* production.

Current Argentine government statistics estimate that in the provinces of Corrientes and Misiones there are 17, 444 producers of *yerba mate* and 13,000 *tarefer@s* (INYM 2013). Indeed over ninety percent of Argentina's *yerba mate* is produced in Misiones. But these are mere estimates, for families are on the move throughout the province of Misiones as well as back and forth along the Paraguayan and Brazilian borders. Moreover, it is hard to account for those *tarefer@s* who are laboring in clandestine camps deep in remote *yerbales*. What remains constant is that contemporary production relies on the same multiethnic crews of those dispossessed over the centuries. Because the Mbyá Guaraní have been designated to reserves throughout the province, they largely labor separately from those who do not self-identify as indigenous.¹⁴ Yet Guaraní is spoken by many of the Paraguayan workers or those descended from Paraguayan parents and grandparents such as Celia whose parents were immigrants from Paraguay. The distinctions many Paraguayan *tarefer@s* make between themselves and the Guaraní who live on reserves have both to do with a politics of assimilation as well as to the fact that there really have been distinct groups of Guaraní that populated this area over time.

Part II Ethnography of Connectedness: Defetishizing *Yerba Mate*

¹⁴ Certainly the European immigration that followed the World Wars further marginalized those Guaraní groups who often do not speak Spanish. Importantly, although I did not conduct fieldwork with Guaraní workers who lived on reserves, I often heard that they are heavily exploited in the contemporary *yerba* harvest.

It was wintertime when I was in Argentina for the 2008 farm crisis. I was returning home after visiting a depressed friend who is a documentary filmmaker of marginal women's lives in Argentina, when I traveled through the train station of Constitución where street children make due in a dangerous world. From ethnographic work I had done in 2003 in the historical *villa* of Fiorito, the childhood *barrio* of the famous soccer star Diego Maradona, I remembered two critical realities: First, that the *villas miserias* (shantytowns) in Buenos Aires are filled with good people who once lived in the countryside, and second, that they relied heavily on *yerba mate* to stave off hunger throughout the day. I imagined that not long back, the children who I passed over in Constitución had parents or grandparents who had fled the hunger and stigma of the countryside, looking for a better life in Buenos Aires.

These worlds came together when I returned home to drink hot *mate* on that cold gray day in the concrete world of Buenos Aires: I imagined a return to a countryside where some living green thing grew: Where did the *yerba mate* I held in my hand come from? In spite of years drinking the tea and living on and off in Argentina, a map unfolded before me that was blank, a desert of sorts. I pointed toward it with an index finger inside my mind, but it shattered, dissolving into ash, before I could connect my designating self with a place, a peopled place. It is like that, commodity fetishism, the way we cannot see or know those who produce the food and drink that sustain our lives (Marx 1977). No matter how hard I tried, I could not get to the person whose hands touched the green leaf that I now consumed.

Sindey Mintz wrote in the end of his beautiful biography of Don Taso in *Worker in the Cane* that “in understanding the relationship between commodity and person, we unearth anew the history of ourselves” (Mintz 1974: 214). But this new history of ourselves necessarily forces us to come face-to-face with the agonizing inequality at various parts in the commodity chain.

Michael Taussig, in the particular context of miners and plantation workers in Colombia and Brazil, described the same effect that for centuries has surrounded the culture of *yerba mate*. In it “the products of the interrelations of persons are no longer seen as such, but as things that stand over, control and in some vital sense even may produce people.” (Taussig 1980: 5). Again, he provided *conditional* terms for unlocking this prolonged agony:

Unless we all realize that the social relations symbolized in things are themselves distorted and self-concealing ideological constructs, all we will have achieved is the substitution of a naïve mechanical materialism by an equally naïve objective idealism (symbolic analysis), which reifies symbols in place of social relations (9).

In this dissertation, I apply a close reading on Taussig’s description of how it is that culture can intervene to ‘defetishize’ a commodity such as *yerba mate*:

Without the legacy of culture and without its rhetorical figures, images, fables, metaphors and other imaginative creations, this consciousness cannot function. Yet it can be made aware of its creative power instead of ascribing that power to its products. Social progress and critical thought are bound to this dialectical task of defetishization. To this end, *labor exerts itself*: to control its material, as much as its poetic products, and not be controlled by them (232).

In his view, culture, in all its creative forms, offered resistance to the alienation that arose from the loss of control that these workers had over production. Both Taussig and Mintz viewed commodity production and circulation in a historical and locally rooted context (Marx 1967: 114). Their work developed at the production site and in the lives of people whose labor originated the commodities.

As more recent work makes clear, the process of defetishization mandates a return to production sites and necessarily the local, as opposed to merely employing views from above that cast broad stroke critiques of global capitalism. Rather, defetishization means working toward assuaging alienation and remaining centered on the very site where that alienation is

born.¹⁵ Arturo Escobar called for examination of the “subaltern strategies of localization” encouraging a return to production sites and producers as a way to combat the destructive fallout of financial global capitalism as it manifested in the first part of the 21st century (Escobar 2001, 2008). He and Wendy Harcourt called for “reembodying the body” in order to “replace dominant globalocentric narratives with rooted, embodied, embedded stories” (Harcourt 2005: 6 and 250). Fortunately in the 2000s, multiple ethnographies have been written about commodities, rooted in local contexts (*See e.g.* Holmes 2013; Besky 2013; Lyon 2011; Benson 2008; Benson and Fischer 2006).

But in this dissertation, I return primarily to the twentieth century bedrock of anthropological thought on commodities, melding Raymond Williams’ concept of “creative practice” together with Mintz’ “spirit force” and Taussig’s “creative culture” in order to work toward ‘defetishization’ (Mintz 1974, 1985; Williams 1973. See also Taussig 1980; Nash 1979). Building off a close reading of this work, I try to work through an implementation of the critical calls to action that make it classic. I do not claim to implement these calls perfectly, nor do I believe such an objective can be achieved. Rather, my intent is to make the abolition of alienation a core objective via intellectual practice and political struggle, the two of which, I believe, should be subordinate to one another. But I attempt to make a contribution through

¹⁵ I grant that many readers of Marx would view this as impossible; a proletarian revolution would be the only solution. In *Broccoli and Desire*, Fisher and Benson explore how Guatemalan farmers grow broccoli for an export market and speak of the commodity chain in which “the hundreds or thousands of lives a given product has touched—the hopes, fears, and desires of men and women whose interconnectedness generally remains opaque” (2006: 160, 32). For them, a view of the “local and translocal’ permits them to speak “to ethical issues of exploitation and resistance, solidarity and competition, morality and market imperatives” (160). They argue that the broccoli trade is “embedded in local ideational worlds” at all points along the way; indeed the thing of broccoli is composed of the biographies of people” (41).

ongoing political work in which I engage in *yerba mate* country on the ground together with writing ethnography that protagonizes those who make the joy of *mate* consumption possible.

Now the colloquial circulation of the term “commodity fetishism” within my generation of anthropologists has worried me. Too often the concept was taken as a given, but political imperatives to work against it did not resound as strongly. In fact, as I turned toward the fundamental dilemmas of commodity production, I did so amidst a turn to what I consider to be an excessive and voyeuristic focus on things, materiality, and bodies. As a respected colleague once said to me after attending a series of job talks at her university: “There are no people in there. What happened to the people?” The consequence of these new trends has been that the *whole* lives of those who labor at the sites of production too often have been doubly erased. This runs contrary to Taussig’s goal that defetishization involve “labor exerting itself: to control its material, as much as its poetic products, and not to be controlled by them” (1980: 232).

Moreover, some contemporary ethnography continues to construct tropes of total social suffering for those who labor in rural economies (*See e.g. Holmes 2013*) without reflecting a fundamental understanding of the historical dimensions of agrarian culture.¹⁶ Furthermore, much 21st century thought on commodities abandons the class struggle politics of the 20th century to focus more on fair trade politics (*See Helfgott dissertation 2013; Besky 2013; Lyon 2011*). Ironically this has taken place in the midst of proliferating inequality around the globe together with an erasure of the middle class (Patel 2012; Shiva 2012; Davis 2007). But this is not sufficient fodder either for eliminating alienation or for ensuring human survival. In sum, while focusing on making consumption more fair is a well-meaning endeavor, I believe it is not

¹⁶ Written from urbancentric perspectives because of the subject positions of their authors, they do not make imperative the understanding of agrarian culture in the context of food sovereignty.

sufficient to bringing us out of the kind of historical crisis for which writers like Williams and Shiva sounded alarms, particularly regarding the global crisis of rural exodus that continues unfettered.

After decades of piecemeal work to make conditions better for “workers”, it is clear that there is something wrong. Alienation continues, mostly unchecked, and supplemented by a 21st century dual force of mass displacement of rural people and their replacement in some terrible form or another. This force pervades *yerba mate* country with more and more rural residents being forced out of the country going to live in the precarious, landless urban peripheries (Ortiz, forthcoming; Rau 2012; Ferrara 2007). At those sites, inequality, stigma, and social exclusion come together with the cruel welfare programs that substitute for an agrarian subsistence, incubating crime and violence. I believe that urban centric narratives that promote the idea that fairness can be achieved from afar ultimately are shortsighted and must be replaced with the critical frames of food sovereignty and working agricultures. An examination of everyday dwelling together with collaborations that employs emancipatory politics works toward making agrarian life at the local site more equitable for all, not just enriching for some.



Figure 2: *Mate* reaches the world stage with Pope Francis as Celia drinks *mate* toward the end of a harvest day (Internet Commons and Photo by Author, June 2012).

Beyond a Mere Commodity: The *Yerba Mate* Economy as Working Agriculture

Although my focus in this dissertation is on the regional economy of *yerba mate*, this ethnography of connectedness has global significance in that it captures a view of how local rural economies worldwide are endangered. The heart of this work constitutes an examination of the history of *tarefer@s* labor and the bittersweet dimensions of their everyday culture, but I have built around it the broader context of the *yerba mate* economy. As Celia once told me, “We never want to be in a situation where people no longer plant *yerba*, because that would be a way of digging our own grave.” Hence, throughout my fieldwork, I worked closely with the small holders, mostly white *colonos*, who hire *tarefer@s* in order to understand what factors contributed to unfair labor practices. Their stories intervene in these pages too as I study their role in food production within both the frames of food sovereignty and agroecology. Even though some *tarefer@s* like Celia double as wage workers and smallholding producers, most *tarefer@s* today do not farm their own land.

Often both farmers and *tarefer@s* asked critical questions: Why are we who provide food for others the least important in this society? When will our labor be valued? When will the state stop taking so much from us and returning to us so little? The fact that these questions came in a global context of unrelenting rural exodus stimulated the urgent tone this dissertation takes. Of all the academic texts written on the history of agrarian life, few speak so clearly to these urgent questions as does Raymond Williams’ late life masterwork *The Country and the City*. Toward the end of it he wrote:

If we are to survive at all, we shall have to develop and extend our working agricultures. The common idea of a lost rural world is then not only an abstraction of this or that stage in a continuing history (and many of the stages we can be glad are gone or are going). It is in direct contradiction to any effective shape of our future, in which work on the land will have to become more rather than less important and central. It is one of the most

striking deformations of industrial capitalism that one of our most central and urgent and necessary activities should have been so displaced, in space or in time or in both, that it can be plausibly associated only with the past or with distant lands (1973: 300).¹⁷

Importantly, Williams did not call for merely paying attention to working agricultures; rather he spoke of making them *central*. Decades later as rural exodus had intensified tremendously around the globe, eco-feminist scientist Vandana Shiva echoed the same conditional imperative in her later life book *Staying Alive*: “Unless the world is restructured ecologically at the level of world-views and life-styles, peace and justice will continue to be violated and ultimately the very survival of humanity will be threatened” (2010: 37).¹⁸ From very early on in my doctoral work, I saw my work in these conditional terms, those necessary for human survival as indicated in the urgent tones of Williams and Shiva. I have kept these conditions at both my cerebral and affective forefront, particularly because of my own personal experience with the devastating rural exodus that came with the family farm crisis of the 1980s in the United States.

A growing body of work on agroecology validates these calls (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Agarwal 2010; Desmarais 2007; Cáceres 2006; Perfecto et al 2009; Altieri 1995). Ivette Perfecto, John Vandermeer, and Angus Wright demonstrate that smallscale agricultural systems

¹⁷ Part of what I find valuable in Williams’ call is the richness is his own biographical journey of rural exodus from a small town in Wales and his return to that rural stage.

¹⁸ Although Shiva has been criticized by some for her supposed support of nationalist projects and her circulation of the concept of “culturally perceived poverty”, I find both her urgent tone and her record of unstoppable activism give her opinions critical authority. Moreover, Shiva’s status as a world renowned public intellectual that everyday people read in earnest has significant value in light of so much scholarship written in opaque, alienating language that is inaccessible to the general reading public due to its use of theory and hair-splitting tendencies. (See Cochrane 2008 as an example of critiques against her. But see also <http://seedfreedom.info/> for highly innovative and multi-issue action campaigns, which document her commitment to the globe’s most vulnerable).

actually nurture many lives in all kinds of subtle ways making them preferable to wilderness reserves. It turns out that the tending of land on the small scale and its beneficial effect means that small farmers hold a key to human survival. This runs quite contrary to the historical aims of conservationists who often have made farmers out to be bad actors in order to promote a concept of pristine nature (Agarwal 2010; Perfecto, Vandermeer, and Wright 2009; Desmarais 2007). Whether it be working agricultures or agroecology, the concept of creating a sustainable rural future vibrates through the countryside in Misiones as well as in Latin America where the concept of *soberanía alimentaria* or “food sovereignty” has gained ground in recent years just as it has around the globe (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Patel 2009, 2006; Desmarais 2007; Cáceres 2006).

Indeed my project originated on the streets of Buenos Aires during the Argentine farm crisis of 2008 in which multiple rural sectors stood up to President Fernández de Kirchner when she summarily attempted to raise export taxes on agricultural commodities, particularly the highly lucrative soy. As both powerful and humble farmers waged highway blockades and general strikes, the media showed crisis moments of dairy farmers dumping their milk on the roadside as it had spoiled in stalled traffic from blockades. Panic ensued, and the urban multitude felt vulnerable to the fact that they were absolutely dependent on others for their food. It was in this context that I walked through the train station in Constitución where street children slept on the concrete floors, vulnerable to anything and everything. Their parents or grandparents could easily have come from rural areas looking for opportunity in the city, only to find misery. Furthermore, in my past work in public interest law and clinical social work, I had worked against the devastating effects of rural exodus up close in its manifestation of proliferating urban poverty. Hence, I chose to return to the countryside to study how it is that people can stay rooted

in place. For this reason, I frame my analysis of the *yerba mate* economy within a theoretical frame of ‘working agricultures’; at each turn, I labor to prioritize the ability of local communities to create equitable systems of food production, following the food sovereignty movement (Patel et al 2012; Desmarais 2007). To this end, I mean to connect what is mostly a domestic market of *yerba mate* in Argentina to global patterns of commodity production, ecological crisis, and rural exodus.

Roots and Relationships: A Feminist Ethnography of Connectedness

When I took Traditions in Ethnology from Conrad Kottak in the Fall of 2008, he typically began each class by placing the book of the week on the table and asking: “What kind of a book is this?” Most clearly, my answer to this is--this is *not* an exercise of anthropology as cultural critique, but rather an attempt to write engaged ethnography that works toward solutions to social problems (Hale 2001, 2008; Speed 2006, 2008). This “feminist ethnography of connectedness” draws inspiration from Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘creative practice’ which he described as “a struggle at the roots of the mind—not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships” (Williams 1977: 212).¹⁹ Since I wrote my preliminary exams, I have drawn on this concept of a “struggle at the roots of the mind” for the way it evokes the possibility of an ecological intellectual practice that connects lives in order to work toward

¹⁹ I draw from Williams and many other scholars who wrote mid-life texts for they reflect a different understanding about survival that comes mid-life. The labor of this dissertation was carried out during my own mid-life. I write from a standpoint of exodus now done and on its way--of what it is then to be part of those many souls who look back, who carry an embodied memory of work on the land, but have long since journeyed away from it. We hang on to our agrarian citizenship and knowledge of the land, but with exodus, this knowledge gathers dust or travels through conversations as anecdotes that have less and less impact on our own and others’ lives.

defetishization of *yerba mate*.²⁰ This inevitably means that ethnography is not to be written about the “other” or those “over there” but it is about *us*, *all* of us, and how we are going to work together to survive in the future through a revival of working agricultures. This practice pushes back against the forces of cultural hegemony that divide and distance us from one another--those who produce commodities and those who consume them. Instead this ethnography works toward the practice of promoting “effective and continuing relationships” (Williams 1977: 212; Gramsci 1971).

At the heart of a politics of connectedness is also the practice of sustaining lives. I believe that if we are to write against violence, we must write simultaneously toward sustenance. This means “appearing” those who have been erased because their labor has not been considered socially valuable. It means giving voice to those who dwell furthest off cultural, political, and even electrical grids. In this politically urgent ethnography, I also draw upon the core tenet of eco-feminism that place women’s labor and emancipatory politics at the heart of inquires on commodities and environment (Mies and Shiva 2014; Shiva 2012; Federici 2009; Mies 2009, 1998).²¹ The words on these pages, the tones of the stories, the “registers of crisis and utopia” all

²⁰ I do so also to work against alienation in academic labor that privileges certain kinds of theory over the value of those who share their lives to make ethnography possible.

²¹ I am interested in those scholars who intuit the grave state we are in, articulate this state in terms of urgency of struggle, and write toward life-sustaining. I believe there is a need to revisit eco-feminism, rescuing it from academic outcast, as I find its urgent tone and embattled struggle to connect violence against women with violence to the earth most valuable. Moreover, writers like Shiva have made themselves accessible to audiences outside of academia, as public intellectuals. I take seriously my duty as an NSF scholar to write up my research toward “broader impacts”. This cannot mean that my portrait of life in *yerba mate* country can only be understood in a circle of insularity, written in code and in conversations with a relatively closed circle of scholars. My own experience in public interest law, clinical social work, and seeing what has happened to my own family in the face of rural exodus necessitates this approach. She who has seen poverty, displacement, and exodus up close cannot speak in a tone that *mutes* the theme of survival.

are collaborations from my listening to the most vulnerable lives at the site of production of *yerba mate*, many of whom were women and children.²²

Agrarian culture in its many historical forms has involved people connected by need-- lanterns lent to another in a storm, helping a neighbor to bring in a harvest, or letting another gathering firewood from one's land. An ethnography of connectedness involves examining those forces that interrupts this culture of solidarity and gives voice to those who help sustain the life of others. In a rehearsal of creative practice per Williams, I sew stories and phenomenological dimensions of everyday culture together as the "fibres of the self" that Williams describes in order to construct both portraits of the bittersweet dwelling that many in the countryside in Misiones experience as well as to pay homage to those who sacrifice so much to ensure sustenance for others.²³ Importantly, this practice inherently involves writing against certain epistemological practices and traditions that have affected history's most vulnerable. I write first and foremost against what I believe to be a perverse practice of writing about bodies and parts of bodies while disposing of the psyche. I do not write about "bodies" because I believe this mirrors the horror of 21st century alienation and makes for dualism in another disguise and permits the subhuman treatment of so many people across the globe. I never met a 'body' that did not have a person in it. I would not want my body to be written of as a mere body; I would want instead to be written of as a self composed of a singular and inseparable fusion of body, mind and spirit. I believe that people who inhabit these pages must be able to find themselves and see that they

²² I borrow this beautiful term "register of crisis and utopita" from Louise Meintjes in her invaluable feedback on my work in the dissertation writing group from Fall 2014 in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University.

²³ I am inspired too by the conscientious ethnographic practice of many other scholars including Ruth Behar 1986, 1996; Tom Fricke 2006; Stuart Kirsch 2002; Lassiter 2005; as well as Rachel Carson 1962, Wendell Berry 1989, and bell hooks 2008.

have been remembered in a way that honors them as full people. To this end, this ethnography works to abolish the shame associated with this kind of representation, taking shame to be fundamentally a state of ‘feeling less than’ (Lewis 1992). Instead, I work toward cultivating a sentiment of empowerment.²⁴

‘Defetishization’ and Bittersweet Memory

As I have said, at the center of the exquisite hold that *yerba mate* has for those who relish its taste, is the quality of being *amargo* (bitter) that resides in the leaf naturally or the *dulce* (sweet) added to the leaf to ease that bitterness.²⁵ While the vast majority of work has focused on *mate* consumption and ritual, I mean to move beyond this. Instead, I root this dissertation in the practice of the ‘defetishization’, taking up Michael Taussig’s call “to liberate ourselves from the fetishism and phantom objectivity with which society obscures itself, to take issue with the ether of naturalness that confuses and disguises social relations” (Taussig 1980: 5). By focusing on the production site of the tea, I unfold the *bittersweet* dwelling that arises from exploitation and alienation *felt* in a green world. Using the grist, grit, and graft that makes up the everyday lives of people like Celia, I show how a bittersweet dwelling exists in which *tarefer@s* and small farmers coexist discordantly together, even as they labor to bring *mate* to circles of intimacy throughout Argentina.

²⁴ Connectedness combats histories of epistemic violence in the process of representation and takes seriously the violence that these representations inflict upon historically disenfranchised communities (Moorehead 2012, on historical trauma). The cultural lives including art, craft, story song etc. of history’s most marginalized have been appropriated, sold, twisted, and marketed in many ways over the centuries, while their material lives have remained the very same. There are real and harsh realities to what have been done to people’s stories including appropriation, twisting, distorting and a tradition of taking fragments of what people said and placing them into a foreign context.

²⁵ I am grateful to Stuart Kirsch for urging me to return to the issue of flavor at the site of consumption in order to guide readers through a defetishization of *yerba mate*. Only years later, did this bittersweetness work its way more clearly into my analysis of *tarefer@s* dwelling.

Throughout my fieldwork, I found a dialectic of alienation of these rural subjects: On the one hand, they are eclipsed from the daily life of the consumer as subtropical rain falls on them and the red clay roads sometimes are literally blocked, leaving many worn down in the countryside. At the same time, there is a sweeter and freer side of life in the country found in the beauty of a green world full of other live beings, song and solidarity in the *yermal*, dancing lines of jokes, and the camaraderie of companion crew members. This sweet side holds within it the material for critical resistance to both alienation and exploitation that has been practiced over the centuries. Focusing on these contrasting effects reveals the forces that have generated an unbearable bitterness in dwelling. I consider everyday life to be inflected with a “creative culture” similar to what Taussig observed with miners and other workers in Colombia and Bolivia (Taussig 1980). Yet the bitterness that taints everyday culture in *mate* country arises when a one person turns against another in order to get what (s)he needs to survive in the countryside. After all, it is very difficult to generate the income that permits purchase of those items, which facilitate social inclusion such as clothing and cell phones. My aim in this work is to counter this bitterness by bringing both life moments and labor to the page in an exercise of “duty memory” (Behar 1996; Nora 1989; Bowles 2010; Orlove 2002) as a fundamental step toward making the lives of those who sustain all of us *matter*. In writing lives, I craft a feminist ethnography of connectedness to interrupt the invisibility that commodity fetishism casts on those closest to the production site. So too do I mean to challenge alienation by showing how long-term political commitments hold within them an emancipatory practice critical to human survival. This politics of memory as a political commitment has taken a sad turn for me: The

farmer and friend of whom I first wrote of regarding this theme, Isaías Carré, died unexpectedly of cancer in November 2013.²⁶

A Social Worker's Approach to Another in the Field: An Affective Politics of Storysharing

This dissertation is grounded in my past practice as a clinical social worker and my continuing ethical commitment to both serve those who are vulnerable and to work toward social justice. Disability researcher Mike Oliver writes of a day he went to a conference in Sweden and someone had written on the board the question: “What do you think you are doing talking about us in this way?” (Oliver 1997). Urgent questions about the politics of representation have troubled me before I even started my doctoral research, and they have not gone away.²⁷ Many of the people whose stories fill these pages struggle at the margins of society and are highly vulnerable. In fact, I have argued that high levels of rural poverty in Misiones place people in a kind of ‘zone of abandonment’ for the way the Argentine state has neglected them (Biehl 2005; Bowles 2010). Before I ever embarked on this project, I believed fervently that each of our life stories belongs to us. If we choose to share it with another, it is a great privilege that invokes an ethical responsibility. I believe this more than ever before. Over seven years have passed since I

²⁶ “Don’t Forget Me: Cultivating a Politics of Trust Among Agricultural Workers in the Hinterlands of Northeast Argentina”, (2010) *Collaborative Anthropologies*, Vol 3: 143-154. When I returned to the field from 2011-2012, I went back and found Isaías and visited him and his family a number of times. My partner, Federico, graciously translated this article for Isaías, and we talked together about what he thought of it. Isaías continues to represent for me a model of agrarian citizenship in which a politics of connectedness matter: Isaías looked out for those around him, helping his neighbors whenever he could. In 2014, working with his wonderful granddaughter Veronica Carré, I started a scholarship, *La Beca Isaías Carré*, in his memory at the Family Agricultural School in his community 2 de Mayo (EFA de Dos de Mayo).

²⁷ My colleagues through the group Ethnography as Activism had the same questions and still do. I had conversations in particular with Chris Estrada, Heather Tidrick, Bruno Renero, Regev Nathansohn, and John Mathias about the ethics around representations and what we were worried could be an ‘extractive industry’ of ethnography. I came to worry about stories acting as commodities that gain more value the further they travel from the storysharer.

first set foot in Misiones, and some people who shared their stories with me have died, become ill, or have been lost to me as they have slipped deeper into the countryside in their landlessness. It is the stories they shared with me that remain fixed with the passing of time. This is that life moment—that day, that time, that moment, when two or more people sat together and talked about life, when someone answered questions and another wrote those questions down. I maintain the same interpersonal ethic that I had when I started graduate school that stems from the ethics I am bound by as both a clinical social worker and a lawyer. Although I do not pretend to think that there is any perfect emancipatory politics in conducting field research with vulnerable people, my best effort has been to adopt the method at all stages of research of treating others, as I would wish to be treated.

I first imagined the *intent* a person had for telling her story. Often that intent was voiced clearly in the context of information I had specifically solicited, although the interior world of a speaker can never be accessed completely. For example, if the story I now present is one told to me by a person explaining how they have suffered in their life in the *mate* harvest, then I know that what they intended to articulate/communicate to me was their personal experience of this suffering. I remember this *intent* as I write, and I work to craft a reaction on my part. I then took up their *expectation* of this storysharing. What was it a person perceived I would do with her story in the very moment that she opened herself up and shared it with me? This expectation necessarily has temporal dimensions: First, a storysharer had expectations of how I might hear her story and respond to it in the moment. She then might have expectations about how I might interact with her in the future as a consequence of her storysharing. Moving further into the future, she might wonder how I would act around her in the days after she told her story. For the people with whom I talked, I knew that their expectation was that their stories would be kept

whole and that if broken apart, would be broken apart in the context of the everyday reality in which they were immersed. In other words, Celia might imagine that I would write the story of her life in the context of the *yerba mate* economy and the countryside in Misiones where she lived.

Using the psychoanalytic frames of transference and counter transference, I knew my questions were interventions in lives, even as they were interventions in each conversation. I knew from my work as a mental health therapist that questions interrupt thought streams and take conversations down paths that the interviewer desires, but that were not necessarily intended for the storysharer. Therefore, I worked to let people freely associate their stories as much as possible according to their own sense of comfort. Knowing that my contact with people was usually an extraordinary one in that people like me did not commonly surface in their lives, I also practiced a strengths-based method of interviewing per the traditions of solution-focused and narrative therapy. Rather than deliberately eliciting potentially destabilizing narratives on personal suffering, my primary questions pertained to exploring the stories of resilience to everyday hardships that people already carried with them. This allowed for our interpersonal moments to be as least invasive as possible in the lives of vulnerable people, but it also allowed me to gather more details on how it was that these same people were able to live their lives without hurting others.

What many of the people cannot imagine or expect to know about is what academic writing looks like and what kinds of expectations academic culture impose on me as an anthropologist in writing up stories from the field. We are asked to take the story and process it together with many other stories and theories of those who have not been where the storysharer is. Their story will surely be broken up and pieces of it worked into these “conversations” we are

asked to have that are not conversations with other people around the world that are marginalized but rather are conversations with scholars, many of whom are very privileged, and who have developed theory about people's lives that most often is never returned to them. What I mean to say is that the profession of anthropology has not developed any systematic process or tradition of bringing stories back to people as they have been processed.²⁸ As I write the stories in this dissertation, I write them thinking of the reader as the very person who narrated stories to them, but there is much more to do about getting people's stories back to them.

In this dissertation, I take storysharing to be a form of life labor. For example, the act of putting a story on paper told to me by a very vulnerable woman who cannot read, as I do in Chapter Six with Presencia, is a radical act. It is radical because it takes her story out of her own vulnerable hands and recodes it in a form over which she has little control. For Presencia, she has already dwelled her life in a world where decisions were made in writing about her fate. When I returned from the field, I found a kindred ethic in Native American psychologist Virgil Moorehead at a Stanford conference on activism in academia. Virgil reminded me about the politics of representation in the context of the historical trauma of Native American populations. I also take into account what Renato Rosaldo has called the ethnographic "eye" which continues to twin that of the imperialist eye (Rosaldo 1993). It is for this reason that I do not write ethnography as cultural critique here but rather as a politics of memory. I see my task as a collaborative ethnographer to map out solidarity in "the hard substance of continuing relations"

²⁸ The annual conference of the AAA is a forum devoid of the people who shared their stories, for the most part, and it is about presenting and processing projects that have been built from the raw material of story-sharing. I struggle with my own impression that this is a precise mimicking of niche capitalism, in that it involves the taking of the labor of others and converts it into a value-added project which gains value the further it gets from the original labor.

as I work on these relationships in a particularly Latin American context (Williams 1977; Hale 2008; Speed 2008).

I believe it matters how you imagine your listener when you are listening to others' stories. Who did I imagine I would tell these stories too? Besides to readers who are interested in addressing human suffering in both academic and political circles, I most often imagined that I would retell these stories to people in Misiones, those directly affected by the story. Not only might one be affirmed by hearing her own story, but also she might learn from the life of another who lives close by. The *connectedness* of these stories forms part of a cultural heritage of those who labor to produce *yerba mate*, and I hope the form as a whole will work to aid and sustain the lives of those who populate its pages.

Hearing Stories Off the Grid

In work leading up to the year I was in the field, I traveled throughout Misiones mostly meeting people in a random way. I worked hard to keep in contact with those who lived deeper into the countryside, although the pull of the urban often required much resistance. I adopted this method from previous work in community organizing with immigrant workers in the United States where I learned that the people who are furthest off political and cultural grids and who keep their distance from social movements often have especially valuable insights to share. This proved to be invaluable later on, because when my family and I settled in Montecarlo for a year, I was able to draw on these other voices that sometimes contradicted views of the townspeople in Montecarlo.²⁹

²⁹ For example, many *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo believed that certain techniques for harvesting *yerba* had been done away with when they were actually practiced widely in other parts of the province.

Over the years, I conducted unstructured interviews with dozens of *tarefer@s* and farmers. I deliberately kept these unstructured in order to get more reliable information and to abide by a more collaborative research form in which research subjects acted as co-directors of the research conversation. In this way, I ended up with variety of stories that do not necessarily have predictable patterns. But again, I prioritized the relationship I had with people over the research results I wanted. I also moved back and forth between classes in order to document inconsistencies and check my own tendencies and biases. This allowed me to document everyday dialectics in food sovereignty and to document dwelling terms of matrices of connectedness in everyday agrarian life.

Finally, I derive my ethic from the child within me who was forced to remake a good part of her agrarian self in order to assimilate into an urban society. From there, I have strived to learn as much as I can about others on the margin, how it is that their very valuable knowledge is erased, flattened, and crushed in favor of hegemonic patterns that work against all of us in the end. This ethic also grows out of my training in the practice of public interest law that involves defending the rights of those who are most vulnerable. It joins with my work in clinical social work in which my task is to help another out of a crisis and guide them into a healing space. The ethics of the two crafts were triggered together in every single conversation I had in the field. Quite different from the eye of a traditional ethnographer who looks for complications and contrasts in stories, I was unable and unwilling to depart from a solid posture of empathy, a posture that I do not believe to be negotiable.

On Being a Mother in the Field

My fieldwork was both limited and enhanced by the fact that I had my daughters with me in my work in Misiones. When I first began work in 2008, my daughter Iris was almost two. When

I arrived in Montecarlo to do a year of fieldwork, I had my six-month old daughter Luna with me as well. On the one hand, this meant that I was able to form relationships that I may not have been able to form otherwise, because I was understood to be a mother. On the other, it meant that I could not do complete immersion work in the tradition of Malinowski.³⁰ Having one child creates multiple complications for getting fieldwork away from one's own home done. Having two children, one a baby, exponentializes these difficulties. Furthermore, the lack of childcare options posed real and constant barriers to my getting work done. My partner Federico was a godsend in his contribution to helping take care of the girls, but the problems were not entirely resolved, for he also had work to do. Having small children with me meant I had to be especially alert to their safety and security; I had to come in and out of harvests and return to different *tarefer@s* at different times in different places according to what was happening with my daughters and how well I could care for them. Adult bodies that are not used to the harsh realities of subtropical Misiones take a while to adapt, much less the body of young children. Being a mother of small children then heightened my empathy for women who had children and the dilemmas they faced in taking care of them and working in the *yerbal* at once.

I worked as a feminist ethnographer, both in belief and in method. For me, this does not stop only at writing about women, but it is also about not selecting them out of their everyday context in which gender violence is present. I did not conduct interviews with certain subjects who were known to have committed violent acts or whom I noted quickly had dedicated themselves to a life of violence, particularly toward women and children. The issue of violence is

³⁰ This is true more recently in cases such as that of Seth Holmes who conducted work on migrant farmworkers in the U.S. and Mexico as a single man (Holmes 2013). Indeed the solitary masculine fieldworker haunts anthropology as much as the solitary male worker haunts all things *yerba mate*.

more clearly illuminated and becomes more poignant when one is conducting ethnographic research as a family. I sensed danger differently when I conducted interviews, because I had to keep my very young children safe in the process.³¹ It was not uncommon in Misiones for men to speak more than women or during an interview with a family, for the man to speak as though the woman had no story to tell. I used my clinical social work skills here, routing the conversation as best as I could to help include the voice of women. But I must admit, it was often quite a challenge, especially in the *yerbales*.

Finally, part of connectedness is making the ethnographer self both transparent and vulnerable. To what sounds, voices, people, places was I connected to as I wrote this story? In my view, the alienation present in academic labor often involves the expectation that one attempt to artificially purge one's self from the text. I believe this not only to be impossible, but fundamentally dishonest for my presence influenced in absolutely every way the content of this dissertation. Moreover, connectedness on my part meant that I was part of a family who spent time with other families. Therefore, our story as a family appears at times in the text that follows.

Note on the Use of Photos

Photos of the *yerba* harvest have scarcely been circulated historically and most do circulate within Misiones. Most photos in recent years in both newspapers in Misiones and on a scant few occasions in Buenos Aires have been selected to demonstrate hardship and suffering on the part of *tarefer@s*. In my use of photos, I try to write against this kind of representation. There are several layers to the ethic of visual representation that I have employed here. The first is to combat the erasure of *tarefer@s* in Argentine history. In appearing workers, I give faces to

³¹ For example, I once cut short an interview in a very humble home when I realized that a drunk man had the entire house held hostage and that this was not the first time this had happened. I did not return to the home again in order to protect everyone, including my daughters.

those who help bring *yerba mate* to the table. The second is that I try my best not to further alienation in visual representation by working to preserve the integrity of the dwelling moment for the person who is in the photo. Rather, the photos I show are ones taken in which there was extreme confidence about how it is that *yerba* is harvested and what this work is like. Most of the photos included in this dissertation were given to the people who appear in them. They were proud of their work and, for those who I have identified, it is because they wanted their real identity used.

Memory and Solidarity

One of the hardest parts of finishing this dissertation has come in confronting the loss I experienced along the way. I started the work with a child, and I experienced a near-death accident by electrocution on May 13, 2009 when my daughter Iris was with me in the field. Because this form of death is quite common in Misiones, my own experience gave me a heightened sense of vulnerability. Indeed the precarious nature of electrical installations in all corners of Misiones creates huge risk in everyday activities such as plugging in lamps (as I was when the accident occurred), ironing clothes, or unplugging refrigerators and washing machines. The beautiful fourteen-year old grandson, Leroy, of my friend Sara passed this way in 2013, when he was electrocuted while trying to reach a soccer ball on a roof at his private school in Montecarlo. But mostly, people who form part of this dissertation died from cancer. In Misiones alone, I lost wonderful friend and farmer Isaías Carré who died in November 2013, my dear neighbor in Guatambú, Roberto Aicheler who died in October of 2014, and a veteran *tarefer@* who was part of Celia's crew, Don Pedro, who died in 2015. In Ann Arbor, I lost a social work colleague, Katherine Luke, and a next-door neighbor to cancer during the course of this research.

I also feel a sense of loss for those who I lost contact with over the years, including Rogelio and María. As a wonderful and vulnerable couple in the countryside that I spent many long hours with, I will always remember them, and remember particularly the heaviest *duelo* that María bore, which was the death of two infants from medical malpractice. Each family is a world and the nature of fieldwork requires that I cover so many spaces at once that I cannot be the loyal friend I want to be—the one who always returns to check up on a friend to see how they are going. Rather, I know that Rogelio and María were evicted from their home, but I never was able to get back to know what happened. The years have passed, their boy Jose Luis is growing up (hopefully), and I have not returned. I learned about Isaías's death three weeks afterwards as well, and realized only then that his granddaughter had tried to reach me when he was so gravely ill, but that I had not read her Facebook message due to my own heavy workload. If I had, I would probably have made the trip to say goodbye to him before he passed away in agony from metastasized cancer.

Writing memory of those who have passed and those who will pass is painful and weighs heavy, what Ruth Behar has termed 'duty memory' (Behar 1986; Nora 1989). But writing an ethnography of connectedness means that I have been compelled to craft out spaces of hope, of illumination. This is most easily done by keeping my sight on those in the countryside who both suffer from stigma but also know the moments of emancipation that can be experienced in everyday dwelling in the green spaces which they inhabit. The commitment that I finally made to multiple people with whom I worked in Misiones was one that was built over time, and finally took a very clear shape in 2012 when I joined the labor solidarity work with the *tarefer@* union of Montecarlo. This was a dream I had, which was a dream to leave something behind in the communities where I had conducted fieldwork rather merely extracting out material in what I

have thought of as the ‘culture mining’ that had so worried my graduate student colleagues and me in the group Ethnography as Activism at Michigan. The connectedness I cultivated in the field today manifests in myriad ways, from organizing relief for *tarefer@s* traveling to Buenos Aires to have their stories heard to the creation of the *Beca Isaiás Carré* in his memory. The ongoing commitment is to give more in a way that is not only do no harm, but is to enrich, to share, to affirm, and to build collaborations that work toward emancipation. I was blessed to have run across and been able to build the kind of relationships I built in the field, and ours is a family commitment, which my partner Federico and our daughters Iris and Luna partake.

Finally, no matter who we are, we come to know the world through our hands. We work with our hands, touch with our hands, greet with our hands, eat with our hands, or inflict violence with our hands. Our hands tell stories of our lives, and, as writers, our hands help us tell stories of others and ourselves. Recent calls to take the local into account are simultaneously urgent mandates to examine culture at the local level in order to work to dismantle commodity fetishism. This dissertation strives to work against an odious abandonment of the vulnerable subjects who labor in working agriculture, those *hands on the green leaf*, who in this particular case, labor in the everyday to bring the friendship drink of *yerba mate* to all of Argentina.³² In appearing these hands, and keeping my eyes fastened upon them, I have worked also to appear the wound of rural exodus, my own included, which threatens us all, even as it creates massive suffering for so many.

³² There is also an academic abandonment that is not intentional but is rather a consequence of the nature of academic labor, which often compels our eventual and sure abandonment of the very people who made our livelihood possible by telling us their stories.

Chapter Progression

The multiple tasks of defetishization and writing memory in the context of an ethnography of connectedness involve tracing dwelling from those in centuries past to contemporary *yerbales*, home patios, and the highway blockades waged to improve *tarefer@s* rights. I build my chapters in that direction. In **Chapter One Ethnography of the (Dis)Appeared Peón**, I examine the history of the *yerba* harvest when it was carried out in the system of debt peonage in the Paraná Forest referred to as the time of *los mensú*. I examine the few written accounts of that world, tracing the history of the *yerba* harvest from the time of the Spanish conquest on to the contemporary harvest, which I then take up in detail in Chapter Two. I trace the sparse glimpses in the written record of those *peones* who toiled deep in the forest of the Alto Paraná, working to appear the presence of the women and children who have been so vital to the harvest. I examine the way both white historians in the town of Montecarlo and labor organizers use the history of *los mensú* to their advantage, yet they often present *yerba mate* harvesters as a single masculine figure. I highlight the way in which women and children as families of *los peones* were disappeared even more extensively.

In **Chapter Two La Tarefa**, I take up the labor of the contemporary *yerba* harvest and bring *la tarefa* to stage as a working agriculture. I also unveil the intricacies of the ‘taskscape’ of the harvest, departing from popular belief that it is a simple task. I write in fine-grained detail what it is that *tarefer@s* actually *do* in the *yerbal*, bringing into view their dwelling as they exert their labor over the material world per Taussig (1980). **Chapter Three** contains a phenomenological portrait of what I call *bittersweet dwelling* in the *yerbales*. I present an ethnographic shadowing of harvesters as they move from tree to tree, fighting to get to the green leaf that puts their food on the table, through *la capuera* (*weed cover*), poisonous herbicide,

waters in place, and other lives. I argue that as they experience bodily suffering and stigma, they also find sweetness in the *yerbal* in the form of camaraderie, sweet tangerines, jokes, and other lives in the *yerbal*. Bringing this dwelling into view is an important step toward the defetishization of *yerba mate*.

A **Chapter Four Interlude Crossing Into the Heart of Flame** builds a bridge between the *yerbales* of yesterday and today and the spaces of resistance and conflict found in such places as highway blockades and lawyers' offices. I cross the Paraná River with Ramona, the mother of labor activist Rubén Ortiz, to set up the connections between biography and protest as they play out in the countryside where the Argentine revolutionary, Che Guevara spent part of his childhood. **Chapter Four The Taking of the Green Gold Highway** then constitutes a close-up view of the most significant commodity crisis in contemporary *yerba* history together with a view of the *tarefer@s* union of Montecarlo. After years of dismal green leaf prices, both harvesters and producers blockaded the key provincial highways of Misiones, pressing for better wages and prices. I tell the story of these protests from the highway, framing the story with the biography of Rubén Ortiz, the leader of the harvester union whose family emigrated from Paraguay when he was a boy. I speak to the ways that *tarefer@s* used their bodies to interrupt commodity traffic speeding away from them and toward their alienation. I analyze how *tarefer@s* make the highway theirs, converting the asphalt to a temporary theater of direct democracy and grassroots power.

In **Chapter Five** I explore a persistent refrain that circulates throughout circles of conversation in Misiones in which people claim that 'the culture of work is being lost'. I explore the dialectic of labor rights and food sovereignty that is at play in the countryside together with an exploration of welfare and informal work politics. I also recount in detail an example of a

labor lawsuit (*juicio laboral*) from the perspective of a farm family that relies on wage laborers to produce food for the local farmers' market.

In **Chapter Six Presencia Dispossessed: How Dry Love Heals** is about the life of Presencia, a mother of seventeen children who has lived all her life in *yerba mate* country. Drawing on eco-feminist theory, I tell Presencia's story as she told it to me, following her account of her life as a motherless child, her scavenging of a cow's head for food (*cabeza de vaca*), to the gender violence committed against her, to her life in *la capuera* where she learned to use plants to heal and sustain life. I argue that she is an example of those forgotten off the grid who help sustain the lives of others.

Finally, I close the dissertation with a May Day dance that remembers Don Pedro, a veteran *tarefer@* who died in 2015. I also recount my own work in collaborative anthropology in the organization of a ceremony that commemorated *tarefer@* labor and organizing. I argue for a theory of subjectivity based on empowered and empowering subjects and bring together the themes of working agricultures, defetishization, duty memory, and a politics of empowerment that work to appear and give value to those *hands on the green leaf*.

Chapter One

Ethnography of the (Dis)Appeared *Peón*

Part I La Casa del Peón

Don't root the recently cut tree in soil because its dry canopy will not trick the birds.
Don't put up dikes for the wandering river, because in the free air it will mount the clouds.
Don't talk about home to the exiled man, for he has already paid a high price for his real country.
The tree already felled, the wandering river, and the exiled man—they all are paying a high price.

-- From *El árbol, el río, el hombre*, poem by Julio Cortázar put to song by Argentine folksinger Atahualpa Yupanqui (Author's Translation)³³

One has to travel about fourteen hours North by car from Buenos Aires to get to the heart of *yerba mate* country and to the lives of those who labor to bring the cherished drink to all of Argentina. Once you begin to see the deep red soil, you know you are in *mate* country. Miles outside of the port city of Posadas, near a stretch of the Paraná River, the steep banks lead up and backwards to an important historical site—the former home of Horacio Quiroga. In the years before his death by suicide in 1937 (1878-1937), Quiroga made a name for himself as one of the most important precursors to the so-called boom in Latin American fiction. A long canoe rests

³³ All labor sources on *yerba mate* in this chapter are translated from the Spanish by the author. The poem in part reads in Spanish:

Al árbol ya cortado no lo claves en la tierra porque su copa seca no engañará a los pájaros.
Al río que discurre no le levantes diques porque en el aire libre cabalgarán las nubes.
Al hombre desterrado no le hables de su casa, la verdadera patria cara la está pagando.
El árbol ya cortado, el río que discurre y el hombre desterrado caro lo están pagando.

For more on the political exile of both Cortázar and Yupanqui see <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/9-4732-2008-07-23.html>, Accessed March 25, 2014.

near the sidewall of the white house. Supported by a sawhorse to prevent frequent subtropical rains from rotting out its bottom, it is as though the vessel floats on phantom water. Beside the canoe, propped up against the house walls, are large wheels from past vehicles of transport. The house itself is a single story home with deep red tile floors inside and walls inscribed by floor-to-ceiling windows, panes crossed with matrices of dark, old-wood seams. Its walls are layered in different generations of wood. A turn-of-the-century camera is held up on a wooden tripod in a main room, a metal-seated bicycle sits aging in the sun.

When I visited the house on a fall day in May of 2010 with my family, we had the house almost all to ourselves. I learned Quiroga had bought the land in the early 1900s when he was around thirty. He set about farming *yerba mate* and dabbled in charcoal making and orange distilling. He spent the rest of his life between Misiones and Buenos Aires as both writer and farmer, taking in the chaos that surrounded him on the banks of the Paraná. Those who recount his biography tell of a life struck by tragedy, which reflects much of the sadness that inflected both the past and contemporary life in Misiones as I came to know it.³⁴

³⁴ His father died in a hunting accident when Quiroga was still an infant, his step-father committed suicide while suffering from a terminal illness, two of his siblings died from illness, and in 1902, Quiroga himself shot and killed his close friend, the poet Federico Ferrando, by accident. His first wife and former student, Ana María Cires, killed herself by drinking poison in 1915 when she could no longer bear the high conflict marriage she had with Quiroga nor the terribly hard life in Misiones; she left behind her two small children. Quiroga returned to Buenos Aires, but later came back to Misiones after he married a good friend of his daughter's in 1927 who was thirty years his junior. But she left him when marital conflict became unbearable, and took her daughter with her back to Buenos Aires. Quiroga was devastated, and learned not long afterwards in 1936 that he had incurable prostate cancer. After traveling to Buenos Aires, he committed suicide by taking cyanide in February of 1937. His daughter Eslé later died by suicide in 1939 followed by his son Darío in 1951 (Quiroga 1987; Danielson 1997). Life events taken from J. David Danielson's helpful timeline in a translated version of Quiroga's *The Exiles and Other Stories* (1987) and from Lon Pearson, "Horacio Quiroga's Obsessions with Abnormal Psychology and Medicine as Reflected in "La Gallina Degollada" (1997).

Inside a main room of the home is a small desk with a single chair and an old typewriter perched atop the desk. One can capture *el encanto*, the enchantment, of what it must have been to inhabit this chair and write of the world outside. As the smell of the river and the plant life took the air over, Quiroga wrote his gripping, gothic tales about daily life in the subtropical province. His stories plunged readers into the world he inhabited during the first part of the twentieth century, one of the Paraná Forest, the menacing beasts that prowled its depths, and the borderland inhabitants who exploited the natural riches from the forest, including timber and *yerba mate*. Most distinctly, Quiroga wrote about the men whose bodies were the beasts of burden in the extractive logging industry.³⁵ And it is these men that this chapter remembers.

In this chapter, I begin with the life of Quiroga in order to slowly uncover the eclipsed labor history of *yerba mate*. Indeed much of what Quiroga lived both in this house and outside the window was folded into his writing. Beyond characters like himself and the women over whom he obsessed, those who most inhabit his imagination were the rural workers for hire, *peones* who were the motor of all industry in the frontier and the animals of the forest, particularly serpents and tigers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century *peones* also doubled as *los mensú* (short for *mensual* for their monthly pay) who were hired out seasonally to labor deep within the Paraná Forest harvesting wild *yerba mate*, cutting timber, or cutting *piques*, the forest paths needed to transport materials extracted from the forest to other

³⁵ The words that formed lines into stories are saturated with shadows of life, laden down with a suffering that grips the psyche, burns the body. For Quiroga and so many others, the Alto Paraná is a land of inherent suffering, a site for the tragic. Although his 1918 book *Cuentos de la selva para los niños* (Jungle Tales for Children) has been read to generations of Argentine children, much of his writing is so bleak that I have known adult Argentines marked for life by the terror embedded in the tales read to them as children, their parents having miscalculated the sheer enduring power of the short story form.

parts of Argentina. The plight of *los mensú* is memorialized in a very few literary and travel accounts of this period of extraction of the Alto Paraná which includes Misiones and parts of Paraguay that run up to the Paraná.

Enter Los Mensú

For many Argentines, it is likely that if they know anything at all about *los mensú* it is via Quiroga's stories. These workers are markedly forgotten in Argentine history, in spite of their vital role in the history of the *yerba mate* economy. This falls in line with many other workers in Latin America whose bodies were used to extract riches from forests that spanned South America (Brass 2003; Rau2012). Relentless extraction from the forest was prohibited in 1930 to prevent mass extinction, and *los mensú* were absorbed into different labor schemes that were part of a new economy dedicated to the cultivation of *yerba mate* (Rau 2012). An entangled bondage and resistance surround Quiroga's depictions of *los mensú*; they are treated as animals, enslaved in the forest, tricked and beaten into submission even as accounts of their fugue and resistance are scattered throughout.³⁶ The forest played a dual role of provider and destroyer for the

³⁶ Quiroga's story "Beasts in Collusion" (1908--*Las fieras cómplices*) represents the timelessness of the social complexity of the province. It is a story of a proud *peón*, Longhi, an "Indian", and a despotic Brazilian log camp owner, Alves, who oppresses all he encounters from all sides. Longhi represents the resilient worker who labors with incredible strength but decides to stand up to the boss, advocating for himself as well as other *peones* (rural laborers). Yet those same workers turn on him when the overseer, Alves, retaliates against Longhi for his disobedience. Alves commands the laborers to participate in Longhi's torture, and they comply. He and his Indian confidant are thrown into an enormous ant bed on which Alves has thrown turpentine to agitate the ants. Alves leaves Longhi to die finally by lighting slow burning dynamite underneath a sort of funeral pyre for Longhi.

As is true in many of Quiroga's stories, death circles about but finally descends in unexpected ways. Here, Longhi and his Indian friend survive miraculously and disappear into the jungle foliage. They come back to seek revenge on Alves when he least expects it; their torture device is a female puma who eats the man alive. Longhi and the Indian part ways. As Longhi leaves on a steamboat on the river, he leaves behind "a dark and faithful friend, and a puma who, hoarse by now, roared desperately after the master who was deserting her."

multiethnic hoi polloi and indigenous Guaraní who inhabited the borderlands of Argentina and Paraguay during this historical period. Landless workers, log camp despots, indigenous people, immigrant families and other troubled figures populate Quiroga's stories, moving about in the forested triple border region just as they do today.

I begin this chapter with this site, because it is a place where multiple histories collide, leaving the contradictions of the day left wide open in ruins for the high sun, in collusion with rain and wind, to break down into soil. Such is the case of the museum-house of Horacio Quiroga. Leaving the writer's house, I walked through the grounds outside where the past and present mingled together. I was supposed to feel a blend of harmony and mystique. But the mood was interrupted when I came upon a line of bricks embedded in the soil. One line met another to form a rough square. Brick-faces of the ruined structure were covered in a veneer of green life. This was once a building, a shelter that had neither stood the test of time, nor had been preserved or resurrected. In the shadow of the house, a small sign accompanied the brick-bone foundation: *La Casa del Peón*, the house of the *peón*. Unlike Quiroga's home, it had not stood the test of time, nor had it been helped to do so. I was not encouraged to contemplate the life of its inhabitant as I was with the writer's home; rather, my fingertips stretched into nothingness as I stepped over the ruins on my way to something higher, durable, and remembered. I looked back and wondered: Who was this *peón*? Did he live alone or with another? What of her? Were their children? What of them? The *peón* had been disappeared. And if his disappearance came because

This is a story of a dance between loyalty and betrayal. It is a story with a noble savage in a time when there were none yet in Latin American literature. It begins and ends at night in the jungle: "The jungle (always terrible even in the daytime with its ambushes and its treachery), at that hour, in the gloomy solitude, irresistibly filled the most intrepid soul with anguish." And Quiroga reveals the way in which the frontier was bloodied by the greedy and nurtured by the desperately poor: his laborers sweat through long hot hours clearing land for a mere bag of beans and another's profit.

he was overshadowed by Quiroga, those with whom he shared his life were disappeared in the shadow *he*, the *peón* himself, cast over *them*.

This casting of a great shadow has consequences. Indeed Quiroga's personal tragedy has been fused with what is considered to be the beautiful, yet tragic landscape of Misiones. A closer examination of gender relations in his life, however, suggests that he was highly egocentric, stubborn, and brought great pain to those around him, particularly the young women who were unfortunate enough to become his partners and subjected to his authoritarian whims. Other young women were fortunate enough to have their families forcefully intervene to keep them from continuing a relationship with the writer. That these women and Quiroga's children are submerged in the shadow of a tragedy that is often written as *his* tragedy alone, as if he had no responsibility in crafting part of his fate, has salience in the way Misiones is viewed throughout Argentina: This tendency to overshadow the suffering of one in favor of a grand male figure makes up the culture that surrounds the history of *yerba mate*, and it is in part because of this that I begin this chapter with Quiroga's life. He is, for most Argentines, the person who most brought *yerba mate* country into view, producing a discord in an otherwise harmonious, daily ritual of consuming *yerba*. His legacy involves the histories of men, women and children living between and amongst each other, yet reduced to a history of a single masculine at the end of the day.

By the time I visited the Quiroga museum, I had already made two trips to Misiones, conducting fieldwork regarding agrarian culture and crisis. I was struck with the way rural workers formed the bottom of the social pile as well as by the dearth of recorded history of their lives. The house of the *peón* in ruins at Quiroga's house was just one more erasure of many of which I had taken note. Quiroga's house, however, is an important tourist site, one of the several that form the so-called *ruta de la yerba mate* (*yerba mate* route) which is the Route 12 corridor

that stretches from the river port city of Posadas up to the world-famous tourist site of Iguazú Falls. Provincial Park Teyú Cuaré and Quiroga's home are just ten kilometers from the center of San Ignacio, the small town that is the home of the heavily visited ruins of San Ignacio, the largest site of the Jesuit missions, left over from the 17th and 18th century when groups of Guaraní were subordinated to Jesuit systems of economy and value even as they sought refuge from raids by Portuguese slave traders (Wilde 2012). The Jesuits were expelled in 1767 in a carefully strategized plan orchestrated by the Spanish crown and the governor of Buenos Aires with complicity of an important core of Guaraní *caciques* or leaders (Wilde 2012). The 1986 British film *The Mission* starring Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons refers to these historical events. Today San Ignacio is one of the most important tourist sites for the province of Misiones, but it is also a place of contested history, about just how good or bad the life of the Guaraní was during that era. The fact Guaraní who live on reserves throughout the province are caught between the state and their struggle for self-determination sharpens this debate.

Beyond the Jesuit sites, the province of Misiones is scattered with museums of different sorts, most of them commemorating the history of the white Europeans, *colonos*, who were permitted to settle the province in the first part of the 20th century. The history of those who inhabited the Alto Paraná before their arrival and who later became the labor force of the *colonos* remains strikingly absent from these accounts: Between the *colonos* and the indigenous Guaraní, there is an unquiet space. What was I to make of all the families I could see who were not residents of the forest reserves created for those who identified as indigenous Guaraní nor were they white farmers?

In this chapter, I use the permitted ruin of the house of the *peón* at the site of Quiroga's house as a symbolic trailhead from which I write an ethnography of the disappeared *peón*. My

intent is to demonstrate how it is that sites of contradictions such as those in Quiroga's house are slowly crafted over time and perpetuated: Indeed not only did Quiroga rely on *peón* labor for his multiple experimental industries, but his stories benefited heavily from their presence. That the very structure in which they lived has been allowed to crumble in the shadow of his enduring home represents a contradiction about how their lives have or have not been remembered.

Disappearing is not an event; rather it is a *process* replete with permissions and prohibitions, acts and omissions. It is necessarily a social process in that its *raison d'être* is to forward the history of one over the other, whether this be done unconsciously or consciously; there are no lone figures. And the ambitious act of *reappearing*, the one in which I embark upon in this chapter, is a layered process in which I must proceed with caution: A race to appear another, in this case *el peón*, may cause the compacted disappearance of another, such as the women and children that are eclipsed in both literary tropes and historical accounts of *peones* or *los mensú*.

In order to demonstrate the occupational hazard of writing this kind of history, I analyze also a live site of contested history—a couple hours travel up Route 12 in the small town of Montecarlo where I lived for a year conducting fieldwork on everyday labor in the *yerba mate* economy. From there, I began to unfold the details that constitute the thin recorded history of *los mensú*, the workers who are the fore parents of modern day *tarefer@s*, those who continue to work in the seasonal *yerba mate* harvest today. Although *tarefer@s* now labor on cultivated plantations rather than deep within the forest, I argue that the legacy of *los mensú* manifests daily in their lives in multiple ways, not the least of which is continued exploitation.

This chapter describes one of the darkest hours in the history of the *yerba mate* economy which was the time in which *yerba* was still extracted from deep within the forest. I use the thin but rich historical record to track *los mensú* in their recruitment in the river port city of Posadas,

Misiones and their transport up the Paraná River to the Alto Paraná forest where they labored for months, and their voyage back down again to Posadas where they spent months in the off season fighting hunger and unemployment. I refer to this journey as an ‘ethnography of the disappeared *peón*’, because the vital role of workers has been so stunningly erased from official history. This has certainly been true of workers across the globe as well, and this erasure also forms part of a greater pattern in Argentine (and Latin American) history in which rural workers have sacrificed body and life to serve economies of extraction in which they have never seen any substantial personal benefit. Furthermore, the everyday violence embedded in these economies reflects a practice that mirrors other periods of atrocities in Argentine history in which the disappearance of urban citizens has been discussed more extensively than has been that of rural workers (Mintz 1985; Taussig 1980; Brass 2003, 2007, 2010; Ferrara 2007). It is an attempt to sew together the tattered pieces that were left behind during the period of *los mensú*. And it is an important step in the practice of attempting to defetishize *yerba mate* (Taussig 1980).

As I construct the ethnography of the disappearance of the *peón*, I aim to scrutinize the ways in which others too were disappeared, even more resoundingly than *los mensú*, namely the women and children who both suffered alongside them and likely suffered because of them. I mean to complicate the idea of a homogenous subaltern proletariat by illuminating those who are hidden within the subaltern’s shadow (Spivak 2010; Federici 2009, 2012). In particular, I work to make visible the lives of women and children as they have been erased in a historical continuum in which so much related to *yerba mate* production has been rendered masculine, in spite of great dependence on the vital role of women and children. Furthermore, I interrogate the ways in which local historians reinforce patterns of discrimination in their own efforts to construct and reconstruct history. I employ the theory of “ethnographic seduction” to illustrate

how ethnographers (including myself) can be seduced into erasing certain figures in the rush to resurrect one which has disappeared (Robben 2012). Throughout, I interrogate the trope of suffering, including exile, both self-imposed and forced, analyzing the role of (dis)appearance in continuing and interrupting this trope.

The Founders

About a year after I visited the Quiroga museum, I arrived with my family in Montecarlo, up the river from San Ignacio, to conduct a long year of fieldwork. I quickly learned of a lively debate at play in this town. Montecarlo, it turned out, was considered sort of a dissident city in many ways. It had not lined up politically the way it was expected to at critical times and the colonos of the town had formed one of the strongest agricultural cooperatives in the province. But the cooperative was run with an exploitative system that depended on *criollo* labor. While most Argentines had absolutely no idea how the *yerba mate* they consumed daily had been produced and under what conditions, at the heart of a small debate in a small town in *yerba mate* country were these questions: What really happened with *los mensú* in the Alto Paraná? Were those stories of dead bodies floating in the river true? Those of massacres in the forest, of disobedient workers being fed to tigers, of men enslaved in the forest where they died of starvation and exhaustion? Or, were they part of rural legend, stories told in *mate* circles throughout the countryside? Or worse, exaggerations perpetuated by people interested in maintaining a victim status? What was at stake was nothing more and nothing less than the everyday production of local history in which important questions were decided that impacted everyday social relations both in town and country: Who will be remembered and how, who will be written of as a hero of his or her own life, whose experience will be told and in what voice? Who will have streets and schools named after them? What kind of account will be told, and to

whom does it belong? Who will be cast to the side permanently, without even a mere sign to designate the ruins? And worse yet, who would be retaliated against for trying to write a history of those who were not supposed to have existed or existed on certain terms?

This small debate was carried out primarily between a group of white *colonos* called *Los Fundadores* (The Founders), and a local labor historian and union organizer Rubén Ortiz, who was critical to organizing *mate* harvesters in the contemporary Alto Paraná. The Founders was an informal group of amateur local historians who regularly met in a building marked with heavy block letters *El Museo del Agricultor*, the museum of the farmer. It had been the original building of the agricultural cooperative formed back in 1930 when farmers decided to organize against the larger capital who controlled production and price of *yerba mate*. Connected to the building was an addition in which the coop supermarket and hardware store were attached, tended by a privileged few employees who never were friendly to me in the entire time I lived in Montecarlo. Indeed the coop was the ‘industry’ in this industry town. Long ago, the cooperative had transformed from poor *colonos* organizing together to fight big money. It now was the hegemonic force in Montecarlo County, acting as a monopoly over much of the *yerba mate* production. Cashiers in the coop were white only, and a large bellied, bespectacled *criollo* security guard scrutinized those who came and went. He was highly valued as a conduit between the non-white community and the *colonos*, and seen as faithful to the white coop managers. In a single up-and-down glance, a person without social power could be made to feel completely invalid when shopping for sugar or flour in the aisles of the supermarket that wreaked with the chemical perfumes of multiple brands of laundry detergent. I stopped shopping at the place several months into fieldwork as I grew to know the history of the way the coop had maintained its own modern system of debt peonage in the *yerba mate* economy.

I had been told about The Founders and encouraged to attend their meetings during an interview with the then outgoing vice mayor, Guillermo Aicheler, a retired schoolteacher. We met several times over a long rectangular table to talk history. Everyone was over fifty years of age, and of European descent, save one other local historian, who ironically was named Rubén Ortiz as well. We were surrounded by pictures of the old times, instruments of travel and work, dust powdered into time and time powdered into dust. The late afternoon sun intruded in from windows above and the heat from the street pulled in with the late summer humidity. People enthusiastically took out maps and read from writing they had done. The conversation was sprinkled with who was trustworthy and who was not. There was a story about the *colono*, the white European farmers permitted to settle Misiones in the early 20th century and the *criollos*, the multi-ethnic mass of brown-skinned people who had populated the area for centuries.

The opposing sides in the debate, Rubén Ortiz (the labor organizer) and The Founders kept their distance from the other. But each seemed vigorously interested that I might write the story of *yerba mate* in the way that they saw fit. The one document that they both wanted me to read was the so-called ‘Niklison Report’ written in 1914 by José Elías Niklison, an employee of the Argentine National Department of Labor who was dispatched on October 26, 1913 to Posadas to learn more about worker conditions in the Alto Paraná; he returned on March 5, 1914 to write his report (Niklison 1914, 6).

According to Niklison, reports of atrocities in the Alto Paraná had plagued the region for some time: A series of articles written between June 15 and 27, 1908 in the Paraguayan daily *El Diario* by the Spaniard anarchist Rafael Barrett had alleged terrible atrocities and spoke specifically to the mechanics of exploitation embedded in the debt peonage system (Niklison 1914; Barrett 1908). Barrett had traveled throughout Paraguay working as an agricultural

surveyor and claimed to report only the most common of the problems, not the even worse exceptions. His account of the suffering of *los mensú* is written in such vivid prose that it is considered an important part of Paraguayan literature. Niklison wrote in his report that rumors of massacres had reached even the press of the day in the United States (Niklison 1914). This was surely in part due to the vivid account circulated by Barrett as well as the fact that those reports involved immigrants from countries that included Europe. A progressive era Argentine state felt forced to tend to its triple border that had long created problems ranging from relentless resource extraction to inhumane labor practices. More importantly, for several decades, the problems with the *yerba mate* economy had given voice to those who argued for a more civil colonization of the Alto Paraná, specifically encouraging settlement of Europeans who were viewed to have superior methods of farming (Peyret 1881).

The Niklison Report was also the document most often cited by the handful of scholars in Argentina who work on the labor history of *yerba mate*. The fact that the report was written by a government official gave the document solid authority for both sides in the debate in Montecarlo; as amateurs, they had no training to encourage a critical interrogation of historical documents. I processed the report much later due to time constraints in the field but also found that there were ethnographic accounts of equal or greater value that had captured glimpses of what the life of *los mensú* must have been. These accounts did not have the same resonance for local historians. Much less important to them were the accounts of Alexis Peyret (1881),³⁷ the exiled French man

³⁷ Alexis Peyret (1826-1902) was a French-born Argentine writer, agronomist, colonial administrator, and historian. He had studied science, letters, law and philosophy and had become a prominent figure in Entre Rios. In France, he avoided military service by paying someone to take his place and studied law instead. He had been a supporter of democracy and socialism in the Revolution of 1848, was prosecuted for his activism but acquitted. He went into exile after he lost as a candidate in the 1852 election where the Bonapartists won and the Second Empire of

who had become an important figure in Argentine politics as well as Juan Bautista Ambrosetti (1890s), the prominent Argentine naturalist, who traveled to Misiones in the late 19th century. Unlike Ambrosetti, Niklison never made it to the *yerbales* of Alto Paraná, for he conducted his research during the *interzafra*, the off-season of the harvest (Niklison in Gortari 2003: 66, Niklison 89). However, he wrote of the forest harvest as though he had been there, even though he most likely reconstructed that life from interviews with workers in the off-season. He did travel throughout Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil for four months in order to collect data for his report which had to have significant import in its day: It exposed the underbelly of the *yerba mate* economy and clearly documented a terribly exploitive system of hiring that was later to be shunned as an outdated system of debt peonage.

It is hard to say how significant the Niklison report was in accelerating the process of the colonization of Misiones with European farmers, but it had to have played a significant role, for by the 1920s, colonization was in full swing as were cultivated *yerba* plantations that would end forever the harvest of *yerba* from the forest. Niklison had recommended an alternative system of labor for the *yerba mate* harvest which involved using more settled populations for seasonal work and doing away with the corrupt intermediaries who were responsible for a large part of the corruption in the debt *peonage* system (Niklison 1914).

Close readings of the Niklison Report were made for particular motives in Montecarlo by those writing local history. Rubén Ortiz wielded the report as proof of a long history of

Napoleon III was established. He arrived in Montevideo in 1852, wrote for a newspaper, offered professorship at College of Uruguay, and had two sons. In 1857, he became administrator of San José under Urquiza. Then in 1881 the Argentine Office of Territories and Colonies commissioned him to explore Misiones. He wrote thirty letters from there, which were published in *La Tribuna Nacional*. Peyret's travels occurred just after the Forest Pact was made. During part of his trip, he traveled with the notorious Dutra who had helped negotiate the Forest Pact.

exploitation of workers in the Alto Paraná that continued in the extractive economy of the present day. Given the dearth of history available on harvesters in the 20th century, he was forced to turn to more general history on workers in Argentina and to that of *los mensú*. In fact, the slogan for the *tarefer@* union in Montecarlo whose formation he spearheaded is taken directly from Rafael Barrett's 1908 incendiary journalism: "The pleasure of drinking mate should not rest on the slavery of *el tarefer@*." Indeed Barrett alleged that ninety percent of the *peones* in the Alto Paraná were compensated with food only (Barrett 1908).

The Founders, however, closely read the document to a different end: They picked up on the way Niklison had concluded that reports of massacres in the forest were patently false. Exploitation and injustice abounded, but the unfair labor practices did not rise to the level of those described so vividly in the rural legends of *los mensú* (Niklison 1914: 232-33). The Founders made it clear they wanted me to have the report so that I would see how they were making a good faith attempt to be inclusive and to recognize the historical exploitation of those who were not of European descent. As the town of Montecarlo was becoming less and less white, The Founders had a heightened interest in recording the valiant and valuable history of their own white 'pioneers' as the first settlers were called. They were express about feeling that the town was being taken over by people who were strangers to them.³⁸

³⁸ Importantly, this passion for history among The Founders involved ownership of the historical record. The passion was to investigate the history of their own, and to fend off against the history of others. These were ethnographers in that people told stories of their own lives and others, and a reading was scheduled once a year in a great event. But recently there had been more fervent challenges at the local level to these official versions of history. The goal of The Founders then was to rescue theirs against the obliterating force of death—that their stories live on, hard times not be forgotten, for the sake of who they were, are, and would be. But others intruded to say that their history counted too, that they were there in that same moment, on that same piece of land near the river, and that what they had to say was different, what they felt was different. This is when, as two pieces of flint coming together, in the contact and friction, fire comes. The

As fate would have it, during the course of my fieldwork, The Founders' museum was given the death knell when their museum was closed in favor of expansion of the coop supermarket. Theirs was considered an antiquated project; their treasured space of history was to be used for the growth of the 21st century coop enterprise that had to devour obstacles in its path that interfered with its growth. The sons of the *colonos* who originally created the coop were now in-town *empresarios* still dressed in the uniform of a cooperative, even though on the inside, they hoped to compete as any respecting capitalist enterprise would. Many farmers talked of a 'black box' in which top cooperative administrators took more than their share of cooperative profits, while the farmer members of the coop, like poor bumpkins, couldn't get a solid group together to stand up and question those slick sons of *colonos*.

Ortiz meanwhile was working on multiple books in which he was writing the history of workers long silenced, making them protagonists in broader Argentine history. I was pressed explicitly to take one side or another. After a heated exchange one night at a Founders meeting,³⁹

Founders fought this by building a tale of peaceful coexistence between *colono* and *peón* where everyone lived the life they wanted to and was thereby happy. They used firsthand testimony, put tools from the pioneer days on display such as the *altaprisa*, and they erected signs of the great historical struggle of *coperativismo* in order to remember fondly old times. They did not make it out to the countryside to talk to people but rather lingered on in their town lives. They did tell me once the vivid story of the day a Paraguayan murdered someone outside the country tavern in Itacuruzú, a farm settlement near where I lived while I did fieldwork.

³⁹ One night, I went to a meeting that would be the last one I went to, although I did not know so at the time. I went with good intentions. I was excited about the possibility of doing some collaborative project with these local historians. That night an elderly white matriarch of the town decided to challenge me. Who was I? Was it my intention just to come here and "write a bestseller"? She herself had written a pamphlet sort of publication about the history of Montecarlo that completely erased any history of people who were not white Europeans. As the old matriarch moved in on me, others in the group sat silently. They made no move to step up and say who I was, as far as they knew, and why I was there. Under duress from constant gossip and suspicion, I stridently defended myself and asked her how she might feel to be treated as she was treating me. She left the meeting having made her case. And only afterwards, did the others

I decided to continue on with Ortiz the union organizer, as any implicit consent on my part to the white supremacist tones of the The Founders placed me in a political and ethical dilemma that would have prohibited me from doing solidarity work with the *tarefer@s* rights movement.

From the day of the confrontation with The Founders forward, I intensified my contact with those who were erased from the official story. I turned toward the other side of history The Founders had meant to control. But as I took to reading and talking with live people who were at work in the *yerbales*, I begin to see how they had been disappeared not only by all of Argentina but by local historians who had reason to know better. I saw the disappearing process, the drops of rain up close, the way the wind picked up, the way the sun bore down. And the contradictions became undeniable. The story The Founders meant to write as a completed one contained a void that they tried to fill by spreading their own selves through the empty space. Everyday ethnographic work I conducted in the *yerbales* helped me see through this ruse based on both conscious and unconscious race and class discrimination. And I came to the question I take up here: How is it that the disappearance of those who work hardest at the production site of *yerba mate*, *los tarefer@s*, takes place? And, how can ‘appearing’ them transform certain erosive patterns?

speaking up. Later I would learn how hated this woman was to *criollo* activists who saw her as a traitor who consorted with key military officials during the dictatorship.

That night as we talked after she left, I expressed my indignation that no one had stepped in to defend me or to explain to the woman who I was, given that we had met together several times. “Oh yes, she is that way, we all know she is that way,” Guillermo said. But I didn’t know this! I said, feeling that I had been surreally set up. Only the youngest woman in the room talked of violence. She said to her father and the other elders: “You all do not realize how violent things are here, what a violent society we live in.” I kept her insight in my head throughout the rest of my fieldwork. What I felt in my body that day after having been attacked by the woman, she had made a rational reality. There was a sort of tolerated social violence in Montecarlo, a violence that bystanders let happen without intervening. I have never seen Mariela again but remain grateful for her insight. I did go to see Guillermo at his home a few more times and maintained a good relationship with him.

Ethnographic Seduction, a Circle of Patriarchs, and Cascading Shadows

It took me many months to see a critical common pattern shared by The Founders and some in the modern *tarefer@* rights' movement. In fact, only once I had been out of the field and had returned for short visits did I gain perspective on this pattern. I had come to Misiones with an established interest in the rights of low-income workers across the globe. I had done both historical work and contemporary labor rights organizing to help improve immigrant workers' rights in the United States. I also had a longtime interest in gender violence, including violence against children. Hence, I thought I would be able to capture fairly accurately what it was that caused continuous exploitation even as I developed a capacity to evaluate certain solutions and kept my eye on what was happening in the everyday lives of women. But while writing this chapter and in short trips back to the field, I was processing the connections between what had been observed of women in the forest harvest and my own contemporary observations of tolerance of gender violence, sometimes within the *tarefer@* rights movement. Only then was I able to see how I had been seduced.

In his work interviewing both military personnel and families of those tortured and killed in the Argentine dictatorship from 1976-1983, anthropologist Antonius Robben wrote of an "ethnographic seduction" which "disarms our critical detachment" in a way that we are not aware of at the time (Robben 2012: 176). This kind of seduction "subverts our understanding of social and cultural phenomena by dissuading an inquiry beyond their appearance". In long conversations with my interlocutors over time about *los mensú*, the history of labor conditions in the *yerba mate* industry and even in modern *tarefer@* rights organizing, I deciphered two patterns: First, all of my sources, both historical and contemporary were male, and second, no woman had ever written on labor conditions in the *yerba mate* industry. Indeed as I dug deeper

into how it is that alienation has occurred over time even in the historical record, I found a resounding absence of the feminine.⁴⁰ The importance of this is that women and children today and in centuries past provide(d) essential labor to production; without them, *yerba mate* could not reach the hands of those who consume it in circles of belonging or in spaces of privileged solitude. Moreover, multiple sources had observed that traditionally these women and children were not paid for their work, viewed only as additional arm of their male partners. While I had been aware that I was the only woman to do work on the politics of labor in the *yerba mate* industry before in Misiones, this took on a new resonance as I looked back. No woman had a public role on the subject of *yerba mate*, anywhere in the contemporary world of the tea. All modern policy on *yerba mate* was developed exclusively by men, both on the side of producers and harvesters. Leaders from industry, cooperatives, government and *tarefer@* union leaders were all men. The modern regulatory board, the INYM (Instituto Nacional de la *Yerba mate*), was a circle of men, albeit at odds with the interests of each other. Indeed this pattern of the dominant masculine contrasted markedly with what I saw in the *yerbales* which was women and children working alongside men cutting *yerba*. Even the strongest *tarefera* I knew, Celia, who was a notorious in the county for being able to carry her *raído* (100 kilo pack of *yerba*) on her back had been ‘disappeared’ in the legal moment in which she moved from mere *tarefera* to labor contractor with the cooperative: All legal paperwork was in her husband’s name and people

⁴⁰ In contemporary politics throughout the province of Misiones, there is a new practice of mentioning women, through the trope of femicide that comes from the recent increase in female homicides in the province from 2012 onwards. But as I discuss in other chapters, that practice is often done for the benefit of a male speaker: It embellishes discourse, draws people closer, but for the benefit of the speaker, not those who are affected in their bodies by everyday practices that render their lives and suffering invisible.

knew them as “Maciel” which was his last name. This was in spite of the fact that Celia ran the harvest operation in the everyday.

Hence, I began to see the history of *los mensú* differently and interrogated my own account of history that I had been seduced to write. Their story had been recounted to me either as one of solitary male figures under duress or of groups of men exploited to no end. But the ethnographic seduction at play by the men, both historical and contemporary, who meant to use the history of *los mensú* for some contemporary goal, involved sidelining the women and children in view. They were not mentioned at all or were quickly stepped over even as male subjects were vigorously ‘appeared’ by those wishing to bring attention to the plight of *los mensú*. For *tarefer@* rights organizers, they spoke to themes of ethnicity and class but did so in terms of a trope of the male worker. In my own work to ‘appear’ a subaltern figure, I was seduced into permitting yet another-- the erasure of women and children. In pointing to the way the history of *los mensú* had been overshadowed by the winners in history, a cascade of shadows was unleashed in which a subaltern overshadowed another subaltern.

My realization clicked into place with the phenomenon I had observed in my fieldwork in which so many women held back what they had to say even when it was clear they had strong emotions. They too were seduced into believing that what men had to say was much more valuable than their own view. Women stayed quiet even when they had something to say in *tarefer@* rights union meetings. My conversations with married couples involved in *yerba mate* production often involved long uninterrupted testimonies by the male partner. In fact, much of the freest dialogue I had was with elderly widows. I realized then that in writing the history of the disappeared *peón*, I had been seduced to see one subject, *el mensú*, and to not look out for the others, the women and children who did not even have a title or historical category.

I now turn to the process of ‘appearing’ *los mensú* as far as their lives were documented by the handful of male observers who wrote of the *yerba mate* industry in the Alto Paraná. But I proceed with caution. In the same way the role of Quiroga has to be interrogated in so far as the trope of male suffering, so too must that of *el mensú*. I do not mean to ‘re-write’ any history but rather to shine the light on details that are usually skipped over in the written historical record as well as to point out absences and/or omissions. This ethnography then rewrites through the act of questioning—questions about permissions and prohibitions as well as acts and omissions, in the spirit of capturing a more “intersectional” view of the history of the *yerba* harvest (Collins 1990, 2009; Crenshaw 1989, 1991). This intersectional focus attempts to bring together race, class, and gender in the spirit of defetishizing *yerba mate* and forming an ethnography of connectedness between the many hands on the green leaf that must have labored to bring the tea to all of Argentina.

Part II Appearing *El Peón* and Family

Forest, night, moon
suffering in the *yerbal*
the silence trembles in the solitude
as the heart of the forest beats
the tranquility is splintered
with the sad song of the poor *mensú*
yerba, green *yerba*, in your immensity
I only wish I could get lost
coming to rest in your fresh leaves
and find the honey that soothes the cuts from the cruel whip

—*El mensú* by Ramón Ayala (Folklore song first recorded in 1957)

In the early 1890s, Juan Bautista Ambrosetti, an ethnographer, naturalist and the father of folklore studies in Argentina, made an expedition to document the plant world of the Paraná Forest. He was, above all, an ethnographer of trees, and he was motivated by rumors that the

giant forest was under threat of extinction. With a Forest Accord made between white men and indigenous leaders having opened up the forest for full exploitation in 1875, a fever of extraction was underway of both timber and *yerba mate* which generated alarm in some circles that the forest would be completely annihilated (Peyret 1881; Ambrosetti 1891, 2008; Rau 2012). This accord had been reached through the negotiation skill of Dutra, a white man who had been kidnapped as a young boy and who had grown up with the Guaraní. The Forest Accord involved a promise not to kill and kidnap the ‘white’ men who were permitted an unfettered exploitation of the forest (Peyret 1881; Rau 2012). Ambrosetti’s journey covered what is today Argentina’s far Northeast where to the west of the Paraná River lies Paraguay, and less than one hundred miles to the east, the Uruguay River divides Argentina from Brazil. The Paraná Forest once stretched all the way from the coast of Brazil to deep within Paraguay.

Buried deep in his travelogue and not cited by any of the handful of local historians, lies an account of a invited trip to visit a landowner’s *yerba mate* company’s harvesting operations in the Alto Paraná. Ambrosetti recounts how it took he and his companions days of fighting off insects, snakes, and tigers to get to a part of the forest in which a harvest of *yerba* was underway. He described the scene they came upon:

After an hour of marching, we got to the miners’ camp which was situated in the middle of the *yerbal*. What I saw before me was incredibly strange and unpleasant: There was a quantity of people of different colors, races, and nationalities. They had long hair and beards and were skinny and gaunt. They wore tattered clothes, but were almost naked, living in miserable huts with their women and children. The children played with some dogs with sad gazes, real skeletons themselves with their tails between their legs and full of wounds and bugs. These people still worked, but in exchange, they received insufficient food. Corn was the only thing that they had, and unfortunately there was too little of it. It is no wonder why there is a work shortage for this kind of job considering that this is what the working conditions are (Ambrosetti 207).

What Ambrosetti could not know was that his recording of what he saw would constitute perhaps the only record of what actually happened for hundreds of years deep in the forest. He had observed firsthand a moment of charged complexity in the forest *yerba mate*. He observed “men with *their* women and children” of different ethnicities, but all working under the cruel debt peonage where the value of their labor was not only undervalued, but it was carried out under great bodily suffering. And, he set the precedent for appearing *peones* even as he viewed the women and children around them to be appendages to those men. Ambrosetti’s ethnographic account of the human figures he saw that day included a scene of everyday resistance (Scott 1985, et al), which unfolded before his eyes:

The miners were really charged up and upset about what was going on. Romero and Don Eloy called all of the miners together and stood in the middle of them. Everyone began to talk in Guaraní. While the workers complained, the *yerbateros* asked for forgiveness and promised better times. Finally it seemed they came to an agreement. In the end, the group that seemed to be hard to make happy, understandably, actually unanimously agreed to keep working as long as they had enough to eat. I was greatly surprised, but I could see that they did it only because the boss was a nice guy (Ambrosetti 207).

Ambrosetti’s account of the harvest is also one of the very few written records from the 19th century when the *mate* harvest still consisted of felling entire trees in order to get to their magical leaves. In order to harvest *yerba mate*, specialized scouts were tasked with cutting their way deep into the forest with crews of workers and machetes in order to find the *manchones*, or patches of *yerba mate* trees. From here, different companies would parse off patches of the *manchon* for work crews like the one described to be brought in to harvest the tea, roast it, and carry it out via mule and human labor so that it could be transported via land and river to consumers in the South where most of the population resided (Ambrosetti 1891, 2008).

The scene Ambrosetti witnessed demonstrates what might have been a typical moment in the labor history of *los mensú*. He described a liminal economy in a liminal place, a forest

borderlands when there were no real clear borders. This space hosted an eternal playing out of conquest. His encounter with *mineros*, the Paraguayan term used for *yerba* harvesters, was a rather happenstance one for his real motive for traveling through the forest was to document plant and animal life in the subtropical Paraná Forest. His words capture several things. First, that the working conditions were terribly inhumane for those harvesting *mate* in the forest at that time. Second, that those charged with hiring and managing them failed to provide them with enough sustenance to maintain their health. Third, that the *yerba* harvest was not carried out exclusively by *peones* but rather by women and children as well who suffered the same conditions as the men. And fourth, he unknowingly documented a practice that still exists today: Convincing workers to work against their own interest by assuming a seemingly compassionate posture. Don Eloy pacified the group with tobacco, demonstrating a precedent that extends into the modern day harvest: giving workers just enough to stave off hunger in return for more labor that benefits the boss.⁴¹

An Official Story of Men

Ambrosetti's account of the forest harvest forms part of a thin record of the labor history of *yerba mate*. It is important to take into account that the men who wrote on *los mensú* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century all had significant economic privilege and were unaffected by the sacrificial labor of *yerba* production and the harvest itself (except for Quiroga who dabbled in *yerba mate* production with much help from his *peones*). The first in the line of ethnographic accounts that form the only historical record on the *yerba mate* harvest after the Jesuits, came in 1881 from Alexis Peyret in which he observed the *yerba* economy in the early

⁴¹ At the state level, this kind of *asistencialismo* dominates the politics of *yerba mate* still in Misiones and many characterize this kind of policy as *pan para hoy hambre para mañana*, bread for today, hunger tomorrow.

years after the Forest Accord was made. Ambrosetti followed Peyret with his early 1890s trip to Misiones. Then Rafael Barrett (1876-1910) that Spaniard from a privileged Spanish-English family 1908 who came to self-identify as an anarchist wrote his famous account, *Los que son los yerbales*, between June 15 and June 28, 1908 in the Paraguayan daily *El Diario* (Del Campo 2013).⁴² After Barrett's account came Quiroga's first stories and the 1914 Niklison report. It was not until the 1940s that Alfredo Varela, a writer and member of the communist party, wrote *El Río Oscuro* (1943) a historical novel in which he clearly drew heavily from sources such as Quiroga and Niklison. The actor and director Hugo del Carril turned Varela's novel into the 1952 film *Las Aguas Bajan Turbias*. Varela consulted on the film from prison where he had been incarcerated by the Peron regime for being a member of the Communist Party. The government obligated Carril to eliminate Varela's name from the credits, however, and forced heavy edits of the film, including changing the title to *Las Aguas Bajan Turbias*.⁴³ Beyond Ramon Ayala's 1957 song *El Mensú*, harvesters of *yerba mate* barely appear in Argentine literature or popular culture. It was not until 2005 that the figure of the *yerba mate* harvester emerged again in popular culture, this time via a *chamame* song by a great contemporary musician and Misionero, Chango Spasiuk in collaboration with songwriter Hector Chavez. *Tarefer@ de mis pagos* pays homage to the *tarefer@*, but again promotes the image of a solitary male figure who suffers in the modern *yerbal*.⁴⁴ If a person knew nothing about the harvest, she would believe it to be an

⁴² Shortly after Barrett was exiled from Paraguay to Brazil. Afflicted with tuberculosis, he died in France at age 34.

⁴³ (<http://argentina-socialista.blogspot.com/2009/02/alfredo-varela-y-el-rio-oscuro.html>, Accessed March 26, 2014).

⁴⁴ The lyrics are: Empezó la zafra y la madrugada te ha de encontrar, allá en el *yerbal*, ponderando el filo de tu machete en un sapukay, lindo de más. La esperanza verde que la tijera pone a tus pies es reflejo fiel de la tierra roja fecunda y hermosa que te vio nacer. Empapado de sudor o tiritando de frío, cargás el baita raído, del sino que Dios te dió.

exclusively male affair, according to the song. Finally, most recently, labor organizer Rubén Ortiz has written a forthcoming book about organizing *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo.

Although *los trabajadores* or ‘workers’ are overwhelmingly masculinized in historical accounts in Argentina, women throughout the country labored both in male-dominated professions and alongside men in everyday life. For example, on the frontier, women worked raising children, doing domestic work as well as sheep-shearing and as prostitutes, *curanderas* (healers) and sheep-shearing (Slatta 1992). The same record of female labor was recorded in the *yerba mate* harvest, but quickly stepped over in the accounts of male subjects. Niklison wrote that there were also some Paraguayan women as hardworking as the men who took advantage of these trips to go along with their legitimate husbands or provisional ones that they shared the hard work of the forest with “which leads me to believe that women are weak beings when they do not want to be strong, but when she wants to, she can be stronger than men” (Niklison 126).⁴⁵

Estríbillo--En tu día mi canción quiere llenarte de halagos, tarefero de mis pagos orgullo de mi región, tarefero de mis pagos orgullo de mi región.

Termino la zafra, nada ha cambiado, seguís igual con tu carayá.

Reviro y cocido hasta la carpida de un mandiocalo algún maizal.

Cuan cambito seco prendes de nuevo otra ilusión en algún galpón y su llama ardiente será confidente de tu corazón.

Que fácil te acomodas con lonadas y pellones en el galpón de los peoneso al calor del

barbacuá....**Estríbillo...** (<http://poesiaycantodeargentina.blogspot.com/2008/09/tarefero-de-mis-pagos.html>, Downloaded March 28, 2014).

⁴⁵ Part of writing an ‘ethnography of the (dis)appeared *peón*’ includes finding evidence of the presence of women and children who have been doubly erased from the record, for the scant recordings of male workers leaves an even greater deficit in documentation on the life of women and children. Although *los trabajadores* or ‘workers’ are overwhelmingly masculinized in historical accounts in Argentina, women throughout the country labored both in male-dominated professions and alongside men in everyday life. For example, on the frontier, women worked raising children, doing domestic work as well as sheep-shearing and as prostitutes, *curanderas* and sheep-shearing (Slatta 1992). (In 1832, General Rosas had police round up 300 women from the street to ship them off to the frontier. This was part of a goal to quell prostitution in the city and to populate the frontier (Slatta 1992: 68).

The forest harvest that Ambrosetti observed showed an industry in which *yerba* came to its consumers via two key portals---forest and river. For centuries, the Paraná River was the route for carrying *yerba* from the dense subtropical forest down into the flatlands below where most of the population lived. The river port city of Posadas, the capital of Misiones, acted as a central market of labor. It is the last major city before the Paraná flows south, through the key port of Rosario and down further until it finally empties its waters into the Rio de la Plata. Having run 3,030 miles, only the Amazon River outruns the Paraná on the South American continent.

Alexis Peyret described the port as a lively commercial hub for the *yerba mate* industry:

The existence of Posadas apart from being a military occupation site is that it is the center for distribution of *yerba mate* industry. From all points of the coast of the Paraná comes the *yerba* to Posadas where, after it has suffered a rudimentary preparation in the forests, it is finally processed, it is packaged and sent down the river, whenever the periodic current permits, and by ox carts that make the road of Ituzangó. These wagons are well known and are the same that run in the plazas of Buenos Aires. The carts are pulled by three or four yokes of oxen and because they don't use animal grease to oil the axils, they produce a horrible creaking that one can hear from long distances away and hurts the ear terribly" (Peyret 1881: 77).

Those who had discovered new *manchones* in the forest would come to the central plaza to announce their find and were greeted with great enthusiasm (80-81). Yet Peyret still scoffed at the comparisons that people made between *yerba mate* and gold, called this a delusion (81).

El Conchabo: The Hiring of a Peón for the Alto Paraná

By all accounts, the workers who arrived in Posadas looking for work came from multiple places, including Paraguay, the Argentine province of Corrientes that lies just to the south of Misiones, and even from Brazil. Much more has been written about the hiring process, *el conchabo*, than any other moment in the *yerba* economy of that time. This is no coincidence: Posadas was a lively port city that made for a much better place to visit than the *yerbales* in the

forest or other sites throughout subtropical Misiones which were inhabited by snakes, insects, and human menaces of multiple varieties.

Without exception, what happened with *los mensú* in Posadas was reported to be a mix of ecstasy and agony. The most complete account of what happened there came from Niklison who provided great detail of what the hiring process looked like. He wrote that Posadas attracted workers “with dominion, pride, irresistibly, in the same way the forest attracts with its silence, with its mystery with its pains” (Niklison 61). The work in the forest *yerbales* up the river in the Alto Paraná was so terrible that workers had to be seduced in nefarious ways in order to get them to sign up for the torturous job. The recipe of seduction was simple: a monetary advance and unbridled access to alcohol and prostitutes. Indeed if workers made it out alive from work in the forest, it was with the great dream of being able to enjoy those four or five days, never more, of decadence in Posadas, in which they experienced “absolute freedom”(61). Barrett himself spent an entire article decrying this system of advances, identifying it as the key to enslaving the workers of the Alto Paraná (Barrett 1908)

The view Niklison and others depicted of *el canchabo* is albeit speculative, flawed and laden with class, race, and gender prejudices, yet it has been taken up as absolute fact by those who study *yerba* history, including The Founders, Rubén Ortiz, Javier Gortari and Victor Rau, all writers who have quoted Niklison without interrogating his subject position. From Niklison’s and even Barrett’s perspective, if there was a woman present, she was a prostitute, and that term was considered at the time to be sufficient to capture her identity. First, she was an ancillary presence whose being was appeared only to show how *los mensú* squandered their advances. A practice of ethnographic ‘appearing’ compels interrogation that involves stopping to linger on these mere mentions of prostitutes: What was any one of these women’s life like, and how might

she have perceived the world? What was the difference between these ‘prostitutes’ lives and those who would then board the steamships with the male workers to travel *alla arriba*? Rafael Barrett wrote a vivid account of women and children that is often overlooked:

Ninety percent of the women in the mines are professional prostitutes; in spite of hunger, fatigue, sickness and the same prostitution, these poor things give birth, and how they give birth like animals in their dens. Naked children, skinny, wrinkled with age before they are even able to stand up, dried up with dysentery, squirming around in the mud, worms of hell of those who although they are alive are condemned to death. Only ten percent will make it to manhood. The most horrific degeneration afflicts the *peones*, their women and their little ones. The *yerbal* exterminates a generation in fifteen years (Barrett 1908).

Juan Alsina, who wrote a detailed work on workers throughout Argentina in 1905, reiterated the same trope of agony and ecstasy when he touched base in the Alto Paraná.⁴⁶ He understood that workers’ contracts lasted at least six months, and that they received advances between fifty and one hundred pesos at that time. He added: “Workers who work in the forests are contracted for at least 6 months and receive also advances between 50 and 100 pesos. Unfortunately, most of the advance for the *mensus* is spent on *orgias* in the days before they board the boat to Alto Parana (Alsina 1905: 331).

In the Niklison report, the advances were between 200 and 300 pesos and were paid to workers in both cash and in-kind merchandise which the capitalists always had on hand in their stores (Niklison 1914: 4). “The truth is”, Niklison wrote, “that the *peón* endures the hardest regimen of work possible in which his health is annihilated and he succumbs, still young, to its weight for the only and exclusive compensation of those days of liberty obtained in long intervals” (Niklison 61). Niklison’s descriptions of workers was predominantly male and he wrote of them often as though they never came accompanied with their wives and families. Most

⁴⁶ Alsina has not been cited often by labor historians of *yerba mate*.

workers were Paraguayans or from the Argentine provinces of Misiones and Corrientes.

Foregoing a description of any female workers for the most part, Niklison offered this

description of what male workers looked like. They were of

[...] medium statures, with little muscle and fat, but solid bone structure, white or coppery of origin, complexion opaque and cold sallow tone, accented always by heavy dark circles underneath the eyes. Their gaze is turned off, and when it is not expressive, it is nostalgic. This is accented by the fact that very early on, cavities destroy their teeth, and this diminishes the view of their nice expressions of their faces that are usually serene and humble” (Niklison 71).

Probably afflicted by the hostile climate in Misiones himself, Niklison was surprised in the way *peones* did not get the gastrointestinal disorders people new to the area suffered, nor were they affected by what he called “the continuous attack of the infinity of insects that populate the forest” making it difficult if not impossible for people who are not from it. The most common diseases that he documented were syphilis and tuberculosis, which he attributed to both “the disordered life that they participated in in Posadas when they were hired” and the terribly unhealthy life in the forest where they never got enough nourishment (Niklison 72).

Niklison’s scant account of women’s lives depicted women doing the domestic work for which they were not paid, because they were not registered formally as workers, even though they helped their male companions with the harvest (Niklison 75). Children, he observed, worked from an early age. Documenting a case from a settlement not far from Posadas called Santa Ana, he related how the local commissary had done a census of the workers’ population and did not find any males younger than 16 years old because they were all away at work in the Alto Paraná (Niklison 75). The first job that youth were able to get in the *yerbales* was as *madrineros* or *cuarteadores*, but as soon as they could, they begin to work in the same jobs as adult men, under the same conditions. Employers chose the smallest youth to work as

madrineros, and men took advantage of the kids, making them do any and everything for them (Niklison 75). Writing just two decades before, Ambrosetti's observations coincide with those of Niklison, and he added that *peones* were hired for all kind of work including guiding canoes, working with mules and oxen, loading up cargo operations, working in *el monte*, cooking and even hunting tigers when they it is needed (Ambrosetti 171).⁴⁷

There were centralized neighborhoods that hiring brokers frequented for recruiting in *el conchabo*. The workers' neighborhood in Posadas ran from north and to the east of the city across a good number of blocks, and its center ran down to the port, from the street of Buenos Aires. Niklison described it as a "tired, interminable line of wooden structures, miserable and dirty, that served as a seat for taverns and brothels, even worse yet. The doors, when one goes through the neighborhood seem to multiply, and each one of these allows a glimpse of the business inside: the sale of alcohol, apparently yes, because in reality it is clandestine prostitution which is the principal source of earnings" (Niklison 61). Again, although Niklison wrote nothing of who the prostitutes were in 'appearing' the role of women, it is difficult to imagine that the hiring process for prostitutes was any cleaner and more just than that used to hire their male counterparts. However, what the women who worked as prostitutes lived and suffered has been forever eclipsed from the historical record.

Niklison described a neighborhood, Barrio Bajada Vieja, with all of its extended arms over the port, where the *peones* lived during their short stays in the city and where the hiring broker looked for them to offer them immediate jobs. These brokers, *conchabadores*, would

⁴⁷ Posadas acted as a crossroads and central market of labor throughout the year. For example, according to the Coast Guard in 1913 the year Niklison was in Misiones, there were 4,327 *peones* who came in and 4,077 who went out. These were 2,164 Argentine citizens, 1,298 Paraguayans, 865 Brazilians, 4,327 total (Niklison 63).

entice the workers with an eye-popping monetary advance of hundreds of pesos. *Peones* could do with the money as they liked, but they would have to pay it back later. With the immediate environs replete with opportunities to spend the money, Niklison, Ambrosetti and others documented that *peones* went hog wild with the money. These same men that Niklison wrote that had come from their homes in the country presumably with the wide-eyed dream of “having fun” for a few days in the city could later be found drunk in the brothels and in the streets, in complete states of unconsciousness (Niklison 62). What a green horn *peón* could not know is that from the moment he first took the advance from the hiring broker, he now legally belonged to the company employer under Fugitive *Peón* laws. The job of the *conchabadores* and other company agents was to track the *peón* and not lose sight of him from the time he left Posadas and through the trip up the river and into the *yerbal*. Other agents often took over on the boat, but once the *peón* had taken and spent the advance, he had entered into the terrible web of debt peonage (Niklison 62). Niklison wrote that there were both good and bad *conchabadores*, but more of the second. In Posadas, he documented nineteen different nationalities of brokers according to the police records, with six of those being Turks who had the most successful operations, because they also owned the general stores where *peones* would be spending parts of their advances (Niklison 62).

Peyret, Ambrosetti, Barrett, Niklison, and Quiroga all wrote that the *peones* spent their money on the fabulously sensual and frivolous such as fun clothes, handkerchiefs and different kinds of silk, perfume, trifles that they generously gifted to their ‘companions of the moment’ the majority of them, to whom they present generously (Ambrosetti 2008: 178; Niklison 62; Barrett

1908).⁴⁸ After these fabulously good times of dance, games and drink, the inevitable day of departure would come in which sometimes police would drag the *peones* out of brothels and bars and down to the port to be loaded as human cargo on the steamboats (Ambrosetti 178).

Ambrosetti's account of what happened in Posadas came with his condemnation of the bosses who only vied against one another to pay higher advances to *peones* in order to seduce them into the horror of the Alto Paraná *yerbales*. There was no formal control of the labor market, rather it operated with savage competition and speculation. This meant only the worst for *peones* who often got on board for the trip up the river "half naked, without clothes, with a huge debt hanging

⁴⁸ Barrett's incendiary account in 1908 of what happened in Posadas reads in part: "¡Pero, durante algunas horas todavía, la víctima es rica y libre! Mañana el trabajo forzado, la infinita fatiga, la fiebre, el tormento, la desesperación que no acaba sino con la muerte. Hoy la fortuna, los placeres, la libertad. ¡Hoy vivir, vivir por primera y última vez! Y el niño enfermo sobre el cual va a cerrarse la verde inmensidad del bosque, donde será para siempre la más hostigada de las bestias, reparte su tesoro entre las *chinas* que pasan, compra por docenas frascos de perfume que tira sin vaciar, adquiere una tienda entera para dispersar a los cuatro vientos, grita, ríe, baila —¡Ay, frenesí funerario!—, se abraza con rameras tan infelices como él, se embriaga en un supremo afán de olvido, se enloquece. Alcohol asqueroso a diez pesos el litro, hembra roída por la sífilis, he aquí la postrera sonrisa del mundo a los condenados a los *yerbales*. ¡Esa sonrisa, cómo la explotáis, bandidos! El anticipo, pagado con diez, doce, quince años de horror, después de los cuales los sobrevivientes no son más que mendigos decrepitos, ¡qué invención admirable! El anticipo es la gloria de los alcahuetes de la avaricia millonaria. Así se arrean los mártires de los gomales bolivianos y brasileños, de los ingenios del Perú. Así se arrean las muchachas del centro de Europa prostituidas en Buenos Aires. El anticipo, la deuda, es la cadena que arrastra de lupanar en lupanar, como la arrastra el *peón* de un habilitado a otro. ¡El anticipo! Un mozo de Cracupé es contratado por la Matte a razón de ciento cincuenta pesos mensuales. Le brindan el anticipo; lo rechaza. Llevan al desgraciado a ochenta leguas de Concepción, allí le dicen que del salario hay que deducir la comida a no ser que el anticipo se acepte. El mozo verifica que su labor no alcanza a saldar su miserable bodrio y por milagro consigue escapar y regresar a su pueblo. ¡El anticipo! La Industrial alegará que sus *peones* le *deben* sobre el Paraná un millón de pesos. Deducid lo que la empresa ha robado a su gente desde que la encerró, y obtendréis el precio bruto de los esclavos. Un buen esclavo cuesta hoy aproximadamente lo que antes, de trescientos a quinientos pesos. El anticipo se cobró y se disipó. ¡*Lasciate ogni speranza!* Ahora, el arreo. El río: a puntapiés y rebencazos los encajan a bordo. Es el ganado de la Industrial. Centenares de seres humanos en cincuenta metros. ¡Bazofia inmundada, escorbuto, diarrea negra y a trabajar por el camino! Escuálidos adolescentes descargan el buque; suben en cuatro patas las barrancas con ochenta kilos a cuestras. Hay que irse acostumbrando."

over him, without a desire to work and most of all without hope of being able to pay back soon those advances that had been given to him, from the moment he needed something from *allá arriba*, it would cost him three or four times, increasing unceasingly his debt, until one day he desperately abandons his boss owing him a huge amount” (Ambrosetti 178).

The *peones* left Posadas then with absolutely no idea of what kind of working conditions they were going to find in their work settlement, nor even an idea of the nature of the work. They did not even know the quality or quantity of food they would receive considering they were taking nothing of their own with them. It would not be until they got deep into the *yermal* that they would begin to understand that they had effectively been enslaved and that they already owed the bosses more than they could imagine (Niklison 62-63).

The object *el conchabo* was to hire men, and given the historical record as it stands, women and children came accompanied as a free extra supplementary source of labor. Those who wrote of these men mostly depicted them as uniform subjects, buffoons seduced by superficial pleasures in life. One of these pleasures was access to the bodies of women that they would not otherwise have had. But the accounts of women’s lust for perfume, male lust for women together with oblivion of what lie in store ahead, and access to the uncontrolled flow of alcohol lie in odd contrast to what Ambrosetti observed in the forest. The ethnographic process of “appearing” by asking questions and noting absences and omissions reveals that much is absent in the record, in particular the way these women formed part of families that were later transported up the Paraná. The debauchery that Niklison and others relished in depicting lies belies the almost certain fact that women and children lived far from ‘the good life’ of lust and alcohol, and their lives were probably deeply entangled in the complex system of *el conchabo*,

advances, and the men they depended on for their survival due to their own erasure under the hiring laws.

Up the River and the Fugitive Peón

Because the Paraná runs from North to South, transporting workers and supplies up the river to the forested *yerbales* necessitated the power of steam. *Peones* were obliged to pay for their own passage. They were boarded on regularly scheduled boats and stuffed into second - class cabins along with cargo (Niklison 64).⁴⁹ In spite of the calculated extractive industry at play, the boats that carried passengers and cargo had such romantic names as the *Edelira* (a name for girls meaning ‘of noble heritage’) and the *Iberá*, a Guaraní word meaning ‘bright water’ (Niklison 63). *Peones* traveled in the same section for one to five days depending on where they got off along the Paraná. Niklison observed that the storage area was not enough for the massive quantity of cargo, and the boats nearly tipped over often as a consequence. Suddenly women and children reappeared:

You can imagine then the conditions in which the wretched workers travel, standing or leaning precariously on the bow and stern, all crowded together, with men women and children all mixed together in repugnant promiscuity... They are not given a bed by any means nor coats, and I remember on one day on the *Edelira* that there was an uprising of *peones* because they did not give them spoons for the skimpy “rancho” that was their meal (64).

This account of dangerous transport and terrible treatment risked lives in a way characteristic of the whole Upper Paraná region where a greedy extraction and drive for the wealth of some had no limits (Niklison 64).

As the reality of what they were in for began to dawn on the *peones*, there appeared in the treacherous grind up the Paraná a desire for fugue. Not unlike the role of the fugitive slave all

⁴⁹ Niklison documented steamboats from at least four companies including Domingo Barthe, Núñez, Gibaja and Juan B. Mola.

over the Americas, the figure of the fugitive *peón* populates all historical accounts of *los mensú* in the Alto Paraná. On both of its banks of the river, from Tacurú to Posadas there were a great number of *escalonados* (work sites) of timber and *yerba*, some on Argentine territory and others on Paraguayan or Brazilian land. If a *peón* could cross from one territory to another, he would be free (Ambrosetti 178). But historical accounts of fugue presume the fugitive to be mostly a single male worker, erasing the female and child family members of *peones*. If the risks inherent in a single man going over board to freedom seem overwhelming, what might this have looked like for women traveling with their children?

The *conchabadores* had a special force of workers on the steamboats that stood guard over the *peones* throughout the voyage up the river to the work sites. They kept an eye out for escape attempts which Niklison alleged to be frequent. Fugitive *peones* took advantage of the dark night and of familiar ports to carry out their escape plans. When Niklison took a trip on the vessel *España*, he witnessed the fugue of three *peones* who escaped at the port of Encarnación, on the way out of Posadas while two others snuck out at the port of Puerto Segundo on the night of Christmas Eve (Niklison 64).

These historical accounts of fugitive *peónes* replace the drunk buffoon with a suddenly agile figure, wielding a machete and savvy to forest terrain (Niklison 65). *Peones* who went overboard or snuck off at work sites, traveled from one port to another on land, cutting away little *piques* (paths) in the forest with their machetes. To travel by water, they used *guaviroas* or *piraguas* (types of canoes) made of tree trunks that were hollowed out by fire. Niklison was puzzled by how they managed to get their hands on them, because they didn't exist in the ports nor in steamboats. *Peones* also made rafts out of *tacuara* (the bamboo that abounds on the river

banks), but they proved to be dangerously flimsy; there were documented cases of *peones* drowning on that kind of raft (Niklison 65).

Of course, a fugitive *peón* was perceived to be a criminal under the laws for fugitive *peones*, for he had received an advance and had not followed through on his side of the bargain. He then was seen as a swindler who had to be punished, and according to specific accounts that Niklison reviewed, these men were detained and tried as criminals at times. This was true even if he had worked some time at the work sites. Niklison reported that the *peones* themselves were convinced that leaving would make them fugitives and that they would be punished as a legal consequence (Niklison 65).

Book Binding--La libreta del peón

According to the law at the time, *peones* were obliged to carry identity notebooks, which allowed their employers to track them. Upon embarking the boat, the *peones* already carried with them the *libreta* in which their debt was recorded. Although most *peones* were illiterate and many could not add numbers as is often the case still today, the law was used to enslave them and to justify their exploitation. Niklison recorded an example of the work rules that were written in the first page of a *peón's* notebook when hired by a company Alfredo Guerdile and Company of Misiones. The book outlines clearly the elements of the debt peonage system:

1. Every *tarifero* is obliged to deliver 6 sackfuls daily of *yerba* of 11.5 kilos each one, of green leaf, well *sapocada* (roasted), clean, with fine branch *palo fino* (fine twigs) and without forks, and will be paid .30 cents per the 11.5 kilos.
2. The *tarifero* who does not deliver that quantity mentioned will pay the difference until he gets back in line with the regimen, an amount of .15 cents per sackful.
3. It is the obligation of the *tarifero* to make camp and build the *picadas* that lead to his work without any compensation for this.
4. Whatever other service that is made in the camp will be added to his debt.
5. No *tarifero* or other personnel has the right to leave before the end of the harvest.
6. The round trip costs will be paid by the boss, with the condition that the *peón* completes all of his established obligations.

7. A book, will be given to the *tarifero* in which the advance and other purchases will be recorded, and he has the obligation to keep it without losing it, and if he loses it, he has no right to complain, and has the obligation of knowing the account which was in the book.
8. No *tarifero* or other employee can leave the camp without the permission of the *capataz* (field boss) (Niklison 74-75 in Gortari 2003).

Niklison himself reviewed the practices on different occasions in the report and readily believed the account of employers. At the same time, he also pointed to errors in accounting and widely varied prices of goods recorded by shopkeepers (Niklison 1914: 4-5).

Bosses should not have accepted *peones* whose books were not in order, but because of the unstable labor supply and the seasonal nature of the *yerba* harvest, everything was allowed to slip by in the spirit of allowing for the lucrative process of resource extraction from the forest according to Ambrosetti (178). He wrote that many were able to repay their debts, having worked up to the last obligatory day, and not one more, and then returning to Posadas without a single peso, only to be sucked back in when the hiring season began by the brokers who offered the highest advances. For one or two hundred pesos of advance depending upon how acute the labor shortage, *peones* were made to sign *el boleto del conchabo* which made them property of the hiring boss to whom he was literally indebted to from that moment onwards (Ambrosetti 178).⁵⁰ The notebook then both gave them validity in identity, but it also was a legal record that bound them those who exploited and indebted them.

Corrupt judges who were influenced by bosses oversaw contracts, and the contracts' justification of debt peonage was rubber-stamped by judges (Ambrosetti 1894: 45; Barrett 1908).

As Victor Rau describes, *el formulario del conchabo* expressly indebted the *peón* to his

⁵⁰ In the film *Las Aguas Bajan Turbias* as well as Niklison's account of a very public case in Puerto Segundo in which a large group of *peones* from different countries waged complaints with their home embassies about treatment, *peones* had their books taken from them as part of unfair treatment (Niklison 199).

employer via the advance paid to him.⁵¹ The contract was then signed by two parties and two witnesses who appeared as adults before a Justice of the Peace. Both were referred to as Don (Sir) as a gesture of ironic formality. According to Rau, this was a typical form of legalized debt peonage that existed on multiple extractive fronts in Argentina recorded during that late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Rau 2012: 42).⁵² These are the accounts we have about the legal construction of debt peonage, but it would be incorrect to analyze the legal system with the little information that is available. It would be akin to reading written court decisions of today only and concluding that these constitute the parameters and character of the law. The law extends far outside any kind of written document as I discuss in Chapter Five. Nevertheless, what is clear is that this ‘unfree labor’ system that *los mensú* labored under was legally sanctioned and enforced just as they were in other parts of Latin America (Brass 2010, 2003).

In the yerbal

For those *peones* who did not escape and made it to their final destination at one of the work stations along the banks of the Paraná, the worst was yet to come. Whether he actually ever really witnessed work in the forested *yerbales*, Juan Alsina wrote what others said about the *yerba mate* harvest in the Alto Paraná: “You have to understand that when workers go up to

⁵¹ A contract Niklison examined stated three conditions: First that “The *peón* was bound to pay the advances whether they be in money or in kind that he gets from his employer through general work in the *yerbales* or in whatever other work that the employer orders.” Second, “The *peón* is bound to not leave his work until his debt is paid, making him responsibly faithful to his duties that he performs and is to perform.” Third, “The employer is bound to pay the *peón* fifteen cents for every pack of *yerba*, and five cents for pack that is prepared in *barbacuá*, paying him a conventional salary for monthly work and promising not to deprive him of his daily *manutención* that would be as a *miner* (harvester) or *tostador* (roaster) would be owed to the *peón*, and being a monthly worker, according to what the employer and *peón* agree to (Ambrosetti 1894, 45).

⁵² These types of debt peonage systems certainly were practiced on a global scale during this same period and were a common part of industries such as rubber, mining, etc. throughout Latin America.

work in the forest, there is no easy way back and the only way is really through the boss. To check one's self into the forests is to expose the self to a thousand *penurias* (poverties) and even to die of starvation" (Alsina 1905, 331). Alsina's account held enough weight that it was actually quoted word for word in the prologue to the Niklison report. Peyret had painted a similar portrait decades earlier:

The opening of the *picada* is an operation with huge costs, sometimes thousands of *patacones*, that is turning on all the necessary costs to get the job done. The reader should know that there everything has to be brought in for there is absolutely nothing to eat, except wild animals and the birds of the forests. But the *yerbatero* people cannot be a hunting society, like the primitive tribes of Chaco or of the Pampa: they do not have time to be so. To be exact, well, they have to bring things alive from outside, to build barns and *ranchos* etc. (Peyret 1881: 83-84).

Peyret provided an overlooked but vivid account of events on an expedition that traveled deep into the Paraná Forest: On the third day, a *peón* Manuel N. suffered from an *urra* in his back. This is a fly that lays its larva under the skin after which a terrible wound develops. The skin must be gauged open in order to remove all of the irritant; the process is, of course, very painful. Manuel N. was better by the eighth day. On day ten a *yararaca* (poisonous snake) bit a dog, and by the eleventh day the dog disappeared. The dog had many *urras* as well. By day twelve, hunger had set in but they found fruit of *giribá* which staved off hunger. They were left with no other choice but to hunt. By the thirteenth day, the notorious Dutra who had forged the Forest Accord killed a wild pig. On day seventeen, the group found "a real *yermal*, the best and most advantageous" so far. On day eighteen, the *yerbatero* Carlos Bossetti was attacked by a spell of terrible vomiting after eating wild honey. More illness and hunger followed on that same trip (Peyret 1881: 201- 205).

Once work began in a *yermal* such as the one Peyret came upon, a different kind of suffering ensued. Unlike the harvest of today where harvesters are paid the kilogram for cutting

and breaking branches from the *yerba* tree, the workers in the forest harvest had to both strip the trees of leaves as well as roast them over open fires that burned almost constantly deep within the forest. These were tended to by workers called *urús*, and Niklison reported that *guainos* were worked side by side with them as assistants.; *guainos* were often women (109). Apparently these fires were not always controlled well enough and houses occasionally burned down (Niklison 1914).

In terms of the actual harvest of green leaf, the workers had to strip the leaves off the treat elevations of twelve to fifteen meters. But as we know from Ambrosetti's account, their bodies were not protected from the rough and varied surfaces of the trees. This meant they developed wounds, scrapes, and scabs all over their bodies from the tree branches scraping them during the ripping off of the leaves (Ambrosetti 66). In other *yerbales*, the leaves were easier to get to such as in the huge *manchon* (patch) of San Pedro closer to contemporary Brazil where workers could reach the leaves while standing on the forest floor. This is akin to the contemporary harvest where the annual pruning from the harvest keeps the trees from growing tall. In 21st century harvests that I describe in Chapters Two and Three, *tarefer@s* wear pants, long sleeves and gloves in order to protect the kind of bodily damage Ambrosetti describes.

Ambrosetti captured valuable details of what *los mensú* were like as people. He wrote that one had to treat *peones* with a kind of camaraderie: "When it comes to the Alto Paraná, science is worth nothing and the only ones who can get you out of an urgent bind are the *peones*." They were "flexible, obedient people, good tempered, helpful when you know how to treat them, but easily useless if they see that the boss is arrogant or inconsiderate" (171). His advice for managing *peones* on expeditions included gaining "the confidence and cooperation of these poor people, that so much deserve that you take into account how difficult are the jobs and the

multiple dangers that they are constantly exposed to” (171). Going further, he wrote that for difficult jobs, “you should calculate in 2 by 2 and a half kilos daily the maintenance of a *peón*, apart from a little bit of *caña* (grain alcohol) that you should distribute in critical moments when the work is too hard to get their spirits up, most of all when it is very hot and they work wet in the water” (171). He observed that the climate, both in terms of work and ecology was depressing enough that “alcohol drunk in small doses is a healthy stimulant that the *peón* is immensely grateful for” (Ambrosetti 171). Again, the *peón* described here is the solitary man, and there is much left to the imagination in terms of how women were impacted by this drinking and whether or not they joined in as well. Certainly the problem of alcoholism plagues *tarefer@* communities today, and women and children often bear the brunt of this problem which is most often found among men.

Of course, companies relied on a chain of command in order to make their profits from their harvests. Once in the *yerbal*, *peones* now had contact with the *yerbateros* (*mate* farmers) who would split up the groves, harvesting for another’s profit or for a company, while remaining responsible for all the costs. The *yerbatero* lived on the ranch there and builds the house, the *barbacua* (roaster) and the machine for grinding the *yerba*. The houses were built from *palmapindó* (a kind of grass). These *ranchos* did not touch the earth, were half a meter high and the *yerbateros* who were “more motivated” made an extra floor of dry straw which they covered with a sackcloth so that the *yerba* would be better preserved and protected from the humidity. The process of roasting leaves over an open fire or *barbacua* was done a bit further from the living spaces, again because of the risk of fire, which unfortunately there were many of in the *yerbales*. The work of the *urú* was truly unbearable as is the modern day work of the *foguista* (fire stoker) who tends the fire in the *secaderos* (drying mills) that are scattered throughout

Misiones. Niklison wrote of “the unbearable heat and devouring flames of the fire, passing the branches into the fire, with sweat, and you have to manage the green branches so that they do not burn but so they do not stay too humid as well...this unending passing of the branches into the fire, the crackling fire..” (Niklison 70). In this labor, continuous exposure to this heat is compounded by the fact that the fire must be kept under control so that everything will not burn to the ground.

Home in the Forest

The workplace was home for *los mensú* inside the forest. Niklison pieced together more details of what the whole camp looked like in which people lived in “a really heroic poverty”:

When setting up a camp, you look for a place near a stream. Then you clean it completely of trees and *maleza* (weeds) in a square of 150 meters on every side. Structures are made from wood, and they consist of the *barbacoá*, the pit which is connected to the cylinder of the *molienda* (where the *yerba* is ground), the *comisaría* (*commissary*), the scale, and the corral for the mules. In the camp, there were various workers including the boss, *guainos* (helpers), a *capataz* (overseer), ten *tareferos*, and a cook (Niklison 67- 68).

But the homes of the workers themselves were a different matter:

Into the interior of the *yerbales* and *obrajes* are the hovels of the workers made from *caña* (palm leaves), poor, low and dirty. The (laziness) of the working men mean that the majority of these hovels are almost always without walls. They are built in the lower parts of the land by the side of rivers, streams in unhealthy places without any good air circulation. They don't build them in better sites because of the need to look for water all the time. I have seen houses this way all over, weak and miserable, so much that one cannot tell the difference between those that are lived in and those that are not. Without any exception, they look like houses in ruined, forgotten, abandoned villages. When going into the hovels, which almost never have walls of *tacuapí*, they still feel the same, feel alone and abandoned. Four forked stakes 50 or 60 cm from the forest floor hold up a long half dozen of *cañas* (poles) lined up, forming something like a rustic bench—these are the workers' beds (Niklison 73-74).

Embedded in Niklison's account is blame toward the workers for 'choosing' to live in such conditions. Indeed in his final recommendations, Niklison expressly blames the *peones* themselves for much of their suffering.

If *los mensú* and their families inhabited a green world, they also lived with and depended on fire:

In the dark of the closed night, at three in the morning, you can see from a distance the fires burning around the workers' hovels. There are enclosed circles, points of red, crackling fire. It is three in the morning and life and work begin in the *rancho*. Men and women take turns to be close by the fire and, still sleepy, take from the stimulating *cimarrón* (*mate*) as they patiently and with a lot of skill stir the *reviro* (fried flour) for breakfast... And before the first light of dawn, the *tarefer@s* already leave behind the resplendent light and crackling of the fire, the fires are down and there is a reintegration of the magnificent and gentle note of the serene, commanding harmony of the forest-- the workers go about their work" (Nikilson 68-69).

Cooks worked from 3 am in the morning to prepare food for everyone. The main dishes were the same that many eat today—the fried flour mix called *reviro* and *yopará*. *Reviro* was eaten as breakfast at daybreak they begin to prepare dried beef, flour, fat and salt. *Yopará* consisting of dried beef, mashed corn, beans and sometimes manioc and squash was served midday and a little after sunset: "If the beef and the fat are good, *yopará* can be pretty tasty (Niklison 137-38). Bosses and *capataces* were served special meals on special days, such as *la feijoada* (beans and bacon) (Niklison 73). Niklison perceived that *peones* did not know about fresh bread or wine as many other Argentines did, and crackers were so precious that they were sold at super high prices as a luxury item.

Workers went off to work "accompanied by their women, excellent *guaynos*" as they started their march toward the *manchón*. Once they arrived there, they would build the fire in order to begin to *zapecar* (initial toasting), starting with the *yerba* that was stripped and stacked the day before. The wood was half dry half green, and the flame was kept this way, dry and green, to regulate the height of the flame and to also diminish, if possible, the work of cutting it, because the fire consumed enormous quantities of timber chips (Niklison 69). After finishing the *zapeco*, workers then prepared their gets the *raído* (pack) that typically weighed from 150-200

kilos. They carried these on their backs for 1500 to 2000 meters until they delivered them to the *pilon* (scale) and the site at which they would be fired.

Here Niklison attested to the physical ruin of the bodies of *peones*. In a kind of maneuver still practiced today in many places, workers load their *raídos* on their backs by first getting on their knees in order to position themselves, readying themselves as beasts of burden (Niklison in Gortari 69): “For an observer, you cannot forget how the workers’ bodies seem to be breaking in the incredible crackling sounds as their bodies seem to break under the weight of the bale they have produced (Niklison in Gortari 70).⁵³

For all the work that *peones* did, there could not be enough compensation. By all accounts, *peones* suffered swindles and cons, especially in the form of being sold merchandise for inflated prices once they were stuck in the forest. At the time Niklison made his trip, he reported a general uniformity throughout the enormous region of all the Alto Paraná in terms of work schedules and pay: Tariferos produced an average of 200 arrobas per month valued at \$60 monthly pay. \$18 of this was subtracted for maintenance of a tarifero without a family. \$42 a month was subtracted for clothes, tools, tobacco, etc. This accounting was done in the context of the amortization of the minimum advance of \$225 at the time of hiring. Over eight months of work for that advance, *peones* were left with \$111, or \$13.87.5 per month in 8 months. This meant that 25 to 30% of *peones* finished the harvest with something, while the rest were indebted workers that the business used as labor until they paid off their debts in works such as *rozados* (clearing for farmland) or *picadas* (clearing roads), etc. (Niklison in Gortari 70-71).

⁵³ This practice called *al muque* is still practiced in harvests in Misiones where carts and pulleys are not used to take the *raídos* out of the line and load them into the truck.

Down the River, Back in Posadas

Much less has been written about what happened to the workers and their families when they returned to Posadas. Niklison wrote that returning workers

...were physically deformed, consumed, *lastimados* (wounded), with gazes filled with profound sadness. They were reduced, in the prime of their youth, to ruins, to real social tatters. At this point in his life, the *tarefer@s* has no other option if he does not want to turn to begging or death, to return to the hiring centers to be a shopkeeper, *bolichero*, or to sign up as a cook for the *cuadrillas* where he returns to the origin of his injury” (Niklison in Gortari 70).

Importantly at this point, historical accounts erase women and children entirely: What of their return and the children who had passed moments of critical development in the forest? What happened to their bodies? If their male companions were reduced to begging, what must it have been like for them? Most importantly, in the work of defetishizing *yerba mate*, for those who survived, how has the mark of this suffering been passed on over generations, given that many *tarefer@s* in the contemporary harvest come from a long line of harvesters?

Part III Cascading Shadows to Light

As I reviewed the Niklison Report and tried to piece together what was known about the period of *los mensú*, I had more questions about his report and other historical accounts. Local historians did not cast a critical eye on documents but used them as paper proofs of what had really occurred in the forested *yerbales*. But I saw that Niklison himself was part of a political project and had been commissioned to investigate during a particular political time. It was significant to me that he carried out his work during the *interzafra*, an issue not mentioned to me by these local historians. I turned to Peyret and Ambrosetti for more spontaneous observations of the actual labor of the *yerba* harvest. Moreover, Niklison recommended solving the eternal labor shortage in the area along with the exploitative debt *peónage* system by providing land titles to

farmers in given areas in order that they be occupied (Niklison 1914: 6). Peyret only decades earlier had made the same recommendation, which would pave the way to colonization. It is no coincidence than that the talk for decades of colonizing the area in order to tame the savage exploitation at play crystallized into a plan. By the 1920s, European settlements in Misiones were in full swing, and European immigrants were officially given titles to land in Misiones.

This was the beginning of a colonizing process that would change the area dramatically. This fell in with certain ironies in Argentine history: The same report which so firmly documented the history of exploitation of workers in the Alto Paraná was that which recommended a creation of a national register of workers as well as settlement of farmers in the province. This would lead eventually to the creation of cultural, physical, and landed differences which exist to this day. Indeed the solution to solving the Alto Parana crisis involved creating a system of private property for white farmers mostly and leaving those dispossessed over the century, the descendants of *los mensú* without land. They would then be at the mercy of another system of bondage in order to provide for themselves and their families.

Furthermore, in Niklison's conclusion, he blamed the *peón* in part for his condition, alleging that workers shunned opportunities for better jobs like joining the police force so that they could return to work as a *peónes* in the forest (Niklison 1914: 232). There were no easy solutions to the complex problem of the *yerbales*, he wrote, and he discouraged the application of any "useless" laws that meant to bring uniform standards to the whole industry (Niklison 2014: 232-33). He did denounce, however, which he saw as contributing to the advances, tricks and dishonest methods that destroyed workers (232).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Niklison himself did not go to the forested *yerbales* but rather was confined mostly to the sites where *yerba* was already being domesticated, and he seems to have composed his accounts from

This lack of closer scrutiny by the handful of local historians of *yerba mate* gloss over labor relations, following the same precedent set by others in writing on *los mensú*. As the plight of both *los mensú* and *los tarefer@s* has been invoked for political purposes, they are often depicted as a homogenous group mired in suffering. Yet in every *tarefa* I experienced, there were different views in which some people detested their work and others loved it. Local historians take as fact accounts by Barrett writing as a journalist and the Niklison Report, without interrogating these sources: How did rumor, prejudice and bias influence their writing about *los mensú*? Consciously and unconsciously inflected or influenced by traditional Marxist views, social subjects were placed in rigid roles in which they played the exploited and the exploiter. The only contemporary work on the *yerba mate* harvest written by sociologist Victor Rau (2012) makes no critique of these sources. As the fight for local history ensued in Montecarlo, the main site of organized *tarefer@* resistance, it seemed to be that the way the history of *los mensú* was presented mattered. When the nuances of everyday interaction were washed out and *tarefer@s* were viewed from the outside as one exploited mass, so too were they expected to engage in resistance in certain ways even as expectant schemes of work are imposed on them. A primary example of this is found in Niklison's conclusions that *tarefer@s* opt out of opportunities when they are presented with them. The same charge circulates today, and because neither activists nor scholars conduct ethnographic work in the *yerbales*, it is incomprehensible for them that *tarefer@s* sometimes prefer the *yerbal* to other forms of employment.

interviews with workers, although he does not make this explicit. In the National University of Misiones, there is no ethnography of either producers or harvesters of *yerba mate* while there are numerous works on *colonos*. While I agonized over not being able to get to the *yerbales* more often, Rubén Ortiz was fascinated by my conducting fieldwork in the *yerbales*, once saying that I had “patented” this practice, as though it were an unheard of trade.

In dismantling the commodity fetishism of *yerba mate*, I ask: What is the choreography of alienation that effectively disappears a producer, a grower, a harvester of this green tea? If *peones* appear for a moment by way of mention or they are, what can we learn in these instances about the practicing of disappearing? As an ethnographer of written records, what do I make of those who are absent in the record? Looking at omissions, inaccurate representations and their repeated circulation in local discourse sheds light on how the practice of disappearance worked in the past and continues to work today. But the dismantling of commodity fetishism does not simply mean naming alienation; rather, it means laboring to appear and re-appear the lives of those who work or worked to produce *yerba mate*.

On the one hand, these historical accounts must be problematized for the prejudices embedded in them and for what content is both excluded and included. On the other, these remnants affect contemporary discussions and memory making about what the role has been for workers tasked with extracting *yerba* for the consumption of all Argentina. The scant written history of *los mensú* has been circulated in very limited ways. Parts of that history have been broken up into pieces for keeping and pieces for refuse. Somehow the suffering of *los mensú* is visited in very limited ways in some popular culture, but these memories have not sunk into Argentine consciousness about where their *yerba* comes from.

It is in this passing over that the disappearance is rooted, and the continuing passing over gains momentum until the person being disappeared is left further and further behind: She is disappeared entirely, gone from the record. This is a creeping disappearance, as I have noted, akin to the erosion that occurs with wind, rain, and sun, that one day causes rock walls to fracture and a wall to break, and a ruin to take form. Such was the case of the *Casa del Peón* at Quiroga's home. The violent past of *los mensú* and the failure to acknowledge it means that harm done has

aggregated over the generations in the form of historical trauma (Duran 2006). From this perspective, contemporary patterns of dysfunction and social violence are actually inevitable, considering the crushing weight of the traumatic past.

My goal in writing this ethnography of the (dis)appeared peon has been necessarily two-fold: First, it is to bring attention to the lives of those who long suffered to bring *yerba mate* to all of Argentina, using a politics of memory to combat the way alienation has always plagued this beloved friendship drink. But as I have worked to bring the very thin record of their lives to light, I have also been pressed to interrogate that record along with the way it is used to affect everyday history making at the production site of *yerba mate*. My aim is not to quell the interest in *los mensú* and efforts to connect it to what happens today. But I have endeavored to connect the dots between what it is we see, and what it is we look over, step over, again and again. In the way even the bitterest *mate* (*mate amargo*) evokes a sweetness memory, of togetherness, even of solitude, the memory of *el mensú* or *los mensú* evokes a sweet poignancy for those who invoke it. Melody, tone and image are slowed to sadness. It reads as how they suffered, those men, those poor men, and even how they continue to suffer. But there is some odd sweetness in the evocation of the memory of *los mensú*. It is a sweetness that rises when a man looks at the life of another and dwells on his suffering. The sweetness of the suffering is that one suffers as an observer, no more. Both real suffering and a fetishization of suffering can be found together with the historical treatment of *los mensú*. But there is a subterranean side to the trope of suffering. At many a turn, the suffering of women and children was and still is stepped over. But just as with *la casa del peón*, the woman is obliterated.

In writing ethnography of connectedness, I stop and linger to see who has been listened to and what was recorded and not recorded. The trade in history of recounting then is uncloaked as

one of re-counting. What is it that we are counting, and then counting again—*re-counting*? I halt the gaze, and hold them in view. At a minimum, there is the tiny life of a child, a mother tasked with keeping her child alive. There is a mother who is not paid for her work. Her story is rendered so invisible that we do not hear what she says, what she thinks, what she feels. This view from above glances over her and quickly turns to her male counterpart, even if only for a moment. In that ethnographic moment, she becomes subaltern beneath a subaltern foot. The child is even less.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that a psychological view of the trauma and hardship experienced by the multiple generations of families that were caught in this terribly cruel system helps understand social dynamics in harvester families today. Nevertheless, *tarefer@s* are expected to act like obedient subjects by white farmers today who view contemporary labor conflicts through an ahistorical lens. I am constantly made aware of how the legacy of *los mensú* still colors everyday life in Argentina's *yerba mate* country. For example, a 2008 documentary *Desde la Tierra* about the struggle to create a fair trade *yerba mate* called *Titrayju (Tierra Trabajo Justicia)* uses coverage from *Los Aguas Bajan Turbias*, the film based on Alfredo Varela's novel about *los mensú*, to tell the story. The documentary then skips over the story of *tarefer@s* in the 20th century and turns to the agrarian rights struggles of white *colonos*. As a viewer, one is led to believe that Varela's film is real.

Finally, the historiography of *los mensú* haunts the *yerbales* of today in more ways than one. One day in a late summer conversation in 2013, I sat reminiscing with Celia and Cándido, the veteran *tarefer@* couple with whom I had visited many times before. For some reason that day, Celia was remembering her early years in *la tarefa* when she and Cándido had recently fallen in love. "Those were such good times," she mused. "I remember how would listen to *Los*

mensú.” *Los mensú*, I asked? “Yes, she said, back then there was a *radionovela* called *Los mensú* about which we were all crazy. On our lunch break, we would all huddle around the radio to see what was going to happen next. Were they going to get away? What was going to happen with *la historia de amor* (the love story) between the young man and woman so terrorized by the horrible bosses in the Alto Paraná?

And so it was... Miguel Wilson’s *radionovela* “*El mensú*” was all the rage in 1975 when its forty-six chapters were broadcast on Radio El Dorado, LT18.⁵⁵ Celia, who loved her work in the *yerbal*, would gather round with the rest of the *cuadrilla* (crew) in the midday shade to listen to a story of how it must have been, back then, when *yerba* was cut deep in the forest.



Figure 3: Entering the town of Los Helechos (Photo by Author 2009).

⁵⁵(<http://www.informatedigital.com.ar/ampliar3.php?id=30084&PHPSESSID=c1b6e4704423d8727bf44dafd6572311> (Accessed January 2013)).

Chapter Two

La Tarefa

Defetishization: The Labor of *Tarefer@s* Exerts Itself

Many people in Misiones believe that the harvest of *yerba mate*, *la tarefa*, is a simple job: It is a job that anyone can do, a job for those ranked lowest in society, a job for those who do not have the skills to do anything else. One important figure in *yerba mate* politics in the province told me that I need only spend a day or two in the *yerbal* and that would be sufficient to know what it is that *tarefer@s* do. Indeed what *tarefer@s* do in the *yerbal* has been of scant interest to most people. For owners of *yerbales* and labor contractors, their interest has extended to the wellbeing of the *yerbal* itself and how *tarefer@s* treat the plants, so that they will produce as much green leaf as possible. The few defenders of *tarefer@* rights who are themselves not *tarefer@s*, have been concerned with what they believe *happens* to *tarefer@s* in the *yerbal* in terms of labor treatment. Hence, what happens in the *yerbal* has been reduced to either the race and class-based disdain for *tarefer@s* or a constricted view of suffering and exploitation. This former is precisely what permits the moment of bitter exhaustion that Celia voiced in the moment she said—“more than anything, el *tarefer@* has been treated like an animal.”

In this chapter, I return to a close reading of Michael Taussig’s concept of defetishization “that labor exerts itself—to control its material as much as its poetic products and not to be controlled by them” (Taussig 1980: 232). To get to this process, I return to the actual

phenomenological aspect of *la tarefa* itself by treating it as a “taskscape” to the extent that the array of work activities of the job itself parallels those that make up a landscape, building into a sense of dwelling (Ingold 2000). This means that up close in the *yerbal*, the term *tarefer@s* falls apart, replaced by a multiplicity of individuals whose dwelling is both the same and quite different from one another. On the one hand, they are all at work on a similar task; on the other, *each life at work* dwells differently in this taskscape.

Indeed part of the reason that agricultural labor is so under valued across the globe has to do with the fact that people believe that it requires no skill. Yet in truth it requires all kinds of skill, and the endurance required to get through a day picking strawberries, for example, requires skill in the sense that not every person can get through one working day after another. And to do so, requires skill (Holmes 2013). In writing ethnography of connectedness, I am interested in fundamentally understanding the *work* of *tarefer@s* in order to both understand what their world is like and to *re-value* their labor. As long as what *tarefer@s* do is viewed as a job we need know nothing about, their exploitation and historical erasure is made possible, culminating in a concentrated bitterness. I am interested in understanding commonality in the experience of *la tarefa* in order to gain view of the fundamental *value* of this labor. Using this materialist approach and my time spent in *yerbales* with *tarefer@s* means that a myriad of details emerged about the work of *la tarefa* that helped me understand what shaped the dwelling of those who carried it out, both in and outside the *yerbal*. Allowing this taskscape to come into view together with seeing the activities through a multiplicity of hands on the green leaf helps move us closer to the goal of labor exerting itself (Taussig 1980).

Importantly each *yerbal* is a site of the local, and although a return to this site is critical to dismantling commodity fetishism, I did not find in the *yerbales* the “embedded stories” that

perhaps one would hope to find (Harcourt and Escobar 2005; 6, 250). Rather, in the unrecorded sky metaphor that I draw on, I found a flow of moments of culture that unfolded in the *yerbales*. These fall beyond the reach of the ghostly fingers of a structuralist interpretation that they may be contained, fixed, even embedded. Ironically what nurtures the spirit of many *tarefer@s* I met, indeed what makes them irritate the *colonos* so much, is precisely their “imaginative creations” that float around, change on the fly, flit about, and land only to zig zag off, and then to vanish (Taussig 1980: 232). Seeing *la tarefa* up close, one after another, shows that many *tarefer@s* actually participate in a kind of *rifting* in which they appear and reappear themselves in largely ungraspable ways. This rifting is Mintz’s “spirit force” that thrives beyond the reach of most *colonos* who do not even attend their own harvest as well as both union organizers and academic scholars that have glossed over the actual work that *tarefer@s* do. In spite of the suffering and injustice over hundreds of years that *tarefer@s* have endured, the distance that those who hold power over them like to maintain means that they are not able to control *tarefer@s* entirely. And this makes the process of ethnographic defetishization a dangerously dialectical one, for appearing *tarefer@s* potentially interrupts this emancipatory space of dwelling.

Arising (Guaraypo, Misiones July 2012)⁵⁶

Celia awoke to the alarm clock at three in the morning, her wrist pressed by the watch she

⁵⁶ This is a composite sketch of the many moments I spent with Celia and her family both at her home and in *yerbales*. I have embedded in it many of the things I learned from her about her routines over the years. Many times I talked with Celia about her routines, what they were and what they used to be. And on occasion, I slept in her home in order to be able to get up and move out early with her to the *yerbal*. She described her day as both representative and singular for, like any person who speaks outside of alienation, she felt proud of certain traditions she had and approaches to life that she felt were better than others. Her ways of doing things were not the ways of *tarefer@s*, and yet they were *tarefer@* ways in some sense. In other words, every *tarefer@* I met identified as a *tarefer@*, but each also wanted to be known as her or him self and asked implicitly or explicitly that I identify their singular personhood.

never removed. The dew on the leaves of the tree that encircled her country home was full still, in its prime, the moon now settling back. Her roosters had yet to crow. Still others slept in the house. The light of the moon came through the window, illuminating the sleeping forms of her lifetime companion, Cándido, and her grandson Mariano. The light revealed Celia's strong profile, and at the center part of her chest, just above her bosom, a dark splash that interrupted the surrounding skin. It was the mark of the sun, which had burned into her over the many days, turned to decades that she had labored in the *yermal*. Her jaw line too was permanently engraved with the same sun-shadow. Her eyes adjusted. She arose and walked to the adjacent bathroom where she washed her face and wet down her hair, trimmed short by her sister-in-law. Then she headed down the hall and into the kitchen where she filled the kettle with water and put it on the stove. With this, the day began.

Celia prepared *mate dulce* for her son Claudio and *amargo* for herself and Cándido. She poured the leftover *reviro* into a large plastic container and began to fry up the meat for today's lunch in the *yermal*. Cándido and Claudio were up now too. But Claudios's five-year old son Mariano lay still in slumber in the bedroom. His chest too was darkened, but for a different reason. The large, raised scar came from scalding water that had turned on him when he was only two years old and reached up to the table for the cup. His mother should have been more careful, Celia believed. But that was what any grandmother might believe who has the fierce love that Celia had for little Mariano.

The trio sat in the living room and drank *mate*, talking about the day ahead. They did not have to travel so far as they would be working in a *yermal* off Route 15 that passed near the house. With the last *mate* served, Claudio went outside and prepared the truck and made sure all the *ponchadas* for gathering green leaf were loaded. He filled a five-gallon blue and white

thermos, marked with red dirt fingerprints around the water -spout from the previous days' draws. Cándido prepared the other truck that would carry the crew of *tarefer@s*. All the materials for the day were loaded in just a few minutes with back and forth trips from house to truck:

las ponchadas
el pilón
serruchos
tijeras
guantes
el termo con agua
yerba
el tereré
comida
el cuaderno

The materials were few but critical—cloth for packing the green leaf, a scale for weighing, hand saws, clippers, gloves to protect hands, a thermos for water, *yerba mate*, a small aluminum cup for serving *tereré*, lunch, and a notebook for recording the weight of harvested green leaf.

Celia called out: *¡ya salimos!* Everyone got in their trucks. The radios already filled the dark dawn air with Paraguayan harp music. Claudio took the cargo truck and Cándido drove the truck that carried the crew. Celia rode as a passenger inside. Some workers met up at Celia's house while others waited at different points around the center of Guaraypo, this very small community in Montecarlo County. With the last worker picked up around the neighborhoods, the crew of the day was around twenty.

Cándido drove through the deep, dark red dirt roads, the tires of the truck running smooth over the two lines pressed from light traffic but heavy cargos. These last several days had been hot dry ones, so the lines in the road shone smooth in the headlights making the trip a glide. He

slowed the truck and turned onto a road that led into the section where the *yerbal* began. An owl swooped down and flew across the road several meters ahead. Out of the headlight glare, it disappeared into a pine grove on the other side of the road. The truck ground up a slope, leaning to the side. These roads in the *yerbal* were full of pits and hollows, devoured by erosion from the heavy rains that fell in this area.

Celia gestured out over to the right. They had gotten to the place where they had left off the day before. Cándido killed the truck engine. One by one the crew hopped off the back of the truck, carrying with them backpacks and thermoses packed with water and food. Each had their own equipment for the day as well as food and water to sustain them through the day. Materials for *tereré* were as important as the tools for harvest. Claudio arrived with the cargo truck and threw out the *ponchadas* used to fill green leaf on the ground. These pieces of nylon were numbered in black marker and stained with red dirt. Claudio called out numbers, and everyone grabbed several with the same number. Then each *tarefer@* walked down the internal roads, choosing a line of *yerba* to take up. There were no line assignments with this crew but there could have been. By the time the sun was up, everyone was already fast at work, moving from tree to tree harvesting green leaf.

Celia took her own line with her son Claudio. She was the *capataz* of this harvest, the crew leader, and hers was a singular one for two reasons: First, she was one of only a handful of women worked as the field boss in the *yerba* harvest. Second, although she now had her own *cuadrilla* (field crew), she still worked just as any other *tarefer@*, filling her own *raídos*. Other *capataces* would spend the day with greater leisure, lingering near the truck, talking with the truck driver and listening to music. They supervised the way the *yerba* was cut but generally did not harvest their own. Celia's crew had always been made up of a number of her relatives

including her son, her sisters Mari and Virginia, her brother-in-law Cornelio, and a couple of nephews including Virginia's son, Eugenio. Later on in the day other family members often joined them in the *yermal* when it was close by the house.

At this moment, the same scene was occurring all across the province of Misiones. It was July, prime time of the *arefa*. The day would be a ten to fifteen hour one, even longer for *capataces* and truck drivers who had to make sure the green leaf got to the *secadero*. By October, the harvest would come to a halt and the workday would change dramatically for *tarefer@s* like Celia and her *cuadrilla*. They would enter into a time of *vacas flacas* (skinny cows), a precarious time in which there usually was no steady work until the harvest began again the following March. Some would be lucky to have work throughout the summer but almost surely at a lower wage. Celia represented another anomaly in that she and Cándido had slowly accumulated land over the years to become small farmers themselves. Their role as producers of manioc, melon, and timber meant that other income flowed into the household during the time of *interzafra*. Although some accused them of having earned their money in darker ways, those who had known them all of their lives reported that it was the fierce work ethic that each of them had, no tendency toward abuse of substances, a preference for a simple life, and a passion for life in the countryside that made this prosperity possible. It was a unique combination that I did not see again throughout Misiones.

I met Celia just ten days after we arrived in the small town of Montecarlo in September of 2011 for a year of fieldwork. It was springtime, and the *yerba* harvest had already ended. In the fieldwork of previous years, I had traveled to distinct areas of the province, learning more about *yerba* in my visits with smallholder farmers as well as *tarefer@s* who lived on the edges of small towns or occupied land in the country. No matter where I went, *tarefer@s* were spoken of

in a negative way. Depending on who I talked to, they were stereotyped as dishonest, lazy, delinquent, dirty, or just unable to come up with a better life for themselves. They were held responsible for just about every negative occurrence, from crimes to labor lawsuits that left *colonos*, farmers of European descent, without farms.

By the time I decided to settle my family in Montecarlo for a year, I understood the *yerba* harvest as an itinerant informal system in which entire families were engaged. Having worked in *la tarefa* in different parts of the province, I understood it as a mostly male-dominated trade where both contractors and *capataces* (field bosses) almost always were men. But my understanding changed just a few days after we got to Montecarlo. A retired teacher, Margot Ebert, graciously helped us find a house in the *colonia*, the countryside of Misiones. Margot came from a German family who had settled in Montecarlo in the 1920s, and her father had been one of the founders of the agricultural cooperative. She and her husband Juan owned a general store in Montecarlo, which had belonged to her father.

Early on Margot told me something that peaked my interest: There was a whole crew of women working out in a town called Guaraypo. They were big women, hardworking women, according to Margot. Juan agreed that the group that lived out there in the country was pretty special. So once we settled into our house in Guatambú, we drove out further one rainy Sunday afternoon in search of the *tareferas* of Guaraypo. After getting lost in the labyrinth of red dirt roads, a kind elderly couple dressed in their Sunday wear, guided us to the correct house in their car, and we drove up to a gated house on a deeply pitted red dirt road.

We were just in time for lunch it turned out, as a sizable group of people was gathered in the living room eating and talking. And that was how we first met Celia. She welcomed us right into the group, seating us on her covered patio with large steamed plates of *yopará*, a blend of

black beans, *reviro* and meat. We had arrived on the perfect day, she told us for it was October 1, *el día para espantar la pobreza*, the day of scaring off poverty and *yopará* was traditionally served in the Paraguayan countryside on this day. October 1st is also the day that historically the *yerba* harvest comes to an end meaning that the next months were times of *vacas flacas* (skinny cows) when families would have to make due with much less income.

This was the beginning of a friendship that continues to this day. We stayed for several hours that afternoon talking with Celia. Slowly but surely, she would become a singular interlocutor when it came to sharing philosophies of everyday living from the viewpoint of a lifetime *tarefera*. And she would become a friend of our family, helping us in times of need. I make Celia a key protagonist in this dissertation because she was special in another way: She loved, *absolutely loved* what she did. Her life passion was *yerba*. As one of the fifteen children of a Paraguayan couple, she first began to work in the *yerbal* when she was eight. When she was twelve, her father was killed one Sunday when the tractor he was driving rolled. Left on her own to raise her children, Celia's mother became ill. She and her brothers and sisters took to the *tarefa*, working for the several months so that the family could eat. But when Celia's mother finally received her widow's pension, Celia continued on in the *yerbal*. Over time, Celia would tell me again and again: "I cannot describe what it is I feel. There is no place in the world I would rather be than in the *yerbal*. I do not know what I would do if I had to leave it. *Hay pura risa en el yerbal*" (There is pure laughter in the *yerbal*).

Celia had distinct musical laughter, and she was known throughout Montecarlo County as an incredibly hard worker and the strongest woman around. Perhaps most of all, she was known for her love of *la tarefa*: She literally shed tears, became depressed, when it poured rain for days, making it impossible to go out to the *yerbales*. Passion for the *yerba* harvest was not discussed

often among those who spoke about *tarefer@s*, for most descriptions of *la tarefa* were negative ones. Celia's narrative then turned traditional ones upside down as did others I sometimes encountered. For her and so many others I met, words failed to effectively describe the imaginative force of what actually happened in the *yermal*. It was only being there over time, that the secret to dwelling in the *yermal* emerged. For me, this created a bond with *tarefer@s* that would fuel my defense of them in circles where they were disparaged. So too would it invoke a long-term political commitment to working with those who worked to organize against their exploitation.

La tarefa: A Working Agriculture

On the morning I described, Celia left her crew of *tarefer@s* alone for the most part and worked on filling her own *raído*. Claudio cut the branches off the trees, selecting out certain ones and leaving others. Celia took to breaking them up, tossing the bigger branches to the side and filling the *ponchada* with green leaf and the slimmer branches. As the sun continued to rise, she and Claudio filled several *raídos* until they called Celia's sisters over to take a break to drink *tereré*. They talked and laughed, *hablando pavadas*, talking silly things, as Celia so often said.

But a view of the *tarefa* as a working agriculture along with Ingoldian phenomenology (2000) reveals that even the summary of what a *tarefer@* does must be revised with time, and that revision sheds light on the lives of working selves. In fact, the soil Celia treaded over was not always so exposed to the sun, nor was the backs of her predecessors. Rather, going back at least five or six generations, they would have been at work deep within the forest, not in a line of *yerba* but in a patch, a *mancha* or *manchon*, where there was no horizon and the crackling of the breaking of the branches was accompanied by that of fire. Now live trees were harvested but kept alive. Fires were built to heat food, water, and bodies.

From afar, a contemporary *yerbal* looks like a lined grove, a uniform plot of green leaf soothing to the eye because of its apparent sameness. Up close, however, each and every tree is exquisitely different. As a tree, the *yerba* plant is an evergreen, free of needles or thorns. Even evergreens have a spring, as does *yerba* which makes tiny white flowers in spring and bears a deep purple fruit that looks like tiny grapes huddled in tight clusters close to its mother stem. Once the eye learns to discern the difference between *yerbales*, each *yerbal* also becomes distinct, for the better and for the worse in terms of the level of care for the trees. Driving through the province, I noted the difference between the short gnarly trees in the south and the deep green, fully skirted trees in Andresito, in the northeast part of the province where the *yerbales* are much newer. Those who most *feel* these differences are not generally the landowners to whom the *yerbales* belong, but rather the *tarefer@s* who spend long hours with the trees for it is their hands which most touch each tree. At times in the twentieth century, small holders harvested their own *yerba*, but this is much less common today, even though it does occur.⁵⁷ More commonly, landowners who do take part in the *yerba* harvest today will do so most often with a hired crew and spend little time in the *yerbal*. Larger tracts of *yerba* require many hands to realize the harvest.

In the simplest of terms, the harvest of *yerba* consists of cutting braches off of trees and breaking them up for transport. But it is much more than that: The job of the *tarefer@* is to shape the tree for the future—assuring good growth for the tree and as much *kilaje* as possible, which is the weighed quantity of green leaf. The tools used to intervene in this arboreal world have changed over time. Just a couple of decades ago, *tarefer@s* brought with them hatchets and

⁵⁷ In my interviews with the group The Founders of Montecarlo, most *colonos* in Alto Paraná historically had their *peones* which helped with the *tarefa*.

machetes for cutting *yerba*. Ladders were even used. But *yerba* plantation and technology for the harvest have evolved so that the work has gotten a bit easier. Pushes for improved rights have contributed as well. Today, *tarefer@s* are usually armed with small saws, clippers, and gloves that protect their hands. Celia and Cándido remember the harvest when they still had machetes and used a special type of cloth to craft makeshift gloves to protect their hands.

When Claudio stripped off fresh branches and leaves and cuts certain thicker ones, he simultaneously extracted while leaving certain key branches in what is called *el corte*. The tree had to be tended to carefully so that in the next spring and summer, it would yield all the more green leaf. But for that yield to occur, the new growth had to be stripped from it so that the tree did not grow too high. It was a balance. He could not end the life of the tree even as he took new life from it. This limited extraction of the plantation *yerba* would allow the tree to live as long as seventy or eighty years if it was cared for well.



Figure 4: Celia Cuba at work in the *quebranza* (Photo by Author, July 2012).

Because the work of the *tarefa* had long been a family affair on which the entire family's welfare depends, *tarefer@s* often worked in pairs. This transformed the task: Claudio cut the tree throwing the branches into the middle of the row between tree lines, and Celia broke those branches up, stripping off the green leaf and breaking up the smaller branches. Each handful was thrown into the *ponchada*. Limbs that were too large were thrown to the side, and those limbs then decomposed with time. This decay then nourished the trees of origin as it enriched the soil of the *yermal*.

The work of *quebranza* had traditionally been done by women, but Celia and other women I knew worked in all parts of the harvest. *Corte* and *quebranza* are made for teamwork, and men and women who are couples often worked this way. Having a partner lightened the load and increased the earnings for a single household. Historically, children had been an important part of the *tarefa* but they were so less and less as the Argentine government had instituted state welfare plans that created incentives for parents to keep their children in school. More recently, having children in the *yermal* has been made a crime. However, adolescents abounded in contemporary *tarefas* that I observed. In fact, I never attended a *tarefa* in which there was not at least one teenager at work in the *yermal*. Indeed most young *tarefer@s* have dropped out of school for one reason or another and make their living in the *yermal*.

Working as a duo was the beginning of a group culture. For *tarefer@s* who worked as individuals or always alone, it is a different work. When I worked in the *tarefa*, I did not prepare my own *raído*. Rather, I always fell in line with a *tarefer@* and went directly to the *quebranza* which is what I knew how to do, for I could never figure out *el corte* and did not want to get *tarefer@s* in trouble by injuring the trees. Although I did this by instinct, it helped the *tarefer@s* I was talking to gather more green leaf quickly. I never knew how much green leaf I could

harvest myself, although I was asked this on a number of occasions. It did not occur to me to work on my own. Fortunately, it seemed *tarefer@s* were glad to have help as they talked about their work, and I felt like I could give back a bit as they shared stories with me about their lives.

When *tarefer@s* work quickly, the green leaf flies. Fast-moving hands break up green leaf from a motion that originates in a flexing the wrists. It is this wrist-to-hand coordination that makes the difference in *kilaje* at the end of the day. She who watches can be a bit dizzied. It is hard, for example, to take a photo of *quebranza*, because a *tarefer@s*'s hands come out with a green blur around them. The true secret to the *tarefa* then is endurance, for they have to push on and on even when the body wants to give up, or else there will be no food (Holmes 2013).

Some *tarefer@s* taught me how I should work and others let me work without comment. One morning I was working with Celia's sister Mari when she said to me that it looked as though I was picking flowers. "I was the same way when I was a girl," she told me. "One day my father grabbed me and said, 'girl it looks like you are picking flowers, picking off the leaves one by one. You have to strip the whole thing'." Mari helped me realize that I was actually working with the opposite hand and this was slowing me down. I had felt at the moment that I was working quickly, but Mari's expert eye knew otherwise.

Watching *tarefer@s* at work, the first question that came to and remained in my mind was: How do they know which limbs to cut off the tree and which leaves to strip? *Tarefer@s* had two choices--think long term and take the tree's welfare into consideration or think short-term and do what you can to gather green leaf weight for the day, even if it costs the tree future growth. Every kilogram more was more money in the hand, after all, so the tendency was to put as much of the branch and leaf in the *ponchada* as possible for it was the wood, not the leaf, that had the greatest weight. When receiving *yerba*, the *secaderos* would penalize contractors for

having too much weed cover in the green leaf or too thick of *palos*, or sticks. Too much branch produced a lower valued product.⁵⁸ *Tarefer@s* often joked about putting more *palo* into the *ponchadas*, and called those who slipped in more *paleros*. But a *tarefer@* could be let go if she did not cut as she was told to.

Capataces were tasked with overseeing the quality of the *yerba* that goes into the *ponchada*. Perhaps their most fundamental job was to make sure the *tarefer@s* protected the plant as it was cut. *Capataces* were instructed on how to cut from landowners, and they were to relay these instructions to their *cuadrilla*.⁵⁹ There were different kinds of cut including the *melena*, which involved mostly a plucking off of new leaves during the summer time. A *capataz* generally was an experienced *tarefer@* who understood all aspects of the *tarefa*. She oversaw the *corte*. If she had a good crew, she knew that the trees were in good hands, that they would not be cut back so badly that they could not come back easily in the spring. *Yerba* that was cut poorly was more vulnerable to frost and sun damage; this damage stunted the new leaf growth. The balancing between taking from and caring for the tree was the fundamental labor of the *tarefer@*: Like any other labor, depending on each worker and their present condition, the work was done with varying degrees of care.

⁵⁸ Most Argentines preferred their *yerba mate* to be a fine balance of leaf and twig, while Brazilians drink *yerba* that is ground into a uniform powder.

⁵⁹ For the most part, the *capataces* in the harvests I observed did not intervene with the *tarefer@s*. In the only film ever made about the *yerbales* of the forests in Alto Paraná, the 1949 film *Las Aguas Bajan Turbias*, the overseers of the day called *capangas* were depicted as slavedrivers. But the modern day *capataces* who I observed do not focus most of their time compelling their crew to work. Rather they only supervise the cutting of the *yerba* and some barely intervene at all.

Atando el raído

The *tarefa* can be a solitary job in which each works for their own earning and interacts at a minimum level with both other *tarefer@s* and the *capataz*. In any given *tarefa*, there are those who are more garrulous than others, and those who work quietly. But there is a moment in the *tarefa* when each *tarefer@* needs another. This is when the *raído*, now full, must be tied to contain the green leaf piled high within it. The four corners are pulled together and tied in knots by two *tarefer@s* to form a tight package which makes the *ponchada* a *raído*. It is impossible to do this alone, for two sets of hands are needed. This work involves the entire body and requires a balance of strength and maneuvering of body weight in order for the green leaf to be successfully contained within. The duo must work both with and toward one another in order for the task to be accomplished. They take two of each of the four corners of the *raído* and push with all their weight toward the other to press the green leaf as far down as possible into the *ponchada*. The objective is to bring the four corners in toward one another. Then with hands and arms crossed in a diagonal fashion, one holds down the *raído* with all their strength as the other ties two of the opposite corners to the other, top to bottom. When the second two corners are tied, less control of the *raído* is needed as the green leaf has been contained for the most part.

Once the *raído* is tied, *tarefer@s* pick up any substantial amount of green leaf that has escaped from the *raído* and stuff it into the open splits that expose the green leaf within. Then each moves on to the next moment of gathering green leaf. By the time the four corners are tied, the *raído* is bursting tight with green leaf and ready for carrying out to the head of the line where it will then be weighed and readied for loading into the truck which will carry it to the *secadero*, or drying mill. Tying the *raído* is ceremonial in that it is a moment of closure. The satisfaction contained in the heavy *raído* is equivalent to a certain amount of money in the hand and a

moment when the security and profit of the *tarefer@* is literally wrapped up in the packaged green leaf.



Figure 5 *Atando el raído* Top left, Eugenio and Cornelio, Celia’s nephew and brother-in-law; top right, Mari and Cornelio, wife and husband; and bottom, Celia and Cándido, wife and husband (Photos by Author May-July 2012).

These moments of working *together* in labor constitute a break in the solitary rhythm of *corte* and *quebranza* (Sennett 2012). Moments in the *yerbal* of coming together to achieve a task,

dependence on the other in order to seal one another's earning or welfare, and cooperation have been completely overlooked in all types of discussions about the lives of *tarefer@s*. They represent the hidden dimensions of dwelling in this everyday taskscape of working agriculture that shape the day, a life, and community culture over time (Sennett 2012).

Sacando el raído

At the heart of the work of the *tarefa* is how to get green leaf from its tree of origin to different sites along the way. The first critical pass here is to move the *raído* to the head of the line where it can be weighed. Given the great weight of the packaged green leaf, it is not easy to move the parcels. This transport is represented graphically in the film *Las Aguas Bajan Turbios* for the way in which human beings are transformed into beasts of burden, forced to carry the *raídos* strapped to their heads for long distances. For generations, *la tarefa* as it was carried out on the plantations of Misiones consisted of *tarefer@s* carrying their own *raído* to the head of the line in a process referred to as *al muque*. This task is one that *tarefer@s* speak of with both pride and with lamentation about its difficulty, as historically, it has been a site of significant injury. This is the ultimate moment of pride, and the *tarefer@* is symbolized in a statue in a plaza in the central sierra city of Oberá plaza with the *raído* on his back. Many *tarefer@s* like to demonstrate this moment because it demonstrates the strength and power required of the entire body; it is an athletic moment. Rogelio, of Campo Ramón, was the first one who showed me how this was done. Working in a neighbor landowner's field who had permitted he and another *tarefer@* neighbor to glean what was left over of a poorly done harvest, Rogelio showed me how *tarefer@s* get down on their knees, hook their fingers into slits in the *ponchada* and hoist the *raído* on their backs in an act of sheer power-lifting. Like many *tarefer@s*, Rogelio was in supreme physical condition. Unfortunately, his friend Roberto was awaiting a pension for injury

to his back from this kind of labor. I saw this practiced in harvests outside of Montecarlo County, although *tarefer@s* there largely believe that others no longer do it, because it has been made illegal. Due to the large distances and isolated nature of many *yerbales*, controlling such labor lies beyond the reach of labor organizers and state inspectors.

But in many *tarefas* in Montecarlo County the problem of getting the green leaf to a loading site has been largely resolved to reduce human injury. In a crew such as Celia's, there is a *carrito*, or sort of dolly which is often managed by one person whose job it is to take the *raído* out. That person is paid a small additional amount to move throughout the *yerbal* loading the *raídos* and carrying them to the end of the line where they are weighed and then carried on to the truck. But in the everyday harvest throughout Misiones, there are surely many *tarefer@s* who do not work with this system; they still must haul their own *raídos* to the end of the line.



Figure 6: Rogelio Matoso, the first *tarefer@* I ever met, was a master teacher of *la tarefa*. Here, he demonstrates how he positions himself to hoist a *raído* onto his back so that he can carry it out for loading.

Weighing

Everything that happens in the *yerbal* culminates in one moment --the moment each *raído* is weighed. This is a moment of fixing value when the work of the day is quantified and priced. It is a moment of appraisal and appraisal. It also is a moment of shameless theft: Too often

greedy field bosses and contractors record lower weights than the *raídos* actually weigh in order to strip down the value of workers' labor. There is little formality in the weighing. Some workers continue to work away while their *raídos* are weighed; others rest in groups drinking *tereré*. In most *tarefas* I observed, only a few people were involved in the weighing. Sometimes *tarefer@s* would stand next to their *raídos* to observe the weighing or even help with the weighing of their own green leaf. In other moments, the same several people would go around to all the *raídos* to weigh, even though the workers who cut that green leaf might not be present.

Weighing typically required four people and two tools, a *pilón* (scale), and a notebook. First, the *raído* was hooked onto an iron hook of the *pilón* or weighing device. Both *capataces* and *tarefer@s* controlled the *pilón*, which required two people to make it balance. *Tarefer@s* used their shoulders to balance the iron bar, and they lifted the *raído* off the ground so that it hung suspended and could be weighed. The person weighing adjusts the scale for all to see and calls out *jnoventa!* or *j cien!* (ninety or one hundred) whatever the weight of the *raído* is in kilograms. Then the two balancers eased the *raído* back down to the ground and the group moved to the next *raído*. At the moment of weighing, someone recorded the amount that was called out in a notebook. This person was usually the *capataz* but was often a designated assistant as well.

Although this declaration happens in an instant, it is the most densely impactful moment of the *tarifa*. There are actually two moments here that are often confused--the moment of actual weighing and the recording of the weight. One was witnessed by all who were around via eye and ear--the calling out of the weight. The other was recorded by a single person, most often without witness. This was the prime moment in which the *capataz* and/or the contractor could take advantage of the *tarefer@* by recording a smaller figure in the notebook. When the load of

green leaf was then weighed on the industrial scale at the *secadero*, the extra kilograms would be recorded as weight beyond what was calculated for each *tarefer@*. That extra weight would go to whoever had control of the bill of weight. With each truck holding dozens of *raídos*, it was easy to see how a *tarefer@* could be docked ten kilograms from each *raído* she had gathered, culminating in an aggregate of hundreds of kilograms of pure profit for the contractor.

When I first observed this process of weighing, I was amazed at how many *tarefer@s* did not come closer to the notebook to see if the weight that the *pilón* registered coincided with the notations of the person who controlled the notebook. Rather, most often they trusted that the amount would be correct. However, veteran *tarefer@s* could tell almost precisely how much each of their *raídos* weighed. After all, the size of the *ponchadas* was uniform. Any veteran could tell me which *raído* weighed a hundred kilograms. They assumed this amount and calculate in their heads so that when Friday or Saturday pay day came, they knew how much they should be paid. But even veteran *tarefer@s* seldom monitored whether or not their *raído* was more than one hundred kilograms meaning that any kilograms over that went toward a contractor's profit or if there was no contractor, to the owner of the *yermal*. These same veterans did not hover around the weighing process to make sure that the weight of their green leaf was correctly recorded in the notebook.

In previous work as a public interest labor lawyer, I had learned that many agricultural workers as well as day labors in urban areas do not monitor carefully how they are paid. There are many reasons for this, of course, ranging from the power imbalances at play to degrees of literacy among workers. Often part of workers' rights training that I had participated in involved teaching workers to empower themselves to intervene in their own rights. This almost always meant teaching them to record things that happened in the work day with pen and paper. But

power dynamics and fear of retaliation often hovered over workers' attempts to defend themselves in this type of salary moment. Furthermore, there was no organized movement in Misiones to empower *tarefer@s* to bring notebooks with the to the field to record their own weight.

Weighing with Celia was all the more interesting. She was legendary for using her foot to weigh each *raído* that her *tarefer@s* had gathered. Although this was a controversial practice, many on her crew did not question it, and she was proud of the accuracy she had. In fact, she added, she was often as or more accurate than the *pilón* for it too could be rigged to the advantage of the *capataz* and contractor. I was present multiple times when Celia did the weighing, and none of her crew came round to watch her weigh and record in her notebook; she did this alone.



Figure 7: Weighing in Guatambú at Roberto Aicheler's farm (Photo by Author March 2012).



Figure 8: Celia records the weight of green leaf for each *tarefer@s* in her *cuadrilla* (Photo by author July 2012).

Loading

The site at which green leaf departs the hands of *tarefer@s* is also that of what has traditionally been the greatest risk of injury. Once the *raídos* had been weighed, it was time to load them onto the truck. In most *yerba* harvests, this was done by a number of *tarefer@s* working together to lift the *raído* onto the truck, *al muque*. The great weight of the *raído* and the possibility of it falling on the heads of those who lifted it is the risk. I once asked a *tarefer@*, what makes the risk? “The risk comes from the fact that we are all different. Some are shorter and some are taller. That can really upset the balance.” It was this difference then, the lack of a machine-like homogeneity that created the risk as the *raído* was being hoisted up onto the truck. Those hands that supported and arms that extended were not all the same and did not all reach the same point at once. Nor did they coincide at the same moment to push off the *raído* into the hands of the *cargadores*. At least two workers worked at the top of truck to stack the *raídos* in a way that they did not fall off of the truck. These workers were generally paid either a flat fee for this extra work or a percentage of the green leaf for this work in *las tareas* that I observed.



Figure 9: *Tarefer@s* in Campo Ramón lift *el raído, al muque*, into the truck in 2010 (Photo by Author).

In Montecarlo County, loading often was semi-mechanized in part due to both progress in the agricultural cooperative and pressure from the *tarefer@s* rights movement. There was *el enganchador* who hooked the *raído* up at the ground level. Then the *motorist* controlled the gas powered pulley, something which required a great deal of strength and concentration. The truck driver moved the truck forward according to what he could see in his side rearview mirror, listening either for a shout or a whistle from the *enganchadores* once they had secured the *raídos* in the truck. In spite of this mechanized system, I could easily see how things could go terribly wrong: Either the *raído* hoisted high in the air could fall on someone or the worker who worked the pulley at the back could get caught in the machinery. The entire process required great strength on all sides and loading could take hours at a time. Once the truck was loaded, *tarefer@s* had to be transported back to their homes. Sometimes they lived close enough that they could walk but often they had to be transported by truck.



Figure 10: Loading with the motorized pulley system at Roberto Aicheler's farm in Guatambú (Photo by Author, March 2012).

Going Home

An integral part of the harvest of *yerba* involves the transport of workers. *Yerbales* are often located far from workers' homes, and most *tarefer@s* do not have cars. This makes transport doubly complicated. Sometimes crewmembers live very close to one another making

pickups and drop-offs easy. But at others, the process of transport takes a good while, especially when workers live in the countryside. Even so, many *tarefer@s* can spend a while walking to and from their work site. Traveling by truck through sometimes treacherous terrain requires skill. Not only are *tarefer@s* at the mercy of truck drivers, they also have no control over the maintenance of trucks, nor of the safety of the vehicles. Throughout Misiones, many *tarefer@s* remember the so-called *tragedia de Aurora* (Aurora tragedy) that took place on October 2, 2000. The community of Aurora is located on the road between Oberá and a town that sits on the Brazilian border called El Soberbio. That day an old truck that had not been properly maintained took to the main road, which was full of curves. When the brakes failed at a critical moment on the route, the truck rolled, taking the life of four *tarefer@s*, Julio Benítez, Guillermo Rodríguez, José De Olivera y Ramón Ayala. Most of those workers were from the poor troubled neighborhoods that surround the central highlands city of Oberá, namely Cien Hectareas and San Miguel. Today they are remembered as the martyrs of Aurora (*El Territorio* 2010). Others suffered severe injuries that required amputations. Surviving workers still demonstrate today in Plaza Guemes in Oberá in order to press for economic assistance given that their bodies can no longer endure stress of the difficult harvest. Some still have not received any disability income. To make matters worse, those responsible for the negligence were never held accountable.

Since the Aurora accident, the law was changed to require that the *tarefer@* crew be transported separately from the *yerba*, rather than on top of their green cargos. But the old tradition persists, and I have often seen it. One of the classic portrayals of *tarefer@s* shows them perched precariously atop moving trucks packed high with *raidos*. One particular photo is commonly reprinted when the Aurora tragedy is discussed in provincial papers. It is an accurate

photo in that it shows a young boy as part of the human cargo in this dangerous ride home. When I first began work in Misiones in 2008, I remember seeing these moments on the highways, but they are less visible now, because of transport laws after the Aurora tragedy. Nevertheless, surely *tarefer@s* return home this way still, as the cost for the owner of the *yerbal* or the contractors of maintaining two trucks is significant. With soaring inflation and very high gas prices, the cost of the truck, or *flete*, is a major one in calculating the cost of the *yerba* harvest. Many producers opt for better annual profits than investing in ensuring worker safety. When labor inspectors patrol the countryside, one of the things they are looking for is illegal transport of workers.

But this is only part of the tragedy in going home for on some days when the harvest ends, home is in the *yerbal*. Because as much as 70% of the *yerba* harvest today is still done by workers who work under the table in informal harvests, the conditions in which they work can be terrible ones. Although it would seem that work camps went away with harvest in the forest, camping for the number of days it takes to finish a harvest is still quite common in Misiones. There are multiple logistical issues here. First, the *tarefa* requires a group of workers, and those workers come from varied areas but must get to the same site each day together. Second, most *tarefer@s* do not have cars and rely on the truck for transport. There are rural bus services but they generally run just a few times a day. Because *yerbales* are mostly located deep into the country, it is impossible to get to them this way. Sometimes *tarefer@s* who are working in their rural communities will walk to the *tarefa* if it is nearby. But *tarefas* begin early and end late. Once a *cuadrilla* is transported to a *yerbal* on a given day, it sometimes is impractical to travel back to where those workers live. It makes more sense to camp in the *yerbal* until the *tarefa* is finished.

Camping, *campamentos* or *carpas*, have existed since many *tarefer@s* can remember, and many *tarefer@s* have told me that they actually like to camp for the camaraderie that comes along with it. Celia, who no longer goes out in *carpa*, remembered her time working in *carpas* as some of the best in her life, particularly because it coincided with the era of *oro verde*, or green gold, when the value of *yerba* was at its historical best:

There were times when Cándido was off working in *el monte*, and I was working in the *tarefa* in *carpa*. We worked from December to October and we made a lot of money. People were generally good neighbors. If you didn't have any salt, surely someone would loan you some and then later you would return the favor. We spent time in the *carpa* with the *olla* (pot) in the *yerbal* for midday.

You don't lose any time when you are in the *carpa* in terms of getting to the *yerbal*. We worked until it got dark. These were wonderful times, *lindos tiempos*, around 1981 and 1982. For those three or four years, *yerba* was really worth a lot: For 30, 000 kilos you could get a brand new pickup. We got paid double for *yerba*--even *yerba sucia* (dirty) because it was worth so much. There were not any issues about having to be delicate with the *corte* (cut). Back then, we cut the *yerba* plant in two or three parts with a machete. Then we went to work breaking it up. Only the super thick trunks did not go into the *raído*. We threw just about everything in there.

In line with her passion for green leaf, Celia loved the fact that her way of making a living was just yards away from where she slept. She could get up and harvest any time she wanted. But *carpas* also existed (and still do) in highly exploitative harvests where people lived in terrible conditions in which they had no access to clean water and were paid below the minimum wage. Often the remote sites of the *tareas* meant that these *tarefer@s* were completely *desamparados*, or unprotected. The *tarefer@* union of Montecarlo had on its banner pictures of a typical *carpa negra* in which *tarefer@s* were found living in very rustic conditions. Importantly, I did not do fieldwork in these camps, mostly because it was not safe for me to be there overnight my own small children. What I came to understand, though, is that these kinds of harvests are still very much a reality in the contemporary harvests deep in the countryside.

Furthermore, there were already sufficient trust issues with my attending local *tarefas*, because the level of government scrutiny increased dramatically during the time I was doing fieldwork. The politics of fighting *trabajo en negro* (work under the table) coincided with an intense campaign of *recaudación* or tax collection by the Peronist government. This meant that there were random government inspections of *yerbales* like the one I described in the first pages of this dissertation in which contractors and owners were fined when they were found to have workers working under the table. Pushes to improve working conditions for *tarefer@s* intensified these inspections. Because I also did labor solidarity work with the union that I discuss in Chapter Four, there were rumors that I was a government agent who turned people in for having workers in *negro*. This made it all the more difficult to participate in *las tareas*, much less those where workers were laboring in particularly precarious conditions.

But more than Celia and many other *tarefer@s* I have met, *tarefer@s* who work today and continue to work in *cuadrillas* where they are taken out in *carpas* and paid low wages are workers who continue to be in the category of “disappeared” workers that live lives that are not so dramatically different from *los mensú*. Save recent and very occasional mentions of them in provincial newspapers, they remain invisible, suffering far off the political grid and forgotten even if images of their conditions occasionally are invoked for some kind of political motive.

Refuse Exposed

Before I had ever worked with *tarefer@s* or seen a harvest, I visited the small farms of farmers from a forum on family agriculture I attended in April 2009. One May day in 2010, we went to visit a Ukranian farmer, Márcia, who had returned to live in San Pedro, close to the old main route of *yerba mate* and in an area where both in the time of forest harvest and today was considered to be one of the most remote and exploitative areas for *yerba* harvests. We witnessed

the great difficulties Márcia endured. Having grown up in Buenos Aires, she had returned to her parents' farm to take a stab at farming with her six children.

As we talked about how hard it was for her to make it as a single mother of six children, I observed the surroundings: Her husband, an apparent alcoholic, had been reduced to living in a tent on her property. Márcia was trying to make her way in the new industry of agricultural tourism in which tourists were invited to experience life on the farm. This was a cumbersome process, because she did not have the skills to pull everything together, particularly building the guesthouses for tourists to stay. She complained of poor workmanship and unreliable contractors as well as getting ripped off all the time. One of her biggest complaints that coincided with our visit had to do with her *yerba*. She had contracted a service for the harvest and negotiated a price to do so. The *cuadrilla* of *tarefer@s* had left behind a big mess—"a total disaster," she told us, in her Buenos Aires-influenced accent.

We walked down the long road that formed the driveway between the two farms that were hers and her parents. Given that the *cuadrilla* had already moved on, I told her I wanted to see what it looked like, these remains left behind by the *cuadrilla*. We walked through several rows of the *yerbales* that were located on both sides of the road and came upon the litter that was strewn throughout two separate sections of the *yerbal*. Without ever seeing a single face, several things were clear about who had been there: At both sites were piles of empty cartons of cheap wine as well as clear plastic bottles of *caña* or grain alcohol. There were literally dozens of empty containers. There were also food remains, wrappers from bags of pasta, and tin cans of tomato sauce. But there was a stark discord in the other remains--dirty diapers dotted the floor of the *yerbal*. Whole families had been working in this *tarefa*, mothers and babies, even as a large amounts of alcohol had been consumed at the site.

While I was disturbed by the discordance of dirty diapers and piles of empty cartons of cheap wine and what this said about the lives of women and children who had just left the *yerbal*, Elena talked of the group as a whole, a repugnant whole. She did not specifically hold the *capataz* or the contractor accountable but rather referred to “those *tarefer@s*”. I wondered then and still do how much she oversaw the *cuadrilla* that came to cut her *yerba*, how much she asked about the rights of the families that worked in that harvest, and how low the price had been that she had paid for the *tarefa*. What was clear was the *tarefer@s* had spent the night in a camp in the *yerbal* and had not had access to running water or bathrooms, but this was not a concern for Márcia. In her mind, they should have taken their trash with them.

This characterization of *tarefer@s* made by Márcia was typical of many other white farmers’ representations of them. Importantly, a complicated story of intersectionality was at work in these labor scenarios: Here was a poor white single mother trying to make ends meet even as she expressed negative attitudes about people who were most likely brown-skinned and landless. This same kind of moment repeats itself daily in which there are clashes and tensions between people of different classes and ethnicities deep in the countryside of Misiones. But at the end of the day, the brunt of class and race-based stigma was born most by *tarefer@s* who were at the mercy of a system in which contractors and farmers conspired in a problematic system that meant to pay them as little was possible for their labor. What I did not learn from Márcia that day was how these workers had been employed and whether or not the contractor she hired was paying the *cuadrilla* of men, women and children a fair wage.

Pay Day

One winter day, I accompanied Rogelio in a rare moment when he was hired as *capataz* for a harvest right down the road from where he lived. On Friday, I arrived at the *yerbal* just in

time for the last of the *raídos* to be weighed as well as to witness a classic Friday moment: payday. In this *tarefa*, the owner was an elderly German widow. Like so many *colonos*, she was the last to stay on the farm. This was a small homemade *tarefa* where David, the farmer's son, had used the old farm pickup to load the *raídos*. A mechanic working in the provincial capital of Posadas, he was a good-natured man who had good *repoire* with the *tarefer@s*, making lots of jokes together with them. Rogelio sat on a pile of wood underneath a tree very near the widow's home to make the payments. Members of the *cuadrilla* stood around smoking and chatting. It was an all male affair, and I talked with a pair of teenage brothers while Rogelio met with other workers. He called each *tarefer@* to him and they sat side by side as he told them what was due to them and paid them. No one had any complaints regarding what was due to them and what was actually paid.

I have always kept this harvest in mind as a nearly ideal one in the sense of the good time the *tarefer@s* had and the way they interacted with David. He made jokes and so did they. It was an eclectic and local group. Everyone lived somewhere in the surrounding countryside, instead of an urban *villa*. Along with the adolescent brothers that worked that day, was a man of Finnish descent named Samuel, an Afro-Brazilian, and Rogelio, the red-headed *capataz* of German descent who was usually a *tarefer@* and not a *capataz*. By not working through contractors, David had ensured a smaller, more controllable harvest in which the *tarefer@s* were not dependent on the good or bad faith of a third party. That day, there was *pura risa en el yerbal* (pure laughter in the *yerbal*) as Celia had always recounted. When each man and boy was paid, they said their goodbyes and walked down different roads, some in pairs or trios, others alone.

But pay day does not always run so smoothly. There are stories of major exploitation, of *capataces* running off with the money, contractors cheating people out of their wages, inflated

prices for merchandise provided for *tarefer@s*, and the list goes on. Because *tarefer@s* usually change *cuadrillas* throughout the season or from year to year, they encounter continuous precariousness in terms of what they can expect from *la tarefa* and their life moments within each day.

Interzafra

While the *yerba* regenerates during the spring, many *tarefer@s* find work in a variety of areas. But these months during the *interzafra* are lean ones. Decades ago, they found work in the *carpida*, or in weeding, but the use of herbicides and fears of lawsuits have slowed this work to a trickle. The more labor conflict and litigation there is, the more landowners use herbicides to keep weeds under control in their *yerbales* instead of *tarefer@s*. *Tarefer@s* often work in *changas* or *changitas* which are short-term jobs of a day or several days. These jobs do not come with insurance or benefits, and landowners often take advantage of a surplus of labor to drive wages down. If they learn that a neighbor is paying less, they often will do the same, for example. Celia was in the minority of *tarefer@s*, because she had her own land. During the spring and summer, she and her family were busy at work planting manioc and tending to their plantations of pine and eucalyptus.

Even those who occupied land in the countryside often planted manioc and other crops in order to eat. When I first met Rogelio and María, María had planted a whole hillside with *rama* or manioc. But many *tarefer@s* who lived in the growing *villas* or poor areas on the edges of provincial cities did not plant anything at all. This made them all the more vulnerable to hunger during the *interzafra*. When I was completing my long-term fieldwork, I found that more and more people who worked in the *tarefa* now produced no food for themselves at all as rural

exodus continued and government welfare plans frayed the traditional practice of planting subsistence crops like manioc.

***Tarefa*@ Personhood: The “Thing” of *Yerba Mate* Falls Apart**

When viewed up close, each *tarefa* manifested as a complex world of different lives working together and apart to achieve similar goals. Each hour I spent in the *yerbal* was different depending on whom I labored beside. Even a group of male harvesters viewed up close shatters the homogeneous glossing of the term “*tarefa*@s” because each person is so distinct from the other. Now, potentially thousands of miles from consumers or even just a mile down the road from a consumer who has never been to a *yerbal* or seen a harvest, the ‘thing’ of *yerba mate*, fell apart and labor exerted itself over the material, each ‘spirit force’ coming into view (Taussig 1980; Mintz 1985). Lives, characters, dreams, jokes, conflict, aspirations, and many other manifestations of human dwelling came forth with each life and views that were shared in singular moments that, if not observed or experienced by another, would pass, as the unrecorded sky.

In the next section, I present fragments of conversation that I had with different people on an afternoon one hot day in a *yerbal* near Montecarlo. If I had talked only with a single person, I would have gained one view of a life, but by moving line to line throughout the afternoon, I came to see the lives that actually inhabited the *yerbal* for that afternoon only, how different they were, and how different one moment of conversation could be from another. Although I slip into descriptions of *tarefa*@ “culture” throughout this dissertation, I hope to show here that each person at work has their own culture and this particularity affected any understanding of dwelling that I had of *tarefa*@s. In the *yerbal*, philosophies of labor intertwine with lives lived and to be lived.

It was 5:15 am on a late summer morning when I awaited Don Villalba at the *rotunda* (roundabout) in Montecarlo waiting for Don Villalba. Raúl, the night watchman for the teachers' strike camp, was still asleep in the tent right next to the house of tourism. A single, young girl with long, black hair walked along Route 12 from the *rotunda* to the dirt parking area a few yards south where a large sign reading *Bienvenido a Montecarlo* hosted a giant steel outline of a fish, the icon of the Paraná only miles inwards. After several years doing fieldwork in Misiones, I knew that the girl was a *rutera*, one of the prostitutes who work the *rutas*, the north-south corridors in Misiones. A group of teen male athletes outside the Petrobras station laughed and joked as they drank their beer. A dark green four-door car of *gendarmaría*, or national police swung into and parked at the tourist *casilla*. The doors opened but the occupants stayed in the shadows inside. The air was fresh and cool after days of intense heat.

I was exhausted, having barely slept the night before due to what sounded like dozens of dogs yapping in the neighborhood where I had stayed the night. Don Villalba and I were still texting about when and where to meet at 12 am, and I had been up since 3. I met Don Villalba through the *tarefer@* union, and had gotten to know him better during the 2012 highways blockades when the union pressed for improved wages for *tarefer@s*. At seventy-two, he had been both a *tarefer@* and a farmer most of his life. Although he already received his retirement pension, like many retirees in Argentina and in the Misiones countryside, he still continued working to make ends meet and to counter the inflation that was worse by the day. For years now, he has worked as a *capataz* for one of the largest and most corrupt labor contractors in Montecarlo County.

After I had waited for fifteen minutes or so, an old red cargo truck came up the road from Guatambú and stopped at the Petrobras station. The crew was already complete in the back, and Don Villalba asked me to ride in front. We headed south on Route 12 several kilometers and then turned right near a cemetery to get to the *yerbal* that the crew was working that today. The 1400 hectare *yerbal* was between forty and sixty years old and owned by absentee landlords who lived in Buenos Aires. Running down Route 12 and all the way into the community of Caraguatay, it was good business for the labor contractor and secure employment for the *tarefer@s* who worked with him. Although his *cuadrillas* changed constantly, he still maintained a loyal group that had worked with him for years. They called him “Don” as a matter of respect, and his ability to charm as a fellow Paraguayan coupled with his political prowess kept them coming back every year. This was in spite of the fact that he had been found by a court of law to have cheated a large group of his workers out of their government-issued family support stipends.

I had returned for just a short stint of fieldwork this time around and had not seen this *yerbal* since the summer before. Once we had all unloaded and taken to the lines, I fell in line with a *tarefer@* I knew from the union named Da Silva. He was a forty-five year old veteran *tarefer@* from Irigoyan which is on the eastern side of Misiones, very close to the Brazilian border. Seven months previously, I had cut *yerba* with him on a winter day in another section of this weed-choked *yerbal*.

I had always seen Da Silva on a motorcycle at the meetings in the union *galpón* as well as at the highway blockades. He stood apart, because of his confidence, good looks, and contagious smile. His Brazilian accent, which he got from his parents, put everyone in a better mood, and people liked to make jokes about it. In Montecarlo, most *tarefer@s* have Paraguayan accents, so

Da Silva was a novelty. Had we been working in the *yerbales* of San Pedro on the eastern side of the province, his accent would not have drawn attention.

That morning we talked about how many weeds there were in this *yerbal*. Not only was the *capuera* thick and high, the task of the day was not a full *tarefa* but rather the dreaded *corte melena* which was a *limpieza* (cleaning) of new leaves. No major branches were to be sawed off, but rather small amounts of new leaf needed to be stripped mostly from the base of the tree. It was a selective cut made during the *zafrina*, or little harvest, done in late summer when the tree is not fully harvested. *Tarefer@s* were supposed to be paid more for this *corte* because they gathered much less green leaf in the process, meaning they had less kilograms to garner a wage.

Da Silva always maintained a positive attitude: “You have to make a yield here or else you are useless” he told me. Since the first time I worked with him, he had never been shy about telling me what to do. He relished having a helper, because he always worked alone. But no matter how hard I tried, this time I couldn’t quite grasp exactly what to take and what to leave on the plant with this *corte*. And of course, taking a long time to figure that out made no sense, for the goal here was to move fast and to collect as much green leaf as possible given that the odds were against putting together many *raídos* that day anyway. The weeds plus the limited cut means that *tarefer@s* would really be struggling to make ends meet in this *yerbal*.

Da Silva helped me focus in on the detail of the line but, each tree, together with the weeds, fought back. When I still had not figured out how much leaf I needed to harvest from the tree, Da Silva told me just to move on, not to dawdle on a tree too long. But he also pointed out when I broke off the wrong branches: “*Soy muy puerco en la quebranza,*” he told me as he worked away. Being a real pig in the *quebranza* meant that he was sloppy with the breaking up of branches, but that he really needed to be so in order to make the money he needed. He was

compelled to work quickly for his family of nine children depended on his income alone. His wife did not work outside the home.

Da Silva, a brown skinned man, had married a woman of white European descent. He did not tell a story of suffering but rather pointed out: “The black guy (*el negro*) is the one who wants kids, the *gringa* (white girl) doesn’t. She only wanted to have two kids and I wanted one every day.”⁶⁰ I never met his wife so I did not learn her side of the story.⁶¹ Da Silva had more social power in the community than some *tarefer@s* who seemed more timid and held back in groups. His role as a delegate from Guatambú for the union reinforced both this power and his sense of solidarity.

“Here, in the same line, everyone suffers. I really take care of my *compañeros*. I try to keep the mood up when it is this bad,” he told me as he stripped the leaves from the base of a tree in a rhythm that was not interrupted by his figuring out which leaves to take. Our conversation turned to life in the *vivienda* where he lived, for he knew I was living just up the road in Guatambú:

When I first came to Guatambú, I had one hundred women in a year. Now I am a believer, *creyente* (evangelist). When I got here in 1991, everything was just a *chupada* (a drunken mess) and I had a 70 Sol motorcycle. All the *mujerada* (women) were interested, and I always took them for rides. I had the pride, though, of not dirtying my body with those women.

Da Silva had come to Guatambú, because he had heard about a *vivienda* opportunity up this way and decided to follow up on the possibility of a cheap housing opportunity. By now, he

⁶⁰ *El negro es el que quiere tener hijos, la gringa no. Ella quería nada más dos hijos y yo quería uno todos los días.*

⁶¹ Another house I visited in the *vivienda* where he lived seemed to be in discord with Da Silva’s just a block behind. Hence, I kept my relationship with Da Silva in the *yerbal*.

had been in his house for fourteen years. But before he had been able to travel a lot and had seen a lot of Brazil. He had lived near the river in his own house, but when he received a government subsidy to work together with a group of people on a better house, he took up the opportunity. He received the material and worked eight hours a day at eight hundred hours per month, installing electrical wiring and most everything else. “*No es fácil, no es fácil,*” he told me.⁶² The expression *no es fácil* that Da Silva used means ‘it’s not easy, but Misioneros use this expression in a distinct way by putting the accent on the *es* part of the sentence and repeating the phrase. This emphasis on the active and ongoing part of the sentence gives weight to nature of everyday hardship that so many people connected to working agricultures experienced in Misiones. According to Da Silva: “When I was growing up, my dad had everything in the farm, chickens, manioc, corn, everything. That was my life before.”

Don Villalba was a mellow *capataz*, according to Da Silva, but the *tarefer@s* disliked the man who was the caretaker of the *yermal*, because of the capricious way that he intervened in the *corte*. He would come and say to cut a certain way and then the next day come and tell them to cut another way. The good news was that they have work in these 1400 hectares, but the bad news was the terrible *descuido*, or lack of care of the *yermal*. Spending time in La Misionera, I saw how much endurance *tarefer@s* had to have to keep on going. They could wrestle with the trees for hours and not harvest enough green leaf to feed their families for the day. The winter before I had heard these *tarefer@s* complaining about the conditions in the *yermal*. It demoralized them to have to come back day after day to such a mess. Every branch cut was money in the hand, food on the table. For many young male *tarefer@s*, it would also be the drink

⁶² It’s not easy, it’s not easy.

for the weekend and the cigarettes which many of them smoked. Sadly for some, there would be less money to play at the state-owned casino in Montecarlo.⁶³

Later on when we are resting in a *tereré* circle, we talk about the *corte* as the rain was brewing on the horizon. “Whoever says that he is not a *palero* is a liar”, Da Silva remarked, while the other *tarefer@s* either laughed or made no comment about this tradition of throwing as many thicker branches as possible into the *ponchada* in order to increase the weight of the green leaf. The more tree branch you could get in, the faster you got to that one hundred kilogram *raído*.

After working a bit with Da Silva, I moved over to another line to work with a *tarefer@* I had never met. Pedro Flores was a sixty-seven year old retiree who had lived in Montecarlo since 1969. Because we did not know one another, he spoke more generally about his trade of being a *tarefer@*: “*La yerba* is the vice of the world. This work is *muy sacrificada* (extremely hard). But everyone uses *mate*. *El mate* represents Misiones.” Pedro mixed the themes of hope with suffering as he referred to his trade: “With this work, no one can do it with a machine. When God gives us health, we have got to work. And when you tie up that *raído*, yes, then there is hope. If you don’t send some *palo* in there, you’ll get nowhere. You really have to take care of the plant.” In these few words, Pedro summarized the ongoing plight of *tarefer@s*, together with the his own understanding of commodity fetishism.

These conversations about *palo* highlighted the *tarefer@* dilemma: It was they, more than anyone else, who carried the anxiety of how the harvest affected the plant. But *tarefer@s* were forced to push boundaries in order to survive. They had to gather sufficient green leaf to live, yet

⁶³ State-owned casinos that are in practically every town and city have invaded Misiones. They are places of corruption and money laundering, but also sadly, places where people go to lose themselves.

they were limited in how much they can gather by the conditions of the *yerbales* in which they work. This necessary boundary-pushing had consequences on the cultural and political dimensions of *tarefer@s* personhood. If they did not push boundaries, they would not survive. And, they were seldom the ones who set the boundaries. When they pushed boundaries, they were viewed as disobedient subjects. Their working world was framed by landowners and contractors who influenced the maintenance of the *yerbales* to produce sufficient yield. Yet white farmers complained incessantly about how much *tarefer@s* made, and how much more they should have made from the *yerba* harvest. And they often complained about how *tarefer@s* left the *yerbales* in a terrible state. This caused them to go from one contractor to another often, looking for ‘someone’ who would leave their *yerbal* in a good state after the harvest.

Pedro was a longtime musician, playing all varieties of music on his guitar. Don Villalba wrote the lyrics for songs for which he put the melodies (*la tonada*). According to Pedro, there are many *tarefer@s* who played music. He appeared to be in excellent health and had not a gray hair on his head, but he made certain to let me know the conditions under which he was still out here working in the *yerbal*: “The necessity is great and the salary of a retired guy is small. For twenty-eight years I paid into the fund, but now I have to work because there is not enough money. My pension is only 1870 pesos per month.”

On the next line over, a different generation labored for hope. Pedro’s nephew Agustín was seventeen and had dropped out of school three years ago. This made certain that he would end up in the *yerbal*. He worked away quietly, talking much less than Da Silva, for example. Almost every *tarefer@s* I worked with who was in their late teens or early twenties had dropped out of high school. Many had even dropped out of middle or elementary school. Agustín was a smoker, and I realized in talking with him how much of his wage that day would go to cigarettes.

Most often three or even four generations labored together in a single *cuadrilla*. Here, a retired man and a high school dropout worked side by side toward both a similar and different hope. Like most men of his generation, Pedro reminded me that things used to be different when he was growing up: “We were fourteen kids and there was no *salario* (welfare). My poor old man had to get up at dawn and live in *la capuera* (weeds). Poor thing. But there was more respect before ...you had to work if you wanted something.”

I bid a temporary farewell to Pedro and Agustín and headed to the end of the line. The truck driver I had met last winter had now been replaced by a young man named Guillermo from Cuatro Bocas, a community near where Celia lived and where the agricultural cooperative had its largest *secadero*. Guillermo was a young man in his twenties with a German father and a Paraguayan mother. He explained to me his economic reality in terms of providing the service of *flete* for this *tarefa*: “Last year I spent 5000 pesos a month on gas. I make about ten or eleven thousand per month but half of that goes to gas.” I made the calculation: *Tarefer@s* were making at that time 170 pesos per 1000 kilograms of *yerba*. If they worked hard in a good *yerbal*, they could make a bit under half of what Guillermo was bringing in, after his gas costs. But Guillermo was also tasked with the upkeep of the truck. Guillermo remembered the history of work in his family: “My grandfather died at 72 from so many blows from work.”

Don Villalba was standing near the truck as we talked. He took me back to a meeting we both had attended about a year ago during the highway blockades. I had had to duck out of it to go take care of my children. At a key moment, the provincial Minister of Labor had come in to negotiate a settlement. A thirty something light-skinned lawyer with an expensive handbag, she lectured the room about fresh new policies of the *Peronista* government. It was one of the few

times in his life that Don Villalba decided to confront a person in power about the injustices he had faced as a *tarefero*.

She asked: ‘how much do you make?’ And I said, ‘I labored for forty years and I only earn 3000 pesos a month. Aren’t you ashamed of this?’ I told that Minister of Labor that she knew nothing about work: ‘you have no idea how the *tarefer@s* works.’ Then when we got the salary increase, there was laughter and tears at the *rotunda*.

Indeed those commodity protests of 2012 in which *tarefer@s* and farmers had blocked the highway to push for higher prices of green leaf had been successful, but quickly contractors began to find ways to circumvent increased wages for *tarefer@s*.

I found the same reality of a sixty-five year old retiree working in the *yerbal* a bit later when I talked with Fariña who I had also worked with the year before. He too was frustrated by the ‘filthy *yerbal*’ that produced almost nothing. When it was time to start hauling out the *raídos*, I saw Omar, a thirty-six year old Italian *tarefer@s* from Caraguatay whom I also knew. Back then, he had been working with the cart, taking out the *raídos* from the line. I had run into him later when he was working in the *secadero* in Guatambú as a *foguista* (the worker who controls the fire). When we celebrated Don Villalba’s birthday just shortly before we left the field, he had gone back to the *tarefa* and was expecting a baby with his new wife. Now he was back in the *yerbal* and had a new six-month old baby. A speaker of Guaraní, Portuguese and Spanish, he had a grown son studying in Oberá. He explained to me that this first wife and he had separated because the work he had found meant he had to live miles away. With time, the distance just got to them.: “When you are gone a long time, and you come back, you have a *quilombo* this big” he said, gesturing with his hands to demonstrate the size of the mess of his marriage.

From Omar’s perspective, things had improved in La Misionera: “Last year we would come out of a line with only one *raído*. This year we are coming out with two. The *yerba*

improved because of the way we cut it.” Omar was just seventeen when he started work in the *secadero* (drying mill) and at twenty-two, he began to work as a *foguista*. He knew how to do every job in the *secadero*. Ironically, he described *Las María* (the largest company of *yerba*), to be a better employer than the local cooperative. They their *foguistas* more, whereas the cooperative paid him fifteen pesos, the same for the guy who swept the floor. But he had left *Las Marías*, because it was not a permanent job.

Hearing how Omar had traversed the variety of jobs that *tarefer@s* could have in the *yerba* industry, I asked him what he knew about the history of *tarefer@s*, particularly the legendary *Alika* who other *tarefer@s* had told me about. ‘*Los Alika*’ as they were referred to were a family who ran a system of labor like that I have described of *los mensú*. I had heard of them before, as there were legends about their brutality. Omar confirmed he had heard stories:

In the times of *Alika*, the women came to look for their husbands and the boss would tell them that they had already come for their pay and gone. It was a lie! They killed those guys and buried them in the forest. *Los capanga* were killers, right hands of *Los Alika*. They waited for them in the road and then they killed them.

For many *tarefer@s*, atrocities committed in the *yerbales* in the forests remained on their minds, in their consciousness, even if the details had frayed over time and if the ugly reality of those *yerbales* had grown worse over time as they passed through the grapevine (Bateson 1972).

At the same time, the material reality of the *yerbal* sparked memories, especially for elders like Don Villalba. Gazing out over the horizon, invoked the past for him. He remembered in this same *yerbal* a day the truck had struck and killed a rabbit: “The guys prepared it and cooked up a stew that was pretty good.” A eucalyptus tree near where the truck was parked he estimated to be one hundred years old: “That other trunk over there is two hundred years old. ” And the days of a different kind of *yerba* harvest came back to him:

Before we used to cut *yerba* with a ladder and two plants would give us one hundred kilograms. We used to take a small lantern and harvest *yerba* by the light of the moon when it was a full moon. When a frost comes, the *yerba* falls useless on the ground. In 1987, people went around stealing *yerba*. People had brand new trucks, and then everything went down hill.

Later I paused to take notes, sitting on top of a *raído* that was at the head of a line near where the truck was parked. By sitting on the *raído*, I converted it into another thing, a chair, which is what *tarefer@s* do. Full *raídos* are used as chairs and tables in the *yerbal*. A dusky black and blue butterfly fluttered about. The *pilón* (scale) lay on the ground underneath a tree several feet from me. Rain clouds gathered on the horizon. I ate a leftover *tarta de acelga* that I pulled out of my friend Gaby's fridge. A *tarefer@* I did not know walked by with the cart and saying *!buen provecho!*. Two men walked down a line on the other side of the road through a grove of trees. Their machetes swung at their sides. They must have been doing *limpieza*. I saw too a white butterfly with a half-moon mosaic on the edge of its wing. Another crew was working far on the other side of a line of trees.

Don Villalba had gone to put gas in the truck. I remembered the day he left his scale at home and asked me to run and get it. I drove back the fifteen minutes it took to get to Guatambú, clapped out so his daughters could see that I had arrived, and they handed me the heavy iron bar which I put in the trunk of the car. By the time I returned, there he was waiting with rain on the horizon. There was something just so sad about the man.

Fortunately, that day we were able to talk about permission to get a space for the party we were planning at the local high school in Santa Rosa, just up the road from Guatambú. Don Villalba had written four songs already for the party. We had gone to visit him at his house to help prepare printouts of the lyrics of his songs. Then he told us more about his life as we looked out over the red-stemmed *manioc*. He recounted a story of a deeply moral life in which he had

prioritized hard work, honesty, his religious faith, and his music. He had been in the military in Paraguay as a young man and played soccer in the first league until he was thirty-seven: “The military hurts more than a bullet, but you learn a lot there about education and work.” He had been a musician when he was young and said it had taken him far, but then he got married and left his music friends. He married at 18 and his wife celebrated her 15th birthday with him. They had been married 52 years. Because ‘the Christian cult prohibits birth control and abortions’ they had 13 children, 8 girls and 5 boys:

Since the first day we were married, we have been *madrugadores*, or get up at dawn and I never went to the farm hungry. There are *tarefer@s* who go to the *yerbal* hungry and at home they have to cook. I have never fried a piece of meat in my married life. At three in the morning, she (wife) was up by my side. When I retired, we got this plot of land here. Most of my life I have worked from four a.m. until the sun sets. Some are left behind because they *andan por ahi* (just hang out). I’ve never known drugs or drinking. I have written a lot of songs though.

On this day and on other occasions Don Villalba used an expression I heard other elder *tarefer@s* use during my fieldwork to gather imaginative force for a life of hardship: “*Dejé mi vida en el yerbal*” (I left my life in the *yerbal*):

I worked for twelve years without resting on Sundays. I was in the *yerbal* at four in the morning then I would harvest tung from eleven to four. We would bag it up at night so it could go to the factory. A bag weighs seventy kilos. It was all loading and unloading, very hard work. We got paid by the month. I also took care of people’s farms. I worked in the *secadero* in the winter, there is nothing to do in the *chacra*. I lived on my boss’s farm with my family.

There was a tung boom in which the fruit was used for oil, but the boom collapsed, and tung is no longer produced in Misiones. Many older *tarefer@s* have stories about how they harvested tung.

The hard life in the *yerbales* is characterized in another common refrain: “*Cruze mucha capuera en mi vida*,” (I crossed many weeds in my life). This crossing of *capuera* symbolized

both the physical and existential hardship that so many *tarefer@s* have faced in their lifetime. In raising his children, Don Villalba made sure they did not get into alcohol and drugs, and at least four of his sons worked with him in the *yerbal*. He was appalled at contemporary youth, finding it a shame that kids came out of school having failed twelve classes. He was disgusted by the fact that there was a twenty-seven year old student in the local high school freshman class. He constantly highlighted a sense of morality around work:

In my family, with the right humility we have, we have never lacked for anything. Where there was work, I was there, and my children grew up that way. I retired at 65 years old. Practically people who work now work so others won't have to.

He was referring to the issue of *planes sociales* (welfare). “We are poor but we take care of ourselves. I have traveled the world. I listen to the radio in Guaraní and hear that song I wrote back in 1954. I now live in a house and on land that I used to *tarefer*.”

When we talked with Don Villalba at his house, his wife sat beside him often smiling, but she said very little on all the occasions that I visited their home. The few times I invited her into the conversation, Don Villalba took his life story back up. I asked him about women *tarefer@s*, especially because he did not have any in his *cuadrilla*. He assured me that he had worked with many, but that rumors about women not being able to get welfare if they worked in the *yerbales* abounded these days: “There was a woman I knew who had 32 children.. She had a baby every year. She was really hardworking in the *tarefa*, she was a happy woman. She had 31 sons and one daughter. But someone killed her daughter one day.” These kinds of conversations held stories that both flowed freely and were elicited by questions I asked. But in all of them, people told stories in which they, as labor, exerted themselves over the material of their labor.

Another Yerbal is Possible

The realities I witnessed in the *yerbales* of Montecarlo County were not necessarily the same as those in other areas of Misiones. In 2010, we had met a family in the frontier town of Andresito near the Brazilian border that we decided to visit, driving two hours north-east of Montecarlo. Driving through the long provincial forest reserve on the old Route 19, we passed a truck piled high with *yerba* and *tarefer@s*. All the cardinal rules that *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo seem to take for granted were broken at once—these *tarefer@s* were working on Sunday and workers rode atop the green leaf, in the precarious and dangerous cargo that was now prohibited. Andresito had been referred to frequently as a place where there was massive production as well as massive *trabajo en negro* (informal work) by both *colonos* and the union in Montecarlo. Later I would learn of the shortage of *yerba* in Andresito was connected to the fact that the Syrian company, Grupo Kabour, had bought 80% of the *yerba*.

As we drove closer to Andresito that Sunday, I was amazed by the distinct aesthetic of the *yerbales* there. There were strong, deeper green leaves and full skirted trees that made the *yerba* plantations look so different than the sad gnarly ones on Route 12 where Montecarlo was or even in Oberá. *Colonos* would tell me that this was because the further south you get in the province, the land is 'old' as they would say whereas the *yerbales* in Andresito were new due to its more recent colonization. Andresito was colonized in the late 1970s under the military dictatorship in an attempt to stave off what it perceived to be infringement by Brazil into the Argentine frontier. Mostly more privileged land owners were invited to buy larger tracts of land in the new colony. Today the area feels much more Brazilian than Paraguayan, but I found the *colonos* there to be more open and friendly than they were further south, particularly in Montecarlo.

In our talk with Alfredo Cukla, the father of a young man named Aldo who we had met at an internet shop back in 2010, I saw a different approach to working with *tarefer@s* than the one in Montecarlo which was dominated by third party contractors. Alfredo, a soft spoken, kind man of Eastern European descent, took us back to see his *yerbales* where he has planted *avena*, a cover crop, in between rows and in other areas sorghum. It was clear that he knew a lot about *yerba* production and he had done it most of his life. His *yerbales* were carefully tended to as were the animals that grazed nearby.

Unlike Montecarlo where *tarefer@s* had lived off *colono* property for generations now, Alfredo had built housing for the *tarefer@s* who worked for him in two different places. He was working on constructing bathrooms for them that he proudly showed me. Abiding by the law, he referred to their rights in a way in which he understood it was important for him to comply. Again, this was in contrast to the way in which white farmers in Montecarlo treated *tarefer@s* as entitled whiners who always wanted more. For Alfredo, he was doing what he should do. We talked about the amount of money it was costing him to build the bathrooms, but he spoke in figures without resentment.

Alfredo was harvesting his *yerba* then and invited us out to the harvest. The cargo truck was just an old farm pickup and the *cuadrilla* was small. This must have been what it was like further south several decades earlier. Toward the end of the day, we spent time with Aldo's mother who made homemade borscht, an oven *asado* from a young steer that they butchered just a while ago, manioc, lettuce and tomato salad, fresh homemade pickles with tiny cucumbers, and homemade flan along with *vino de colonos* that they made from this year's grape crop. It was a perfect meal accompanied by a freshly prepared corn pie made of ground sweet corn, milk and eggs. In the system that so many in Montecarlo referred to as one that had long ago been

extinguished, this *colono* family shared their land with another who helped with the harvest. They lived in a small house just yards away and as we ate, the smell of frying meat wafted out of the window of that home too. I remember Andresito as a moment of a different coexistence that did not exist in the more race and class segregated landscape of Montecarlo County.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have labored to appear the dwelling of *tarefer@s* in la tarefa, deliberately their presence, of today and yesterday, now that those voices have been carried away by the wind and water. Although most *tarefer@s* I talked to spoke of themselves as part of a social class, i.e. regarding their category of work, each too was her or his self and expressed a desire to be considered as such. As I considered each of them as individuals, the political discourse of a single oppressed class quickly and constantly crumbled away; there was no one *tarefer@*, no one class. There were instead men, women, and youth who labored cutting *yerba*, some of whom had done this all of their life and hence had a kind of layered culture built in the *yerbal*. Others had just begun to work in the *yerbal* or ducked in and out of it in search of better or different opportunity. I believe in the end it is important to consider the rights of those who work in the *yerba* harvest together but equally as important to consider the personhood and subjectivity at play that defies homogeneity and develops instead a complex community of people who play very different roles not only in the *yerbal* but also in their families and community. Between and amongst themselves, *tarefer@s* acted as friends and enemies. To all these ends, the ‘thing’ of *yerba mate* fell apart to reveal lives in labor, each particular upon close view.

In the next chapter, I linger in the *yerbal* in order to capture a phenomenological view of what is to be in this world. *La tarefa* is work, but as *tarefer@s* work, they live. Many of those

who shared their worlds in this chapter provided me with glimpses of this bittersweet life, but I now turn to it in more detail.

Chapter Three

A Bittersweet Dwelling: I left my life in the *yerbal*

More than once, I heard an elder *tarefer@* say: *Deje me vida en el yerbal*, I left my life in the *yerbal*. This lament was offered often in the context of the struggle for *tarefer@* rights and the fight to have a greater share of the distribution of profits from *yerba*. Over the decades, many had prospered from the production of the tea; the roads of Misiones were full of late model Toyota pickup trucks running back and forth between town and country. Yet most *tarefer@s* had no car at all. Because so many had begun to harvest *yerba* in their childhoods, most *tarefer@s* never finished high school, and many had very limited elementary school educations; it is not uncommon to find *tarefer@s* who cannot read or write. This legacy of dispossession is a long one that I have already discussed in a review of writing about *los mensú*. With so much opportunity foreclosed to them, they were left with a handful of choices by which to put food on their tables, and the *yerba* harvest is one of them. What did *tarefer@s* mean to convey when they said they had left their lives in the *yerbal*? How could I reconcile this statement with all the moments of humor and camaraderie that I had witnessed in the *yerbal*, the green world in which *tarefer@s* lived out their working lives? And, how did it relate to that remark of veteran *tarefero* Cándido who had said that when he saw a *yerbal*, replete with green leaf, he saw ‘total hope’? What kind of a place then is the *yerbal* which contains such bittersweet experience?

In this chapter, I first describe how the corporal suffering of *tarefer@s* is dismissed by many middle class white farmers in Misiones. I then turn to the natural world of the *yermal*, focusing on three aspects of the earthly world that especially affect *tarefer@s*: *la capuera* (weed cover), *la tierra colorada* (the red soil) and the multiple forms of water in the *yermal*. Indeed contact with the natural world over time shapes the social, ecological, and political being of *tarefer@s*. As I turn to these natural phenomena that affect how they move in their work day, I pay attention to the way in which this bittersweet dwelling evolves from what happens in the *yermal* itself as well as from what *tarefer@s* bring into it from events that occur outside. I use the frames of stigma and labor rights to illuminate the ways in which *tarefer@s* come to *feel* that they have left their lives in the *yermal* because of the bitter sense of place produced there. Finally, I turn to the sweet dimensions that form a sense of place such as the cold water that quenches thirst, sweet tangerines from companion trees, and the accordion music that sometimes drifts through the air from truck radios.

In his classic work written on the Western Apache, the late Keith Basso called a sense of place the “ways in which citizens of the earth constitute their landscapes and take themselves to be connected to them” (Basso 1996: 106). In adding this dimension of earthly space to the concept of place, he built on Martin Heidegger’s notion of dwelling which includes the “multiple lived relationships” that people have with places (Heidegger 1977: 332). For Basso, a sense of place was most often positive and creates a sense of belonging. But what sense of place comes from working on the land of another in which one is permitted to belong only temporarily and with certain conditions? Departing from Marx’s insinuation that a capitalist workplace interrupts dwelling, Tim Ingold writes that “the worker does not cease to dwell in the workplace. He is ‘at home’ there. But home is often a profoundly uncomfortable place to be” (Ingold 2000:332).

Hence it is from these two distinct musings on what a sense of place can bring— belonging on the one hand and discomfort on the other--that I build this chapter on labor performed in the ecological space of the *yerbal*. *Tarefer@s* temporarily inhabit the *yerbales* of others, and the *yerbal* is a home-space that is both uncomfortable and comfortable. It is a space of work, of socializing, joking venting, and storytelling together with a space of rights that are both given and taken away. The sense of place that grows out of this complexly full space is one of a bittersweet dwelling: On the one hand is Cándido's statement that he sees 'total hope' in a *yerbal*, and on the other, is the plaintive contestation that I heard so often: I left my life in the *yerbal*.

Bodily Suffering and Stigma

As I have demonstrated in the first part of this dissertation, getting to *yerba* has always been a difficult labor in itself. Even though *tarefer@s* now work in lines, because they work in cultivated fields rather than the wild patches of the Paraná Forest, they must traverse the land around them in order to gather green leaf. *Yerba* is harvested in the subtropical wintertime when workers labor against frost, the dense weedcover known as *la capuera*, cold dew, and the searing sun. No *tarefer@* can speak of her or his work without mentioning how dirty, cold and wet the body gets or the way that *el sol pica*, the sun bites. When *tarefer@s* recount the worst in the *yerbal*, they often speak of their bodies against natural world forces and the way their bodies suffer. What happens to them in this chronic exposure is often beyond words, not given to articulation, such that the experience falls into silence (Abu Lughod 1985; Rosaldo 1989; Duran 2006). So much bodily suffering eventually seeps into the spirit.

The tasks of *la tarefa* which I described in Chapter Two involving the sawing, breaking, and lifting of tree branches, intertwine with landscape in ways that affect both political and social

formation that should not be overlooked. The failure of others in Misiones, particularly those in positions of power over *tarefer@s*, to understand the depth and breadth of this imprinting, much less acknowledge it, has had negative consequences throughout the times in which they pushed for improved legal rights: *Tarefer@s* have been portrayed as lazy, drifting subjects even as defenders of their rights have reduced their experiences in the *yerbal* to a life of pure suffering. Just as many in Misiones dismiss *la tarefa* as an unskilled task anyone could do, I also noted another important dismissal of *tarefer@* experience. Making entrances and exits between the *tarefer@* rights movement and other pockets of rural communities in Misiones, I noted a tendency of many, often landowners of *yerbales*, to deny the corporal suffering experienced by *tarefer@s*. For example, in a meeting I had with the managers of the agricultural cooperative of Montecarlo who were almost all white farmers of German descent, *tarefer@* claims of suffering in the *yerbal* were met with scorn and rejection. A member of the board of directors challenged me to think of the first thing that *tarefer@s* did when they arrived in the *yerbal*. When I could not think of an answer, he said they get out their cell phones, meaning they spent their day socializing rather than working. What did I think of ‘these people and their work ethic’, the president of the board asked? The men went on to criticize the demands of the *tarefer@* union, suggesting that calls for such rights as a minimum wage were requests for luxuries. They decried the fact that they just could not find hardworking *tarefer@s* who could bring in those one thousand kilograms of *yerba* a day. To them, many *tarefer@s* were troublemakers who just would not let people live in peace and wanted to work as little as possible. Over years of fieldwork, I heard so much discriminatory talk that I learned to gauge character by what one had to say about the life of *tarefer@s*. Although I gained a greater understanding of the nuances of labor conflict in which there were legitimate problems caused by some *tarefer@s*, I found a

stronger social consciousness in those who knew or at least acknowledged that the harvest of *yerba* was a job that could sap the body and the spirit.

In conversations with *tarefer@s*, they reiterated several things: First, that they labored in isolated fields where the many who judged them never, ever went. And second, that in an increasingly urban society, the person who still labored in contact with the earth was considered less than others. Most in society did not consider it a priority to understand the bodily experience of *tarefer@s* in order to empathize with their plight. They often felt alone then, alone against a human world and an ecological one from which they had no relief in the sense that they were bound to return each year in order to survive. They also were not quiet about noting that privileges of all kinds were mostly reserved for lighter skinned people. As I listened to them in both public and private spaces, *tarefer@s*' descriptions of bodily suffering involved a scant use of words. They did not have 'thick descriptions' of their experiences (Rosaldo 1989:2). Sometime it seemed like so many words and trains of thought had been left behind in *yerbales*. But resoundingly, they referred back to the ecological place they inhabited while working, including the scorch of the sun and frost and the cunning of moisture in weed cover. They spoke of the body doused in cold dew for hours and the great difficulty in warming up as the workday stretched on.

Although suffering in the forest *yerbales* of the Alto Paraná had been documented during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Ambrosetti 2008; Niklison 1914), decades had passed with near total silence as to the extent of ongoing suffering in 20th century *yerba* harvests. Indeed *tarefer@s* are virtually unknown outside of the province of Misiones, and inside the province, the legitimacy of their voices was ground out decisively by a social hierarchy that kept them pinned to the bottom.

My ongoing interest in their lives in the *yermal* was incomprehensible to many, but I sensed that there was more to learn in the *yermal* itself about *tarefer@s* personhood. My interrogation was driven by my own experience growing up on a working farm in Texas. I had spent long hours laboring in both heat and cold as a child, working together with my family to put food on our table. I knew that I still carried with me in my own consciousness imprints of the natural world in which I had labored. This consciousness is bittersweet: I still remember vividly the smell of late summer drying weed cover, of the blackland prairie soil upturned from weeding, of thirst on one hundred degree days, and the feeling of work without progress when I was tasked with removing patches of weeds that seemed to stretch on forever. I also remember the exquisite smell of springtime, the divine quenching of a cold drink taken in after hard work under the sun, and moments of hilarity and mischief with my brothers and sisters. The *place* in the natural world in which I worked mattered then and has never stopped mattering. These imprints have never gone away even though I have traveled far from the site of imprinting.

Using my own bodily experience as a guide, my own memory of hands on green leaf, I endeavored to tune into what it was that *tarefer@s* felt in their bodies in the unique theater of the *yermal*. I engaged in the tasks that they did and pushed myself to work their schedules in order to understand what they felt. I kept in mind what I had heard from them outside the *yermal* about what happened within---about the sun, the frost, the cold dew, and *la capuera* (weed cover). I now move to an ethnographic shadowing of their embodied selves as *tarefer@s* traverse the natural world of the *yermal*, taking in all around them and maneuvering as they must to gather green leaf.

La Capuera

As *tarefer@s* move within the *yerbal*, they must step over weed cover or *la capuera* to get to the *yerba* trees. *La capuera* imprints on *tarefer@* personhood in a distinct way. Just as many veteran *tarefer@s* speak of leaving their lives in the *yerbal*, they also speak of having crossed much *capuera* in their lives. The crossing of *capuera* symbolizes both the physical and existential hardship that so many *tarefer@s* have faced in their lifetime. In Misiones, the word *la capuera* is tossed into conversations often: It comes from the Portuguese *capoeira* and means ‘bad grass’ or weeds.⁶⁴ Now that *yerba* trees are planted in deforested zones, weeds grow in places where the forest canopy before would not have blocked their growth. Left bare in full sunlight, the soil becomes a site for prolific weed growth. Weeds punish because of their incessant growth and the way that they block easy access to the *yerba* trees. I worked with *tarefer@s* in *yerbales* where the weeds were so thick that they had to lift their feet up high to get through them. Crossing *capuera* is akin to what one has to do to get across a shallow stream, raising the feet and cutting through with the knees. Within the weeds are menaces such as thorns and burs that stick to clothes. Foxtail gets in the way for its high growth while plants with *yoti*, or thorns puncture flesh when exposed.

Not only is *la capuera* hard to cross over, but it also affects how much *tarefer@s* can harvest. I saw *yerba* trees that were ensnared with weed vines that had made their way through all the branches of the tree. *Tarefer@s* are expected to still harvest from a tree such as this, not let the weed leaf mix with that of the *yerba*, and leave the tree healthy for producing more green leaf. Most of the drying mills will discount *yerba* contractors if there are weeds mixed in with the green leaf, and that penalty is passed on to *tarefer@s*. They traditionally were contracted

⁶⁴ The same name refers to the martial art developed over time by slaves in Brazil.

during the summer months to weed the *yerbales* so that the *yerba* trees would have better yield. But since the 1990s, man-made venom with no anti-venom has taken control over the countryside: herbicide or weed killer. Monsanto's Roundup first came on the market in the U.S. in 1976 but began to be widely used in Argentina in the 1990s. Although multiple brands and cocktails of herbicide are used to kill weeds, Roundup is the most commonly applied herbicide. Its use has practically extinguished the possibility of summer income for *tarefer@s* throughout Misiones. Although weeding during the summer months is especially taxing to the body because of the sun, snakes, and the abundance of insects, *tarefer@s* were still able to earn a livelihood off of what was considered to be a menace. Now they can rely only on the limited summer harvest of *yerba* which is just when Roundup is most vigorously applied to weed cover. A full harvest only occurs in the winter months.

When *tarefer@s* talked of *el veneno*, the poison, they often interchanged the term with *el Roundup*, indicating the power of the brand that has infiltrated everyday vernacular. Many *tarefer@s* believed that they were being poisoned themselves, because as veteran *tarefer@ Santos Villalba* once told me “we bathe in *veneno*.” This is due to the way they take back up into their bodies whatever has been applied in the *yerbal*, especially when their pores open up in the heat of the summer. Many *tarefer@s* have told me that there are less snakes where poison has been applied in the weed growth. For those who have to be in the *yerbal* not long after the application of herbicides, they report that the stench of herbicide seeps into their lunches, their clothes, and even into their sweat. Indeed Misiones has one of the highest cancer rates in all of Argentina, and many suspect that this comes from agricultural chemicals that are applied in abundance throughout the province. I observed high rates of asthma, child birth defects, and epilepsy as well as cancer in my study of *tarefer@* communities throughout Misiones.

La capuera is a barrier that *tarefer@s* must cross over to harvest the weight of the green leaf that will put food on their tables, but its extinction via the use of herbicide generates both health risk and unemployment. When the weed cover is high, they have to fight it all day long in order to gather what surely will be a lesser quantity of green leaf. This means that they work harder to make less money, because they are paid only by the weight of the green leaf they harvest. I spent many hours with Don Villalba's crew who worked in a poorly tended *yerbal* that was over 1000 hectares strong. *Tarefer@s* were trapped in the *yerbal* for months at a time, making much less than they could have in another better cared for *yerbal*. *Tarefer@s* were then caught in a dialectical thicket of tensions between suffering and sustaining. With decreasing income, many *tarefer@s* turned to government welfare plans and supplemented their income by working under the table in the *yerba* harvest. This dialectical thicket is memorialized in many a neglected *yerbal* where the politics of soil management, *la capuera*, labor, and corporate and political corruption converge to form a bitter sense of place for *tarefer@s*.



Figure 11: The high *capuera* (weeds) dwarfs the *yerba* in this *yerbal* close to Montecarlo where Don Villalba and his *cuadrilla* worked (Photo by Author 2013).



Figure 12: A *yerbal* heavily treated by herbicide. (Photo by Author 2009).

Poison in the Bad Grass

In the messy praxis of dismantling commodity fetishism, weeds take center stage in *mate* country. If the heart of commodity fetishism is about erasure of the hands and lives of those who produce food for others, weeds actually constitute an active theater for this disappearing process. As *yerba* gains added value the further and further it gets from its site of origin, the lives of *tarefer@s* lose value, so too do weeds disappear. *La capuera*, the weed cover, historically played the role of in the bitter sweetness of the *yerbal*. Weeds brought back memory while the incessant sorting through or pulling up of weeds could forge distance between memories. Love-making occurred in weeds-- from the illegal lovers' rendezvous to a teenage couple bedding down in exploration or conquest, depending on one's view. Dead bodies were hidden in weeds. With the breaking and crushing of stem, green leaf, flower and root, life was given, life was taken away. And, weeds themselves could facilitate killing as they covered up the serpents and parasites that dwelled within.

It was not only the substance of weeds on which many a family survived over generations, but also the trouble they caused. *La capuera*, after all, translated roughly from the Portuguese as "the bad grass" perhaps for at least the reasons so many people viewed it as a problem—oftentimes far from having medicinal value, weeds got in the way of growing other plants that people needed to either eat or sell in order to buy other things. The clearing of weeds is and was fundamental to all kinds of cultivation. For at least a century, *tarefer@s* had worked clearing weed cover in *yerbales* during the offseason, which was the summer. *Yerba* cannot be harvested all year long; rather there is a mandatory offseason in the spring and early summer in order to allow the plan to regenerate and produce more green leaf. It was also during this time

that weed growth proliferates in the heat of the sun and subtropical rains. Heat and humidity join to foster weed fertility.

Besides the weeding by hand that so many *tarefer@s* remember, weeding was done historically by hand with the machete. *Machetear*, as it is referred to, is the practice of hand-made weed whacking, the work that in many areas of the world today is now done with mechanical weed cutters. Most anyone who walked through the *capuera* would carry with them a machete, whacking away paths as they went. The blade was good for so many things---from this cutting of swathes of weed to making pathways, killing snakes, or even cutting peels of fruit. Even the thousands of red dirt roads (*piques*) crisscrossing Misiones were cut by machete-wielding crews of nameless laborers in the time of *los mensú*.

Most all agreed that going out to *machetear* was one of the hardest jobs for it was done in the heat of summer and with the threat of snake bite and swarming insects. It had been the way that people made due in the offseason; that little bit of income was the difference between eating and hunger. But since the 1990s, things had changed. Weeding crews had been replaced by *el veneno*. This replaced the most important and historic tool---*el machete*. Herbicide could be applied by a single person covering a lot of terrain quickly. Overnight, many hands used to weed were eliminated, and for farmers, the headaches of labor conflict dissolved as well. Weed clearing and herbicide were part of everyday life in *yerba mate* country, and the topic was heavily polemical. With *el veneno* came more efficient weed clearing but also contamination of soil, water, and any number of consequences for the health of those who lived in the wake of its application.

The way I listened to *tarefer@s*' stories of weeds was influenced by my own experience growing up on an organic farm where we did not use herbicides to do our job for us. My father,

rather, used his children, which had been the preferred source of eradication for many centuries. I knew that the job of weeding brought forth meditation, irritation, and powerlessness all at once in part because it is carried out under open sky (hooks 2009: 201). There is a certain physical satisfaction in clearing, in uprooting, in the touch. But there is great frustration in seeing how far one does not advance and how the weeds come right back at you in their stubborn growth.⁶⁵

Machetes and Mochilas

On most every farm I ever visited, it was there: In sheds, back porches, tossed to the side of houses and fields, are the plastic gallons of weed killer. Often they were the white ones with the green, black and gold logo of Monsanto's Roundup on them. Roundup for many years now has been the most widely applied herbicide in the world. The *mochila* (backpack) that people put on their backs is actually a plastic canister, often blue in color, which held the diluted poison. Walking through the weeds, one shifted the extended nozzle to and fro, spraying across the weed cover. Often the wind picks up and the smell of poison wafts through the air, but people most often are used to going on with their work. What comes out of the *mochila* is for the weeds, not for them. Moreover, Monsanto has waged effective marketing campaigns to deny that Roundup causes any harm to humans. As my neighbor Berta once told me, "El Roundup just disappears when it hits the soil."

⁶⁵ The part of Texas where I grew up is afflicted by an invasive variety of sunflower which grows tall and quickly. They have strong, coarse, prickly columns that one must seize and then bend down toward the root to try to unroot the plant. It required a great deal of force, one that I did not always have. For days, my hands remained stained from the resin that comes from the plant and I went to school with resin and scratches all the way up to my elbows. It takes great effort to get the resin off. I carry with me the memory of the stigma I felt at school for I was the only one of my classmates who did that kind of labor.

Roundup created a new trade and a new worker as it displaced the crews of workers, often families, who had worked to provide weed control for generations. The labor of weed extermination is quite different from the labor of someone looking for medicinal plants in the weeds as Presencia does in Chapter Six. She worked within the weed cover, selecting out, touching the plants. The person who sprays moves above the cover. Rather than selection, totality is the goal—total cover, total destruction. This is in contrast to Presencia's gathering of plants in which she parsed through, selected out, left some life behind, took some life with her. In some cases, the removal of leaves would bring on new green leaf, as does cutting *yerba* to enable new sprouting of green leaf. Roundup, on the other hand, killed everything and left the ground thirsty.

Everyday talk in the countryside in Misiones was peppered with the subject of herbicide application in a way that it used to be peppered with talk of what it was to *carpir*, to weed. Now people spoke differently: *Fui a pulverizar. Voy a pulverizar. Estuve con la mochila toda la mañana.* I went to spray. I need to go spray. I was out spraying all morning. *Mochilas* then replaced machetes as the obvious tool with which people countered the weeds. Carried symbolically on the backs of workers, *mochilas* contain in them a *coctel* of active and inert chemicals that, once sprayed onto plants, kill everything with which they makes contact. This was the magic behind Roundup, a total rounding up of all life that is perceived to be in the way with the objective of extermination.⁶⁶ The poison smelled strong when it was first applied, but

⁶⁶ The micro-political workings of what Roundup is meant to do, extinguish the life of plant, are found too in the very name of the brand--if we take the name seriously (like the corralling of a calf or bull), what effectively an herbicide like Roundup is designed to do is extinguish and corral all at once.

the smell quickly disappeared as it was dispersed and taken up in the air. Lively crews of workers are replaced by the silent, solitary practice of *polverizando*. On the one hand, some found it hard to be nostalgic for the hard labor of hand-weeding, and farmers were glad to be rid of labor headaches. But as *el veneno* entangled with employment and livelihood, it also left in its path a more sinister effect.

In my time in Guatambú, stories of sickness and premature death filled the air and many pointed to *el veneno*. There was the mentally retarded nephew of Margot who never left the house. Celia's sister-in-law had to draw on disability to treat her asthma and was going further and further down hill, although she was only in her forties. There was no other obvious reason why she would have developed asthma later on in life, her family said. When Margot's daughter had multiple miscarriages, the doctor told her that he had been seeing many aborted pregnancy and that he suspected it to be coming from different chemicals attached to large paper mill up the road. The owner of the country house we lived in believed that Roundup had caused the cancer that killed his father, for he had spent many hours of his life *polverizando*. Joaquin who drove to our house in an old white Peugeot with a weed cutter sticking out the back window liked to sit a spell and chat about life. Some of the stories he told had to do with *veneno*. A nephew of his had been working on a *colono's* farm barefoot where they had just applied *veneno*. Unbeknownst to him, he had taken up the poison through his feet. He began to have trouble breathing. They got him to the hospital. But it was too late.

Of course, Roundup was not the only herbicide or pesticide applied, and it was likely another toxic that took the life of Joaquin's nephew. All agreed that even more potent and toxic chemicals are applied to young pine saplings when they are first getting started in order to keep off beetles and other problems. The only good part of it was that once they were off to a good

start, the trees would not require further poison. *Yerba* on the other hand required constant application of poison to keep the weed growth down. That is if there was no planned companion planting such as *avena* or people hired to *machetear* or to weed. Farmers talked among themselves about who was inclined to spray their *yerbales* with even more toxic chemicals, without discretion.

The international politics of Roundup and other chemicals made their mark in Misiones. A great controversy was at play in Argentina over the aerial spraying of Roundup in Argentina's expanding soy fields. There was litigation over increasing birth defects and cancer in zones where this spraying was occurring. Argentina actually was in the forefront of grassroots campaigns to have Roundup banned. But in Misiones, there was no actual quantification of things, as hard as it would have been if the effort had been made by the state. Rather the questions, the possibilities of contamination from *el veneno* hovered in the air, in circles of *mate*, rolling off worried tongues. Everyone had stories. After all *el veneno* was everywhere, literally in the backyard. The unbridled use of herbicide was facilitated by low literacy rates on the part of both farmers and harvesters. Not only could many people not read, but for those who could, reading was rarely a daily habit. Reading the complex print on Roundup containers and following up with other reading was just not going to happen.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ If Misiones was any example, this was, in part, what made the dumping of Roundup into Global South markets so profitable. In my interviews with agricultural and forestry engineers at INTA, the state's agricultural technological and extension agency, there was often much denial about the harms of Roundup. Other toxic chemicals were of greater concern, and rumors in the countryside were of little concern.

Setting Foot in La Tierra Colorada

La tarefa takes place in the land of *la tierra colorada*, or ‘red soil’ that is deeply colored so because of its mineral content, especially iron. This soil makes Misiones and the surrounding subtropical climate the only place (for now) in the world where *yerba* can be grown. The beautiful red soil contrasts stunningly with the many shades of green that cover the subtropical landscape. Even *Misioneros* who have never planted a seed in their lives are fond of recounting the refrain that if you just toss a seed on the ground in Misiones it will grow, because the soil is so fertile. *La tierra colorada* is most visible in the roads, and I too have never tired of the view I have when I travel along the deep red earth roads that traverse Misiones by the hundreds if not thousands. In fact, *Misioneros* believe that *la tierra colorada* has a kind of spiritual power that captivates visitors, bringing them back forever.

But *la tierra colorada* has another side. It is not a porous soil but rather more like clay. With the heavy, frequent rains of Misiones, the red earth converts to red clay, *el barro*, and stains absolutely everything. It is then very difficult to remove. This clay-like texture means that when it rains, the roads are turned into extremely slippery messes. One way to imagine the extent to which these roads become slippery is to imagine what happens to clay on a potter’s wheel. With more water added in motion, the clay becomes slippery enough to form a pot. Speeding vehicles on red dirt roads after or during a rain means the vehicle can slide out of control and even in good moments slide to the side. *Misioneros* who live in the countryside are experts at what they call *patinando* or skating on *el barro*, the clay. People also have a way of walking that I never learned exactly. When they need to, adults manage to avoid getting the red dirt clay on their clothes no matter what. Many farms have special metal frames with a straight iron edge for cleaning *el barro* off the shoes. The problem created with rain in *la tierra colorada* is an

everyday one that deeply affects culture. Schoolteachers do not come to school on rainy days at rural schools because of the problem with the mud; children do not come either. There is no public transport for children in rural areas, and many walk to school along the red dirt road. When walking after a rain, feet become heavy with layers of *barro* that is inches thick and clothes are inevitably dirtied.

Along with the main dirt corridors, the *yerbales* of Misiones are crisscrossed with thousands of internal veins that facilitate the getting in and getting out of the *yerbales* for the harvest of green leaf. If the rains were enough the night before, the *tarefa* does not take place, because of the risks of getting the truck stuck in *el barro*. This means there are numerous days during the *yerba* harvest season that *tarefer@s* do not work and hence do not get paid. A *tarefer@s*'s first step in a *yerbal* is usually done on the red dirt soil of one of these internal roads. If the soil is wet, their feet gather the red clay as they walk; there is no way around this. Then, they set foot into the *yerbal*, which will surely be somewhat wet from rain or dew. Every step a *tarefer@s* takes in a *yerbal* is of import for, *el suelo*, the ground they walk on forms a part of their taskscape. This is the floor of their home, so to speak, and often they are not in charge of taking care of it in a way that profoundly affects their walking. In order for *yerba* trees to grow more green leaf, they need rich soil. The poorer the soil, the less the yield. In the plant world, as in any living theater, green lives compete for resources. The more competitors the *yerba* has, the less energy the tree has to produce more green leaf. *Tarefer@s* have to get to the green leaf and one kind of green leaf only or else they will not be able to eat. Although the members of Don Villalba's crew did not talk of *el suelo* in their narratives, they talked much about the *capuera*, which had taken over the ground.

If each *yerba* tree is unique, so is each *yerbal*. In a well-tended one, some level of plant ground cover will be preserved so that the soil can be enriched around the tree and erosion will not wash away all nourishment. Sometimes that ground is planted with cover crops such as oats and at others times the natural plant cover is cut low, often by the machetes wielded by *tarefer@s* working in the off season. If the ground cover is low, *tarefer@s* set foot in the *yerbal* and move effortlessly from tree to tree and between rows. But a poorly tended *yerbal* suffers from of two extremes: either the plants have grown too high, making it difficult to step forward and around during the *tarefa* or the plant cover will have been almost entirely removed, most often through consistent use of an herbicide. In each, the *yerba* suffers and so too do *tarefer@s*. A third scenario is the demoralizing one that I have already described in which *tarefer@s* have to work in waist-high weed cover that has later been exterminated by indiscriminate dousing of herbicides in a futile attempt to stop the direction of *la capuera* in all directions.

One spring day not long after I had arrived in the small community of Montecarlo, I interviewed an agricultural engineer named Tito who was an expert in soil management at the local agriculture extension office. He complained of the persistent lack of consciousness of owners of *yerbales* in their care (or neglect) of their *yerbales*. Quite simply, he explained, it is easy to sit back once the *yerba* is planted and wait for the profits from the *tarefa* each year. Montecarlo County was full of absentee landlords, sons and daughters of the original *colonos* who had left the farms to move into Montecarlo but still depended on income from those farms. They hired others to tend to their farms and visited them on occasion. When Tito realized exactly which house we lived in in Guatambú, he told me: “Take a look at the *yerbal* just up the road from you. There is a pine grove in front of the *yerbal*, and then you will see it. It is in terrible shape. *Tu vecino es un asesino del suelo.*” In saying that my neighbor was an ‘assassin of the

soil', he meant that the intensive use of herbicide and poor weed cover had caused extensive erosion which in turn meant starved, scrawny *yerba* trees. It is this kind of *yerbal* that most frustrates *tarefer@s* for they have to work all the more to gather less green leaf.

From the moment I set foot in *yerba mate* country, I heard complaints about the low prices of *yerba*. People just couldn't make it and were leaving their farms, selling them off, or planting pine and eucalyptus because they grew fast and the market was better for the timber that went straight to the paper mills in the province. Few could afford to keep their *yerbales* clean, because officially registering was just too costly due to the high rate of taxation. The *yerbales* suffered and *la capuera* benefited. But *colonos* still expected an annual profit from the *yerba* harvest, and they wanted *tarefer@s* to help deliver it. In general, *colonos* in Montecarlo County showed little interest in the impact of poor soil management on *tarefer@s*; they only saw declining profits for their *yerba*. I did learn looking closely at the numbers that the low price of *yerba* coupled with the high cost of officially registering workers to weed the *yerbales* only for a couple of months hardly made things worth it. The earnings were minimal while the input costs were high. The Argentine state had failed to take into account these discrepancies even as it expected farmers and *tarefer@s* to produce cheap *yerba mate* for all of Argentina.

For *tarefer@s* setting foot in *yerbales*, a parched bare soil means less green leaf but having to traverse waist-high *capuera* means less green leaf as well, just much more difficulty getting to it. But *tarefer@s* do not just set foot on the deep red soil. They touch it all day long, and it gets on their shoes, ankles if they wear no socks, and clothes. When the *yerbal* is dry, *yerba* leaf is often coated in a fine layer of *tierra colorada* from the kicking up of dust on the roads nearby. Carrying out the *raído*, the packed green leaf, and moving back and forth between the rows in the *yerbal* all create more contact with soil. By mid-morning or after just an hour in

the *yerbal*, the clothes of *tarefer@s* are stained with soil. *La tierra colorada*, the only soil that can give life to the *yerba* plant, and therefore *tarefer@s*, ironically creates a double bind for them. The intense discrimination they face comes in part from the perception of *tarefer@s* as dirty. *La tarefa* is considered *el trabajo más feo*, the ugliest of jobs, in part because of the intense way that the earth soils clothes and skin in the *yerbal*. Again and again I heard people refer to the *yerba* harvest as a dirty, ugly job, and some *tarefer@s* decried the way that they always got dirty. Because of the emphases on material wealth and urban identity, being dirty created huge stigma for *tarefer@s*. Many people in the town of Montecarlo just never go dirty, I noticed. In fact, there was a preference for snow-white athletic shoes during my stay in the town which seemed to never get even a speck of red soil on them. The staining from the soil added much bitterness to the sense of place in the *yerbal* for clothes were ruined or required much work to get clean, and *tarefer@s* were looked down upon when they came out of the *yerbal* for being so dirty. The lack of access to indoor plumbing made things harder for *tarefer@s* who lived in more humble conditions.

Waters in Place

The green world place of *tarefer@s* is often a wet one. They inhabit *yerbales* at dawn, and an everyday moment in the natural world affects them dramatically as no other. In a twenty-four hour day, there is a point when a chemistry of hot, cold, and wet coalesces into magic. As the air cools at night, it is able to hold less water vapor. The dew point comes when water vapor in the air condenses to form drops of water. Whereas clouds form when condensation occurs in the air, the cooling night air that touches something on the earth in condensation manifests as dew or frost. Lifetime *tarefer@s* are intimate with both. They set foot in the *yerbal* often before the sun has risen. Walking into the dawn air means entering a wet world. As they move through

weed cover and touch the *yerba* trees, they are in constant contact with dew. Until the sun takes it up anew, they literally bathe in dew, and that dew is often cold. They do not have access to waterproof clothes, which means the cold dew reaches their skin.

The winter in Misiones sinks into the bones because of the subtropical humidity. Whereas dew is not necessarily a topic in everyday conversation for inhabitants of urban areas, it is in Misiones. Often times dew during the wintertime is viewed as a health threat. Even in town this is so. My daughter's kindergarten teacher once told me that she would call her own children inside after five pm in the wintertime no matter what so that they could get out of the dew: "It falls heavy," she told me, "and causes great damage to the body. All the kids have coughs, and two are in the hospital with a form of pneumonia." At the time she told me this, my daughter too had a deep cough. Even doctors in Misiones insist that cold plus humidity brings on sickness. *Tarefer@s*, however, cannot be taken inside. They have no shelter from this heavy falling of the dew. Rather, they have to confront it every day and are bathed in it by the *yerba* trees and *la capuera* that they must cross over to get to the green leaf. Ironically, the very dew that menaces in this bittersweet dwelling is that which sustains, for it provides critical moisture for the *yerba*, which brings more green leaf. Indeed this fundamental value of dew for human life is forgotten increasingly in contemporary life.

One early June morning, I worked with Celia and her sister Mari in a well-tended *yerbal* near the Paraná River. In just minutes, we were all drenched in dew from our chests down to our feet. After working for some time, Celia stopped to wring out her gloves. Rusty red water trickled out, streams of dew now running water that the gloves had taken up, mixed with the red earth. "I have always tried to keep that dew off my belly", Celia reminds me, "as it is not good

for us women. If you let the cold dew soak you all the time, it is bad for you. It makes your menstrual pains really bad.”

Celia’s and others often talked about how prolonged exposure to the cold mixed with wet will make the body suffer in some way or another. It was a couple of hours that day before the sun was high enough to start drying us out, and it would take hours more to become sufficiently dry. But *tarefer@s* are masters of the layer for many winter days begin with bone-chilling cold, but the subtropical sun takes its hold as the day wears on. Moreover, the body warms with the exertion from the tasks of the harvest. With the sun rising, we peeled off our outer layer of winter wear and hung what was wet in the same *yerba* trees for drying. By around ten or eleven in the morning in most *yerbales*, I could find these makeshift fresh air closets with the clothes of both men and women hung to dry.

Just as *tarefer@s* both head into and maneuver around dew, they confront the ebb and flow of waters in place. If they harvest in a late summer drought, the lack of rain probably means more sun. Because Misiones is in subtropical zone with high precipitation, *tarefer@s* are rained on all the time. Getting drenched is part of their taskscape (Ingold 2000). Often when the rain comes, work does not stop. Celia, who tends to still harvest when others have pulled out for weather reasons, has a rule on rain: If it is raining when they get up in the morning, they wait at home to see when it stops and how wet the roads are. But if the rain begins after they have already gone out, la *tarefa* continues. Celia had recently gotten so wet and cold during a harvest, she just took off all her clothes and wrapped herself in a blanket in the truck cabin on the way home. Of course, her crew was not able to do the same thing. *Tarefer@s* seek shelter when it rains, but that shelter is often arboreal, and most of those trees only help a little for a short time. When the rain stops, they must continue to harvest green leaf in order to eat.

If getting drenched from water that pours from the sky is a reality for *tarefer@s*, they do not have an easy way of harvesting that water. The need for water to quench thirst does not cease. Because *tarefer@s* move constantly throughout the day, they need to drink large amounts of water. If it is cold, they need hot water for *mate* and when the heat moves in, they drink *tereré* or cold *mate*. Most *tarefer@s* bring thermoses of water with them to work, but the water does not always last. If they have walked to the *yermal* from country homes, they may have carried only the water they could. They then must depend on other sources of water--the supply that the field boss has, on the farmer who owns the *yermal* or creeks and wells that they find on the land. The nearness and availability of water is critical.

One day I was on the front porch of the home of Rogelio and María who lived at a crossroads near multiple *yerbales*. A young teenage boy appeared suddenly out of a nearby grove of trees and asked to fill up two gallon jugs of water. Surely they were cutting *yerba* nearby, but it could not have been so close. Rogelio had a fine open well just a few meters behind his house, and he invited the boy that way. There the water from the well was especially refreshing, kept even cooler by trees that shaded the well. The boy walked away with his cargo, hauling new weight along with his thirst. Pressing the body into thirst through labor is part of the bitter sense of place, and stigma infiltrates the politics of water in the countryside.

“I have never given someone a glass of hot water,” Celia told me proudly once. “You wouldn’t believe that there are *colonos* out there who will give you a glass of hot water.” Because there are multiple major and minor roads where Celia lives, people come knocking often. The intense heat in Misiones means that it is almost a given that all water that is drunk in the summertime is chilled. Plastic beverage bottles are recycled and are filled, frozen and then submerged into water or hacked apart with a hammer or knife to create large chunks of ice that

are used to cool water. The use of small ice trays is not common both because small cubes melt too quickly, and because people recycle as a tradition of everyday budgeting.

Part of the reason Misiones was colonized was because of the extensive networks of rivers and streams that flow between the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers that form the east and west borders of the province. Land was parceled off according to these water sources. But over time, wells were dug so that water could be more easily harnessed. Veteran *tarefer@s* have lived through floods and droughts in which wells ran dry. Sharing water both in good times and bad times is connected to the everyday culture of neighborliness. But again, water marks lines between those who have and those who do not. Don Villalba talked of water in place as it connected to social relationships:

There are good and bad people everywhere. When we had our farm out there, we had terrible neighbors. I had to go look for water a kilometer away because we did not have a well and our neighbors did not share theirs with us. We ended up digging our well at night by the light of the moon and a kerosene lantern while the kids were sleeping. For the 25 of May, the kids came home from the celebration and they were thirsty and I could say, 'go get water' and there was water to get. It was a day of incredible happiness.

Then in 1989 a terrible drought came for three months and our neighbor's well dried up. One day he came asking for water and I asked him, 'remember when you would not share your water? I am not going to do your work for you, but go ahead and go get some water.' According to legend, you should not be greedy with water because that comes with eternal punishment. And I have proof of this. To this day, there is no water there on that farm, just dust. It took us a month to dig a 17 meter deep well.

This story about water happens on the periphery of the *yerbal*, but *tarefer@s* remember the greed or kindness of others vividly in the times that they suffered through thirst in the *yerbal*. For Don Villalba, his narrative circles back to his own personhood and the kind of moral person he has tried to be in his life.

The Body Punctured in the Sun

Although it might seem that *tarefer@s* toil away in solitude because of the isolation of so many *yerbales*, the truth is that they are accompanied by many other life forms. They sense, feel, and interact with these other lives. Much fear and discomfort for the body comes from fear of being punctured by insects, snakes, or in a past time, of being attacked and devoured by tigers from the Paraná Forest. But no creature brings on fear like the snake in the *yerbal*. The dilemma of ‘crossing *capuera*’ is made worse by the specter of serpents coiling therein. People across Misiones keep their grass cut short or keep the red dirt floors around their houses completely swept because of their perception that snakes are most attracted to deep weed cover. A cleared earthen floor also makes snakes readily visible to the eye. *Tarefer@s* have no way to keep their working home, the *yerbal*, clean. They carry with them the fear of snakebite and kill snakes whenever they can. On the day my dog who I had rescued in the countryside killed a coral snake in a neighbor’s *yerbal*, a *tarefer@* with whom I worked told me how just days before while working in the central highland county of Oberá, he had felt something pull at his chest as he sawed branches from a tree. He looked down to see a *yarará* latched on to the shirt on his chest; the *yarará* is an intensely poisonous South American viper. Luckily the man had worn a double layer of clothing that day, so the snake’s fangs did not puncture his skin.

Yerbales are full of life from the multiple varieties of insects that feed on the blood and skin of humans to bees, butterflies, pheasants, song birds, snakes, owls, armadillos, wasps, rabbits, monkeys and less often today, the *yacaraté* or jaguar of the Paraná forest. A farmer for whom Celia had harvested *yerba* for years told me how people used to put lard on their skin to keep away the *baregui*, the horrible gnat-like biters who leave wounds that itch for days and are inclined to get infected. With climate changes, there are occasional swells of insect populations

as well. Don Villalba recounted how the *yerbal* of a past summer was especially full of wasps, which pose danger to *tarefer@s*. But what is left of biodiversity in the *yerbal* affects dwelling too. When a group of young *tarefer@s* in his crew found a creature that looked like a miniature bat crossed with a caterpillar, I showed Celia and Cándido a picture of it: “That is just a *gusano* (a worm),” they commented, marking their experience as veterans of the *yerbales*, able to recognize many life forms.

Past and present beings inflect *tarefer@* imaginings as they move in the world of the *yerbal*. Celia recounted how her own musings about fear and the natural world once intruded in her work day as she worked in her own *yerbal*:

One morning I went out to weed, in that space over there, where there is *yerba* now. I started to think, you know the mind spinning round and round. And then I was weeding and thinking about how that lion ate the little two-year-old boy of that park ranger from Iguazú two years ago. How much that mother did not look out for that little creature! So careless! That old lion did not even have any teeth left! He just gnawed on the boy. He was so hungry he came round to the park ranger’s house. That week, this was the only story on the news.

As Celia worked away, lost in thought, a rabbit suddenly jumped up in the weeds. “That rabbit almost killed me! I thought I would die of a heart attack it scared me so!” Even though jaguars are now endangered in Misiones, they are very much a part of local history. The number of *tarefer@s* devoured by them in the forest harvests will never be known (Ambrosetti 2008).

The presence of animals and insects that menace comes together with the intensely hot sun. In Misiones, once the heat stokes up by 11 am, the sun can be quite unbearable until 4 pm or so, even in the winter. The scene with which I opened this dissertation in which labor inspectors had interrupted the morning harvest makes clear how important those early morning hours on. Between the cold wet dew and the hot sun, *tarefer@s* work incessantly to deflect and survive multiple forces of nature. As the sun drained Celia that day, it also brought comfort in dwelling:

After being drenched in cold dew or on a cold day after a freeze, *tarefer@s* welcome the sun, for it dries out clothes and warms bodies.

The Trees Fight Back

The *tarefa* is intensely corporal, and a *tarefera* uses her whole body to gather green leaf. Her body closely connects to the tree; she extends to and from it as she works, interrupting its expansion and its branching out. Once she has sawed the branches from the tree and plucked off the tender shoots, she has to break them up. She extends her arms, her wrists are flexed over and over in the breaking, she turns, she stoops, she lifts, and she crosses the weeds. Her back and abdomen are challenged at different times. The wrists and hands in *la quebranza* or the breaking up of branches are challenged intensely. Just as fruit pickers are scratched and pricked during their labor, in the *tarefa*, the tree fights back. The tree's yield later is sunk into a *tarefer@s*'s body through food and *mate*. They use gloves to protect their hands from the scrape and blow of leaf and branch as they break up the green leaf. Fingernails crack from the constant beating of the branches against them. This is true even when wearing gloves. Clothes or any kind of cloth are quickly worn out in the harvest as the constant brushing against the tree branches creates wear. Most *tarefer@s* wear shoes with socks tucked in or boots so that the ankles are not exposed to potential snake bites, bugs and branches. If the skin is exposed, there is something waiting to feed on human skin either out of fear or necessity. Long sleeves are generally the other necessity for snake possibilities and for keeping the arms from being torn to shreds by hours of contact with branches. Many wear hats for the sun bears down, even though the gathering of green leaf must go on.

Before I learned of the harvester rights movement centered in Montecarlo, I had just begun to learn about how it was that *yerba* was harvested. Rogelio, the redheaded *tarefero* who

first taught me about life for *tarefer@s* deep in the countryside, was the first person to show me how *yerba* was cut. I was impressed by the choreography of the harvest moments. Rogelio worked with great speed, and he was deeply proud of his knowledge of the *yerbal*, the trees, and the different styles of harvest. This would be the case with many other *tarefer@s*. Later, when I tried *quebranza* myself, I could not stop, at first, as I did and still do enjoy the rhythm that the work demands. But eventually as I worked long hours doing the same, my body desired to stop, feeling it could go on no more. In that moment, I moved to a different level of understanding *tarefer@* lives, having felt some sense of the endurance aspect of the work--the effort of the body over time in a single day, a season, and a lifetime. In their late thirties, Rogelio and his wife María were both in superb physical condition from their lifetime of work. But in the years I knew them, their faces aged notably from the sun and the hardships they faced in the countryside.

La quebranza requires force to break up of the branch fibers. A *tarefero* from Guatambú and union activist once told me in the *yerbal*, “*la yerba le gusta que la golpeas*”...*la yerba* likes to be beaten. Ramón was a peaceful father of seven children, but he had a point. The work facilitates catharsis. Often *tarefer@s* arrive happy to the *yerbal* and some sing away. Those who arrive angry, take it out on the plant. But there is always pushback; *la capuera* pushes back and so does the tree. There are always times when *tarefer@s* feel like their bodies can go no longer. I sensed over time that grief and rage were worked out in the *yerbal*. Celia herself said that she forgot about everything when she went to the *yerbal*. Her sister Virginia, who was widowed during the time I was living in Montecarlo, began to work through her grief when she returned to the *yerbal*. As Ramón Fernandez suggested, *la tarefa* permits a beating, demands one. In this bittersweet dwelling, rage is expressed in the *quebranza* and the tears that drop into the dew are

disappeared by the sun. So often what *tarefer@s* feel in these life moments pass by as the unrecorded sky.



Figure 13: Celia's shows how *la tarefa* takes its toll on her fingernails (Photo by Author).

The Beginning and End of Life in the *Yerbal*

In the space of the *yerbal*, the sky is a point of contemplation, of warning, soothing, rising, and waning. Rain could be on the way or moving out, and the horizon is always a space to see the way the sun raises, centers, and falls and the way that clouds converge to bring rain. The moon guides the planting season and makes it easier or harder to cut the *yerba* depending on whether or not it is full. And the horizon brings contemplation about the beginnings and ends of life in the *yerbal*. One afternoon, during the *interzafra*, I sat talking on the patio with Celia and her older sister Mari about life. For them, life was the *yerbal*, and the *yerbal* was life, from beginning to end.

Our conversation turned to babies. Children were an important part of our life together as I almost always had my two small daughters with me when I visited Celia, and Celia was raising

her five-year old grandson. Many of her relatives lived near her, and children from multiple households would gather in play at different houses. Celia and Mari not only grew up in the *yermal*, but their children also spent significant time there too. They believed that it was healthy to have children help out in the *yermal*, that they learned about work and how to work. The *yermal* was a good place to see how the *tarefa* caused suffering, enough to where children would be motivated to finish school so that they would not have to live the same life as their parents. Caring for children while working in the *yermal* had been a fundamental part of both of their lives. Care for dependents highlights how vulnerable the body can be in the often hostile environment of the *yermal*.

How did you manage with all the bugs in the *yermal*? I asked the two sisters. As Celia recounted how she protected her babies, her narrative enfolded soil, bugs and everyday culture all at once: “We always put the babies in a hammock with mosquito netting all around to protect them. Later they would run around in the *yermal* with their faces covered in dirt, having all kinds of fun. It is so funny-- I don’t have a single photo of them how their faces were so dirty when they went with us to the *yermal*.” Celia remembered too how her household chores followed her in and out of the *yermal*. “In the *yermal*, we had a bag with clean diapers and one for dirty ones. I would come home and soak all the dirty diapers overnight in a bucket near the kitchen wood stove and then wash them the next day.”

Mari remembered a story of a baby who had been left in the hammock as her mother went about harvesting green leaf. When she returned, the mother realized that the baby girl’s hand had been partially eaten by a *langosta*, a large grasshopper. “It skinned the babies’ hand entirely” she said, “the horrible thing.” Then she recounted a story in which a mother returned to her baby in the hammock only to find a green snake about to lick the milk that still coated the

inside of the baby's mouth. The terrible contrast of the snake and the vulnerable baby made all of us wince-- how the same milk that brings the baby life could actually contribute to its death.

This was representative of other dilemmas faced by *tarefer@s* in the *yermal* that had dialectical twists. We were appalled even though we knew the green snakes are not poisonous. Mari had one more story about a baby and a poisonous snake:

In Paraguay, once a mother came upon a huge snake approaching her baby and licking at the baby for the milk. She had stopped work to take a small nap and woke up to that. Many people gathered around, but they kept quiet so as not to cause the snake to bite the baby. A man crept in and killed the snake with a revolver without hurting that baby. The snake was not startled because the people kept quiet.

But all stories about babies in the *yermal* and their coexistence with other creatures in the *yermal* did not end well. Mari then told how there had been a woman who was weeding and had to put her baby down to get the job done. The baby crawled around, away from her, and he came upon an armadillo hole. Tragically, he fell in headfirst and died.

Stories like these from women who labor in the *yerbales* are absent completely from the historical record. I wondered how many thousands of stories there were, how much loss and escape had occurred through the centuries in the *yerbales*. Babies are vulnerable, dependent on their mothers, but their mothers must work in the *yermal* even as they care for their children.

Celia had raised her three children partially in the *yermal*, and she recalled a story about her only daughter, Claudia, who now works as a physical education teacher in Tierra del Fuego.

I remember Claudia was already walking, playing. We changed lines in the *yermal*, and when we looked for her, she wasn't anywhere. She had been walking behind us. We searched everywhere, but first, before anything, *absolutely anything*, we searched in the creek. We looked line by line in the *yermal*. We looked everywhere. Finally we found her under a tree asleep! But first we looked in the water.

More than anything, water was Celia's concern. In her storytelling, she repeats how they checked the water first. Again, in the natural world of the *yerbal*, that which brings life can also bring death. In fact, in 2013, when the first harvest season after I returned from the field, a year old baby was killed when the truck ran over it while loading *yerba*.

***Aire Libre* (Free Air)**

I turn now to the less bitter dimensions of the place in the *yerbal*. Although *tarefer@s* suffer great stigma in that their trade is considered to be the most base of jobs, I met numerous people who returned or were returned to *la tarefa* over time. For those who chose to return, they found a certain freedom in the *yerbal* that they could not find elsewhere. The hours of the *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo were generally a lot more flexible and shorter than other jobs such as those in sawmills or *secaderos*, the *yerba* drying mills. Although workers in the drying mills had a stable salary, they worked extremely long hours and were exposed to fire or dust all day long. Returning to the *yerbal*, they could rest when they liked, and they could pace themselves, given that the more they worked, the more they could earn. Workers like Rogelio were called *golondrinas* or swallows by some, a discriminatory term that roughly translates as a vagrant. In the time I knew him, Rogelio changed jobs several times, working in both the *yerbal* and a local sawmill. He was a dreamer who dreamt of making money and traveling; he could never be pinned down for too long. Even when he had the opportunity to work in officially registered employment, he left that work when he found it too confining. His dreaming was only a problem because he had so little, and each time he moved, he risked losing what he did have.

Aire libre marks part of the dialectic embedded in the bittersweet dwelling of *tarefer@s*; the same *yerbal* that brings suffering also brings freedom. This fueled the reputation of *tarefer@s* as being itinerant and not interested in doing better for themselves in the same way

farm workers in the United States have been viewed (Benson 2008: 618). It also made them more independent and more self-determined even if they condemned themselves to the hard work of the *yerbal*. Many *tarefer@s* told me that *la tarefa* was where they could earn the most in agricultural work in the countryside of Misiones, if one was willing to work hard.

Working *al aire libre* also meant being in the natural world with other beings such as plants and animals. This altered consciousness and life rhythms. Many elder *tarefer@s* have a fondness for other beings in the *yerbal*. As I worked with Don Villalba's crew, I sat down with Don Farinã, an elder *tarefer@* while we waited for the *yerba* to be loaded. He lived on his own in Guatambú, his wife having long ago moved on to someone *más guapo* (more handsome). Rain was moving in, and the man had spotted a praying mantis on a branch. Communicating with it with his index finger, he meant it no harm; rather, he meant to talk to it. The praying mantis talked back with its front limbs and by backing off a bit. The man continued on, reaching toward it with a smile on his face. It was what another would do with a baby or with a dog, a playing with out of affection, a talking to without words.



Figure 14: As Don Fariña of Guatambú waits for the truck to be loaded, he converses with a *madre de vibora* (prayingmantis) (Photo by Author, 2013).



Figure 15: Members of Don Villalba's *cuadrilla* on a tree trunk on a late summer day (Photo by Author, 2013).



Figure 16: A *raído* doubles as dining table with a spread of manioc, *reviro*, fried meat, and *fiambre* sandwiches (Photo by Author, July 2012).

Wooded Circles, Rest, and Sweet Tangerines

That day we observed the praying mantis, we sat on an aging dead tree trunk. When it comes time to rest the body, *tarefer@s* turn to the solace of trees. In spite of deforestation, *yerba* plantations are still worlds of trees in which *tarefer@s* dwell. They sit under them and on them, under their shelter and on their remains. Resting time and waiting time are intertwined and are almost always moments for drinking *tereré*, or cold *mate*. Some pluck wild plants from *la capuera* to add flavor or medicine to the *tereré*. Underneath and on top of trees, confessions, networking, friendship and all kind of human relating occurs. There is a circular pattern to all arboreal in the *yerbal*--the way the wood is sawed from the *yerba* trees, leaves are scattered to the ground floor, and trunks too large and thick to put in the *raído* are thrown aside where they then decay in the *yerbal*, becoming soil that will come back to feed the mother trees. When the

tree is hurt as in drought or frost or a poor cut from the year before, the *tarefer@* is hurt as well, because there will be less green leaf to gather. When *tarefer@s* build a fire in the *yerbal* to heat food or water for *mate*, they do so from these wood scraps that come from the *yerba* trees. These are sweeter moments of dwelling in which food and *mate* are shared along with stories and jokes.

Yerbales often contain other companion trees, and no other symbolizes life in the *yerbal* like the tangerine tree. Citrus flourishes in the subtropical climate and fruit trees abound, both single and in groves, throughout the small farm landscape of Misiones. *Misioneros* consume large quantities of tangerines in particular. If *tarefer@s* are lucky enough to be cutting *yerba* near a tangerine tree or grove they usually pick tangerines to eat on their breaks. Tangerine trees can mark lines between those who have and those who do not just as water does. If *tarefer@s* find a tangerine tree amongst the *yerba* trees, it is not always clear that they are allowed to eat its fruit. Celia remembers a time she was cutting the *yerba* of a woman we both happened to know. The woman was an elderly German widow who was known for proselytizing the Seventh Day Adventist faith. She had a habit of coming into the *yerbal* to preach her religion to the *tarefer@s* even though she also watched their every step to see if they made a wrong move according to her judgment. One day when Celia and her family were working on the woman's farm, Celia's niece spotted a tree heavy with ripe tangerines. She asked the widow for a tangerine, "Just a single tangerine!" Celia emphasizes. She felt a bit embarrassed about her niece's forward approach and let her know that asking for things was rude. The widow was able to hear what Celia told the child. Yet the child still insisted on asking for a tangerine. The widow told her that she could not have one, because the tangerines were for her and her granddaughters for whom she made freshly squeezed juice.

Celia told me this story more than once for she had never forgotten that moment: “¡A single tangerine!” she would repeat, “¡A single tangerine!” Her story had a broad context. I heard *colonos* complain of *tarefer@s* eating up all the fruit in their trees and even plucking the tree dry to take the fruit home. In other instances, farmers invited *tarefer@s* to pick tangerines as they liked. The *yerbal* across from where I lived in the country was planted with a companion grove of orange and tangerine trees owned by the same widow who had denied the tangerine to Celia’s niece. But the year we lived there, most of the fruit fell to the ground and rotted, for the price for citrus was so low there was no incentive for anyone to come and pick it. Indeed a single orange or tangerine tree often bears enough fruit for one family to eat. The tangerine tree is a real gift in the *yerbal* for the exhausted *tarefer@* who has worked long hours in the sun, but even its sweetness can be made bitter by intervening discrimination and stigma, as Celia’s story reveals.

Hablando Pavadas: Jokes in the Yerbal

Celia remarked again and again that there was *pura risa* (pure laughter) in the *yerbal*. Indeed every *cuadrilla* I ever saw had at least a couple of workers who were specialists in cracking jokes all day long. Young men particularly made jokes constantly that rifted off of talk on bodies, sex, food, families, just about everything. Other people’s personal life was a source of many jokes and some people were more the object of jokes. From *burlas* (making fun of self and others) to *hablando pavadas* (talking silly things) this spiced up the workday as people moved down the lines. Eugenio, Celia’s nephews, talked and joked incessantly as he worked in the *yerbal*, bringing howls of laughter from those working the lines around him. If anything characterizes talk in the *yerbal* more than anything else it is that it is joking and making fun. Part of telling jokes was to get the others to respond with laughter and stories were embellished to

gain that effect. Celia's sister Mari shared a story about her visit to a priest and required confession before she got married to her husband Cornelio:

The priest asked me if I had been *infidel* (unfaithful) and I didn't have any idea what that word meant. I didn't want to show how ignorant I was, so I thought a bit and said 'yes, yes I have been *infidel*. ¡*Cochina!* Pig! the priest yelled at me, and he whacked me around the ears. ¡*Carramba!* Damn it! He yelled. And I ran out so embarrassed I couldn't say another thing.

Everyone died laughing listening to Mari's story. She was so delighted at how well her story was received that she kept repeating the punch line again and again, tweaking it just a bit to get more laughter out of her audience. "I didn't know what *infidel* meant, I just knew the word *guampudo!*" she said. Everyone laughed even more. *Guampudo* was the slang term used in this part of Misiones for cheating on your partner. Laughing at Mari, they also laughed at themselves.

Jokes also allowed for *tarefer@s* to distinguish their personhood, one from the other. While working with Don Villalba in a *yermal* near Montecarlo, several *tarefer@s* were taking a break as we talked, sitting on the back of the truck drinking *tereré*. They joked about one of them having three kids. The subject of the use of condoms came up: had they ever heard of them, I joked? Don Villalba, with his ever serious face, made his contribution to the conversation: "Yeah, they use them for balloons." The three youth resting on the truck's tailgate howled with laughter. "*Mesquino mi cuerpo*" (I care about my body), Don Villalba insisted to me, his straight-edged demeanor invoking another round of laughter from the youth. Over the years of doing fieldwork in multiple sites throughout Misiones, I saw how the use of jokes interrupted the bitterness of the long relentless struggles in the *yerbales*. When a jokster was part of the crew, *la tarefa* became a totally different event. Not unlike the French country folk in John Berger's *Pig Earth*, *tarefer@s* used all kinds of humor to lighten up everyday burdens (1979).



Figure 17: Cándido Maciel and Celia Cuba drink tereré on a break near Cuatro Bocas (Photo by Author, July 2012).

Conclusion

In examining the sense of place of *tarefer@s*, I have explored it both as a place of sweet belonging per Basso and a place of discomfort per Ingold (Ingold 2000; Basso 1996). In tracing the culture that grows out of the working life of *tarefer@s*, I am reminded of the West Virginia landscape that Kathleen Stuart described as an “occupied, betrayed, fragmented, and finally deserted place” that is a “shifting and nervous space of desire immanent in lost and *re-membered* and imagined things” (Stuart 1996: 17). The yerbal is such a space, but I have argued here against the notion that it is a space of total suffering. *Tarefer@s* dwell in a body held under the elements, under threat, suffering, exhausted, but also of breathing, breath that is sometimes exuberant and sometimes stifled, inside a green world that they share with other lives. Others in the *yerbal* range from fellow and sister workers around them to the plant and animal life with which they move. These lives both menace and comfort; they cause the body to suffer and they invoke the fundamental joy of life. This bittersweet dwelling is one that must be understood fully in order to absorb the value of this working agriculture and to understand the everyday cultures

that are generated by *tarefer@s* both in and outside of the *yermal*. These cultures are inherently moral and political at once and they are born in work in this green world. As Tim Ingold has written:

The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave. If it has a surface, it is like the surface of the basket it has no 'inside' or 'outside'. Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is in the weave of the surface itself. And it is within this weave that our projects of making, whatever they may be, are formulated and come to fruition. Only if we are capable of weaving, only then can we make. (Ingold 2000: 348)

Tarefer@s craft as they live and live as they craft. The stories of their lives cannot be disconnected from the *yermal*, nor can their fights for improved labor rights.

I contribute an additional layer to Ingold's phenomenology by examining the 'world of experience' that is inflected with an incessant stream of the giving and taking of rights.

Tarefer@s experience such injustices as having the weight of harvested green leaf recorded as less than its real weight, thereby cheating them out of their labor, and not getting paid at all for work completed. The ecological world in which they labor is then morally charged with past unfair acts done to them, present alertness to unfairness and the specter of future unfair acts. What happens in the *yermal* affects how they move in the world in relation to rights, fighting for or against policies, and joining or opposing movements that articulate certain schemes of rights. There are those who stand outside of rights movements or come and go from them.

As I turn to the *tarefer@* rights movements in Chapter Four, I keep in mind this phenomenology of rights as I have heard it described to me in which one *feels* that one should be entitled to rights and *feels* that they are being taken away. These rights include deeply desired ones such as the right to be respected (Sennett 2003), the right to a fair wage, the right to be treated with honesty, the right for both the body and spirit to be protected, the right to rest one's

body and to quench its thirst and provide it food, and the right to move freely as one engages in their life work. Life outside the *yerbal* compounds suffering. The stigma of being a *tarefer@* means the body's suffering goes unacknowledged. Low pay earned only through bearing down without cessation builds a psychological suffering. How can the depth of these things be expressed, be gotten across to those who do not suffer this same bittersweet dwelling in the *yerbal*?

Often I would go looking for a *tarefa* in the labyrinth of red roads, both main corridors and the smaller roads that run through the fields. Almost always I traversed pine and eucalyptus trees on the way. On the main dirt roads, I knew a *tarefa* was in play when I saw a trail of branches strewn onto the road from loaded trucks on the way to drying mills. Fresh truck tracks in the red clay off the road would help me know where a truck had turned or come from in maneuvering in and out of *yerbales*. When I felt I was near the harvest I was trying to reach, I would stop the car, quell all noise, and stretch my ear, listening closely toward the horizon to see if I could place a crew at work.

The sounds of the *tarefa* are distinct: If *tarefer@s* are working without talking or singing, there is the distinct crackle made by the sound of the cutting and breaking up of branches. This crackling can be heard all day long. Theirs is a job of extraction that is different from breaking the stem of a fruit, an orange or tangerine, and moving through trees for gathering. The task at hand is to take from the tree, to gather green leaf so that it can be taken away, processed and sold, in a new form, to consumers of *yerba mate*, both near and far away. But growth is taken from the tree in a way that must permit the tree to grow in the future, and *tarefer@s* feel the heavy responsibility of caring for the tree so it will produce in the future.

As I got closer to the *yerbal*, I could hear conversation, often laughter, sometimes yelling, singing and sometimes, *sapukai!*, which is the musical field holler that is customary in this part of Argentina. Sometimes too I could hear a truck radio playing the plaintive melodies of the accordion-based music called *chamame*, which sounds through the green space of the *yerbal*. On a good day, the *yerbal* could be a place in which the body could dwell with a sense of belonging in place. As I spent more time in the *yerbal*, I came to believe that the expression ‘I left my life in the *yerbal*’ spoke to both what happened there and what did not happen. *Tarefer@s* suffered in carrying out their tasks, but so often the camaraderie between them made things bearable. What was spiritually unbearable, however, was the way in which their existence was rendered either repugnant or invisible upon exiting the *yerbal*. Perhaps for this reason, more than any other, elders contributed their heavy reflection to discussions on rights: I left my life in the *yerbal*. For no matter where they went, they returned always to this bittersweet dwelling that could be made sweeter by societal acknowledgement of the great value of *tarefer@* labor. Without these women and men, the symbolic friendship drink could not be consumed in circles of belonging throughout Argentina.

Chapter Four Interlude

Crossing into the Heart of Flame

Ramona arose at dawn on her farm in the *colonia* of Alborada. Setting out on her daily journey, she carried *maní* (peanuts) and tobacco ready to be rolled into cigarettes. Walking as fast as her cargo permitted, she directed her children to stay closely by her side. Reaching the banks of the Paraná River, a humble vessel awaited her in the morning fog that was already being drunk up by the thirsty sun. Ramona steadied the canoe that would carry her to work in the country across the water, Argentina. It was this *contrabando de hormiga*, ant's contraband, that helped sustain generations of poor families like hers (Ortíz, forthcoming). Crossing the river with their farm products to sell them in Argentina helped them make ends meet in bare subsistence lives in the countryside. Ramona rowed across the wide brown Paraná, *traiconero* because of its unpredictable currents. When they reached the bank, everyone helped unload before working their way up the sandy riverbanks to the forest trails. About ten minutes in, they reached a stone house where Ramona would work for the day as a domestic servant. Her children would play for the morning on the grounds and then walk to school several kilometers further into the town of Caraguatay.

Ramona recalled these times when I met her on Father's Day in 2012. Rubén, now in his forties and a father of two sons, had invited us to meet his family. I had come to know him for his work as a progressive teacher and organizer of the *tarefer@* union of Montecarlo. For those

years when Ramona crossed the Parana, Rubén accompanied his mother in her daily tasks until he began elementary school. While the lawyer and his wife were away, Ramona watered the plants and opened the house for airing out. The *señora* had been very good to her. She paid her well, left her extra money when she went away, and gave her clothing for her children. The lawyer had been quite the opposite.

Ramona's crossing was an ironic one, for she was actually an Argentine citizen, born to Paraguayan parents. But early in their marriage after she had had four children in Argentina, her Paraguayan husband convinced her to go back to Paraguay. For ten years, they lived on a twenty hectare *chacra*, raising pigs, chickens, and cows. But Ramona's husband continued to work as a fruit picker in Argentina. While he increasingly became involved in political activism, Ramona tended the farm, planting the *maní* and tobacco that she later sold in Argentina. According to Rubén, this was made possible with the help of an elderly indigenous man who the family had "adopted", a practice common in the Paraguayan countryside at that time. But mostly, Ramona built the farm up on her own.

After I came to know him in 2012, I encouraged Rubén to add more of his life story to the book manuscript he was writing called *Vidas Entre Ponchadas* about organizing *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo County. He remembered that Colonia Alborada contained about forty families who had farms of ten or fifteen hectares in front of Caraguatay. It was one of those places of the old system of *obraje* of the timber industry that had stopped growing some time in the 1960s. Rubén had been Ramona's first child born on Paraguayan soil. Although as a child Rubén understood little of *la política*, he heard about it all around him, for he was born during one of Latin America's cruelest and longest dictatorships, that of Alfredo Stroessner who governed Paraguay from 1954 to 1989. Rubén's father had left Paraguay in the 1950s to try to find opportunity in

Argentina and escape from the violence. He met Ramona in 1958, they married in 1959, and their first child was born a year after. His father soon began to participate in movements that opposed the Stroessner regime, although it is not clear whether he was part of the 14 of May Movement for the young Paraguayans living in exile in Argentina who dreamt of crossing the river to ignite a revolution that would free Paraguayans from Stroessner's cruel grip. They eventually launched their greatest offensive just across the river from Caraguatay that resulted in a massacre: Hundreds of men remain disappeared to this day, for the politics of memory and recovery of the disappeared is a process that is very much still in its nascent phase in Paraguay (Field interviews with Rudi Gimenz).

It was during this time that Rubén's father decided to return to Paraguay, but he continued to cross the river to Argentina to work. This meant that Rubén and his brothers and sisters spent much time without their father, alone on the farm with their mother who was forced to labor on her own to raise her children. During these years on the farm, Rubén remembered hearing about men hiding from *los militares*. More than once when the family went down to the river in the morning, they saw bodies floating in the deep, brown waters. "What happened there?" they asked their parents. "They were killed", was the answer. But nothing more was said. There was a great deal of silence, but the air was heavy in unspoken conversations, events, planning, and the sense of danger. Only as an adult did Rubén come to understand that both Argentines and Paraguayans had lived under some of the worst dictatorships in 20th century Latin America during this part of his childhood.

Rubén also remembered murders and other 'absurd' deaths in the countryside. Suicide was a fairly regular event. Women died less, but many of their lives were stained by everyday domestic violence. Ramona taught her children not only that education would be the only way

out of poverty, but more importantly, that it was one thing that could not be taken from them once they had it. Meanwhile his father taught him that a better world was possible through political activism. These lessons were well-taught and received, for eight of nine of Rubén's brothers and sisters finished high school.⁶⁸

According to Ramona, a single experience inspired her to give up on life in Paraguay altogether. She and her husband had gone to visit an old woman who lived on a nearby farm. That evening, they found her in the dark, for she had no money to buy kerosene for her lanterns. Ramona saw that despite the woman's wealth in her animals, she had no money that would permit her to leave her farm. Nor could her weathered body move like it used to. She was, in effect, trapped in her rural wealth. That night, Ramona vowed to not end up the same way. She looked at her own life and said to herself: "I won't be able to weed like this forever. I do not want to end up like this old woman in the dark, lost and poor. I have to find another life. This is what this life in Paraguay will do for me." Shortly after, one day in 1975 when Rubén was eight years old, she stood up and told her husband: "I am leaving this place where I have never felt at home." She first sold a young steer and then everything she could in order to get ready for a final crossing to the other side. They never went back to that farm, and Rubén would grow up in the hardscrabble *barrios* of Montecarlo, burned by the stigma of poverty and his Paraguayan origin but invigorated by an intense desire to change the world around him.

Into the Heart of Flame

The rural community which Ramona and her children inhabited during those years when they crossed the Paraná is called Caraguatay, the Guaraní name meaning "heart of flame" for a

⁶⁸ This is a remarkably rare achievement for to this day it is very common for youth to abandon their studies even in elementary school.

flaming red, sharp-leafed plant.⁶⁹ Caraguatay lies just ten kilometers to the south of Montecarlo where I lived with my family from 2011-2012.⁷⁰ For many years, cars on their way to Iguazú Falls sped past the road that leads into the town center of Caraguatay. But in the early 2000s, a historical feature to the west of the entrance to Caraguatay was resurrected. In fact, it was a while before I realized that the same property where Ramona labored as a domestic servant was actually the first childhood home of Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the legendary Argentine who helped lead the Cuban Revolution and whose image remains a symbol of revolutionary hope throughout the world. Today a sign off Route 12 points to the twenty-two hectare provincial park Ernesto “Che” Guevara, sporting the iconic image of a post-revolutionary Che in his black one-star beret, along with a message: “Here is where it all began”. And there too sits the house where Ramona worked as a younger woman, and the crossroads from which her children departed on foot to walk the long kilometers to school, deeper into the subtropical countryside.

Not only did Guevara wage revolution for political and social justice in Latin America, but he also brought consumption of *yerba mate* to the world stage. Some of the most famous photographs of him show him drinking *mate* in the Cuban *sierra maestra* or during meetings with world heads of state after the rebels had taken Havana. In fact, one of the most widely reproduced photos of Che shows him bare chested and gaunt drinking *mate* in the very heart of

⁶⁹ The *Bromelia Balansae* or the 'Heart of Flame' is a very hard to find plant native to Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil. It has sharp dagger like silver-green leaves. When it flowers, the leaves turn a fiery red, contrasting with the white and purple flower. <http://shop.theplantattraction.com/Bromelia-Balansae-Heart-O-Flame-P-Bromelia-Balansae.htm>. Accessed February 2013.

⁷⁰ For my family and me, Caraguatay was significant for us because we had thought of making it our long-term field home. But the house that we lived in in Guatambu turned out to be owned in part by one of the German families with deep roots in Caraguatay. The owner's brother was mayor of the town during our time there.

revolutionary trenches. But Che's famous consumption of *mate* had an extra twist: He actually spent his first years surrounded by the *yerbales* of Misiones. Yet he did not come from humble or Guaraní origins. Rather his father, Ernesto Guevara Lynch, was of Spanish and Irish nobility and also the grandson of one of South America's richest men while his mother Celia de la Serna was of Spanish noble heritage. In response to opposition to their marriage, the couple fled 1200 miles up the Paraná River to Misiones after their wedding where a friend had convinced Guevara Lynch that he could 'make his fortune' by growing *yerba mate* (Anderson 1997: 5). From that point on, the family began to live a precarious existence quite distinct from the lives of comfort that Che's grandparents had lived.

Little is known about Guevara Lynch's experience as a *yerba* farmer, but he is alleged to have found the *mensú* system repugnant to the extent that he broke tradition on his five hundred acres by paying workers in cash instead of the private bonds that often indebted workers for life (Anderson 1997: 9). He also is said to have given little Ernesto a tiny *mate* to give to the cook for filling, and Ernesto, a stubborn child, would stumble and fall on his way to the kitchen but pick himself up no matter what in an effort to get to his *mate* (Anderson 1997). Early on he was cared for principally by his mother who would swim in the Paraná regularly and almost drowned on several occasions, including when she was six months pregnant with her second child.⁷¹ In May of 1930 when Che was around two, he got bronchitis after a winter swim that would later leave him with asthma for the rest of his life. Later prices of *yerba* crashed around the time he was seven causing economic distress for the family.⁷² In the end, economic stress and Che's asthma

⁷¹ She was saved by "her husband's axmen" who threw her lines to safety (Anderson 1997:9).

⁷² Toward the end of 1929, the left for a trip downriver when Celia was about to give birth to a second child. Land had been cleared and the *yerbal* was planted, but Che's father's business in San Isidro in Buenos Aires needed his aid. Although they planned to be away just a few months,

compelled the family to move to a drier area, and they chose Alta Gracia Córdoba where Che would later live for eleven years.

The Intersection of Biography and Protest

Indeed it took years of fieldwork trips to Misiones before I began to make the connections between landscape, lives, and protest. In dialogue with people and place, I came to see how the landscape hid stories of tragic rises and collapses, but also germinated desires for change in new lives. Argentine sociologist Javier Auyero has written on what he calls the “intersection of biography and protest”. In *Vidas Beligerantes* (2004), he writes of the “thirst for recognition” that the two unemployed female worker activists had in which they wanted the world to know that they had “done the right thing” at the right time: “Telling their stories is part of the search for both individual and collective value: to remember that day as part of a process of constructing who they are and who they want to be” (Auyero 2004: 272-73).⁷³ Auyero is interested in the “intersection of biography and protest, the collective biographies of the communities involved in the protest and the concrete emergence and development of the protest such as work, both theoretical and empirical that are worth considering as the fundamental points in research and writing” (Auyero 2004: 280).

In presenting these certain life details of Rubén Ortiz and his mother here, I mean to set up the stage for biography and intergenerational resistance as I saw it manifest in Montecarlo and particularly in the contemporary *tarefer@* rights movement. Although I met Ramona only once, I couple her story with that of Rubén as an ethnographic gesture of connectedness that “appears” the physical and affective labor of women. Moreover, Rubén attributes his mother’s dedication

they never returned, because a fire at the yacht business destroyed Ernesto’s inheritance overnight. (Anderson 1997).

⁷³ Translated from Spanish to English by Author.

to much of his success today. Rubén was only seven years old when his mother decided to go back to Argentina for good. Up to then, he had seen the border as a space more of opportunity for different social relations than a realm of oppression. He had spent a year of his elementary education crossing the river to go to school in Caraguatay as an undocumented child. He would never return again as a child to Paraguay. By eight years old, he became an Argentine citizen, but his father remained exiled from Paraguay and would not return to see his own mother for twenty-seven years, for both personal and political reasons. Today as one of the most prominent social activists in the province of Misiones, Rubén describes a sort of ‘crossing into a heart of flame’ as he remembers the legacy of that exile:

At seven years old, I began to live my life in exile. From that moment on, I began to live like a foreigner in Argentina, but I would never forget about our Paraguay. This pain is present in every step in struggle that I live as well as with so many *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo County. We live in Argentina, we were given the opportunity to study thanks to my parents’ enormous sacrifice, we believe in Argentina, but we continue with the wound of Paraguay. We continue to endure discrimination from many, the same people who exploited our parents and grandparents for decades. I studied, I struggled to study, in spite of the obstacles, the discrimination. Montecarlo is a place where white skin, those who came from Germany, had all the privileges and something even more important...the land (Ortiz, *Vidas entre Ponchadas*, forthcoming, Author’s translation).

Those early experiences for Rubén would mark him forever, but he was also taken under the tutelage of a special teacher and mentor named Billy Maerker. Maerker was an architect by trade and a German, but he had grown up in a different social context in the province of Entre Rios, south of Misiones. He ended up in Misiones working as both carpenter and teacher and lived in an enormous old house on the banks of the Paraná where he would invite his students to come for talks on politics. As a teacher, Maerker made his students draw a map of the world on the chalkboard by memory without ever taking their hands off the board. He taught Rubén and his fellow brown-skinned classmates everyday civil disobedience rooted in the security of their

having more education than the white farmers who controlled the town but had very little formal education (both then and now).⁷⁴

Maerker was Rubén's teacher in 1983 right when the military dictatorship in Argentina came to an end. He himself had been imprisoned the very first day of the coup in 1976 and tortured. Rubén remembers that during the early days of democracy there was so much hope, until it became clear that the way that the military had consolidated economic power in the hands of a few in a way that would perpetuate the misery of the poor and landless in Misiones (Ortiz, Forthcoming). For some time, Rubén was encouraged by the politics of *Peronismo* and its seeming friendliness to poor workers. *Peronismo* was a fundamental presence in the homes of these families: "Workers are *Peronistas* and bosses are *Radicales*," his father would say. Both his mother and her parents had also been devout *Peronistas*, with his mother secretly teaching workers how to read as part of a *Peronista* women's group before she had gone to live in Paraguay. But Rubén developed an early interest in understanding why it was that *los obreros* were poor, and it was this steadfast interest that would eventually cause him to turn against *Peronismo*.

In the next chapters, I cross into the heart of flame to examine discord, resistance, and hope as *tarefer@s* emerge from their invisibility and anonymity to take the green gold highway.

⁷⁴ Twice we visited the aging Maerker's house with Rubén. It was a house of ghosts from the 1970s filled with some 3000 books, up on a hill overlooking the Paraná River. Billy told a story in which a white power player in town had tried to to pay workers 3000 pesos of 100 peso bill counterfeits. Billy had intervened saying "you don't do that with my people, not my people" and the man backed off, eventually coming forward with the real one hundred peso bills. On a return visit to his home, we arrived late. Billy literally had disappeared, apparently angry because we were late, but we still enjoyed a nice dinner with her sister who had come to try to clean up the house. Billy was infamous for being moody and capricious. I could not help to think that what many observed to be Rubén's difficult character was formed partly under the influence of Maerker, for no one else I met in Montecarlo had the same spirit of irreverence and disobedience that the two men had.

These protests could not have been effective were it not for these “intersections of biography and protest” per Javier Auyero, particularly in the legacy of resistance that Rubén Ortiz brought with him to both union barn and highway. I believe landscape imprints on memory and influences social protest as people seek refuge in green spaces and build themselves up for resistance. In the history of green spaces of Montecarlo County are the ghosts of the dispossessed, those who came before, who were forced to scatter via violence, and their families broken up forever. This landscape shapes resistance, the river acting as a place of crossing for opportunity and the building of new social relations as Rubén believed, but also as a dreamscape, a place where people see another way, a better way, across the way. As they leave behind pain, they also leave behind a part of themselves, a wound which never heals entirely. This frame of exile in its natural theater comes from Rubén, other teachers, and *tarefer@s* with whom I worked who helped me see at every frame, at every moment, the pain of exile. This exile is about leaving behind one’s *patria* (fatherland), but it is also about everyday exile under an economic system that fosters accumulation for some and bare survival for others.



Figure 18: The Heart of Flame (Bromelia Balansae Caraguatay) (Internet Commons 2013).

Chapter Four

The Taking of the Green Gold Highway

El placer de tomar mate no debe descansar en la esclavitud de los tareferos.
(The pleasure of drinking *mate* should not rest on the enslavement of *tareferos*.)
--Union slogan--*Tareferos* and Unemployed Workers of Montecarlo, Misiones.

“I hope that you remember me when it’s 12 at night and you think of me even though I don’t know you. I hope to know you some day; and I hope that I am granted this wish to know you. This is my greatest wish, to know someone to whom I’ve confessed what happened in my life.”
(Antonia, a banana plantation worker from Honduras)⁷⁵

The sun burned down, parching the red clay soil roads we traveled regularly to reach the paved entrance to Montecarlo on Route 12.⁷⁶ Army green trucks of the *gendarmería* were parked near the Petrobras fuel station indicating something was amiss. Two agents stood in the middle of the highway, orange highway cones at their feet. Still and silent, an eerie sensation radiated out from the asphalt. It was the trembling power of hundreds of automobile engines, forced to a standstill to both the North and South. In the long lines, stood double-decker buses packed with irritable tourists, logging trucks with their American pine cargos, and residents of small towns and cities traveling up the road to get to doctors’ appointments or other events. People strolled

⁷⁵ Her autobiography *Lo que hemos vivido* (2003: 78) is cited in Frank 2005: 109.

⁷⁶ A Petrobras gas station sits on the Northern corner and the house of tourism of Montecarlo holds the southern corner. To the South, Route 12 runs down to the provincial capital of Posadas and fourteen hours later, to Buenos Aires, Argentina’s capital. To the North, one hundred and twenty kilometers later the highway dead-ends into Iguazú Falls, where Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil converge.

down the middle of the highway or crossed from side to side. Others sat in lawn chairs, aluminum frames planted across sections of the double yellow lines that bifurcated the asphalt. Under the sparse patches of shade on the roadside, groups of three and four sat in circles on grass patches drinking *tereré*. The patio outside the small tourist bureau was filled too with people sitting on makeshift wooden benches and eating snacks purchased from the Petrobras station.

This intersection was ground zero for protests that had caught the entire nation's attention. For the past years, consumers had enjoyed low *yerba mate* prices in Argentina while *yerba* farmers had struggled to make it in the face of historically low prices of *hoja verde*, the green leaf that forms the raw material of *yerba mate*. But in a constellation of events of resistance and conflict, both *tarefer@s* and producers came together to press for an increase in the price of green leaf in March of 2012. Their efforts were eventually successful, achieving a historic increase in the price of their product.

The *corte de ruta* or highway blockade is a form of social protest that has been widely employed in Argentina in the last decades by those cast to the margin by neoliberal policies and ensuing economic crisis. Blocking traffic applies pressure on those who have the power to provide access to welfare, jobs, unemployment compensation, and public services (Lapegna 2013; Auyero 2003; Currutti and Grimson 2004; Brusco et al 2004; and Weitz-Shapiro 2006). These protesters earned the name *piqueteros* for the *piquetes*, or protests, they waged in desperation at the loss of their jobs. They became emblematic of the disastrous consequences of neoliberal reform that fell apart by the late 1990s in Argentina. Although the height of this kind of protest came before, during, and in the months after the December 2001 collapse, it continues

to this day.⁷⁷ As sociologist Javier Auyero and others documented, the 1990s crisis from the neoliberal reforms hosted both significant protest and an increase in clientelism. This indicates that protest was met with attempts to obtain patronage in exchange for resources or that protest was managed by creating clientelist networks that allowed resources to trickle in, depending on one's view (Auyero et al 2009 and Álvarez Rivadulla 2012).⁷⁸ The election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003 followed by his wife Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's election in 2007 and reelection in 2011, invoked a new populist era in which social movements were incorporated into the government in exchange for their patronage. This caused a significant demobilization in general of social movements (Lapegna 2013; DeSvampa and Pereyra 2004; Villalon 2007, et al). In spite of the hegemonic hold that the Kirchners came to have on social movements including their cooptation of leftist rhetoric, growing inflation together with continuing economic precarious existence had not squelched entirely the discontent that was at play throughout *yerba mate* country in the time I lived there.

This discontent was played out on the asphalt in the odd quiet of *el corte*. There was no marching, no chanting of slogans, and scarcely a banner to identify the cause of the protest that played out peacefully in the scene I have described on Route 12. But this did not make it any less compelling, for the truth was that the air reeked with conflict. Over the course of several days, I had learned that some of the drivers stuck behind the hundreds of throbbing motors harbored a desire to kill the *piqueteros* who once again blocked the highway, interrupting daily life. The *gendarmería* had established a safety zone of a couple of kilometers between the protesters and

⁷⁷ Social protest was massive and multivaried taking the form of highway blockades, occupation of factories, neighborhood assemblies, and the formation of autonomous organizations (Lapegna 2013; Villalón 2007).

⁷⁸ The same phenomenon occurred in other Latin American countries (Lapegna 2013; Álvarez Rivadulla 2012 (Uruguay); Hilgers 2009; Lazar 2008 (Bolivia)).

those caught in traffic in order to prevent logging trucks from running down protesters as had almost occurred in 2010. As some white farmers had told me, this agitation could be brought to an end by taking out a single man—Rubén Ortíz. He was the master organizer of the highway blockades waged at different strategic points along Route 12 in efforts to achieve better wages and working conditions for both teachers and *tarefer@s* in the province of Misiones. His orchestration of these protests was so frequent and well organized that a governor of the province had once insulted him by calling him a serial *piquetero*. Ortiz was a longtime organizer for the progressive teachers' union, but he had begun organizing *tarefer@s* when he saw through his work as a rural schoolteacher how deeply their families were suffering and how the consequential rural exodus would, over time, put he and his colleagues out of a job.

In this chapter, I bring to center stage these protests that occurred in Montecarlo in the late summer of 2012, focusing both on *tarefer@* resistance as well as the joint producer-*tarefer@* protests. I examine this 'taking of the green gold highway' together with a closer view of everyday union organizing by *tarefer@s* waged outside of the space of the *yerbal*. I work to capture the moments before, up to, during and after *los cortes* by studying the micro culture generated in these protests and elaborating on Michael Taussig's powerful argument that 'creative culture' acts as a chief combatant of commodity fetishism (Taussig 1980). Importantly this creative culture in the context of Northeast Argentina evolves in the theater of Peronist politics which have dominated Argentina for many decades and manifest particularly in what Javier Auyero has called "the politics of the poor" where poor communities are trapped between political point people who hold resources hostage in exchange for their political support (Auyero 2001). I argue that the subaltern power grab of *el corte* is a bold attempt to slow the alienating speed of commodity circulation. By using their bodies to physically stall commercial traffic,

tarefer@s force a re-viewing of the connectedness in production and consumption in ways that menace the comfortable blind spots of everyday consumers of *mate*. Time and place in the commodity chain are altered in the making of a temporary dwelling space on the asphalt in which social permissions are interrupted and challenged. This holding time is kept in a theater of blockade in which violence hovers on all horizons in the lines of stalled commercial traffic, a violence that typically is cloaked or back grounded in the everyday practice of *mate* fetishism which leaves *tarefer@s* suffering hidden in the *yerbales* and the poor *colonias* and *villas* where they dwell in the everyday. Finally, of utmost importance, I observed the way the majority of consumers in the megacity of Buenos Aires were not made aware of this resistance nor the threats of violence. Rather, this particular crisis merely caused a temporary spike in speculation and shortage of *yerba* at the super market. Consumers far away remained relatively blind to the plight of *tarefer@s* in large part because Buenos Aires-based media barely covered the crisis.

Part One The Politics of Green Leaf

When I first began work in Misiones, I wanted to understand the small farmer activism that had produced *Titrayjú*, the fair trade *yerba mate* produced by forty-nine producers in the county of Oberá located along the Route 14 corridor.⁷⁹ Small farmer organizing was a vibrant force, particularly in the fairly recent 2000 *tractorazo* in which small farmers from all over the province had driven their tractors to the provincial capital of Posadas to resist the destructive fallout of government deregulation of the *yerba mate* economy.⁸⁰ I met wonderful people in this early work and gained invaluable insight into the everyday difficulties of keeping a farm going in

⁷⁹ The Río Paraná Cooperative formed out of the resurrected El Movimiento Agario de Misiones (MAM). They marketed *Titrayjú* as a fair trade *yerba* standing for “tierra, trabajo y justicia para los excluidos del campo” or “land, jobs, and justice for those excluded from the country”.

⁸⁰ See Gortari 2007.

Misiones. But as I worked with white farmers in different areas of the province, I realized they failed to take into account those who harvested their *yerba* for them. Although certain members of the *Movimiento Agrario de Misiones* (MAM) realized that racism was a problem, they had not taken it on, in part due to the difficulties they faced organizing their own small farmer communities. For other farmers, *tarefer@s* were often addressed as ‘they’ and were treated as second-class citizens. During consecutive summers working in Oberá, I learned of the intense discrimination that *tarefer@s* faced. The stubborn racism that barely allowed *tarefer@s* to be seen as human is what allowed *Titrayjú* to be dreamt up, marketed, and continued to be sold as a product completely devoid of the print of the *tarefer@*. As Rubén would later say, there was very little talk of the *tarefer@* in this fair trade talk. *Yerba* was treated as though it was harvested by the *colonos* themselves, which is usually not the case.⁸¹ How could it be that fair trade was thought, organized, and promoted casting *tarefer@s* totally to the margin? In other words, the integrity of the small farm family, *el colono*, was promoted at the expense of the complete erasure of the *tarefer@* family especially when *la tarefa* had always been a family affair.

Subsequent fieldwork permitted me to observe the intense discrimination that *tarefer@s* faced from white Misioneros and *colonos* themselves. When a German family I had developed a friendship with stopped talking to me at the farmers’ market in Oberá, I suspected it was because the rumor had spread that I had begun to visit and conduct interviews with a couple, Rogelio and María, who worked as *tarefer@s*. I witnessed again and again conversations in which people spoke disparagingly of *tarefer@s*. As I deepened my relationship with Rogelio and María, I learned about the *tarefer@* union in Montecarlo that was making news in the provincial papers. By early 2011, I had decided to make *tarefer@s* the protagonists of my research, a decision that

⁸¹ See *Página 12*, 9/30/2008.

would mean some backlash from previous contacts. In the time I lived in Guatambú outside of the small town of Montecarlo from 2011-2012, I observed that most every one I knew at some point battled accusations of wrongdoing or double dealing. Racism and classism perpetuated a segregated society in which white farmers held land worked by brown-skinned workers. Within this frame were extra layers of complexity in which many Paraguayan workers faced heightened exploitation when they crossed from Paraguay to look for a better life in Argentina. At the same time, poor white farmers were subject to discrimination by other white farmers who held power in the agricultural cooperative of Montecarlo and drove late model pickup trucks.⁸²

In February and March of 2012, I participated in the first of several blockades that culminated in a national commodity crisis with its roots in Misiones. As an accountant once told me in Montecarlo “Everything in Misiones revolves around the price of green leaf. When it goes up, we all go up; when it goes down, we go down with it.” The first blockade was to improve the wages paid to *tarefer@s*, and the second was a joint protest to improve the price of green leaf. Although the first blockade was heavily condemned by the agricultural cooperative, those same white farmers ended up relying on *tarefer@s* in a second blockade which occurred when the national Secretary of Commerce Guillermo Moreno stipulated that the price of green leaf would be at one peso per kilogram, far below the 1.70 that producers had said they needed to make ends meet with rising inflation. This blockade was different for it was not only poor *tarefer@s* and their teacher allies who blockaded the highway but also small producers, non-union *tarefer@s*, and some of the power players from the agricultural cooperative in Montecarlo. I witnessed firsthand in the union barn the moments of flagrant contradiction on the part of the white power

⁸² See Holmes 2013 for more on these kinds of layers of discrimination in migrant labor in California.

players from the cooperative: They first publicly criticized *tarefer@s* for choosing highway blockades as a form of protest. They then changed their position entirely, waging their own blockade and calling for *tarefer@s* to help block the highway. Both blockades had positive outcomes in the short term, but the new price for green leaf as a commodity led to hoarding, hiding, and manipulating at different levels of the commodity chain— the mill and supermarket sectors used the specter of a shortage of *yerba* to manipulate prices leading to the soaring prices on store shelves. The crisis eventually resolved after a couple of months, with the federal government threatening to step in to control the circulation of *yerba*. But the Kirchner government’s discourse about monopoly power in the distribution system dominated the headlines, drowning out the labor politics at play at the production site.

In recovery of this space and time of the taking of the green gold highway, I draw on Auyero’s extensive ethnographic work in Argentina’s urban shantytowns as well as Pablo Lapegna’s work in rural Northwest Argentina in which they examine the “patronage politics” which govern the lives of the poor generating what they term to be a ‘politics of the poor’ (Auyero 2000; Lapegna 2013). They conclude that the poor communities wisely maneuver the system of political patronage in Argentina in order to get the resources they desperately need. However, in parsing through the moral conflicts that form the heart of *tarefer@* union politics, I depart from a totalizing “politics of the poor”. Instead I found that *tarefer@s* had diverse moral practices and that they made important distinctions between and among themselves. I believe that these differences and firm demarcations around who was perceived to be corrupt or not, for example, should not be erased.⁸³ These moral practices and distinctions add critical nuances to

⁸³ In my longtime community work in law, social work and anthropology, I have never seen a community which had homogenous content in terms of morality and affect, in which all actors

James Scott's pioneering political frame of 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1980). I wish also to revive Michael Taussig's concept of 'creative culture' as a combatant to commodity fetishism by bringing it into a 21st century border zone of corruption and patronage politics as they manifest in contemporary rural Argentina. I ask: How is creative culture forged in zones where people have been dispossessed for centuries in ways that have interrupted and disintegrated traditional culture? In other words, what does creative culture look like when there are only remnants of tradition to build from when crafting it? Finally, I develop further Sydney Mintz' concept of a "spirit force against alienation" in examining everyday resistance (Mintz 1985).

Throughout, I mean to show how some poor persons strategize to get the most basic of resources such as food. Yet some of these same people are corrupted in the process, turning against other family members and their neighbors. I consider corruption in its most rudimentary form to be the cooptation of common resources for one's own use, to the detriment of another and to the benefit of one's self. Truly, at the ground level in Misiones, I observed every kind of betrayal to be possible, regardless of kinship. In fact, many told stories of their own family members engaging in dishonest attempts to get more for themselves from their own kin. *misioneros* themselves consider their government to be corrupt at all levels, and the differences arise in who they consider to be corrupt rather than whether or not there is corruption.

Considering the ways in which poor communities are manipulated from every direction, it is no surprise some people within these communities turned to corrupt practices. Nevertheless, I do not subscribe to the trope so often circulated in liberal circles that justifies corrupt actions

act the same, much less one in which people are economically disenfranchised. Rather, communities are full of diverse opinions and moral approaches and these differences take critical form during moments of social protest and organization. I find any tendency by anthropologists to draw generalizations from anecdotes to be quite dangerous, at least in letter (*See also* Robbins 2014 on affective contrasts to suffering).

such as theft and embezzlement on the part of poor actors. This is because for over twenty years, I have worked on and off with people in poor communities both in Latin America and the United States and have observed that many people still try to do the right thing, in spite of pervasive corruption (Sennett 1998, 2003). In spaces of corruption, there are still people who look out for their neighbor's welfare, in spite of their own dire needs. Importantly, I do not wish to condemn or excuse those who become corrupt at the expense of their neighbors. Rather, I highlight the everyday practices of those who do *not*: Those *tarefer@s*, unemployed people, teachers, and labor organizers who refuse to be corrupted and who work incessantly to carve out a space for an authentic politics of dignity of which solidarity and concern for community form the core. In an ethnographic practice of *revaluing* and in continuation of a politics of memory and recognition, I bring these *compañeros* to the page, because they are most often forgotten. Their sacrifices too often go unnoticed.

Part Two Organized *Tarefer@* Resistance and Patronage Politics

The combination of remote distances and itinerant labor provide challenges for gaining an accurate view of the depth of *tarefer@* resistance to exploitation (Lapegna 2013). As I wrote in Chapter One, the vast majority of *mensú* history has been lost, and only fragments of complaint, work refusal, strikes, fugue, and stubborn creative culture made the historical record. But even after the period of *los mensú* when *tarefer@s* became part of a colonized countryside, very little has been written about their resistance, although labor struggles of the day waged by a Spanish anarchist inspired the Niklison report that contributed to the end of the *mensú* system (Rau 2012; Niklison 1914). Like so many rural workers in history, low literacy rates and lack of access to infrastructure interfered with a recording of life and struggle, contributing to a blackout in the record. But work of oppression is also at play in which one sector is made to believe that

they have no value, no history, much less a history to be recorded (Wolfe 1982, et al).

Furthermore, since the 1970s, the University of Misiones in Posadas has been producing research on the rural economy in Misiones, but *tarefer@s* had barely been mentioned in that research.

Only very recently has this begun to change, particularly because of the very public and persistent advocacy of Rubén Ortiz.

In the only contemporary scholarly work on *tarefer@s*, University of Buenos Aires trained sociologist Victor Rau argues that they have never taken on the form of either a working or peasant class. He found that the historical record mostly contains *tarefer@* struggles for better wages, improved working conditions, and access to jobs in urban areas, including areas outside of Misiones. Therefore he concludes that *tarefer@s* have not struggled historically for the right to land and access to agricultural production (Rau 2012: 13). However, given what I found in my ethnographic research with *tarefer@* families deep in the countryside, it would be more accurate to say that those who struggle to have land and hold onto their agrarian dream are probably the least likely to appear in the historical record, given their lives far off grids of all sorts---urban, political, and academic. Furthermore, their forms of resistance in terms of getting access to land more probably have taken the form of Scott's 'everyday resistance' than an organized movement to get land (Scott 1985). For example, Rogelio and María had been seduced to give up their place in line for a house in a rural housing project for a small plot of land where they could raise animals and plant manioc. The title for that land was never produced, and they were evicted from the land eventually.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Rau argues that the consolidation of *tarefer@* communities opened up new opportunities to organizing. But my ethnographic work both in town and country and with both small producers and *tarefer@s* shows that continuous rural exodus will be catastrophic and will convert people more and more into state welfare subjects rather than more autonomous agrarian ones.

Unfortunately Rau concludes his book with a positive outlook on the poor settlements of *tarefer@s* on urban peripheries, suggesting that this gives them more access to multiple resources for resistance (Rau 2012). Yet I found that *tarefer@s* who wanted to maintain some autonomy via producing their own food knew that moving to urban areas had its downsides. In the end, it was not that *tarefer@s* so much *wanted* to become urban subjects, but that they were forced to become so, because life in the countryside was so unbearable in terms of lack of transportation, facilities, healthcare, income opportunities, etc (Reichman 2011). Through in-depth work with Rogelio and María, I learned of multiple forms of resistance: people complaining when *capataces* tried to rob them of their pay, consulting judges in town courts, and work stoppages in order to get paid. Moreover, their moves between town and country revealed on the one hand their ambivalence about urban life, and on the other the persistence of an agrarian dream. They meant to get a hold on their lives once and for all. In fact, Rogelio quit his job at a sawmill and returned to the *yerba* harvest, for he felt it was a less restrictive way of working. If he worked hard, he could make more money in *la tarefa* than on salary at the sawmill. María had been happy as a domestic employee until her boss died. She then preferred to make ends meet in the countryside then to be subjected to the abysmally low pay and poor working conditions that most domestic employees endured. In fact, a common form of work for women like María was to work as a *cama adentro* (literally bed inside) which is essentially a

I studied the union in Montecarlo within a context of food sovereignty, i.e. with an eye on community self-determination when it comes to food. What comes out is the vitality of the *tarefer@* population and the critical necessity to prevent rural exodus and promote *tarefer@* small holders who have played a role in their own food sovereignty. It has been much easier for the state to allow the corralling of rural dwellers into urban peripheries, but I see little long-term benefit. Even Rau consents that these constitute surplus labor pools that local capital can rely on whenever they need to, but abandon them when the need is no longer there to great negative effect (Rau 2012: 141).

live-in maid who is at the beck and call of her employer and can barely ever get out to live a free life.

For *tarefer@s* like those in Montecarlo who chose an organized form of resistance, there was both an important regional and historical environment in which they organized. First, Argentina fits squarely into a strong Latin American tradition of what some have called ‘patronage politics’ or clientelism (Lapegna 2013; Auyero, Lapegna and Page 2009; Shefner 2008; Fox 1994; Roniger and Gunes-Ayata 1994). In the context of Misiones, clientelism means that people give their vote or other sort of political support in exchange for any variety of public resources including welfare, scholarships, employment, insurance, etc. (Lapegna 2013; Auyero 2000). Now ‘contentious politics’ have been on the decline in Latin America due to the so-called “pink tide” in which multiple Latin American governments have rejected and even reversed neoliberal reforms from the 1990s, bringing the welfare state back to power.⁸⁵ Part of this reversal has meant that social movements were invited to form alliances with the government in exchange for their political support. In Argentina, for example, former prominent community organizers or social movement leaders, many of them labeled *punteros políticos* (political point people) came to occupy positions of power in the national government, one of the most prominent being the former *piquetero* Luis D’Elia from Buenos Aires (Oliva Campos, et al 2012). But the social movement I discuss below in Montecarlo both fell in line with the decline of contentious politics as well as detoured from this trend, largely because of the stewardship of Rubén Ortiz who has remained firmly on guard about the realities of worker resistance being coopted by political interests.

⁸⁵ These governments include Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Because of the scarcity of resources in the countryside, patronage politics has particular power both with *tarefer@s* and small producers. In other words, the lack of such volunteer operations like soup kitchens, clothing banks, etc. that are found in urban areas means that people in the countryside are forced to scarp together income from many sources, working very hard, over distances, to get what they need to survive (Lapegna 2013; Reichman 2011). This fundamental difficulty in securing income in rural areas perhaps has not been taken into account in the sparse amount of scholarship on social movements and patronage politics in rural areas in Argentina. But as Argentine sociologist Pablo Lapegna⁸⁶ points out, perhaps one of the most under studied issues around social movement mobilization and demobilization of peasant movements involves the distances that people have to travel in order to meet, convene, and stage their protests (Lapegna 2013). Within this difficult organizing environment, social movements like the *tarefer@s* union in Montecarlo undergo relentless pressure to fall in line with the dictates of national, provincial, and local Peronista governments. There is ample documentation that people on the economic margin “develop survival strategies relying on clientelistic arrangements based on expectations of reciprocity” (Lapegna 2013: 843; Auyero 2000; Auyero and Swistun 2009). In a similar context addressing agricultural contamination from herbicides in soy production, Lapegnahas documented a “pervasiveness of patronage in popular politics and a relational process of “dual pressure” on popular movements” in which leaders have to manage pressure “from above” at the national government from which they are trying to get resources and the poor rank and file of the movement “from below” who pressure for the resources that

⁸⁶ I am grateful to Pablo Lapegna for sharing his work at a late stage in my dissertation writing as well as sharing information regarding important events on contemporary Latin America from 2013 onwards. Moreover, as one of the few social scientists doing ethnographic work in rural Argentina, his insights are particularly valuable.

they desperately need (Lapegna 2013).⁸⁷ He worked to understand the relationship between contentious politics and collective action, and analyzes the process of demobilization and to understand why peasant organizations mobilized against certain moments of harmful drift and did not organize against the same phenomenon six years later. In response to the pressure from above, some leaders take the chance of “contentious collective action” as they get access to and distribute resources from national political figures (844). It was in this kind of complex context that the *tarefer@s* embarked on a campaign of organized resistance in Montecarlo County and other parts of Misiones.

The Formation of the Montecarlo *Tarefer@* Union

As Rubén Ortiz recounts in his forthcoming work *Vidas entre Ponchadas*, the union really began one particularly hot summer when a group of people, including a former student of his, came to his house in desperation. They reported that people were going hungry, because they had been cheated out of their government issued family allowances. Rubén had a long history of community organizing, and was now a veteran union organizer. For this reason, things in Montecarlo turned toward the creation of a union. By 2013 and onward, the organized struggles of other *tarefer@s* groups around the province were documented in provincial newspapers. These groups also participated in highway blockades, hunger strikes, and marches to Posadas (Ortiz, forthcoming). They were both influenced by middle class vanguards and organized on their own. Notable struggles occurred along the Route 14 corridor as well as in the eastern frontier town of Andresito, near the Brazilian border. Organizers in Montecarlo, including Rubén, often cited

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Pablo Lapegna for his sharing his work at a late stage in my dissertation writing as well his sharing of information regarding important events on contemporary Latin America from 2013 onwards. Moreover, as one of the few social scientists doing ethnographic work in rural Argentina, his insights are particularly valuable.

Andresito and the other frontier community of San Pedro as being especially intense zones of informal work.

Rubén writes that the origin of his activism on behalf of *tarefer@s* came that day in 2009 when he learned what had happened to *tarefer@s*. Within a short time, one of the major labor contractors Eladio Barreto along with at least seven other contractors in Montecarlo would be prosecuted for embezzling money from the government agency ANSES which handled family allowances for workers. The swindle they had engaged in involved deducting the required amount from the workers' pay for their contribution, but when the workers went to ANSES expecting to bring home this very valuable stipend, ANSES reported that they did not exist. A judge ruled in favor of the *tarefer@s*, but the national ANSES refused to fulfill the judge's order and pay them. By 2015, they had opened a bank account for people to get their pay, but by this point several of these *tarefer@s* had died and their widows were unable to access their funds (Agencia Hoy, 2015; Ortiz – interviews by the author).⁸⁸

One key dimension of this swindle meant that the employers enrolled people as though they were employees in order to be able to receive the family allowance, and the employers took a part of this for themselves illegally. It was a swindle that employers engaged in to get money for both themselves and for workers, yet the direct fraud was on the part of the employer. But when ANSES found out about the backdoor dealings, they applied the withholdings to all of the *tarefer@s* that were enrolled with the contractors, including those who truly had worked and had nothing to do with such a swindle (Ortiz, forthcoming). This meant that those who really worked were forced to go without their family stipends when they desperately needed them to get by,

⁸⁸ As of this writing in September 2015, *tarefer@s* continue to block highways and wage all kinds of resistance to get their backpay as it was awarded by the court so long ago. ANSES still constantly manipulates things and refuses to pay.

especially during the income-scarce hot months of the offseason, particularly December through March.

I had heard about this kind of swindle through Rogelio as early as 2009 in the area of Campo Ramón. This was a type of scam that employers facilitated, and certainly some workers benefited from it. It was in line with another way to get income, which was to fake a disability or injury in order to get what was called the *pensión de invalidez* or disability. I heard persistent rumors all over Misiones for the entirety of my fieldwork about this swindle, and I came to know people who had actually faked or exaggerated an injury. In other words, it was not just a paranoid rumor of employers that workers would self-injure or lie to get what they called *un salario*. The benefit of getting such disability was that they would have the benefit for the rest of their lives, and this amount was adjusted fairly regularly for inflation by the government. It was a steady income, as opposed to the ‘sweat of the brow’ work in the *yerbales* and other industries.

From those early days in the union, *tarefer@s* had engaged in multiple forms of protests to get their needs met including highway blockades, marches, occupations, and even hunger strikes. The early blockades were seen as incendiary, and white farmers talked of them as though *tarefer@s* were dangerous criminals unleashed on the community. There was great fear that they could become out of control. But there had been fallings out along the way and some of the early participants in the union were long gone by the time I began to observe *assembleas* in the union hall. No matter what the truth was about those early days, the climate of false accusations and rumors that I observed cultivated a heavy air of distrust and fear of betrayal (Das 2007).

El Galpón: The Union Barn

In Montecarlo, I observed non-union and union members, union leaders, and the rank and file as well as *tarefer@s* who declined to participate in the union and the small farmers who most

often expressed negative sentiment toward the *tarefer@s* union. I sat in on many strategic meetings, *assembleas*, and had many conversations with diverse actors who were both currently active in the union and had been active in the past. By 2011 when I first was invited to a union meeting, the *tarefer@s* had been able to rent an old *secadero* right down the street from the municipal offices of Montecarlo. *El galpón* (the barn) as it was called would be the site of many a charged meeting that meant to confront the regime of oppression that *tarefer@s* had so long endured. It was located on the main avenue, Libertador, and set back from the street. People gathered in the paved area in front of it, along with a couple of cars and motorcycles on the small incline that led up to the two large padlocked doors. I could always tell when a meeting was in session for there were people gathered in groups smoking outside and the doors would be at least partially slid open. Inside, was a two-tiered space with a historied cement floor.

Tarefer@s did not just go to meetings in the *galpón*; they inhabited it. More than anything it was a space for the unemployed, the dispossessed in search of shelter and food. To the left of the entrance were rather makeshift entrances and a toilet that had to be flushed by filling up a five-gallon bucket from the faucet next to the toilet. Toilet paper was a rarity there just as it was in many a household I visited. A wall toward the back of the whole space separated the rectangle into what constituted the main meeting space and a living section where there was a stove for heating water for *mate*. At different times, a huge pile of cardboard was stacked against the back wall, or food staples sent from the government. These were supplies almost always won after highway blockades that made visible the real food scarcity and hunger that plagued *tarefer@s* families during the off-season.

A small core of women generally ran the order of the place, most of whom had a male counterpart who played either a formal or informal leadership role in the union. Men often

played a small role in helping maintain order. The small core of women was primarily led by two sisters who had very conflictive relationships over time and who inevitably made decisions in order to support their husbands who worked as *capotaces* for different *cuadrillas*. Neither of them worked outside the home, and both had limited history working as *tarefer@s*. Both also had seven or more children.

My participation in the union meetings often was thwarted by my own struggle to take care of my two daughters and to navigate the lack of childcare. There was constant crisis, rain, and sickness. This heightened my sympathy and empathy for families who worked in the *yerba* harvest, particularly for the women who often were the sole caretakers of their children. There were no childcare centers either in town or in the *colonia* for women. I had learned that even when there had been, they had closed perhaps because people had not paid their bills. I came to understand things differently by attending meetings in the union barn, often dominated by women in physical presence, but by men in vocal participation and leadership.

The union hall functioned as a space of gathering and also of resource redistribution. But it also was a space of conflict and gatekeeping. As protest garnered supplies to be distributed, so too did the supplies bring efforts by some to hoard for themselves and their friends. Fights ensued about who was stashing supplies for family and friends and whether those who did not participate in the blockades should get a share of the supplies that were won on the highway. Many people in the union learned that the more power they had the more resources they could get for themselves and their family (Lapegna 2013). Nevertheless, *tarefer@s* were learning how to organize and work through conflict as it developed in the union.

Charged Silence and Historical Trauma

One of the most striking features of union meetings was how most of those who attended meetings remained silent. People traveled for miles to get to meetings on hot summer evenings. These evenings sometimes went on for hours, and it was clear that people went without food and drink throughout them. Moreover, they very often did not have good endings in the sense that there seldom were clear victories. Yet in critical moments, many attendees sat silent. This was true even when there was a reason to shout out in protest. I found this same silence in *yerbales* and many other spaces. It came together with a culture in which talking about the self and promoting the self were not practiced, especially for women. Most women remained especially silent, and some were reticent to share their opinions even if they were asked to speak outside the group environment. Upon closer view, most women had become mothers when they were very young, and many of them never got relief from work that consisted of cooking, cleaning, parenting, and tending to everyone's health. Part of this incessant work was the labor of traveling from place to place and to receive health care, public benefits, and other forms of relief that they sought out in order to ensure that their families survive. Javier Auyero has recently written about the way that this waiting wears the spirit down in his characterization of those who are 'patients of the state' (Auyero 2012).

Considering the similar history of genocide, annihilation, enslavement, and denial of history, I find the theories of historical trauma pioneered by Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) to be helpful in understanding this silence on the part of *tarefer@s* and unemployed workers. This work was built off the theories of trauma that Jews encountered during the Holocaust. It is described as a "legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998: 60 and Brown-Rice 2014). According to Sotero (2006), historical trauma is

transferred from one generation to another through “biological, psychological, environmental and social means, resulting in a cross-generational cycle of trauma” (in Brown-Rice 2014). This is a view of trauma not as the kind of Western-framed individual phenomenon but rather “collective and multilayered”(GoodKind, Hes, Gorman and Parker 2012: 102 in Brown-Rice 2014).⁸⁹ In the ‘zone of abandonment’ in which *tarefer@s* lived was also a history of interventions like patronage politics that wore the spirit down all the more (Biehl 2005).

The trauma endured by the people who attended the meetings could not be summed up easily and could be gotten to only through individual stories. Faces of those who sat silent often showed in them something of what must have been held inside. Incessant suffering marks the face, I have found, making it a tense visage. But people broke down at times, and fights broke out as well. For example, there was a time when a woman broke down; she yelled and yelled about many things that should have been yelled about, from my view. It seemed that people were embarrassed for her, that she seemed to have lost control. But at the same time, she spoke painful truths that seemed to resonate with those present.

Unlike the dependence on Freudian psychoanalysis that residents of Buenos Aires are famous for, there is little to no understanding of psychology or psychological thought in Misiones. As a clinical social worker, I looked to people’s family histories to understand a bit of their own worldview, and I found that there was next to no understanding of trauma in the countryside. But this did not mean at all that people did not have narratives for suffering and getting through it. What was true as veteran community organizer Dimarco told me after I had given a presentation on shame at a forum for the union: “There is a desperate need for this kind

⁸⁹ I am thankful for my conversations with Virgil Moorhead whose dissertation on using digital stories for empowerment of Native Americans put forth a synthesis of these theories of historical trauma.

of teaching here”. But part of the legacy of dispossession and shame meant that people had been deprived of spaces in which they could figure out how to work through both trauma imposed by socioeconomic violence and trauma that came from everyday precariousness and threats to life.

Not unlike life in the yerbal, life in *el galpón* had a bittersweet edge. Many people told me that the union was a place where they first had learned to speak, in fact. Not only did they learn more about their rights and how to fight for them, they learned how to *articulate* these rights. And in spite of the way the development of the union preceded with high levels of internal conflict, these skills for articulating rights had irreversible value. Virgil Moorhead, the Native American psychologist I met at Stanford, wrote about the power of this kind of transformation in a similar way I heard it articulated by *tarefer@s*:

As advocates of their own lives, the original people of North America can be instrumental in reclaiming their beautiful, resilient, traditions and stories, as well as their individual identities. To this end, implementing social justice interventions that promote mental sovereignty and reflective thinking, and breaking conspiracies of silence will help American Indian communities restore their traditions and cultures. In this way, current and future generations can reframe what it means to be an American Indian in the 21st Century (Moorhead, Dissertation 2012).

As union members gained strength and women particularly begin to put into words both their suffering and their refusal to tolerate any more of it, they found as Native American psychologist Eduardo Duran has found that “the medicine is already inside people” (Moorhead, 2012; Duran 2006). Yet the patronage politics and *asistencialismo* overshadowed union politics in part because of the urgent needs required to survive. Although Rubén and Dimarco knew that education and healing techniques were needed desperately, the urgent politics of survival replaced these other methods.

Part Three The Taking

On the night of March 1, 2012, at an *aseamblea* in the *galpón*, *tarefer@s* voted to block the highway the next day. They had made no progress in getting the agricultural cooperative to address the problem of under the table work, low wages, and other tricks that contractors were playing on them that left them those with a large share with even more. On the morning of March 2, I dropped my eldest daughter Iris off at school and went on to the *galpón* where *tarefer@s* had already gathered to march the long stretch of Libertador down to Route 12. There were probably not even two hundred people in the march. I walked alongside María who offered to push my youngest daughter Luna in the stroller. It was a peaceful walk, with different groups conversing together and no chants. The union banner at the front of the procession provided the only indication of the reason for the march.

María talked to me about her life. She had two children, a seventeen-year old boy and fourteen-year old Jamila who was often at the union meetings. Her mother left her when she was a girl, opting to go off with her stepfather. María felt she must have preferred him to her children. Her mother had not come to her wedding, and she had never been around to help during the hard times. She now would tell María “*Hija*, I am going to show you how much I love you”, but she never ended up doing so. She would try to embrace her and tell her that she loved her, but María rejected her: “I just don’t want to, I can’t” she said.” Her father had taken off to Buenos Aires when she was just a child, and she had only ever seen a few photos of him. Another mother walked just ahead of us with very small children who did not complain of the long walk. It was clear that they were used to walking on their own, whereas my own daughters would have begged to be held during such a journey.

As we walked down Libertador, I saw the former vice mayor Guillermo Aichelcer standing on the sidewalk watching us pass. He was part of the Founders Group that I wrote of in Chapter One, which meant to record the history of *los colonos* of Montecarlo. I waved to him, and he gave me a meager thumbs up which I took to be half support and half cynical. I saw other people I knew along the way which made me realize how, in a community this small, one was being watched and judged all the time. If I felt uncomfortable being under the gaze of these onlookers, I thought of what it must have meant for these *tarefer@s* who had to pass by small town power players and still walk on, holding their heads high. Although there did not seem to be any hostility, there also were few signs of overt support for the march. And I knew because I moved in between communities of different ethnicities and classes where *tarefer@s* were viewed with much disdain. I could see that it took great strength and persistence on their part to stand up to both this critical gaze and the incessant streams of gossip meant to discredit *tarefer@s* both on individual levels and as a group. In the gossip and rumors that I bore witness to both before and after this day, I could both see and feel how the “lethal conditions for circulation of hate” came to a head, especially when long-exploited members of the community stood up for their rights (Das 2007: 118).

María explained to me that she participated in the union as an unemployed person. She had once worked as a domestic employee for four hours a day receiving twelve *pesos* a day, *una miseria*. She pointed to a shoe store along the way to indicate an example of a place where she had experienced such exploitation. She had another job that involved caring for an elderly person for five hundred pesos a month, but slowly her boss added more and more work for her to do, and she eventually left. María claimed that she was not one to complain on the job, but when she

got home, she would blow off all of the steam. Her husband thought she was *tonta* (stupid) for not standing up for herself.

As we neared the intersection of Route 12 where the blockade would take place, it began to rain. The temperature had dropped, and people began to run for cover. Rubén circled round in his pickup and told people to move quickly to the highway and cut it off right away. I passed off my daughter Luna to Federico, her bare feet pelted with cold raindrops. The *gendarmería* was already set up at the roundabout ready for the blockade. People sought shelter from the rain under a tent set up by the tourist booth, and those who cut off the route had a large black swathe of plastic that they tried to maneuver against the down pouring rain. Teachers who were joining the blockade had their umbrellas, but most *tarefer@s* did not shield themselves from the rain. While the *tarefer@s* sought refuge in different places, the teachers chanted: *Hay que socializar, hay que socializar en los hoteles del gordo para educar* (“you have to become a member of the fat guy’s hotels if you want to get an education”, referring to the provincial Governor Mauricio Closs’ enrichment off his hotels in Iguazú and the lack of public money for education). I learned talking with one *tarefera* in the rain that the blockade was so quiet because the *gendarmería* now created a long distance between the line of cars and the demonstrators due to the fact that a logging truck had tried to run people over a year ago or so. But this protection had unintended consequences, for the message of the protesters now could not be easily gotten to those in the line of traffic. People stuck in the traffic could not see the demonstrators, nor find out why they were waging such a protest. Nevertheless, occasionally travelers left their vehicles to come to see what was going on.

Federico and I had put in the money for the ground meat that would form part of the group meal in *la olla*, the large pot in which stews were made to feed the crowd of protesters. I

kept up with María as she worked to build a fire under the tent near the tourist stand, her eyes watering from the smoke. She first fried the ground meat and then added an abundant amount of water which turned out to be too much. Many young men gathered around but did not help. Later when the food was ready, everyone tried to eat from the limited dishes. It was a soupy kind of mix. Poor María's feelings were hurt terribly when another female leader of the union, Mónica, chastised her for adding all the rice to the soup instead of saving some to make *arroz con leche* (sweet rice) for the children to eat later. María vowed never to cook again. I encouraged the women to invite the men to do some of the work, but I saw that they did not feel like they could make such a request. Instead the women turned against one another while the men sat and talked together.

I encountered this kind of dilemma repeatedly, but I often stopped short of intervening. My role coming in and out of the union was already a fraught one. Although I made jokes that tended to highlight how much women's labor held the union together, I noticed these jokes did not in any way actually propel men into action, motivated perhaps by being ashamed of their wives working more than they. Rather, it was assumed widely that the women would do all of the cooking, and that labor of cooking for large groups of people was not valued as labor per se. The interpersonal conflict that arose between the Mónica and María reinforces one of the fundamental arguments of this dissertation: That systemic violence settles to the bottom of the social pile where things break down in a violent way. This kind of unequal labor and ensuing stress for women occurred completely behind the scenes, as male figures dominated the headlines in their talk about the commodity crisis of low *yerba* prices. At this point in time, the single masculine figure of *el tarefero* still dominated both producer and union organizer rhetoric, eclipsing the fundamental role that women like María and Mónica played.



Figure 19: Women of the *tarefer@* union of Montecarlo in *el galpón*. María is on the top row, second from left, with her daughter to her right. (Photo by Author May 2012)

Space, Time, and *Tarefer@* Power in the Taking

Rain or shine, the taking of a highway is a stilling of as well as a replacement of the sound of life. When a highway resounds with commodity traffic, it trembles and shakes with the speed of commodity traffic and the weight of history. This is the sound and speed of the consumption of petroleum, rubber, steel, timber, green leaf and global capitalism. The air is beaten, compressed and left to recompose itself when trucks and buses rush through it. The ground beneath the asphalt is one of the most concentrated areas of modern death, life having been completely pressed out in order to form the road.

But a highway brought to a halt has another feel. One could say it is still, but really it is that another kind of life slowly moves into form—the permission of life. Like so many things in *yerba mate* country, the highway itself is dialectical—as a “ribbon of highway” of farm to market traffic it acts as a corridor that facilitates alienation. Indeed weekly papers are filled with incidents of pedestrians crushed by speeding vehicles and fatal car crashes. The stilling of a highway imitates the cleaning of a window in an abandoned country house. From inside, suddenly the ancient flowering tree can be seen, the nest reused from last year, the dew on the morning field (Bachelard 1958). The stilling of the highway allowed for inhabiting: Chairs were set up right across the yellow lines, the bottoms of thermoses for *tereré* rested on the asphalt, people converted the asphalt to chairs. Live flesh made contact with the sun-scorched strip of lifelessness; asphalt, after all, in order for it to be effective must absolutely block life. If this is not the case, traffic cannot press on.

Now time and space move together inseparably, but I separate them out here for the sake of seeing the power of the taking. Here, the moving forward, the moving in a line, speed to market or to Iguazú without thinking about labor relations and conditions in the countryside, in the schools, in the *yerbales*---the very motor of alienation---was challenged abruptly. In their ‘creative culture’, *tarefer@s* along with their teacher allies spawned an odd displacement time, of speed (Taussig 1980). *El corte* happened with little ceremony, because it was accompanied by the *gendarmería*. It was an astonishingly quiet *space* of protest. Space becomes place as this singular kind of space and time comes together: “Rather than being the minion of an absolute space and time, place is the master of their shared matrix” (Casey 1996: 43). What I saw in the taking of the green gold highway was much like Casey’s observation that “a place is more of an *event* than a *thing* to be assimilated to known categories” (26). In the space of a few seconds, the

highway was transformed from a corridor for commerce on which heavy autos pressed upon in their route to market or tourist destination to what was suddenly a living room space, a classroom, a town meeting hall, a *tereré* or *mate* friendship circle, a dining hall, and other things at once. Perceptions of space differed depending on where one was---in the stalled line where space was compressed, heated and charged with frustration and fantasies of enacting violence on the protesters or participating in the blockade where there was fluidity as the taking created a habited space, Ingoldian in its unfolding of dwelling (Ingold 2000).

Most importantly, *tarefer@s* had themselves come forth to occupy a prohibited space, emerging from fields and both rural and urban *villas* to occupy the route. While usually they lived carless lives, relying on others to transport them or walking, now they halted the buses that never carried them, the trucks that carried the green leaf they harvested off to other places and profiteers, and occupied space where usually they were rendered entirely invisible. In their creative culture of protest, *tarefer@s* forced their visibility and, for a span of hours or days, leaned into the commodity chain, looming large in face and body, exerting their labor over the material commodity of *yerba mate* (Taussig 1980). They demanded to be taken into account, even if it brought shame upon them via the disapproving gazes and chatter of other townspeople. For unlike other harvests, such as that of tea, the *mate* harvest still *needed* them as it had not yet been mechanized.

But the space of the highway became their place only for a limited time, for the highway was barely physically transformed, just minutes after all the traffic had passed when the blockade was lifted, it was impossible to know that the taking had ever taken place. Rather it was carried away from the space of the highway in bodies where internal memory created an odd kind of place. The highway became a “dream-space” where at least for hours at a time, the moment

belonged to *tarefer@s* or to producers (Bachelard 1958). But then permission for others to move forward was re-granted, and the space turned over for others for place making. In the moment that *tarefer@s* used their bodies to take the highway, they felt for a very rare moment that they had power. There was a dream in the air that this power could be made constant over time once someone like María left the space of the highway. But the highway formed a part of a dreaming, a place-making, in which what belonged to all as an avenue of circulation could be taken to ensure a redistributed power. It was in the dwelling of resistance a sort of “nest-house” per Bachelard:

A nest-house is never young...we might say that it is the natural habitat of the function of inhabiting. For not only do we *come back* to it, but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest, or a lamb to the fold. This sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and, through the dream combats all absence. An intimate component of faithful loyalty reacts upon the related images of nest and house (Bachelard 1958: 99).

A nest-house for *tarefer@s* as they participated in multiple takings of the green gold highway was a house in which resistance came to bear a sweet fruit---the dream that one’s bodily exploitation would end, that unfairness end, that one would stop having to battle for food, for fairness, for opportunity, and for the right to be considered a valuable being among beings. This nest-house was a domestic space for the spirit, not domestic only in that it was fed and sheltered, but that its psyche was fed and sheltered from continuous exploitation that made *tarefer@s* suffer in the most basic sense: Being made to feel sharply less than because your body has been used for another’s gain, treated as Celia had said, “like an animal.”

Asphalt Democracy

As the taking unfolded, Rubén Ortiz played the role of a sort of master of ceremony, bringing dialogue and negotiation with political brokers onto the route through phone

conversations that could be heard in the middle of the highway. In the taking, the backroom democracy of everyday corrupt Argentina was at least partially interrupted. A temporary directness was resurrected, acted out on the pavement and the roadside. Those on the asphalt participated in spontaneous *assembleas* or meetings in which information was shared and opinions were voiced. Mayors, government bureaucrats, and other political figures were forced to reckon with the possibility that the *mate* harvest would be ground to a halt along with traffic for the other lucrative industries of timber and tourism. They were forced out of offices out into the sun, their blanched skin aglow. In critical moments of negotiations, protesters, browned and lined by lives of work under the sun, came to occupy government offices that would have never welcomed them.

Importantly, while the speed of traffic was slowed, ground to a halt, the protesters meant to speed up the political decision-making process and to make their voices heard as far away as Buenos Aires where so many decisions were made. Indeed, the compulsive postponing and lateness of decision-making due to corruption in the political sector had dire consequences in everyday life ranging from unpaid wages to hospitals operating without the supplies they need. *Tarefer@s* forced freezing, rerouting, stalling, and a seething contemplation of what it was to be them, who they were, what work they did and under what conditions they did it.

But in the space of the take, lurked the potential for violence of multiple kinds. By making themselves visible, daring to say that they should be taken into account, *tarefer@s* ran the risk of being targeted for this unforgivable act. There were death threats against Rubén, near running over of protesters at multiple sites where cars were trying to escape the blockade on back red dirt roads. There was a fantasy of making them disappear, for the possibility of their having power was unbearable. Morning and afternoon *mate* circles were filled with talk of violent

fantasy, a desire to extinguish, while others condemned the protesters as *vagos* (lazy people) who spent their lives *cortando ruta* for government handouts. I was witness to a number of these conversations in which there were jokes about running the protesters over or having someone else do it.

Finally, when the blockade was lifted either for moments at a time or for good and either because of successful negotiations or a decision in the *assemblea*, there was a quiet watching on the roadside by *tarefer@s*. People did not rush to get off of the asphalt. At one stage in the blockade, I stood together with others and counted the cars, the trucks, and the buses that slowly began to grind forward. A double decker tourist bus passed whose side depicted a huge picture of Iguazú Falls together with a blonde, blue-eyed boy right in the middle of them. There was a quiet satisfaction in what had been done – this temporary undoing of commerce, if only for the space of several hours or an entire day. But in just a short time, traffic was flying by, as though the take had never occurred, and for all of those cars heading south toward the great capital, the further away they got, the further behind they left those who had interrupted, if only for some hours, the incessant commodity traffic heading south to the great ports of Rosario and Buenos Aires. The larger obliteration of these moments of democracy occurred in the failure of the main papers to cover such protests. I found in corresponding with friends and relatives in Buenos Aires that almost always when a major protest had occurred in Misiones, people in Buenos Aires had no idea this had occurred in Buenos Aires. There was absolute silence on television, radio, and in the daily papers such as *Página 12* and *Clarín* that *porteños* read over their morning coffee and *mate*. And when these protests were not picked up at the national level, they certainly did not appear beyond, the news of resistance breaking through borders to spread through Latin America

and beyond. Rather mate continued to be imagined for its powers, its ability to bring people together, and the overpowered the bitter history hidden in the dried leaves.



Figure 20: A trio of *tarefer@s* holds the union banner in the moment of the taking of the green gold highway in the rain (Photo by Author, March 2012).

Part Four Double-crossing and the Joint Taking

Savage Cuts

It was Monday morning March 5, 2012, and the highway blockade had continued intermittently since the previous Thursday. When we headed up to Route 12, we found Rubén amid the different groups of people. He was exhausted and a bit delirious from lack of sleep. He told us that his wife Iris was really bad off. The day before at a Sunday gathering, someone had told her that people were talking about killing him. Iris was the second daughter of a prosperous

German family in one of the *colonias*, and she suffered terribly from rumors and gossip as she had to move between the white and brown worlds that were socially constructed as black and white. This was not the first time she had suffered so, but the length and severity of this blockade had taken its toll on everyone and the potential for violence hovered in the air. Rubén also told us he was receiving anonymous calls. After all, the day before the *tarefer@s* had engaged in what Rubén called *un corte salvaje* (a savage cut) in which they had blocked the highway continuously for around eight hours.

We returned home to our house in Guatambú where we had access to the internet. There we wrote an alert to the federal human rights office regarding the threats against Rubén. In my year of fieldwork in Montecarlo, I came to know Rubén, his family, and the multiple organizations which he worked, each of which aimed to bring change in town and country in Misiones. One of the roles we played was to make linkages between offices and contacts in Buenos Aires about what was going on in Misiones. We had seen that almost nothing of what happened in Misiones appeared in the national press, and those who were protesting were extremely vulnerable to the kinds of violence with which Rubén was threatened. But sending out a death threat alert to the federal government was a fraught action on our part. In the days just before, provincial papers had broken a story about Project X, which was the project of the *gendarmería* which generated a database of information about social protesters and union organizers. Agents pretending mostly to be journalists were spying upon social protests.

What was strange about the end to some blockades is they came with the signing of *un acta* (an accord) usually between designated representatives of *tarefer@s*, the mayor, and possibly heads of the cooperative. The *tarefer@* blockades eventually ended this way, and they had gained much ground as the commodity crisis was brewing over the price of green leaf. Most

importantly, they gained an increase in the price paid to *tarefer@s* per *raído*. But *colonos* would not write the history this way.

Radios, Rumors and Pickup Trucks: The Coop's Turnaround

By March 21, 2012, the very same producers who had condemned the *tarefer@* blockade had now taken to the highway. It was remarkable to see up close how they acted as though they were protagonists of the idea. In fact, Rubén had called for the blockade at least a full month earlier as the only solution to increasing the price of green leaf. But the arrogant white men who controlled the coop now presented it as their very own idea. Never mind that they had publicly disparaged the *tarefer@s* in the *galpón* for the very same idea. Uniformed members of the coop supermarket headed out to the route, making sure that they did not mingle with the *tarefer@s* who had been called upon as well to block the highway in a push for improved price of green leaf. People stuck tight to their radios that kept track of the blockade, while rumors appeared on the radio that were far from true. Late model pickup trucks driven by coop leaders and contractors circled round and blocked the highway as symbols of power, transport, and connecting.

What was incredible to see was the way in which the cooperative functioned as a corporation, which did not feel entitled to share information with *tarefer@s*. But this tendency was rooted in the roots of the dark past of some of its leaders. I will never forget the vigorous conversation I had with one of the leaders of the cooperative who argued intensely that the German ethic of 'order' was what had built Montecarlo. In fact, Rubén once told me that the same figure told him: "Look at what all we have built! And you *negros* have done nothing!" This incredible blind spot regarding the labor that they had relied on to build the town persisted in many a conversation I had with white farmers in Montecarlo County. The conversation I had

about order happened during the *tarefer@s* blockade, but only days after this same figure now appeared to be friendly with *tarefer@s* for his own sake. During the second blockade, the coop elite presented itself as a unified force with both small white producers who they regularly disparaged and the *tarefer@s* who they needed to block the highway.

Together: An Affectively Charged Space

“This is the happiest day of my life,” Rubén said to me the second day of the highway blockade in which productores and *tarefer@s* joined together. Indeed Rubén’s expertise as a political broker and master of negotiations during blockades was now needed in the collective press to get the national government to increase the price of green leaf. I did not think so much of what Rubén had told me until a year later when I was processing my field notes. For him and others, the highway blockades brought new energy to the hopelessness that stalked everyday life (Moorehead 2012; Frank 2005). The hatred and racism in the town were suffocating enough to stimulate significant self-destruction in the everyday in the form of family violence and or drinking. This coming together on the asphalt gave him hope about what could be different in Montecarlo. But because I moved between different social groups in my unique status as an ethnographer, I had come to see that temporary alliances did not necessarily bode well for future ones. The coop *needed* the *tarefer@s* now, but that did not mean that they would develop a politics of recognition toward them.

A taken highway is a charged highway, and to be charged, there must be positive and negative energy. In the taking of the green gold highway, what was affectively positive was the charge of interrupting everyday violence, of changing roles in order to change the way everyday systems operated. For *tarefer@s*, their first taking of the green gold highway in 2012 provoked a temporary power grab that meant to interrupt an intransigent oppressive hold; that hold in

Montecarlo County was the Agricultural Cooperative that worked with the general support of a regional economic system to divide people up by race and class, landholders and the landless. The affects I observed in the highway blockades ranged from buoyant hope derived in moments of coming together to rage that had come particularly in the first blockade when coop leaders treated *tarefer@s* with such disdain. But for just some time in the joint blockade, social fragmentation was interrupted by people coming together to push for a single cause---a better life for each and every one of them (Sennett 2012). For some, I saw this dream of togetherness through the take was also to occupy a space and then to experience, if only for the space of hours or days, the powerful sweetness of belonging (Sennett 2012).

I saw multiple moments of people coming together in the joint blockade who ordinarily would not do so. People came to the highway blockades who had just weeks previous completely shunned people like Rubén. I saw Celia and Cándido, union opponents, beneath a tree, while Cándido held a small branch in his hand, tracing designs in the dirt and picking at different plants in *la capuera*. As a man who had worked in the country all his life, Cándido was a levelheaded well-respected man with an intelligent mind. A restless sort, he did not take to long stretches of doing nothing. Celia sat beside him, dressed in a white and pink sleeveless blouse, her musical laughter traveling through the air. A neighbor *colono* who I knew from the farmers' market came up to me as I gathered under a tree with the *cuadrilla* of sixteen *tarefer@s* I had worked with on Roberto Aicheler's farm: *Como andas piquetera? Parece que ser piquetero esta de moda, no hay mucho otro trabajo.* "How are you doing, *piquetera*? It looks like being one is all the rage, there's not much other work to be found" and we laughed together. As we took pictures under the tree of the *tarefer@s*, one made a joke of the other that I would have to use the flash several times for one of them because of his very dark skin. In these moments, *tarefero* culture came

forth from the *yermal* to occupy a different moment in commodity chain. In a clear tense moment during an *asamblea* Celia could be heard to say: “*Ortiz tiene razón*” (Ortiz is right). And the president of the coop, a white supremacist, thanked the *tarefer@s* for their support while being interviewed live on the radio.



Figure 21: This proud group of *tarefer@s* with whom I had worked in Roberto Aicheler’s *yermal* usually wanted nothing to do with highway blockades, until their bosses took to the highway (Photo by Author, March 2012).

But negative power was also part of the charge. There was a desire to annihilate, to crush by running over, to eliminate life breath. During the first blockade, there was a desire to seek revenge against s/he who desired to challenge authority, be it police, landowner, or labor boss. These were the affects I gathered as I moved through town and country listening to what people had to say about the blockades. At a critical moment during one blockade, my partner Federico went out to help union organizer Federico Chilavert at a site called Palomar, which was the unpoliced space where the *gendarmería* unofficially allowed the traffic to circumvent the

blockade. People power was needed to effectively cut off those other routes so that the *corte*, especially *un corte salvaje*, could be effectively enforced. A conflict developed when a rugby coach from Buenos Aires threatened violence against the *tarefer@s* if they did not let him through: “I have a whole team of rugby players here, and I am going to sic them on you they will beat you to a bloody pulp if you don’t let me through!” Chilavert asked Federico who is also from Buenos Aires, to try to calm them down. The two explained the purpose of the blockade to the man, giving him numbers that he could call to apply pressure during the commodity crisis. With some dialogue, violence was averted.

After the crisis, Federico asked why people had not spoken up to help him out. But what he then realized was that the group of *tarefer@s* had been communicating in another way and in fact had begun to move inward, encircling the *porteño*. But they had not talked. “What’s going on is that we need people to talk,” Chila said. “People don’t know how to talk.” This silence in the blockades on the part of *tareferos* echoed what I had seen in the *galpón*. For a time, it seemed people were “talked at” and they had to sit for hours listening to others. I remembered too that Rubén had told me that in Peronist culture, workers had learned to be silent. But they had also learned to use other methods to protect themselves (Scott 1985).

White farmers expressed both paranoia and a fear of a potential *tarefer@* threat. For example, the German owner of the house we rented in Guatambú came over one day during the blockades to warn me not to talk to the *tarefer@s*. They would burn his house down, he said. They were pure trouble, just wanting more and more money. And worst of all, what could not be forgiven, was that the *tarefer@s* brought their children to the highway blockades. It was clear from his visit that he felt I too was making trouble. Many middle class white people decried the fact that the *cortes* were allowed to occur at all. In any other decent country, they said, such

highway blockades would be illegal. The blockades were seen as part of a stubbornly chaotic Argentina, far from what the Kirchner government had referred to in its election campaigns as *un país en serio*, a serious country. As a form of demonstration, the blockades were replete with contradictions. It was true that very humble folk could cut off the highway without a legal permit or without much notice. This certainly contrasted dramatically with a place like Washington, D.C. where demonstrators must have lawyers present in their event organizing in order to gain state approval of where their demonstration routes might go.⁹⁰ No such rules existed in Misiones. Technically taking the highway was illegal, and Rubén had been detained for this kind of protest when the state had decided to restrict his movement. Indeed freedom of press, speech, and assembly were controlled quite differently at different times.

⁹⁰ When I lived in Washington, D.C. and practiced law there from 2000 into 2003, I was involved in the massive protests against the IMF and saw firsthand how demonstration routes were negotiated between protest organizers and police. Certainly spontaneous protests are not permitted and those who do so are promptly detained. There are strict rules about how protesters must stay on sidewalks and march in circles in order to not block traffic.



Figure 22: *Tarefer@s* and producers gathered together in *asemblea* on the asphalt (Photo by Author, March 2012).

Green Panic and the Language of Numbers

For someone who does not manage numbers well, I constantly had to ask people to repeat numbers to me, for so much language of *yerba mate* at the site of production flows in numbers. Both *tarefer@s* and producers talk in numbers: 1.70 per kilogram also means 1700 per 1000 kilograms, for example, and those figures were peppered constantly into conversation in meetings in the *galpón* and during the blockades. In fact, the language of numbers forms the first sentences of commodity fetishism, the first steps in the dance. Furthermore, behind every social policy in *yerba mate* country, was a discourse of numbers that emerged in full volume when *tarefer@* protest began to intensify. This involved language of how to get more, of who should receive, and who should not. The floor of number talk was then a weaving of inequality and accumulation. On it was a slipping and sliding, gripping onto, and seizing from that made up the

spaces in the commodity chain that were closest to the *yerbal*. The populist rhetoric and practices of patronage politics provided the lubricant for creating wealth transfers and maintaining sharp inequality (Auyero 2001; Lapegna 2013). For the most part, the state, provincial players and local bosses released resources to *tarefer@s* and their families only when they absolutely had to or just in time.

I noticed that this same talk in numbers did not pervade much everyday talk in Buenos Aires. Many middle class Argentines there had absorbed a discourse that the capital dailies circulated about *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo esclavo* in rural economies. This conjured up images of ruthless individuals, most often landed oligarchs, controlling vulnerable families in isolated spaces. Their talk mirrored human rights rhetoric, but did not get into the language of numbers I found close to the production site of *yerba mate*. But as Rubén and the teachers eloquently argued during the highway blockades, the biggest employer of *trabajo en negro* was the Argentine state itself. In fact, teacher blockades and their solidarity with *tarefer@s* hinged on both of them being paid *en negro* via a manipulation of numbers. Both the state and the employee got the short end of the stick, so to speak, in the shade of tax-free work. Teachers were paid large portions of their salaries under the table so that the government would not have to pay out so much of percentages in benefit, i.e. the lower the salary, the less the state had to contribute to retirement and other benefits. When teachers retired, their pensions were calculated only from the amount of their salary they received above table, not the amount they also got under the table. While the language of numbers crossed out the sociocultural dimensions of these kinds of labor scenarios, the more descriptive language without numbers spoken so often on the streets of Buenos Aires left to the side the complicated labor politics at the site of commodity production.



Figure 23: Rubén Ortiz (middle) with the Agrarian Federation's Orlando Marino (right) and labor contractor Eladio Barretto (left) as decisions are made in the middle of the Route 12. (Photo courtesy of Natalia Haasis).



Figure 24: Hugo Sand (left) and Carlos Ortt (right) of APAM, a small *yerba* producers' organization, address the links between small producers and *tarefer@s* at a May 12, 2012 forum in the *galpón*.

In the aftermath of the highway blockades, the rise in *yerba* prices provoked panic along the commodity chain. Throughout the country, people panicked that they would not be able to get *yerba* at a reasonable price and newspaper editorials pined away about the symbolic

importance of the tea. Labor crises, however, were not generally part of everyday coffee talk in Buenos Aires. No press, internet or otherwise, brought to consumers of *mate* what was happening in Misiones. At the level of the province, though, Carlos Ortt then head of the small farmers' advocacy group APAM and the small farmer representative on the INYM acted as a prominent voice that articulated the way the power players in the commodity chain worked to make sure the increase in the price of green leaf worked to their advantage. He argued that the sharp increase in the price of *yerba* on the supermarket shelf was due to supermarkets and hypermarkets like Carrefour and Walmart trying to get the upper hand to ensure their hefty end of the profit. Having carefully studied all input costs, specialists had put the price of *yerba* per kilogram at no more than sixteen or eighteen pesos whereas it was being sold as high as forty pesos on the grocery shelves. The high demand for green leaf, or raw material, came from the fact that due to very low prices, producers were planting other crops instead of *yerba*. In speeches and forums, Ortt and his fellow organizer Hugo Sand unpacked the price of *yerba* for consumers: For one kilogram of *yerba* on the retail shelf, the state took 250 grams, the commercial chain took 250 grams, industry took 250 grams, and the rest was shared by producers, intermediaries, and transport people (Ortt, Territorial Digital: 2012). Although he was one of the producers that most sympathized with the plight of the *tarefer@s*, he did not mention them specifically in his statements to the press or his comments about them were deleted by journalists. Perhaps what was most significant about his breakdown was that a full quarter of what consumers paid for for their *yerba mate* went to the Argentine state.

Contradictions and Hardships in The Taking of the Green Gold Highway

Commodity fetishism takes form when those involved in production become entirely invisible to consumers and awareness of working conditions at the production site is eclipsed

completely. But long before this invisible violence occurs, the violence necessary to make this happen occurs at the site of production, both in the everyday and in the violence that comes in the form of retaliation when workers demand better working conditions (Taussig 1980; Mintz 1985; Marx). Because I worked between groups in Misiones, moving between town and country, I heard very diverse reactions to the highway blockades and to *tarefer@s* organizing in particular. Often white farmers criticized the *tarefer@s*, articulating their deep seated race and class prejudice without reservation. In this black and white world, they often saw themselves as victims of *los negros* who wanted more and more. One common accusation that circled about in Montecarlo was that the union wasn't even made up of *tarefer@s* but rather mostly of people who did not want to work. Again an ahistorical view of what had happened to the rural economy was imposed on the precarious conditions that so many unemployed workers faced. They were blind to or did not care about the barriers someone like María faced as she tried to find some kind of employment that did not crush her spirit. Ironically this accusation about *tarefer@s* authenticity doubled back on itself, because even if the union had been composed of the most veteran, currently employed *tarefer@s*, they would have been stigmatized all the same by white *colonos*.

Voices in the *tarefer@s* rights movement depicted *tarefer@s* as those who least benefitted from the *yerba mate* industry. On the one hand, leaders circulated a stories of the most extreme forms of suffering to provoke a reaction on the part of the government. But *tarefer@s* themselves were deeply divided both in and out of the union. In the union, the discord between those who still labored as *tarefer@s* and those who were long-term unemployed grew. Rubén insisted that the two were linked, for one of the realities of *tarefer@s* was unemployment during the offseason. But for *tarefer@s* like Celia, she found the trope of suffering to be misplaced. She

was too proud to participate in the union, saying she would rather cook in her house than cook on the highway. She had no shame in being a *tarefera*, found *pura risa en el yerbal* (pure laughter laughter in the *yerbal*), and believed that anyone who wanted to work hard would be able to make do. She told stories of people who worked hard but who could not hold on to their money because of financial mismanagement or compulsive spending on everything from clothes to alcohol. Rogelio and María also had talked fondly of *la tarefa* as a space where people helped each other out.

People also felt threatened and storms of paranoia gathered on the horizon. There was much negative conversation in town and country about the highway blockades both before and after in 2012. Indeed, *tarefer@s* and teachers continue to participate in them to this day. There were accusations that people accepted bribes, had ulterior motives, were bought out, etc. These rumors were persistent, damaging, and cast shadows over the legitimacy of protests. Often protesters were rumored to have ulterior motives for their protests. This was not surprising do the longstanding tradition of political groups that compensated people both in cash and in kind for attending protests. In other words, often what seemed to an outside viewer as a spontaneous protest, was actually an orchestrated one in which attendees of the protests are getting something quite tangible in return. But I saw what happened in Montecarlo to stem from the deeply inequitable society that had been constructed over time. The system was so unfair, that the white farmers who held power became sick with paranoia in their attempts to hold onto and justify their exploitative systems. It was in this climate that resistance developed, and so it made sense that certain dimensions of organized protest had an ugly underbelly that could not easily be brought to light and abolished.

Organizers of the blockades needed critical masses of bodies to take the highway in order to pressure political regimes for change, but I took into account how certain people in the union had little power. I wondered at times what mothers walking long hours in the sun to get to the highway and staying there actually got out of these protests. I remember Sonia, a mother of five who has now become a leader in the union, and her deep toothache on those long hot days of the *corte* of 2012. She had no transportation, and her five children needed her. Federico took her through the back roads to the doctor, as she couldn't take the pain anymore. Our own difficulties caring for our daughters during the blockades magnified my empathy for those who sacrificed so much to participate in the blockades: For some time, Iris was sick at night with a fever and had a deep and ugly cough. Luna needed her nap. We had to find someone to care for them, so that I could get my fieldwork done. But Sonia had no such funds. She had to rely on family or her older children for childcare. And many like her walked in the heat or waited for long periods of time for the *colectivos* to take them to and from the protest. It was easy to see how people slowly were forced into town, for so many things were more difficult in the countryside. And, as I began to understand union politics, the urban *tarefer@s* and more frequently the unemployed core came to dominate the politics as well as generate some of the most intense moral debates of the union. Even in organized *tarefer@* resistance, those deepest in the countryside were the most vulnerable.

I observed people coming back to the highway again and again. I also observed those that decided not to return. They grew bitter, distrustful, or felt that the blockades meant that *tarefer@s* had to suffer in the hot sun for the benefit of others or for no benefit at all. Some of those who left the demonstrations and did not return felt that *tarefer@s* were being used. They gave up the comfort of their homes, walked long miles with their children, etc. and even suffered

by spending the night in *carpas*, only to get nowhere. I especially observed this in days of long blockades where someone was asked to keep watch in the tent by the roadside to keep the protest active and vigilant. Many times it was the poorest or most marginalized *tarefer@s* who made this sacrifice, while the more middle class teachers were off to have dinner inside, drink together, or simply go back to their family homes.

Indeed deep class divides manifested on the asphalt. For example, during the protests where teachers and *tarefer@s* joined together, the two groups here mostly socially segregated. *Tarefer@s* gathered together in their own groups, while teachers gathered in theirs. Ortiz angrily called the teachers out at times about their classism, but admitted that the classism was deep rooted and continued. Nevertheless, veteran organizers know that these kinds of challenges are not resolved overnight, but rather through long days of painful process. I cannot see how the dilemmas of race, class, gender and privilege would have been so much different in other places. Although I had moments in which I had a negative reaction to what I saw, I also came to believe deeply that a lack of protest created conditions that perpetuated and deepened exploitation of workers, both teachers and *tarefer@s*. Were it not for the taking of the green gold highway, there would have been no change at all.



Figure 25: A view of the 2012 highway blockades waged by farmers and *tarefer@s* for increase in the price of green leaf (Photo courtesy of Natalia Haasis).

Part Five A Life Under Threat

After the highway blockades were over, most everyone assumed their old positions and the cooperative took public credit for the success. Life in Buenos Aires resumed as the shelves were full again with *yerba mate* within a couple of months. As *yerba mate* consumers around the country continued enjoying circles of *mate*, they remained entirely blind for the most part of the very existence of *los tarefer@s*. In Montecarlo, very quickly talk of highway blockades turned negative, for it was only the *tarefer@s* and teachers who still had the need to engage in them. Nevertheless, the local idealist in Rubén persisted. Circumstances had kept him from going away from Montecarlo, but he had other choices. He had made the decision repeatedly to commit himself to pushing for greater social justice in Montecarlo in spite of death threats and

continuous assassination of his character. It was people like us, often, outsiders, who came closer at times to affirm his struggle.

I want to emphasize here that my own solidarity work with the union is rooted in the same kind of ‘creative practice’ that Raymond Williams referred to as “confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships” (Williams 1977: 212). Relating with Rubén and others was not always easy. We had moments of disagreement, distrust and distance which continue to this day. But as I came to know him better, and we had gained a substantial degree of trust in one another, I invited him to tell me more of his own story. This story sharing was also a way for me to collaborate with him on his forthcoming book *Vidas entre ponchadas*. It was clear to me, that for all of his confessed defects, much of the organizing that happened for both teachers and *tarefer@s* could not have occurred without his enduring talent, commitment, fearlessness, and personal sacrifice. Rubén was an established history teacher who could have rested on those laurels, even become corrupted as many others did, following the political in-group of the day in order to achieve personal enrichment. But he chose another path. For him, his decision to struggle on behalf of *tarefer@s* had huge consequences:

Before I started the *yerba* battles I was a respected historian, a guy that people greeted wherever I went, except for those who were accomplices of the dictatorship. But after I began to organize *tarefer@s*, I went from *licenciado* (one with a college degree) to a *piquetero*, a degrading process for one’s image. And what really gets to me is the people who never did anything for anyone and who judge. They are real *charlatanes de feria* (fakes) when one looks at their story: where were they all this time? But what keeps me going, in spite of all those who don’t like me, is when I go to the *barrios*, and there is recognition of people that tell me to keep up the struggle. That they say to you ‘thanks for what you did, we are better now, we have a better salary each day.’ With every conflict, every peso that they earn is happiness and fortification for me to continue on.

The other joy that I have is to imagine that *tarefer@s* have a place to gather, that costs a lot to maintain, but a place to unite that is the *galpón*. And the bosses have to come to

dispute salary issues there, because we have built an immense power and because we accomplished this between and among all the workers. It is an immense triumph. It fills me with pride to sit beside the bastards and tell them that they screwed us over with the price and not one of them can tell us that we are not going to get paid.

And what we were able to do was to build a bridge of solidarity between at least some teachers and *tarefer@s* so that teachers could support the *tarefer@* union. That more people were unwilling to turn their backs on the suffering of *tarefer@s* was a great victory. And those in power blame me for everything, but they can't see that it is pure hunger that has pushed people to look for help, to learn about political formation.

Rubén talked frequently of being watched, of police cars waiting outside his house. That was the dark side, the worrisome side of his activism. But they had never forced him out of the school or of his job. In 2011, he had received an anonymous death threat by phone and had taken the number to the prosecutor's office, but he never gotten any response. Someone also had gotten a copy of his pay stub, copied it, and passed out flyers with the information saying that he made a good living and had no reason to be complaining, blocking the highway. Beyond the tragic untimely death of a younger brother in a diving accident, one of the darkest chapters of Rubén's life was when he was detained for highway blockades. For him, the deepest pain was having one of his siblings call him to tell him that his mother was going to die, because he had gone to prison, because he had orchestrated a blockade. And his father had told him that all his life, for fifty years, he had lived in Argentina as a Paraguayan, and he had never been taken prisoner. What had happened to Rubén brought shame, and this pain was intense.

When the existence of Project X was made public, various activists who had been present at protests over several years identified one particular agent. He would infiltrate *assembleas* and ask for information such as when and where protests would be. On one occasion in which *tarefer@s* were engaging in highway blockades in Oberá for the fourth day, a person came to the workers and offered them \$300 pesos if they would allow him through the blockade. Of course,

workers knew that they could be charged with extortion by the state if they did such a thing, and they summarily denied his request.⁹¹ Rubén and other social activists in Misiones had decried (and still do to this day) what they called “the criminalization of protest” which was a low profile state repression of activism in which activists were being detained, fined, and left with charges hanging over their heads indefinitely. This had significant consequences. For example, another activist friend of ours in Buenos Aires could not leave the country because of pending charges that were never resolved by the state. By leaving the charges dangling in a kind of proceeding limbo, the everyday movements of activists were limited and confined, affecting their ability to press for change. Rubén himself had been charged two times for illegal blockades. Both times he reported that it was clear that he has been spied upon. Before he had been detained, odd figures had showed up at protests.

I recall what Pancho Ferrara had written about rural protest during the military dictatorship: When a person was ‘disappeared’ in the countryside, no one found out about it (Ferrara 2007). Rubén presented a potent threat: He was highly sophisticated, intelligent, audacious, and fearless. Moreover, he had developed contacts and allies across the country that he could call on when things got too hot. But his status as teacher and union activist gave him certain kinds of protection that everyday *tarefer@s* did not have: They were absolutely vulnerable to all kinds of oppression. Nevertheless, Rubén’s intense commitment to everyday people experiencing oppression meant that he was the point person to go to, and he would take action in any number of ways. In a sense, he acted as a kind of mobile protective wall for workers to stand behind for he had voice, fearlessness, and more protection than they had. Even still, I could see the real

⁹¹ See *Territorio Digital* Feb. 22, 2012 and *La Nación* August 14, 2014.

vulnerability of those who organized in rural areas, far off the Buenos Aires political grid, where most political sectors had been corrupted and coopted within the current political regime while human rights organizations were located far from social protests in the provinces. With over a third of the population living in greater Buenos Aires, people who pressed for social justice in the provinces were particularly vulnerable because political energy was geared toward the urban area, not the rural ones (Lapegna 2013).

At every turn, I defended Rubén for his outspokenness and his spirit of investigating history to tell the story that hadn't been told. When I worked at the only café in town or enjoyed the beauty of gardens and nice houses, I thought how easy it would have been merely to embrace the order that had been created and pretend that this order had not come with disorder. One could accept this community with low crime, good comfort, and a couple of hours of *siesta*. I could have joined the chorus of those who denounced Rubén for his troublemaking, his bitterness, his aggression, his shouting, and his unforgivable interruptions of this order. It could have made my life in the field much easier. But I came to the field with scars of my own from organizing as well as my own memories of having grown up on the margin in Texas. I identified with Rubén--with his departure from the countryside, his sadness, his ornery aggression, his imperfections, and his preference of burning up on the asphalt rather than sitting in artificially cooled air at a corrupt table.

Rubén told me more than once: "People who have power in this town are never going to forgive me for organizing the *tarefer@s*."⁹² One day I fell into an argument with a small farmer I knew well at the farmers' market who told me that Rubén was *el peor mugre en este pueblo*, the worst scum of the town. He received two salaries from two different unions: "Why doesn't he

⁹²*El poder nunca me va a perdonar por organizar los tarefer@s.*

work from the sweat of his own brow?” asked her husband, an elderly German who had labored his whole life on the farm. I intervened vehemently to explain how what Rubén did was a kind of work, how he had finished school when he wasn’t supposed to finish in terms of statistics.⁹³ I told her he was one of the few who could be counted on to defend a humble person wronged. He had been condemned, because he had turned over the town rock to show its dirty secrets underneath.

When Ramona crossed the Paraná all those years ago, she had done so in search of a better future for her children. But she could have had little idea to what extent the place she had crossed into was a ‘heart of flame’. She told me the day I met her that one of the saddest days of her life was when Rubén was taken to jail: “How could they put the person who most fought for people’s rights in jail?” she asked, a shadow of pain in her eyes. I watched as Rubén slowly sacrificed himself to a town that meant to devour him. But he refused to do what so many did which was to be bought out by unions and political parties which would provide him with residence either in Posadas the provincial capital or in Buenos Aires where he would slowly but surely be corrupted away from his original constituency.⁹⁴

⁹³ There was a gap between *colonos* who had very little education and a former *peronista* like Rubén who was highly sophisticated in terms of community and national politics even as he continued reading. Like other people in the community, *colono* knowledge often came from talk in *tereré* circles, rather than the reading of books, newspapers, and other sources. Many barely read the newspaper if at all. This contrasted with the organized *colonos* in the southern part of the province like those who were part of MAM.

⁹⁴ There are certain things a fieldworker can never know, and there are many things I am sure I will never know about the lives of *tarefer@s*, the internal workings of the *tarefer@* union, and degrees to which certain people in Misiones were and were not involved in corrupt practices during the time I conducted my fieldwork.⁹⁴ In particular, there are aspects of Rubén’s life that I will never know. But there were things I could know because of the places I found myself during 2012 in Misiones, for multi-sited fieldwork gave me this advantage. The first *tarefa* I ever worked in Montecarlo was thanks to an invitation by my dear and now deceased (November 2014) neighbor in Guatambú, Roberto Aicheler. Shortly after the blockades I talked to a *tarefero*

Therefore, when the times got hard, Rubén often became physically ill. He had been in a near death car accident years before, and his body sometimes could not take the stress. And, during the hot summers, he sometimes camped for days down by the river. In the times we spent together, he was most vibrant when he took to the countryside and the urban neighborhoods as a community organizer, making contact with people. He believed in them, remembered their stories, and knew their children. This was the way he felt alive. But this same creative culture that he was bound on living also meant his slow demise, stress for his family as he endured death threats.

I have learned that the strongest people are sometimes the most vulnerable inside. When Rubén told us the second day of the *corte* with productores that this was the happiest day of his life, he spoke to the most basic politics of recognition. It was not that he longed to be accepted by people *out* there in the world, but rather he longed to find peace and belonging in the place he called home. Somewhere in the agitator was a desire for recognition, to be acknowledged as the honor student he had been in high school when the white school administration had denied him the honor, and to be acknowledged for his intelligence. He would never be forgiven for threatening the hold of the powerful by organizing the *tarefer@s*. From his perspective, he had no real peer group. He had been betrayed by academics, by unions, by politicians. What would be his salvation?

during *quebranza* who viewed the union with scorn: “Those guys are just a bunch of lazy welfare cheats. They don’t even want to work,” he told me. And yet this same *tarefero* would benefit that very day from better pay, an increase that had come *only* through the long hot days of the highway blockade.



Figure 26: Rubén Ortiz in the March 2012 taking of the green gold highway (Photo by Author).

Epilogue **The Tangerine Girl in the Childhood Garden of Che**

Days after the historic 2012 blockades ended, I walked part of a pilgrimage to the country shrine for Santa Rita, patroness of impossible causes and hopeless circumstances. The church of Santa Rita was located on the road to the Provincial Park of Che Guevara where Ramona had worked so long ago, and Rubén had played as a boy. Once the procession ended at the church, I said my goodbyes to the pilgrims and headed on to the park, just about a five-minute drive down the red dirt road. I wanted to go back to see the beautiful butterflies that abound there due to the lack of agrochemicals.

When I had first come to the park in 2010, I met a friendly young man named Diego who still acted as the *guardaparque* at the park. I found him there on that clear sunny fall day along with his wife Sonia and young son Maxi. They both hailed from the interior *colonia* of Tarumá,

near Caraguatay. We sat on their patio in the shade drinking *tereré*. They both had gone to the Escuela Normal in Montecarlo where they gained increased consciousness about social justice and the environment. They told me that they wanted their children to grow up outside, watch less television, and eat from their organic garden that they had named *El Tatú* (The Armadillo). Sonia dressed differently than many young women her age in the area, for she wore beaded earrings and gaucho country pants, an indication of her effort to live a simpler life.

Diego remembered a woman he had seen when he was eighteen and first worked at the park as a volunteer. She came walking through daily with her daughter carrying a basket of tangerines atop her head. One day he stopped to ask: How could it be that she treated her daughter this way? When would she be able to go to school, if she worked like this all day long? After all, they crossed the river to work by seven am and were already headed back to cross the river by three or four. “Oh, *señor*, you don’t understand,” she told him, “It could be much worse. If I leave her at the *chacra*, the men go out to work, and someone could go and rape her. This happens. We are too *desamparados* (unprotected)”.

Diego remembered feeling his throat tighten, shocked that these were the alternatives for the girl. Having benefited from going to public school, he was deeply impacted by how she had become a slave to work in order to avoid being raped or sequestered. The years passed, and the girl continued to work until one day she came no more. She now had a boyfriend back in Paraguay. It did not matter, however, for in the meantime, the woman had had other children, and that girl was replaced by another who carried the tangerines. Still later, the woman’s husband got a job as a *peón* on an Argentine farm, and Diego had never seen her again. “These *paraguayos* who don’t know that they have rights just keep coming across the border,” Diego said, sadly shaking his head. As he spoke more about labor irregularities on the farms in

Caraguatay, it occurred to me that people learned to tolerate a culture of separate and unequal and sometimes exchanged few words about it. Silence in Misiones was as thick and dense as the mountain hardwood in the forest around us. Learning how to be silent makes for souls buried deep in bodies not allowed to breathe easily.

I spent an hour or so more with the couple, but then had to head home. I left them behind along with a memory of something Rubén had told me about the boy who lived there when both were children. He was the only son of Ramona's bosses, the lawyer and his wife. He blamed his mother for not having another child, for he had become envious of how the Ortiz siblings played together in the green space around the house. The boy grew up to struggle as a gay man, lost himself to drugs, and squandered the family's wealth, ending up on the streets of the city up the road named after the legendary city of gold that Spanish explorers sought, El Dorado. I left behind too the giant yellow butterflies that fluttered about, air-bound vessels of life. They were joined by those with black lace embroidery on their white wings, and the ones locals call 'eighty-eights', named for that number etched in white on their black wings. Less abundant, but there nonetheless was a tiny, antique-violet butterfly soaking in the sun in the childhood garden of Che.



Figure 27: On the road (Photo by Author 2012).

Chapter Five

Everyday Litigants: The Culture of Work in *Yerba Mate* Country

I pushed them hard, and no one wanted to do that second load in the rain. Our driver swore in frustration for he wanted to get home, but he had no other choice. As we loaded the truck that day with the last of the *raidos*, he turned to me and said: Celia, when you die, we are going to plant a *yerba* tree on your grave and come to drink *tereré* with you.

–Celia, Guaraypo, Misiones, Argentina 2012

All I have to remember when the judge asks me about thing the worker has said is to say: that isn't true, that isn't true, that isn't true.

–Sara, Montecarlo, Misiones, Argentina 2013

“The Culture of Work is Being Lost”

Up to now, I have only alluded to the kinds of everyday conflicts and resistances that permeate working life throughout the countryside in Misiones. But in this chapter, I turn to them in detail in order to capture a view of the grit of conflict, which comes to a head during events such as the highway blockades. This is the conflict that has been washed out of the *mates* consumed throughout Argentina by commodity fetishism: No matter how *dulce* or *amargo* a *mate* might be, everyday conflict has been erased from the tea by the time consumers take in their first sips, and this erasure is what permits *yerba* to be one of the most affordable items in the government's food basket.

On a bright sunny day, I raced against the clock to get food for the week before everything closed up at noon. I was scheduled to work with Celia's crew, cutting *yerba* in a

yerbal a bit north of town off Route 12. My last stop was the farmers' market where I had bought food for my family for months. I bought milk from Luci, and chard, carrots, squash, and tomatoes from Sara. Then I ran back to the car and headed back to Libertador to get to the highway. One of the town's most popular radio hosts, Pepe Levy, was in the middle of his morning show, a mix of talk and music. I tuned into his monologue as I passed the crews of people who received welfare stipends to beautify the town's greenery in the median.

Today his focus was one that could be found any day, at any time in some conversation around Misiones—the issue of *los planes sociales*, the welfare programs implemented to assuage Argentina's problem with poverty and unemployment. A particular focus of criticism was the Universal Child Allowance known as *el salario universal* that since 2009 had sustained unemployed families. As he talked and responded to the text messages he received, Levy unfolded the multilayered discourse that others also circulate about what was referred to throughout *mate* country as 'the culture of work':

If they want to provide for their family, they need to work more, a little more. There are a lot of people that while we are getting up at five in the morning or six, any of you out there who worry about progressing, there are a lot of people who by nine am are just getting up to drink their first *tereré*. This is the reality. This is the truth.

Here comes a message from a teacher who says:

Don't be envious of my progress without knowing my sacrifice...

This is the refrain that corresponds to the examples that I am giving. Hypothetical examples. This is what you have to take into account but truly, returning to the issue of the culture of work. Surely, it is not a question of now. Surely it grew with the issue of the welfare plans, or the president. I can't blame all things, and beyond demagoguery that I disagree with, what I observe is that there is a question about the Universal Child Allowance. Surely it helps some people, but there is a worry. I mean it is a project that is ambitious and useful for the society, but also there are people who do not feel like working, and don't want to grow and get better. This is what we should take into account: one has to work to be better, do whatever is possible to get out. You have to accept that the *planes* are not enough. We need to persevere, get beyond the every day. This is the message of the every day. For our own good, for our own good, and for our young people

to try to study, to try to get ahead. That is what one would like to take away as a daily message.

Here are more messages...a slave camp found in which they pay only 15 pesos a *raído* and on top of that they took out money for food--all Paraguayan workers. This still exists in Misiones, we don't want to see this kind of thing.

Another message says: Pepe, my husband is a cargo carrier (*changarín*), and he works all day long. I get the Universal Child Allowance but he doesn't rely on that. I hope that God blesses us and that he gets a permanent job because he is looking for one. He doesn't just sit still. Thank you.

Right. These are some of the cases. People have one plan but they keep in mind that they can't just rely on that, they have to do more to make do for themselves.

Another message...Our model of production is the problem, because more and more human labor is replaced by machines.

We can go back to the issue of taxes. How expensive it is, how difficult and costly it is to employ just one worker. One worker, just one worker! If you have an employee, how much does that cost you? Whichever one, tell me, whichever one! Remember that business guy who had a forestry business? He said he has eight employees and pays 11,000 pesos a month in contributions and taxes. And that is the question--it is true that he prefers to buy a machine that at first costs more, but later you have paid for it a single time and you keep it up, because of taxes, dangerously expensive and then in the long term the machine costs less. So it is true this substitution for human labor, it could be, but watch out the issue of taxes!

Another message is in...You are right, Pepe, *la plata no alcanza*, the money is not enough. I work but my husband also works.

This is the culture of work. I collect what the government pays, but I don't just hang out with my arms folded. I need to keep working to have a better quality of life....

It is 9:26 in the morning in Argentina, our country.⁹⁵

The radio waves filled with drums, tambourine, and applause as the deep, resonant voice of Mercedes Sosa, the great Argentine folk singer, closed the show. I turned off the road into the deep red roads of the *yermal*, and begin to search for the telltale tracks of the fresh *tarefa*—trees freshly stripped of green leaf, *raídos* stuffed with leaf waiting to be loaded into the truck, and wet clothes hung in trees to dry in the sun.

⁹⁵ Recorded and translated from Spanish to English by author.

From the time I began work in Misiones in 2008, I encountered the kind of conversation I heard on the radio at all turns in *yerba mate* country: This commingling of anecdotes, numbers, fragments of laws, historical accountings, declarations of moral high and low grounds, citations to and rants against tax laws, and narratives that culminated in the refrain: *The culture of work is being lost*. Reports that no one wanted to work anymore tumbled out of many, varied mouths--*tarefer@s*, white farmers, contractors, teachers, secretaries and clerks. Everyone had an opinion on the issue. Even people who received welfare *planes*, a majority of the working poor, the underemployed, and the unemployed shared the conclusion that the culture of work was being lost.

In this chapter, I tread through farms, markets, lawyers offices, *yerbales* and my own field-home to get to the bottom of what the culture of work *is*. I address the ingredients of everyday conversations about work in which *trabajo en negro* (informal work), *planes sociales* and work are thrown onto the table and criticized, reworked, and repudiated all at once. Rather than framing this as a general conversation about work, welfare, and preferred roles of the state, I root the politics of work culture in the context of food and survival: What must be done in contemporary society so that all may eat, and who will do this work that others need done? In order to grasp the context of the comments that Pepe Levy and his callers made, I describe labor quagmires as they arise in the context of labor laws and welfare programs in Part One. I then turn to a case of labor conflict on Sara's farm where she depended on wagedworkers to help produce the food she sold at the farmers' market.

I draw insight from the working lives of two women with whom I worked very closely over the course of several years---Sara a smallholder and Celia who was both *tarefera* and producer. Both of these women over time became landholders and employers and continue to be

food producers to this day. But they are quite different---Celia is a lifelong *tarefer@*, a brown-skinned woman in her early fifties, born to Paraguayan immigrants, while Sara was born to German immigrants and has always been a smallholder, although her move to her now late husband's farm set her back quite a bit in her youth. Both women have lived lives of hardship, are not part of any town or country elite, but have extraordinary roles in their communities due to their perseverance, sense of humor, and generosity expressed in the communities where they live. They shared their sensitive stories with me in great confidence, helping me to understand the everyday difficulties involved in producing food for others, both as workers and as employers. To this end, I have attempted to protect them from any repercussions of sharing these details.

Fine Grains of Working Agricultures

Work to unravel/undo commodity fetishism via ethnographic writing becomes a daunting task when confronted with the micro details of interpersonal working relations that manifest on the ground in the everyday. In this chapter, I build from Williams' call to make 'working agricultures' a priority concern by writing accounts of the affective, legal, sociopolitical, and ecological dimensions which form the grit of everyday work relationships in *yerba mate* country. In writing out what constitutes "work" in the 21st century agrarian zone of Misiones, I continue to employ an ethic of letting everyday stories in their context "lead" the discussion, rather than filtering these stories through contemporary discourses in anthropology. This politic becomes particularly salient and urgent, in fact, in the context of the potentially inflammatory politics of welfare and work. In a surely imperfect effort, I attempt to treat ethnographic content not as data to be subordinated in fragmented detail to social theory but rather as cultural heritage. I do this because the stories shared with me came from live beings who continue to struggle to survive in

an ever-endangered agrarian world. Since I began my work with them, each has lost loved ones in tragic circumstances, making their lives all the more difficult. Because I grew up in a place that was similarly threatened by hard times and rural exodus, I endeavor to present them as theorists of their own lives, with the hopes that they will be cited in the future in the spirit of helping us all understand more how working agricultures can persist in a more equitable way. I mean to come close to and linger with the hues, textures, registers, temporalities and the feel of classes on the move, in multiple directions, as they appear in everyday life in *yerba mate* country. What I mean to say is that often the analytical points, the dilemmas, and the catch 22s shine through in ethnographic detail in the stories that follow; often, the stories speak for themselves.

For this reason, I often present stories largely in the bulk of their original form, writing to reveal the shapes and colors of a kind of *class making and resource shifting on the move*. These resource disputes are serial, escalating, and competing. Everyday people endure the historical consequences of unequal land distribution, labor laws, state corruption, and stigma. The people who form working classes in Misiones, as opposed to *the* working class, experience resource shifting as both expressions of *mi derecho*, my right, as well as trickery, deception, one-upping, out-foxing, and swindling. Farmer-employers for the most part do not see their own land ownership as *un derecho*, however, nor do they have a politicized view of the history of land sales and distributions in the triple border area. Farmers and contractors see those who engage in lying in order to access more resources in as cheaters, dishonest, thieves, morally corrupt, greedy dishonest sort who are always trying to make money without working for it. Rather, they are mostly locked into their everyday struggles to survive in which the temporality of living and searching for a better life runs through just about four generations—their parents, themselves,

their children, and their grandchildren. The same temporality I found to be shared by *tarefes* and other waged workers.

I reiterate that I conducted the vast majority of my fieldwork with landless workers, small holders who doubled as waged workers, and small farmers. Building relationships with both white farmers and brown-skinned workers made me both enemies and friends in the field, but it helped me understand the myriad dimensions of labor conflict in *yerba mate* country. My concern as a writer and collaborative anthropologist has been with the most vulnerable sector for and about whom this dissertation is written. Misiones suffers from striking inequality and in Montecarlo County since the early part of the 20th Century, white German farmers have been the primary landholders while brown-skinned workers who descend from multiple indigenous groups form the wage worker force. There are exceptions in that there are *tarefes* who hold land and employ waged workers while poor, marginalized white workers can at times be found in the *yerbales*. Furthermore, what puzzles many a visitor to Misiones is the amount of poor white farmers who live in this area; newcomers to the area, including myself, are surprised to see poor blonde children walking down the highway. Social categories of race and class cannot always be neatly sorted out, and there is lively mixing at play in the everyday politics of love and desire. But for the most part, the power players in Montecarlo County have been and continue to be white and of German descent. Many of them look down upon both the brown-skinned population as well as other poor white farmers.

A Dialectic of Labor Rights and Food Sovereignty

In contemporary Argentina, everyday rural work routines, discussions, schedules, conversations, expectations, and disputes are all intervened in, interrupted by, influenced by, and even generated by the contemporary welfare state. This was true through the neoliberal reforms

in the 1990s and up through today with the populism and clientelism of the Kirchner regime (Auyero 2001, 2012; Lapegna 2013). This incessant intervention is orchestrated on stages of intertwining pasts and futures that are played out at macro and micro levels. Juan Domingo Perón, the father of the Peronist politics that have so dominated modern Argentine history, has a live presence still. White farmers often see Peron as a villain who intervened in the farm economy without understanding it and gave rights to workers that even farmers did not have, such as vacation pay. But for workers like *tarefer@s*, the original laws for rural workers passed under Peron allowed them to have the rights they deserved, such as severance pay. Both workers and farmers today receive new state policies and interventions in a historical context of the giving and taking of rights and resources. These policies include the proliferation of state welfare *planes* like the Universal Child Allowance mentioned in Levy's radio show and the unrelenting efforts by the state to capture tax revenue when and wherever possible.

Workers' Rights and Harvests en negro (under the table)

When reviewing Argentina's labor codes, the country appears to be a worker's paradise. Going beyond basic rights as outlined by the ILO such as minimum wage and restrictions against compulsory labor, Argentine workers, on the books at least, are entitled to a variety of benefits: From day one, vacation pay begins to accumulate as does the right to an *aguinaldo* or bonus pay that comes in the middle and end of the year. Workers have a statutory right to both severance and vacation pay. In Argentine labor courts, workers are given the benefit of the doubt more quickly, even though burdens of proof shift back and forth between worker and employer. These laws would generate a climate of fairness for wagedworkers if conditions existed that permitted workers to avail themselves of these rights. In reality, however, large numbers of Argentine workers work *en negro* or under the table and thus have less access to these rights than would

seem clear when just reading the labor codes. Moreover, of the universe of labor violations in play, very few will actually be litigated. This is especially true in the countryside where by most accounts, almost three quarters of workers work *en negro*. This means not only do they not pay taxes, but they also do not contribute to their own retirement nor do their employers under the contribution system that exists.

Again and again, local, provincial and national presses decry the amount of *trabajo en negro* in rural areas, calculating it often to be over 70% (MisionesCuatro 2013; Nardi 2011). By the second decade of the 2000s, Argentina's National Institute of Statistics and Census shows that the number of people in the informal sector was still high, in spite of almost a decade of strong national growth. The status of *tarefer@s* as agricultural workers fits neatly into that of others around the globe in that "enforcement of minimum wages is widely thought to be difficult if not impossible in rural areas in view of the extent of surplus labor and widespread unemployment. The largely informal nature of labour contracts in agriculture seems to preclude the possibility of enforcing a non-market determined minimum wage" (ILO 2007: 43). The ILO determines that that factors that affect wages are agricultural growth, food prices and food security, labor supply, non-farm employment, minimum wages (ILO 2007, 45, 41). Like other areas, in Misiones it is often impractical to enforce labor laws, and workers often do not know their rights.

But during my fieldwork, I found additional intervening factors that kept wages down, promoted rural exodus and threatened food security. These are the more complicated everyday conflicts that call for analysis of additional factors in order to scrutinize the plights of both small farmers and wagedworkers. As I conducted ethnographic research on with both sectors, I always kept in mind the optimal goal that people could stay on in the countryside, both farmers and

wage workers, and continue to have a hand in their own food security. Early on, I came to see how conflicting welfare and labor policies actually caused discord on the ground, fomenting rural exodus and decreasing food security. Moreover, the Argentine government's relentless pursuit of tax revenue along with widespread kleptocracy only made redistributive policies seem more cynical on the ground: Many farmers and wage workers claim that while the rich get richer, the poor have just barely avoided hunger.

Zero Hunger

How can a family go hungry in a fertile countryside like that of Montecarlo County? What ingredients make the death knell sound for food sovereignty or a community's control over its own food production? In 2010, two child deaths from malnutrition in Misiones drew national headlines (Sánchez Bonifato 2010). This might not have been an issue in other countries around the world, but the time and place were significant: Argentina is considered one of the breadbaskets of the world for its vast swathes of productive agricultural land, and the country was experiencing huge increases in state revenue due in large part to the global commodities boom from which it was benefitting heartily via exports in crops such as soy, wheat and corn. Misiones, far north of the fertile pampa, remained one of the country's poorest provinces. Despite being poor for generations, people in Misiones had managed to take advantage of the fertility of their own *tierra colorada* (red soil) in which poor families had produced at least manioc and peanuts for themselves along with eggs and milk. Yet at the time this death was recorded, Misiones has the second highest number of chronically malnourished people in the country (Sánchez Bonifato 2010). Ironically, both of the children were enrolled in a *Plan Hambre Cero* (Zero Hunger Plan), which had been implemented by the provincial government the year before to address hunger.

The politics of food, hunger and *yerba* all come together at the farmers' market I regularly frequented in Montecarlo, Misiones. On Wednesdays, those registered for Zero Hunger come to get their bag of vegetables and fruit which farmers pulled together from merchandise available that day. Most of these farmers also grew *yerba* in order to add to farm income, and most relied on *tarefer@s* for the harvest each year. Together they formed what is one of the healthiest farmers' markets in the province, but they struggled daily with labor conflicts they experienced on their farm. Sara, a small producer who had done quite well in recent years with her son producing vegetables for sale at the farmers' market, related how difficult it was to find stable workers to maintain her growing number of greenhouses where she produced green peppers, cucumbers and tomatoes: "In the end it costs us less just to employ people *en negro* and deal with issues as they come up. Too many people just want to live off welfare so it takes a lot to find workers at all." The welfare that she referred to primarily involved the Universal Child Allowance which was implemented in 2009 in order to provide a safety net for unemployed workers with the condition that they send their children to school while receiving it.

Here, in a prime space of food sovereignty was where the contradictions played out when labor rights were placed on the table. On the one hand, I did not want to support Sara's employing people under the table. On the other, if she were to rely only on registered workers, she probably would not be able to provide produce for reasonable prices, nor would she be able to afford the van for trucking the produce into town for sale. The politics of alienation at the site of production then began to become complicated very quickly in the first spaces and moments of the production site.

One Argentine labor minister, Carlos Tomada, consented that labor laws fall hardest on small employers, and that these small employers most often employ workers under the table:

“For every 100 pesos of monthly wages, the employer has to pay 43 in social security and other contributions” (Valente 2012). Tomada argued for a more relaxed regime for small employers, but agreed that the government made no move to distinguish between large and small. Small farmer advocates were the one who had fought for people to have access to fresh producer through Zero Hunger. But farmers like Sara who had worked from sunrise to sunset all of her life could not understand way she worked to provide food for those who did not work. In fact, most housing scenarios for those enrolled in welfare throughout Montecarlo County had at least some land attached to them in which people could at least plant manioc. Both farmers and *tarefer@s* who still produced some of their own food readily talked about past days when the poorest of the poor still produced most of their food for themselves.

A Welfare State that Wreaks Havoc

Celia and Cándido frequently reminded me how *yerba mate* had been the everyday bread and butter to both small farmers and to wage workers. They had worked their way out of poverty through their fierce work ethic combined with their becoming labor contractors and producers all at once. Having labored all his life for others, Cándido discovered along the way that what he most loved was being a farmer. Any Sunday, he could be found working somewhere on the farm, weeding, planting, and tending to livestock. Celia, on the other hand, passionately ran the *yerba* harvesting business and managed the crew largely composed of family and friends. But they told me, as did many others, that green gold was fraught with everyday labor conflicts. The very day I joined her in the *yerbal* after listening to Pepe Levy’s comments on the culture of work, Celia recounted to me how she had fought off a labor lawsuit from her own brother who had lied about the amount of time he had worked for her in order to get access to greater severance pay. And although Celia eventually won the case because of her brother’s inability to document his claim,

Celia now approached labor contracting with a much more cynical view. Having labored all her life in the *yerba* fields, she reported that it was hard to find people to work now that they could make ends meet through government welfare.

Among the varied voices throughout the provinces of Misiones that addressed these everyday politics of *yerba* were Carlos Ortt who has been the voice of the small *yerba* farmers' organization (APAM) for years and Rubén Ortiz. In multiple conversations with them overtime as well as dozens of others, I learned about the everyday details that caused more and more farmers to leave *yerba* production and prolong abysmal working conditions for *tarefer@s*. As the plight of each worsened, so also did their connection to their own food security: Both were inclined to leave the country, abandon any rural food production they had practiced, and turn themselves over to full consumption of food produced by others at high prices.

According to the Argentine state, each worker a farmer employs (even if via a contractor) should immediately be registered with the National Social Security Agency (ANSES) so that employment taxes can be taken out, and contributions for health benefits and retirement can be made (ANSES 2013). This seems looks like a ripe opportunity that no one in their right mind would turn down. If a worker is not registered and continues to work, then she is considered to be working *en negro*. According to Ortt, until very recently, about 80 per cent of small producers put together their own field crews. However, in the last years, greater regulatory presence of the Department of Labor (*Ministerio de Trabajo*) and the Internal Revenue Service (AFIP) had caused farmers to contract out the harvest to third party contractors who managed papers and the field crew. In this process, the contractors had to resolve everyday issues of the harvest such as putting together and maintaining a crew, transporting workers in reliable transport approved by the state, and paying bribes to local police in cases in which the transport does not comply with

laws. Contractors themselves often cheated workers in multiple ways, and many viewed them as a malignant presence. Even still, the ultimate responsible party was the landowner herself in terms of whether or not workers were working *en negro*. If a fine was to be rendered, it was applied to both farmer and contractor.

A key complexity in the labor-food sovereignty weaving has to do with state taxes. Let me consider the cost of legally employing a single worker for a smallholder, i.e. employing a worker *en blanco*: The obligatory social charges represent 60% of the cost, according to Ortt (2013). In the 2013 season, a ton of green leaf was valued at around 400 pesos. A producer was obliged to pay a worker that amount plus around 160 more of costs toward workers' benefits and state taxes. Once the worker was released from work at the end of the harvest, producers were responsible for paying prorated amounts of severance pay (*indemnización*) (5.85 of salary), vacation (8%) and bonus (*aguinaldo*) (5% of salary). Even though these costs came from work completed by *tarefer@s* who were not permanent workers, it still amounted to almost unworkable amounts. Workers themselves also experienced a deduction for health insurance and social security.

The seasonal income insecurity provided grave problems for *tarefer@s* that echoed those of others around the globe. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) “agricultural workers are especially vulnerable economically when loss of wage-earning power occurs in the event of death, injury, ill health, invalidity or natural disasters” (Hurst 2007: 59). Indeed, injuries abound in the countryside in Misiones along with premature death. Several months after I began working with Celia, her beloved brother-in-law who was also an integral part of her field crew, died of lung cancer at age 52, leaving Celia's sister a widow with five children to raise. Many members of the family believed he had received inadequate care because

he was just a *tarefer@* from the countryside. Fortunately, Celia's sister applied for a widow's pension and continued to work in the *yerba* harvest in the next season. Because of widespread use of agrochemicals, Misiones also has one of the highest rates of cancer in all of Argentina. It is also common to find children with disabilities that may be linked to these chemicals, and surely so in the case of tobacco production. Insurance coverage, poor quality of care in public hospitals, inadequate transportation to reach urban hospitals from urban areas, and widespread corruption in the public sector all worked against poor families in the countryside when they sought to remedy health issues such as that of Ramon.

ILO data also shows that less than 20% of agricultural workers in the world are covered by one or more of the nine standard contingencies (medical care, sickness and maternity benefits, family benefits, unemployment benefits, employment injury, invalidity and survivor's benefits, and old age benefits (ILO 2007; Hurst 2007; Ginneken 1991). Workers forced to work in the informal economy in Misiones were enslaved to poverty for the short and long term. Working *en negro* meant they did not have to pay taxes, but it also meant that they had no health insurance; they were forced to rely exclusively on public hospitals which often were sorely lacking in their care. They also would not be saving money toward their retirement. Finally, when they left the harvest, they lost their rights to legally mandated vacation, bonus and severance. In a final cruel twist, having worked under the table, they would not be eligible for inter-harvest stipends for which *tarefer@* rights organizations had fought mightily.

Lost to the politics of the state too are the politics of *la minga* which is the traditional system of labor bartering that has existed for many years in the area. In this system, neighbors lend a hand during planting and harvest season to get work done and compensation is both monetary and in kind. Many small farmers still use this system, and in my fieldwork, I saw its

practice, particularly among farmers closer to the Brazil border. When this system was used, I observed that there was less labor conflict. And yet this kind of system is technically an illegal practice in terms of Argentine labor and tax law.

The Other Side of Severance Pay

As I have mentioned, just a generation ago, farmers were able to employ wageworkers all year round. But they now cited labor laws and dependence on herbicides as the reasons that they turned only to seasonal labor. One of the greatest barriers to employing long-term employees in the country was the amount of severance pay that mounts with each year of employment along with the other costs. Argentina goes beyond basic labor rights in mandating severance pay or *indemnización*, and although severance pay seems like another no brainer in terms of securing workers' rights, it turns out that it too can be counterproductive. Recent research shows that higher firing costs increase discrimination against unemployed workers, because they increase the costs associated with hiring a bad worker. Moreover, in the presence of higher severance costs for older workers, separation decisions may be biased against young workers. In other words, it seems that large firing costs contribute to the emergence of dual labor markets, with well-protected formal sector workers (predominately prime-age males) and much less protected informal sector workers and the unemployed. Other researchers have found that pro-worker legislation may work against the poor in developing countries (Kugler and Saint-Paul 2000: 3; Besley and Burgess 2004; Ahsan and Pages 2009).

Research also lends credence to what I heard on the ground about severance pay. In theory, severance pay promotes longer-lasting employment relationships and improves employers' incentives to provide training, thereby increasing the productivity of workers as well as their future employability. But among the costs severance pay is recognized as a source of

labor market “sclerosis” reducing the intensity of labor market flows, particularly to and from employment. Severance pay makes firing more costly and thus hinders job creation (Kugler and Saint-Paul 2000: 4; Blanchard 2000). A number of studies show that strict employment protection, including hiring and firing rules as well as severance pay, reduces employment. Employment protection contributes to longer unemployment spells (stagnant unemployment pool), thus compounding the difficulty of leaving unemployment. Severance pay does not create a moral hazard problem by lowering job search effort, but it does affect incentives to enter unemployment and hence creates a different moral hazard problem. De Ferranti and others report that large litigation costs arise from disputes over the cause of separation in Latin America (Ahsan and Pages 2009; De Ferranti et al 2000; Kugler and Saint-Paul 2000: 4).

In Misiones, it was common for farmers to recite stories about farmers who lost their farms because of labor lawsuits. Indeed a labor lawsuit brought by a long-term employee can result in significant costs. As each year of employment passes, the amount of money owed to an employee adds up. But in Argentina, a supposed welfare state accompanied with an abundance of populist rhetoric had actually shifted the burden to private parties for caring for the seasonally employed poor, or more specifically, job creation had fallen by the wayside in favor of alternative policies. Again, this seemed like a good idea when private actors consisted of large companies, but the small farmers of Misiones ended up collapsing under the cost. As an alternative, farmers tried to shoulder these costs by avoiding formally employing workers. In so many instances, they also threw in the towel, selling their farms and moving into towns where became consumers of food rather than producers of it.

The Cunning of Seasonal Work and Welfare

Importantly, as soon as a worker registers with an employer via the Social Security Agency (ANSES), the agency immediately drops her from the welfare rolls if she has been receiving aid. In the last several years, this has had key consequences because of new welfare programs designed to help unemployed workers. It is important to keep in mind first that most all wage laborers in the countryside were also seasonal, part-time workers who endured spans of unemployment at some point in the year. In 2009, the Argentine government launched the Universal Child Allowance (UCA) (Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH) in order to provide support for unemployed families. Recently popular throughout Latin America, conditional cash transfers (CTCs) are ways that the state attempts to assuage systemic long-term poverty and to curb reliance on child labor (ILO 2007 and 2008). In Argentina, the transfer is provided per child and it is conditioned on mothers sending their children to school and updating their vaccines (ANSES 2013). The program began by providing 180 pesos per minor child under 18. But by May 2013, the amount had grown to 460 pesos per child. Official registers estimated that 3.6 million children received the stipend, or almost 9% of the population (Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas and Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social websites). Mothers usually received the stipends for up to five children, which means up to \$2300 *pesos* per month as of August 2013. If a mother was able to receive that amount per month without working and for twelve months out of the year, it made little sense for her to drop the plan and head off to seasonal work, especially if the political climate did not ensure she would be able to get the stipend back. Lack of childcare options exasperated this scenario, given that the only options also were for these mothers to convert to employers themselves, and this meant employing workers informally. Too often these mothers turn to their older children to help provide for their younger siblings and this had long-term consequences on their education as well.

Indeed *tarefer@s* faced some of the hardest times during the off-season, which amounted to six months of the year. Whereas they used to work on jobs such as weeding the *yerbales*, increased uses of Monsanto's Roundup and fear of labor lawsuits had left them largely unemployed during this time. *Tarefer@s* used everything from hunger strikes to highway blockades to call attention to the desperate situation that ensued when families did not have income for as much as six months out of the year. The new Agrarian Law in 2011 (Régimen de Trabajo Agrario) gave *tarefer@s* a state stipend in the off season, but workers had to be formally registered in order to qualify, meaning that probably only about 10% of workers are able to access the interzafra subsidy. Out of around 16, 000 *tarefer@s*, only 1750 earned the stipend in 2011 (Valente 2012).

Why didn't more *tarefer@s* register so that they would receive the subsidy? The first clear answer is that it was much cheaper for producers of any scale to employ harvesters *en negro*; they avoided all taxes altogether as well as the time and effort of getting and keeping employee papers in order. *Tarefer@s* who wanted to work would more often be recruited in a climate where they would not be contracted *en blanco*. Secondly, many *tarefer@s* believed they would lose their benefits of the Universal Child Allowance if they started to work *en blanco*. On the ground, *tarefer@s* who do manage to work *en blanco* for several months during the harvest had to reapply for welfare as unemployed persons. The money they received every month on welfare could easily be greater than the fairly paltry inter-harvest subsidy, especially if there were many children in the family. It is important to understand that working *en blanco* does not take into consideration the fact that the *yerba* harvest is only part of the year. Getting back on the Universal Child Allowance could take up to two or three months in which families were without income. Moreover, there were more cases of workers who are denied the welfare altogether once

they tried to regain access to it (Ortt 2013 and field interviews). To this end, workers preferred to keep their welfare benefits and earn whatever other income they could *en negro* in order to supplement their welfare payments. The fact was that the *yerba* harvest was temporary work that lasts at the very most six months of the years. When smallholders finished their harvests, they had no choice but to send *tarefer@s* on their way. Workers now feared losing the basic monthly security of the UCA, which was what kept them from going hungry. It was enough that the amount of money was so little.

As a small farmer, Ortt saw “a grave contradiction in the fact that those who received the welfare benefits could not work *en blanco*” (Ortt 2013). For the 2013 harvest, Ortt admitted that for his own *yerba*, of a crew of seventeen *tarefer@s*, they could only put four *en blanco*, as the others relied on benefits that they feared losing were they to be employed *en blanco* (Ortt 2013). According to both Rubén and Ortt, the Universal Child Allowance was a path to eternal misery for workers. The state provided welfare which was barely enough to meet the daily calorie needs for one person and it made it difficult for them to work freely, because of the penalties that came from working (Ortiz and Ortt, August 2013). This led to the widespread charge that many people now preferred to “sit under an orange tree and drink *mate*” rather than go out and confront the tricky conditions of working life (Ortt 2013). This was the idea that Pepe Levy had promoted in his radio show the morning I drove out to work in the *yerbal* with Celia.

Grateful for this steady stream of state aid over the entire year, families desperately wanted to hold on to it, and when push came to shove at election time, they would vote for the same state officials who gave them the welfare benefits to begin with. Many workers I talked to throughout the province confessed they had become dependent on the stipend, even though many also consented that soaring inflation had sliced the value of their monthly benefits by several

fold. But in Misiones and throughout Argentina, there was a strong grassroots perception that the stipend created a reliance on state aid, crushing incentives to find work, and grinding out a work ethic in youth. For example, a headline from another Northern province, Salta, announced the results of its survey with the headline: “For many, la UCA foments laziness” (El Tribuno de Salta 2013). When I came to see the daily struggle families had to put food on their tables even with the Universal Child Allowance, I felt it was hard to be against it. But after many interviews with farmers and *tarefer@s* alike, I came to see it also as a pernicious intervening force which attempted to put a band-aid on the larger problems of disappearing jobs, long-term unemployment, and the failure of the state to enforce labor laws for provincial power players. According to Ortt and many others throughout the province, the Argentine government was desperate for funds; he and others viewed the AUH as just one more populist move to get votes from the poorest of Argentines. Even Rubén agreed with this, yet he argued that the real problem was that the labor laws were not enforced. For very large landowners and the companies who control the last leg of *yerba* production, a bribe was always a way to get state labor inspectors to turn the other way.

The issue of child labor in the *yerbales* resounded frequently. Celia and Cándido, for example, had always brought their children to work with them, because there was no one to care for them. Bringing them to the *yerbales* helped fuel their motivation in the classroom, according to Celia, for they wanted anything of their futures but to spend their lives in the hard work of the harvest. One problem with the Universal Child Allowance was that the school day in Misiones was usually only several hours a day. In other words, older children helping their families out and going to school are not mutually exclusive. But for smaller children, the state welfare condition prohibiting work meant that mothers were forced to stay at home and rely on welfare

rather than go out and work. There was no childcare option for them. Ortt and others had called for state intervention in childcare but none had come. Still, even sympathetic portrayals of the child labor dilemma do not take into account the fact that women workers simply do not have good, safe childcare for their children that would permit them to go to work. (See Longley 2010, attributing child labor still to a family need for income; ILO 2008, 90 child care is not included in the main gaps to be addressed regarding child labor).

According to Ortt, workers and producers found new alliances against the state, because workers were afraid of losing their welfare benefits. A common refrain that I had heard from all sectors of the *yerba* industry in Misiones was that people are working to pay for those who did not want to work. Many people felt that there was no incentive to work and that the government welfare plans punished those who did work. For small producers, they perceived the more virulent state presence in the countryside as a desperate attempt at more aggressive tax collecting. The funds then went to maintain those who supposedly were not working. Ortt, who was in favor of the UCA, still believed that it drove a huge wedge between hardworking folks who wanted to work and small producers who wanted them to work for them.

In short, labor laws that intertwined with welfare laws in complex, politically motivated ways have created a climate of fear in the countryside: farmers were afraid of labor lawsuits even as they were afraid of being fined by the Department of Labor for not having workers' papers in order. This contributed to a significant labor shortage in the countryside according to multiple contractors and small producers with whom I talked. Rubén believed that if farmers were to pay all of the legally required benefits to workers, they would choose to work *en blanco*. Yet farmers reported an inability to do so along with welfare barriers to being able to fully register employees.

Everyday Labor Inspections

The conflict around informal work played out in everyday work in the fields very much like the scenario that I described at the opening of this dissertation. For example, in 2012 an operation by the Argentine Internal Revenue Service (AFIP) was carried out on farms in the San Pedro area with helicopters and 4 x 4s looking for field crews *en negro*. Several farmers ended up with embargos on their farms and/or severe fines. On other occasions in the counties of Oberá and San Pedro, workers chased out agents of the Department of Labor as well as the AFIP from *yerbales* by yielding sticks and machetes and throwing stones. The state presence was perceived to be interfering with their ability to work. When the agents returned with police and *gendarme* reinforcements, the workers scattered, hiding in the surrounding countryside. Often, when the government trucks came into the *yerbales*, workers either decided to run themselves or were instructed by contractors or field bosses (*capataces*) to get lost so that no one would be fined. More and more workers took off so that they would not get caught working *en negro* and lose their welfare benefits (Ortt 2013).

In the case of Misiones, the added concerns of contradictory goals of agencies as well as corruption need to be taken into consideration, for bribing one's way out of law enforcement exists at all levels in the province. In fact, during a critical point in the highway blockades during the commodity protests of 2012, the Department of Labor officials arrived at the blockade in pickups and were escorted by the largest labor contractor in the county who also had just recently lost a labor lawsuit for depriving *tarefer@s* of benefits. When I confronted the labor inspectors, they acted as though they had no idea what I was talking about. I noted the absurdity of their working in this 'fox in the hen house' sort of way. Workers themselves, of course, were either

used to this kind of contradiction or felt powerless to confront it. Confrontation meant retaliation, and workers were desperate for employment.

Ironically, though, for the *tarefer@s* who fought against exploitation in the *yerbales* and for more state scrutiny of labor practices, one of their only tools against labor exploitation was to threaten to pressure the state to intervene in informal work. As the 2012 commodity crisis took root in Montecarlo County, *tarefer@s* were the first to impose highway blockades, demanding both better wages and an increase in the price of green leaf. As I described in Chapter Four, I attended *assembleas* and meetings during the blockades in which *tarefer@s* patiently tried to create a dialogue with the cooperative, asking it to use its leverage to ensure that contractors were paying *tarefer@s* a fair wage and not taking advantage of the low price of *yerba* to exploit workers. At a critical moment when representatives of the local cooperative met with *tarefer@s* about the possibility of increasing their wages, they were met with cold indifference. After months of patience and meetings, Rubén exploded one day on the roadside: “If you all are unwilling to budge on harvester wages, we have no other choice but to call the Department of Labor and have them come make all of you employ only workers *en blanco*.” With this threat, the meeting ended abruptly with each side going their separate ways.

Unfortunately, labor inspections do not seem to be the answer according to sociologist Eduardo Donza of the Catholic University of Argentina, because the risk is that these small employers will close down, firing the few workers employed (Valente 2012). Moreover, those *tarefer@s* who fought for improved workers’ rights in Montecarlo now face unemployment, blacklisted not only for their union activism but also because small producers fear they could lose everything due to fines or lawsuits (Ortiz forthcoming). A vicious circle was then in play in which ideal workers’ rights ultimately were traded in for unemployment, rural exodus and

growing welfare dependency in which workers no longer produced their own food and fought daily battles for increased state assistance.

As a small producer known for good labor practices, Ortt laments what has happened. “Many of us, we grew up together. But so many of the other guys have left the country altogether and have gone to live in town. Others that work with me, say to me, let me work *en negro*, because if I work *en blanco*, they are going to take my *señora* off the plan” (Ortt 2013). Women with seven children receive a pension for life (*Plan Madre Siete Hijos*), and even though the pension is hers, there are cases where she loses the pension, because of perceived welfare fraud. Again, spouses saw themselves as being penalized for working.

The Fraying of Working Agriculture

By all accounts, most *tarefer@s* had stopped producing food for them. But this was a new trend. According to Ortt, he could track this change back to about twenty years when the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s bottomed out *yerba* prices, causing rural exodus to accelerate throughout the province. He recalled that on the farm on which he grew up, the family had six *peones* who lived in their own houses on the land. Both the owners of the land and the *peones* had chickens for both meat and egg production, cows for milk and meat production, and pigs.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Ortt recalls: “All the guys had their own milk cow that they took care of, their pigs and they had their vegetable gardens. Four of them retired with my family (meaning that they worked for enough years to retire with the family). Today we have double or triple the amount of hectares and we do not have a single contracted *peon*. They all left. And, I am really too afraid to put someone on the farm, the risk is just too high. To have a stable *peon*, I would have to employ him *en blanco* which will cost me \$6000 pesos a month. If I employ him *en negro*, I run the risk of the AFIP coming and being fined by the AFIP. I run the risk all around.” (From Author’s Interview).

Ortt's account certainly invoked a portrait of inequity—those with and without land, bosses and workers. But it is significant to the extent that it underlines that in the recent past, many families were almost entirely self-sufficient with what they were able to produce. There was a sacred triad (cow, pig and chicken) borrowed from the European model of farming that *colonos* brought with them and mixed with other modes of agricultural already in place. But for the last fifteen or twenty years, most wageworkers do not even produce a chicken or an egg (Ortt 2013).

Nor do very few *yerba* farmers produce any of their own food (Ortt 2013 and Ortiz forthcoming). Indeed caring for animals is an intensive task that requires an everyday presence on the farm. For decades now, the children of farmers have been leaving farms in search of urban capital of many farms. They have gone to work as domestic employees as is often the case for women and as taxi drivers, etc. For more poor families, young girls often fall into prostitution as domestic work is so severely underpaid. This has meant that farmers have grown elderly on the farms and no longer have the capacity to take care of animals on a day-to-day basis. Cultivated crops too have fallen by the wayside.

According to Rubén of the *tarefer@s* in Montecarlo who participate in the union, only a very few produce their own food. *Tarefer@s* like Celia in rural areas are more likely to produce some of their own food, but those who have been routed into rural housing projects or attached housing are less likely to produce their own food, in part because these come with almost no land attached. Rather, once the *yerba* harvest ends each year around October 1 or earlier, *tarefer@s* enter into a six-month period of precariousness in which they struggle for income. It is this inter-harvest time in which the *tarefer@* union has most strongly intervened to bring an end to hunger.

Everyday Litigants

I developed many relationships with food producers in my time in the field. In filling in the grains of “working agricultures,” I endeavored to understand how people lived between and amongst one another in spite of differences in ethnicity, class, and historical positions. I turned to Sara to both remember and understand the grit, grind, grist involved in the everyday production of food as well as to see what the culture of work looked like for a small producer of both food and *yerba mate*. For almost a year in the field and later in follow-up visits in 2013 and 2014, I followed the everyday scenarios in Sara’s life that helped both facilitate and thwart food production. Not only did she produce reasonably priced vegetables for the local farmers’ market, but she also produced food under the Zero Hunger program. The detailed stories she and her son Leo shared with me were typical of many other farmers, but they were particularly open, fair, and generous with their workers. Sara had grown up on a farm in a *colonia* south of Montecarlo in an area where Germans from a different part of Germany had settled. In fact, when she came to Montecarlo to live with her husband, she was shunned for some time, because the German she spoke was not considered to be “real” German. She had lived on a farm all her life, but she had not always been an employer.

The first time I ever went to Sara’s farm was on a spring day in November of 2011. She came out through the trees to greet me, barefoot and clad in a wet dress. We headed to the back of the house where she was washing fresh cucumbers in a quadruple basin sink. When she finished, I walked with her through the freshly tilled fields, carrying my seven-month old daughter Luna in a swing. The fields had been cleared out. Carrots and beets now withered by the sun were scattered across the land, vegetable carcasses turned up by the plow. A large insect

circled around a dead frog, turned belly up in the soil. We stopped, and I turned it over with a stick to reveal a beautiful mottled black and yellow skin.

We then went to see the greenhouses where she produced vegetables for the farmers' market. Two workers pulled a load of fresh tomatoes with a tractor on a road that ran between the houses. Huge mounds of compost lie at the back--chicken manure and rice husks from Entre Rios, *yerba* leaf compost leftover from drying mills, and cow manure. Sara walked me through each field and green house, so that I might see what it was she grew and how she grew it. There were cucumbers, bell peppers, and different varieties of tomatoes. In one of them, three young men were at work cutting all the plants down, cleaning out the old crop that had already been harvested. Once all of the old stalks were removed, new soils would be prepared for the next.

Sara was a lover of plants. She had apple, orange, plum, tangerine, and fig trees. A small vineyard had grapes winding round a structure with rafters in the open sky. At every turn, something has been planted and spring growth was in full swing. She showed me different native trees that bore edible fruit. One of them was a small orange persimmon fruit she picked for Luna and me to sample. Another tree bore a small red fruit, something like a cranberry crossed with plum. We headed through green onion and pepper fields, past tiny new eggplants, still faded violet in color. When we came to her *vertiente* (natural spring), covered in lily pads, we stopped. Sara had three springs on her land. Pointing to the pump at the edge of this one, she told me how three other pumps had been stolen. Who stole them? I asked. "*Personal* (employees)" she explained, "the same people who work for us".

When we came back to the house, we sat on the small front porch so that I could nurse Luna who was hungry. Shortly, Sara's only son, Leo, joined us, and the talk turned to life on the farm. I was particularly interested in how work got done and the problems they experienced in

producing food for themselves and for sale at the farmers' market. I asked them about who their workers were and where they came from. Many had crossed the river from Paraguay. Sara, who had worked extremely hard all of her life on the farm, told me the women who came from Paraguay particularly struck her: They had it really hard there. It seemed like they did all the work, and the men didn't do anything. The women crossed over, came up the river, carrying everything while the men carried nothing.

Leo, a young man in his thirties with intense blue eyes, reported that he had grown bitter over time with employment situations. He recounted a particular story involving a Paraguayan couple that arrived from Paraguay with just the shirts on their back. They had eloped, both of them leaving families behind. The man had left five children. They arrived looking for work with nothing. Leo agreed to let them work on the farm, and the first day, he paid them so that they could get food. Several days later they bought used clothes, found a bed, and later a small gas stove. Leo then gave them a motorcycle to which they slowly paid for through Leo subtracting from their pay. This practice of *adelanto* (advances) is very common throughout the countryside, although some workers are against it and see others who use it as lacking discipline with their finances.

Over time the undocumented couple began to accumulate more and more. After they received their Argentine documents (Argentina has very flexible immigration laws), they quit the very next day. Soon thereafter a letter arrived from a lawyer demanding 80,000 pesos. Labor conflicts often begin with a *carta documento*, which is a form of demand letter that holds less weight than its equivalent in a U.S. labor conflict. At first they claimed to the judge that they had never been paid at all. Then they claimed a smaller amount. The judge said that he did not understand such a thing—how had they survived on nothing? He said he would have gone after

the first month. Indeed what had they eaten? Where had they lived? The story began to fall apart rapidly. At some point, Sara said she offered them 3,000 *pesos* that they rejected. Someone else was behind the operation, she offered. She also said that the woman wasn't so bad, just controlled by the bad man. In the end, the couple got nothing, and they went to work in the *yerba* harvest which Sara and Leo saw as much more difficult job. When the neighbors learned of the swindle, they let the couple go. Of course, no one wanted litigious workers around, much less of this kind. Just recently, the couple had inquired with a neighbor about who was working for Leo and Sara. It seemed they were looking to come back, Leo recounted. He claimed that if he were to let workers sit around and drink *tereré*, everyone else would want the same.

This was not the first time I had heard about these kinds of lawsuits. Workers and employers alike often recounted work dramas of this kind in detail. These kinds of stories do not appear on television or in the newspapers but they circulated in everyday conversation. Everyday storytelling is an important practice in the country, especially when people are taking breaks with a round of *mate*. People related labor disputes in a play-by-play style with great detail, making for a riveting experience. But inevitably the other side of the dispute was missing during the telling of these stories, and I always found myself wondering what version the other person might have told. In Leo's story, what may have been the other view?

!Ojo! (Watch out!) I Know Where You Live!

Almost a year later, I had developed a much closer relationship with Sara and her family as I had done some collaborative work with the farmers' market during a drought. I also had gathered many more accounts of labor lawsuits that were always told as one person trying to get something out of another in an unfair way. On another visit to the farm, I accompanied them as they answered questions from workers in the greenhouses and worked alongside them. When we

took a break for lunch, workers came up periodically to the gate at the back door, adjacent to the kitchen with questions, against the noise of the pack of barking dogs. By this point, Sara had suffered so much theft on her farm, that she had permitted one of her workers to build a small wooden home down by the spring so that he could both have a cheaper house and keep an eye on things. Over time, he would prosper, find a girlfriend, and have a baby.

I had begun to see that when people told me about their labor conflicts in this small community, they had a number of aims. They searched for a sympathetic ear, hoping that I would agree with them that they had been done wrong. I could see from their narratives that they often had not let go of what had happened. These working relationships gone sour caused everyday wounds that festered within people, seeding distrust and defensiveness even as they poisoned what would otherwise have been an environment in which two people met in a world of labor exchange to get a job done. No matter how much happened, the frame of what was a good or bad person was never abandoned. But being a good person who got taken advantage of was not something many people wanted.

We sat down to a lunch of roasted chicken, boiled manioc and fresh salad with vegetables from Sara's own greenhouses. Leo had come back from town after delivering a load of vegetables to a local *verdulería* and trying to collect on accounts. Sara could prepare a homemade meal faster than anyone I knew, and she made plenty of jokes in the process. After we ate, I asked Leo to tell me a particular story he had once told me, but I wanted to hear it again because I was interested in the kinds of feelings people reported throughout these stories. This was the story of a worker who had, according to him, tried to swindle money out of him. The worker had already begun to ask for money in advance. Asking for an advance was also considered a way that many begin to slowly test how much they could get from their employers.

Celia, for example, was proud of having never asked for an advance from any employer, even in her poorest days. In her mind, it simply was a matter of pride not to do so.

The worker in Leo's account claimed to have an injury, which is the worst fear of the *colono*. Farmers trade stories all over Misiones about people who supposedly cut fingers off with machetes in order to get a disability check. Moreover, a multi-story glass building on Libertador was called *la casa del colono*, the house of the *colono*, because of the money the lawyer had made off of these kinds of lawsuits. Leo took up the story:

He said he had a *tacuara* (splinter) in his eye or some piece of silicon. Something got into his eye. The guy grabbed the eye. He rubbed at it, a lot. Logically it was going to be red. It scares you a bit, you know, this kind of behavior, because you don't know if they are trying to cause injury to themselves. So the first thing you have to do in that *very moment* is grab the guy and take him to the doctor. Right away, that is something that you learn. You go ahead and pay for that appointment. So right away I gave him 400 pesos to go to the doctor and for any medication if there was anything missing. He didn't come back anymore. Then he came the next week to the farmers' market asking for 200 pesos that he needed, because they were going to take him to the emergency room in El Dorado. He wanted money, you see. And he called me, and he asked me, and I told him no.

So on Thursday, after he had just come down to the farmers' market on Wednesday, I called him and I said 'come over for a bit to the house and we are going to talk things over. You shouldn't be going to the market and arguing with my mother. You have to talk with me. I don't want you going over there making a scene. Now don't worry about things, I told him when we talked early that morning. So I said, what doctor did you go to about this eye issue?' 'I went over to the Lotto, the hospital' he said. Okay, I said. Let's go see for a bit, it can't be possible that they couldn't do anything for you over there. And there, you see, it was like he wanted to get away. 'Wait a minute, he said. I'm going to go over to the school for a little bit to see my daughter, and then we can go over to Lotto.' No problem, I said. I'll wait for you.'

I waited. I sat there, and I waited. He went into the school and came out. You see, he didn't know. It was just an excuse, nothing more, you see. He wanted to get away. Right there I made an appointment. I paid for an appointment with the eye doctor Lizera, you see. I told him not to take off. And he said, 'Okay, I'm going to go outside and smoke.' Don't go anywhere, I said. You are going to get to see the doctor. If you go too far, you are going to lose the appointment.

He did a few other things, and then we went upstairs and he went into the doctor's office, and I went in with him. And I told the doctor 'so he was working for me and apparently

something got into his eye. He said he already came here and you aren't going to take it out.' That's why I came here, I told him, to see what's going on. 'What's the name of the doctor who saw you?' the doctor asked. And the guy said, 'I'm not sure, he was a skinny guy, a short guy.' And the doctor said, 'The only person here is me, there is not anyone else. You didn't come here. Here, let's take a look.' And the doctor got out his apparatus and took a look at the guy's eye. 'You don't have anything there' he said. 'The only thing you have is an old scar. Now I am going to put in some eye drops...how does that feel?' 'Now I can see better,' the guy said.

You see this ignorance. He took him, gave him a prescription for some medicine. I went and bought the medicine, and I gave it to him. And I took away the medicine that with which he had self-medicated. He went back to the doctor and he told me. 'The guy doesn't have anything wrong with him. Nothing.' No, he didn't have anything. He just had an old scar, you see. He just wanted money.

So he wanted then to make a deal over the job. He owed me 150 pesos supposedly but also those 400 that I had given him to see the doctor. So I told him 'I'm going to give you 500 pesos and let's see if that works for you. And I am going to see if I can get you something more, early in the afternoon, tomorrow I'm going to see in the morning.' And then I headed off to see the lawyer. And the lawyer said 'let's head on over to the Department of Labor so that he can't bother you anymore.'

I told the guy, 'I am going to pick you up at 10:30 and my attorney had come and he had everything set up in El Dorado. I looked for the guy, and I said, 'I'll go to your house, and I got to his house and I said, 'did you change already? Because we have to go to El Dorado over the thing about your money.' 'Oh really?' he said to me. Yes, I told him. We've got to go to El Dorado, not here.

And that was it. He went and changed and got all fancied up because he was going to go to El Dorado. We got to El Dorado, and we went straight to the Department. We got there and he said: 'But you've brought a *boga*.' 'Yeah,' I told him. You see they say '*boga*' for all lawyers, slang for *abogado*. And he said, 'Why did you bring me a lawyer?' And then he went crazy. 'You know what's going on?' I told him. 'You wanted to make a deal, and we are going to do things the right way. We can't do it our way, just any old way. We have to do it with a lawyer. 'Why did you bring me here?' he asked, 'All the way to El Dorado.' Because you have to do these things the right way, the way you should, so that you can feel okay and I can too.

So we went inside and waited until our turn. And then he called me outside, and he said 'Give me 800 pesos, because what you did in bringing me here, you just don't do that.' He wanted to make me feel guilty, you see. He thought he had me on the hook. But listen, I said, 'the papers have already been drawn up for 500. They are going to kick our asses out if we now tell the *doctora* that everything has to be changed to 800. You know what we are going to do?' I told him. So we won't screw everything up, just sign for 500, and I will give you 300. Now I tell you I don't have it now. I don't have the

300 now. They are going to give you the 500 and afterwards they charge me in payments.'

'Are you sure?' he asked me. You know, *I know where you live.* '*I know where you live, too.*' You see, I threatened him a bit too, I mean telling him that whatever he was capable of doing, I was too. 'Okay, he said. Let's do it.' We went back in and the woman lawyer said, 'You don't have any other type of complaint? After signing here, you sign away your right to sue. Do you agree to this? Everything comes to an end here. No more claims.' And the guy was like, yes but no. 'Okay, let's go ahead with it', he said. He grabbed the papers, signed them, and just stood there looking. I took out my billfold and I gave him 500 pesos that theoretically the lawyer was supposed to give him. And he just stood there. He didn't understand anything. But you know you have to do this type of play, because if not, they take you out, they will drown you, make you lose everything.

'Okay,' he said. And we went outside. 'I'll give you a ride, I said. Let's go.' He thought of going his own way, like a bird that you just opened the cage and he goes out flying, you see. And with that, I called my girlfriend, and we agreed to meet in a restaurant in El Dorado. And I told him 'Look I am going to see my girlfriend and see if I can collect on some accounts. If I do, I'll pay you the 300. Wait for me there at the bus stop. But if you want to hitch a ride, go for it, because I don't know how long I'll be.' And I left him there and *chau!* I never saw the guy again.

In the end the resource shifting that day involved 1150 pesos plus the 300 pesos that Leo paid the lawyer, a total of 1450 pesos. Leo counted the 150 pesos that he had given the worker as an advance, plus the 200 for the doctor, plus the 400 pesos and the 500, plus 120 for the doctor and 70 for the medicine. Although this case had happened months ago, Leo remembered all the numbers as though it had been yesterday. The same language of numbers that dominated everyday discourse in the *yerba mate* economy dominated talk on labor conflicts. I found this to be common both in worker and producer talk about these labor fallings out. People remembered exact figures, and they remembered them years later just as they remembered exactly what one party had said to the other. This was part of the slippery nature of inequality in the countryside in which white farmers and some brown-skinned farmers held the land and others had to make due working for them.

I had come to understand why Leo felt like he was being taken advantage of, because I had heard so many stories like this from both *tarefer@s* and *colonos* alike. But I could not help wonder what happened to the worker? What had become of him? As riveting as the labor play by plays are, one of the frustrating parts of listening to the story was that I did not usually have the chance of interviewing both parties. I could not talk to Leo and Sara's workers, for their jobs could potentially be in danger if I was perceived to breach confidence. Even with *tarefer@s* who shared with me accounts of being cheated out of money or being employed *en negro* I made sure not to talk to their employers and to keep their identities closely disguised. In a small community as it was, negative fallout from the wrong move in terms of interviews could have long term consequences on people's everyday livelihood.

One labor story led to another. What is striking about these stories as they are told is that people remember material things at issue and numbers very well. As Sara cleared the table after our lunch, she shared a story about her daughter's bakery. Her daughter had first begun making bread out of her house, but she was so successful that she started a small bakery. Sara had been helping her out with preparing pastry dough and was working with one of the workers. Around midday, the worker had the apron and she would cut half a kilogram of the cheese for making pizza. She did things nervously, and Sara realized that she was taking the other half. Cheese, especially this kind, is quite expensive in Argentina. Sara observed the worker with her son-in-law until he caught her red-handed one day--two kilos of cheese are worth 50 pesos. She also took the red wax cheese, a kind of *gouda* that is used in the everyday bread in Misiones called *chipa* which is manioc flour mixed with egg, cheese and milk. As she finished washing the dishes Sara said:

And so when she was caught, she went crazy. She yelled and screamed and said all kinds of ugly things. Then she left and sued! Then my son-in-law had to pay her 2000 pesos. The workers' father, brother and sister were all police. Her other sister had robbed from the cash register. Think about it. That's three sisters, one stole from the cash register, the other stole cheese, and the other caused trouble. My son-in-law had to pay 4000 pesos. But they are flying around everywhere, and they can't find work anywhere. That's so you can see how things are. You cannot let your guard down with the cash register of your business nor with your red wax cheese. You can't relax the least little bit because of that kind of rat!

Leo added one last anecdote:

When my dad was alive, he had different workers. He always went down to the wholesale store where things were a good percentage cheaper. I would buy a box of oil, a pack of detergent. You know, you make about 3 of those trips a year. And then one day he began to see that one box had only 6 bottles of oil, they would take one out. Then another would go missing. Two weeks later, they would take another one. Then another would be missing. They would take them that way. And you just stop and think: It is not about the money. The money is not what is important. It's not that much! It is the act, the gesture of the person--the bad faith. That is what I always say gets to me: This is bad faith. I mean I worked for my boss for nine, almost ten years, and I never took anything from him. And I didn't sue him, even though I could have sued him for a lot of money. It just wasn't the right thing to do.

The way that Sara and Leo recounted these conflicts echoed other stories I had heard. Because of incredible scarcity on farms and the fact that people do not have steady incomes like those that come with state salaries, people are focused on everyday material goods. In these stories, true or not, the workers are focused on getting more of material objects that they deem valuable, while these same objects, in the aggregate, form the value floor for the livelihood of the small employers.

The Labor Lawsuit and the Many Grains in Truth

While workers readily go to lawyers who are waiting to make money off of their claims, employers also have theirs to turn to. Almost a year later, I accompanied Sara to meet her lawyer so that he could prepare her for an upcoming hearing in a lawsuit that a worker had filed against her. His office was located just around the corner from the short street that led into the private

German school in town. I had been in the office some seven months previously seeking advice on how to understand the domestic employee law. The lawyer, a slim young man with an angelic face set with deep blue eyes was dressed in jeans and a tennis shirt and sported a narrow gold chain around his neck. He was a serious man, known to be one of the most honest lawyers in town.

Sara and Leo went inside his office to consult while I settled into the chair next to a small corner table with a plastic bordered frame that read ‘The Ten Commandments of a Lawyer’, each with a one-sentence explanation: *Study Think Work Fight Be Loyal Tolerate Have Patience Have Faith Forget Love Your Profession*. As I waited, I thumbed through the newspaper that the current mayor had created during his term. The mayor was the son of the prominent *yerba* contractor in town who himself was the former mayor. The elder was a defendant in the civil suit in which he was found to have cheated many of his *tarefer@s* out of thousands of pesos. Both men however, used their Paraguayan origin and populist rhetoric to convince *tarefer@* communities to vote for them in their affiliation with the Peronist party.

The December issue of the paper was a glossy colored act dominated by red and blue, lined at the top with a banner advertising the ability to use all kinds of credit cards—Visa, MasterCard, as well as ones specific to Argentina, *en cuota* and without interest—to buy from the small shoe and clothing outlet in town. The mayor had his own editorial column labeled “Merry Christmas”. It began with a quote from the bible: “I wrapped him in diapers and I laid him down on the manger, because there was no available space in the posada, inn or home.”

The mayor proceeded with his column from there:

Every Christmas people talk about the image of a Christ who is born among the poor, making the holdout for hope even longer. This caused my mother to say—‘long like the

hope of a poor person'. This is the most resistant and unbreakable palace, but he was born in the manger, and this is the first great act of love and commitment.

He went on to write on faith, family and community, but abandoned the theme of poverty by the end of his note. A serious photo of the mayor accompanied the article, along with a signature at the bottom, his email, and a telephone number. It felt so personal, yet I wondered: Was there only the best of news to report in Montecarlo that December?

As I read about what the mayor was busy doing to help people, I heard to the lawyer's advise on Sara's case: "What we have said here is all lies. You can't go and talk about that because we have said the guy never worked for you guys. You cannot say much about anything or else you will get yourself in a trap." Sara and Leo voiced their own reactions about what the guy had done. Why had he changed lawyers, Sara wanted to know? Earlier the accountant had told her that either the other lawyer was not so *sin verguenza* (shameless) as to ask for the ridiculous amount he was asking for or that he just didn't think the merits of the case were what the client sized them up to be. The lawyer continued, now sounding irritated:

When they ask you this, you cannot say, I don't remember, I don't know, or I'm not sure. That automatically will mean 'yes' to the judge who is listening. You need to say, *no es cierto*, that isn't true. They ask you if he ever packed vegetables for you? *No es cierto*. They ask you if he ever helped get you ready for the farmers market? *No es cierto*. If he worked hours beyond the eight hours? *No es cierto*. In Argentina, you DO NOT win a labor lawsuit by telling the truth. Do you understand? You will not win!

He continued on and I heard little of what else was said. Later Leo and Sara came out and the lawyer agreed to talk with me a bit, while they headed on to a dinner. I started by iterating a general overview of the law as I had heard it spoken of throughout the countryside. But I quickly realized how much I needed to approach him lawyer to lawyer. Like lawyers in the U.S., he had the tunnel vision that one is asked to have in which law is the narrow focus, not discourse about the law or other extraneous details. He asked me:

How do you think people can do this? I mean 40 to 50% of labor costs are taxes and employer contributions. If a work month includes 22 days and .75 per month. A work day, or *jornada*, is determined to be 8 hours. And there are limits to working extra hours. The Law of Rural Work (*La Ley de Trabajo Rural*) creates norms for different categories of workers. Each one has its agreement and value for each one, regimen. There is a National Commission for Agricultural Work (*CNTA or Comisión Nacional de Trabajo Agrario). Each region has an advisory commission. Most rural workers are entitled to one month salary per every year of service. If they have worked for 20 years, they are entitled to 20 payments of monthly salaries. And that salary is calculated from the last, highest salary, i.e. a 20 year old salary suddenly becomes one of twenty years later. From the time a worker has worked three months with an employer to one year, there are employer contributions. Keep in mind that the employee also makes contributions to his own retirement and *obra social* from his pay. So there is a double system.

For a domestic employee, she is entitled to one half a month salary for a year of service as well as a proportional vacation and holiday pay. Every 20 days, an employee accrues 1 day of vacation pay by law. Remember that a labor month is considered to be 22 days plus. Once the employee has worked more than half a year, she is entitled to 10 days of vacation pay. For other jobs, that would be 14 days, every *gremio* (union) is different.

The fundamental problem here is that the percentage of costs is so high when you have a registered employee, i.e. a worker working *en blanco*. Basically employers are taxed for having an employee. They pay the worker's retirement plus health insurance plus a labor contribution. The worker also pays for his health insurance from his check.

For example, if a worker earns a base pay of \$1236.00, she or he will have 284 subtracted from it to contribute to retirement and health insurance. That makes her or his take home pay 951. Take into account that the employer then also pays his or her contribution as well as the labor tax. An average salary of a worker working *en blanco* is \$4000 with all of the employer contributions. In order for a worker to retire, he needs 30 years of contributions, which means that he needs to have worked *en blanco* during that time. Now imagine what this means for an employer. If he terminates a worker after 25 years then he must pay 25 years of monthly salary which would add up to 100, 000 pesos.

Now who can pay that and still keep their farm or still continue to be able to hire people?

In response to my questions about the trade of lawyering in Argentina, the lawyer went on to tell me that he did not always represent employers but did take up interesting workers' cases from time to time, especially if it was one against a big company. What he meant to say was that he would take up the case if he there were deep pockets on the other side. I explained to

him that it was odd to me that severance, holiday, and vacation pay were considered fundamental rights, as compared to the U.S. where they were not. “Look more closely”, he said. “These are rights in the ILO. They are fundamental rights in Argentina. And some day, they will be fundamental rights in the U.S. too. One day there will be a Latino president in the U.S., and one day these rights will be fundamental rights.”

“I’m not so sure,” I countered. “I mean the whole capitalist system is in crisis, and a number of rights are being taken away or rolled back in the U.S.” He showed no interest: “Some day they will be rights in the U.S. too. Look at this stuff” he said, pointing to the shiny new edition entitled The New Statute of the Country Peón Law Number 26.727, “These come from socialism and that will move from South to North. Pure socialism.”

“I understand,” I countered. “It is not that I disagree, but really, do you think people are better off here with this scheme of rights?”

He avoided my question and insisted on the expansion of rights:

“This is redistribution,” he said, with his hand on the cover of the shiny white book. “This is the way that wealth gets redistributed, the only way.”

“But it does not seem to work so well,” I noted.

“But it is redistribution. Better than nothing,” he said.

Our conversation ended and we said good night outside the office. He walked East on Libertador and I walked West. The next day I told a friend who was not from Misiones but who had worked in the mayor’s office at some point about his view on redistribution. She laughed at my naivete:

Oh, yeah! He’s a heavy duty *Peronista*. *Social justice boca por afuera, pero cuando toman el poder todo por la ventana.* (They talk of social justice but once they get in power, all that goes out the window.) Here in Argentina you can’t believe anything.

When someone says something, there is always something behind. *Esta Argentina es una truchada*. (Argentina is one big joke!)

And there it was. The same man who just minutes before had advised explicitly his employer clients to lie, was now defending the superior socialist roots of the various Argentine labor statutes.

Later that day, I stopped by the farmers' market. Sara was the first stall at the entrance and was busy selling tomatoes, squash, sweet potatoes, and oranges. The other farmers were joking about her new boyfriend, how her older sister had come from Puerto Rico to take care of her, to make sure she did not get pregnant. I talked to her about my conversation with the lawyer and asked her to relay to him how appreciative I had been of his time. I also expressed that I felt guilty that something I had said to him might have made him testy. "No fears," Sara said, "I feel better prepared for Friday's hearing. I just keep telling myself, all I have to say is *no es cierto, no es cierto, no es cierto*" (that's not true...).

A couple of tables down, Agnes was selling cookies, tomatoes, and crochet potholders. She was not surprised about the lawyer's defense of labor laws: "Those lawyers make their living from those laws. I have said before that if the labor laws in Argentina came to an end, the lawyers would have to make their living going out to weed or harvesting *yerba*. I would have been a good lawyer," And she added, winking: "A real jerk."

Peeling Onions

On yet another day I was out at Sara's farm. She has gotten thousands of small, green onions from farmers in a nearby town, Alcazar. The farmer told her that if she snipped the roots with a knife, then pulled the outer skin off over the base of the onion before planting it, this would make for better yield. We also chopped the top half of the green leaf to go after the same

effect. Fifteen boxes of onions had cost her 250 pesos. We calculated that it would take about 9 hours of one person peeling to get all the onions ready. It would be about 1000 to recuperate that. As I asked why this was the better method, Leo said that people didn't plant seeds so much because they didn't sprout or because they produced poor quality plants. The seed was very expensive, time would pass, and you wouldn't have a harvest.

Coming in and out unloading boxes of tomatoes was Javier, the man who lived down by the spring. He now had worked for Sara one year. Originally from another town, Aristóbulo del Valle, he had left school when he was only ten year old. He had to walk a long way to school and walked alone. He had been afraid that animals in the forest might eat him. The child of a Brazilian mother, he had nine brothers and sisters, four women and five men. Before working for Sara, he had worked in the frontier town of Andrecito where he rode his bike 6 kilometers to reach the *tarefa*. Sometimes he had harvested by the full moon light because *el patron*, the boss, wanted more. Then the boss didn't pay. Fortunately, in his new working life, Sara had taken him under her wing, buying clothes for his new baby, finding an adult education teacher for him, and giving him the advances he needed to start his own household. A year later when I visited Sara, the two were still working together in both classmaking and resource shifting.

Sara said that if the government did not provide so many welfare plans and there was not such a fear of labor lawsuits, *los colonos* could hire many more people. In fact, if she could, she would hire seven more *personal*: "The same government trips things up, whatever work whether it be the drying mills, producers, etc. They create problems in every sector. The problem is that people don't rise up against the government. The day that there is no production, what are people in the city going to eat? Rocks?"

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the ways in which labor laws, welfare programs, and labor lawsuits collide on the ground in Misiones in ways that fray working agricultures. At the same time, this is what agriculture is made of, the complex relationships built around class-making and resource shifting. I have considered labor laws and welfare policies as they affect both smallholders and wagedworkers, but in the end, those who suffer most are people who are already the most vulnerable. As farmers try to make do in the everyday, wagedworkers are the ones who pay the ultimate price. Even though current welfare policies keep them from starving, the state has also created a double bind for these workers in a system Misioneros often refer to as *pan para hoy, hambre para mañana* or “bread for today, hunger tomorrow.” With these realities, the organizing between farmers’ organizations and *tarefer*@ unions become all the more important. Even so it helps to unveil analytical fault lines that exist in the way that people live between and among each other and the ways in which a person either contributes to or takes from the welfare of a given community. As I learned from the stories of everyday litigants, one is always perceived to be trying to live off another, and lawyers are often ready to make that happen.

In his important essay on farm workers in the tobacco industry in the U.S., Peter Benson found that tobacco growers were “a node through which harm passes and at which it is localized”. He argued against blaming growers and in favor of labor organizing that combines the interests of growers and wagedworkers in the face of larger forces, which dictate conditions and prices (Benson 2008: 621). Well-intentioned policies like the simple requirement that growers install portable bathrooms actually had counterproductive fallout on the ground. As Benson stresses the importance of ethnographic research in understanding how policies play out,

I too have found that ethnographic research in which culture is taken into consideration provides invaluable insight into contradictions that emerge on the ground from well-meaning policies that backfire once they come into contact with the everyday dynamics of farm production.

Who could be against severance pay, welfare for the unemployed or benefits for workers? And yet, when analysis is carried out keeping the frame of food sovereignty in mind, the evidence in Misiones suggests that current poverty alleviation practices as well as redistributive labor laws can actually fray the everyday fabric of food sovereignty not because they are bad laws, but because the political and economic climates on the ground distort their original intents. Labor conflicts in this climate foment rural exodus for they make life increasingly unbearable in the countryside. Nevertheless, there is a culture of work at play that involves attempts to be what people consider to be ‘a good person’, even if these attempts often occur in a context such as Sara and Leo’s farm, where the history of land distribution is not taken into account.



Figure 28: Javier, late in the day’s work...then freshly showered, off to night school to learn to read (Photo by author--Montecarlo, May 2013).

In the next chapter, I close the core of the dissertation with a life story that brings to light another dimension to everyday conflict, that of gender violence. At many a turn in Misiones, everyday conflict settles into households via violence against women and children. In this context, women often have had no law or tribunal to turn to meaning that historically they have not been counted as litigants.

Chapter Six

Presencia Dispossessed: How Dry Love Heals

One afternoon I drove to Presencia's house. It was a pumpkin colored one-story located on a street corner in the housing project of Guatambú located a few miles away from the river and Montecarlo. When I had first come to Guatambú in the spring, months before, I had noticed her beautiful which stood out from many of the other houses which had fewer plants. This day Presencia's garden was in full bloom: Ivies and orchids alike sprang from lengths of tree trunk used as makeshift planters. The garden stretched out toward the road corner of a one block street. To the one end, the street met in a T another road and on the other side was a field of weed and pine trees. Just across the road from the corner where I parked was a *yerbal* which spread out alongside the anemic red road that framed the *vivienda*. Worn trails led through it down a slight hill to the *secadero* which employed a number of men from this community. In a few weeks, the *yerbal* would be slashed down to the semi-bald look that marks a recent harvest. In spite of its rural feel, Guatambú had the marks of a company settlement, controlled by the Agricultural Cooperative of Montecarlo which for generations had relied on this community of *tarefer@s* to produce its national brand of *yerba mate*, Aguantadora. Presencia and her husband had lived most of their lives here, tethered in some way or another to the coop.

I clapped my hands to signal my arrival as is customary throughout the countryside in Misiones. Presencia, a sixty-year old mother of seventeen children, was expecting me. She called me to her back patio, a partially enclosed space where she almost always had an open fire lit for

heating water and cooking. A kettle was on to heat water for drinking *mate*. I walked through the doorway and headed toward a long rectangular table where I was met squarely by a fresh cow's head, *cabeza de vaca*. The head was cradled in a large, red, plastic bowl and wrapped in a Christmas-themed green plastic table cloth that had imprints of holly leaves, poinsettias, and snow men adorned with scarves. One of the cow's eyes stared out from a socket with a fleshy pocket exposed, almost opened up to the bone in the cranium. There were still patches of hide along with a mass of clotted blood in the area where the bone faded away into the soft, rubbery, black flesh of the nose. It looked as though the head has been painted with oil paints, for the way the aging blood shone in the afternoon light.

A bespectacled Presencia, dressed in a sleeveless white shirt and pinstriped pants short at the ankles was at work in her bare feet at the sink next to the fire. The bare wooden wall behind the sink was worn from many hours of washing, and outside light shone in through the cracks between the wooden slats. A tiny wooden shelf had been crafted into a soap dish that sat above the sink, just in hand's reach. Presencia had almost finished skinning another *cabeza de vaca* in the sink. This cow's eye too peered out doubtfully.

We swung into talk about her new haircut and the recipe that she was going to prepare: Once she boiled the heads for hours, she would deflesh them. Then she would chop up all the forms of flesh she had scrapped off the head, *todito con sal y limón*, dousing it with salt and lime. When she prepared the cow brains, she chopped up every kind of vegetable she could find and served it with *reviro caliente*. Feeding those who have come from her and surround her is a labor that has consumed many hours of Presencia's lived life: "This is how I brought up my kids, with this food. I share it with people. If a woman asks me, do you have this thing or that thing? I never say no." For her, an experienced gleaner, scavenger and *curandera* (healer), the refuse of another

was sustenance for her loved ones. Having lost her mother when she was just an infant, Presencia had been her own in many ways most of her life.

A Woman Like Her in a Place Like This: Gender, Place, and “Embodied Materialism” in *Yerba Mate* Country

In this chapter, I tell Presencia’s story as she told it to me back in 2012 on this back patio and in other green spaces when I was living in Guatambú, just several miles down the road from her. How and when she chose to share her life with me has importance: Presencia and I had come together to talk a number of times from the highway blockades onward. During the *assembleas* held in the shade, I heard her as singularly outspoken, shameless, and articulate. She stood out among different groups of *tarefer@s* for her willingness to vocalize the many realities that others, more reserved, were probably thinking: There was no work. All the *yerbales* were going to the weeds. Farmers were planting pine trees to get rid of the *tarefer@* labor problem. And, people were hungry. I met few women like her over the years of my fieldwork. For many, she was probably dismissed as crass and a bit off her rocker.⁹⁷ But at the *assembleas* she garnered support in the way she articulated the plight of women and mothers. The town mayor had seemed to listen intently to her bold story and reacted with promises. After all, votes of the poor majority had brought him to power. And his father had made his fortune off of paying harvesters just barely enough so that they could eat.

⁹⁷ Every time I talked with her, Presencia’s spoke freely of life, morality, culture, and loss all the while she worked. Even in the moment that she told her stories, I longed for her to slow down, because she always said so much so quickly. If I only could have captured the power of every story she told, whether it be about how to master a certain kind of labor or how she had come through one difficult moment to another, the account would read very much like a manual for survival. Presencia struck an incredibly powerful presence as a fierce survivor who still stood strong after the birth of seventeen children, the death of a son, and a life of significant hardship.

As she began to hack away at the cow's head that day, by freedom of association from those blows she struck, Presencia returned to a narrative, part of which I had heard before. Taking off her glasses, she grabbed a small switch that she kept on hand for swatting the family's pack of dogs and began to tell her story, one which took place in the weeds. For her and many other harvesters, *la capuera*, was a theater of life in which both the tragic and the ecstatic transpired; working to harvest *yerba*, hack away weed cover by machete, or search for food therein, people inhabited the weeds throughout their lives. Water from the sink swirled around Presencia's bare feet as she talked.

My uncle was the only one who never hit me. Once he told me--go over there and bring me a flower, a real delicate one! *Con eso te voy a romper todo!*,--that's what I am going to use to break you apart! And then he hugged me. 'I'm only joking', he said, "I am not ever going to hit you.' Since the time I was seven years old, I had no one to defend me. I learned from my rib. My stepbrother took me out to the *yerba* when my dad was working there and they talked all kinds of bullshit. Everyone wanted to hit me. When I could defend myself, I hit back with a stick. When my father hit me a whole lot, I thought about my mother, and I would think: Why are you messing around with me, and only me? Here I am! Come and look for me!

I write about Presencia as a surviving mother living in a place many consider the 'middle of nowhere'. But in reappearing working agricultures and defetishizing *yerba mate*, I mean to critique how it is that such dwelling spaces as hers come to be seen this way, as nowhere. For as Presencia recounted her life, her life-place was one center of the 'spirit forces' that drove the production of *yerba mate*. Presencia longed to tell her story, indeed was *bound* to tell it per a strong inner drive to do so for a very specific reason: She meant to invoke the memory of her dead mother, to call out to her, to find her, to know how it was that she was taken from her. Her memories flowed as she touched the material world, with hand and eye – leaves, soil, roots, blood, hide, bone, and flower connected her with her own life-memory.

By walking beside her through the weeds and standing by her side as she worked to take apart *la cabeza de vaca*, I mean to bring to the light the continuous violence that unfolded in her ecological dwelling, producing deep, unhealed scars as well as a remarkable resilience and a singular epistemology of survival. This gender violence has been and still is a fundamental part of the *yerba mate* economy. Walking with Presencia through *la capuera* revealed how violence, ecology, and healing intertwine in the everyday lives of women who experience place both as a kind of open air prison as well as one of belonging (Basso 1996). Finally, I use the *cabeza de vaca* as a symbolic trailhead for which to explore an unmapped history of the dispossession of women in Argentina's red lands where *yerba mate* is cultivated. Everyday scavenging such as that of Presencia's use of *la cabeza de vaca* unveils an ecological dispossession that has new dimensions in the *yerba mate* economy where deforestation and climate change threaten. I contrast Presencia's bloodied hands with that of many younger women around her, including some of her daughters, who aspire to be clean, to wear spotless white clothing, and to be free from the stigma that the labor of killing, scavenging, and gleaning bring. In the cruel social hierarchy, those with the cleanest and newest clothes take precedence over those who are dirtied by work so close to the production site of food. Therefore, some women explicitly told me how they longed to be disentangled from the kind of labor that Presencia has been forced to engage in so that her children could survive. They preferred to be able to purchase food ready to eat in a super market without getting their hands dirty in a way that marked them. This metamorphosis in everyday labor repertoires expresses symbolic and fundamental differences between rural and urban, producer and consumer, black and white, stigmatized and powerful, dispossessed and propertied, and the repugnant and attractive feminine.

Presencia's everyday life invokes Edward's Casey's thoughts on embodied place in which "bodies and places are connatural terms" that "interanimate each other" (Casey 1996). But given the degree of violence and deprivation that she came to recount together with our 21st century understanding of how critical rural women's labor is to food sovereignty, I read her life here in the context of eco-feminist theory in order to capture a fine-grained view of what Ariel Salleh has termed an "embodied materialism" (Salleh 2009). I mean to link anthropological theory and the art of ethnography to an "embodied materialist epistemology" which, per Salleh, is the "day to day experience of negotiating humanity-nature relations" (Salleh 2009: 300). I do so after keeping watch over years of fieldwork of the way that women's labor consistently gets subverted, erased, and appropriated at their expense. Indeed in Misiones, poor women continue to suffer poverty, illiteracy, early pregnancy, domestic violence, and higher rates of maternal death than most any province of Argentina. I take up this embodied materialist epistemology too in order to present a necessary contrast to the new "inter-species" turn in anthropology. This eco-feminist view places women's labor and life squarely at the center of discussions about nature and culture, simultaneously casting as politically urgent the status of women in these discussions. I believe the story that Presencia shared reveals a moving dialectic of the active daily giving and taking away of life that she is obliged to do in what María Mies has called the "production of life" (Salleh 2009: 291; Mies 1986). This fine grains of this feminine labor make up the larger picture of working agricultures as they struggle to survive around the world. And, this 'production of life' makes everyday consumption of *yerba mate* possible for those so far away from the production site. I "appear" Presencia's labor and stories of her life as steps toward the defetishization of *yerba mate*.⁹⁸

⁹⁸Although ecofemism has been strongly criticized, I find most of its critiques to be hair-splitting

A Motherless Child in a Green World

Days after I had met Presencia at the historic highway blockades, she came to visit me at our house in Guatambú. I had had a difficult day mostly because of having had a poor night's sleep. My eldest daughter continued to suffer from conjunctivitis, while my infant daughter woke us up all night long as infants tend to do. I had gotten used to conducting fieldwork in both a fog of exhaustion and the hostile environment I encountered when white farmers found out that I was talking with *tarefer@s*. It was not seen as acceptable to have *los negros* for friendly visits at one's home, especially not our rented home. But we had broken this rule, and visits from people such as Presencia exacerbated our marginal status in the community.

So when Presencia decided to pay me a visit one day, it was in this hostile context. But Presencia did not care for when she had a message to deliver, she was bound to do so. She came down the road accompanied by one of her daughters and three grandchildren. Hers was a sort of doctor's home visit to show me a way to heal Iris's conjunctivitis that we had talked about a few days back at the blockade. I came down the steps of our house onto the dirt road to talk with her, grateful for her help for the inclement fall weather had brought sickness for both of my daughters.

Presencia stepped into the weeds that grew in the deep ditch between the road and the *yermal* across from our house. The first plant she pulled from the deep red soil had broad leaves: It could be used for *mal de ojo* (conjunctivitis), she told us, and it was the same plant whose

and adapt the proverbial "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" approach. Vandana Shiva in particular has a record of activism that continuously creates real material change on the ground. A scathing critique of her is more about possible repersussions than real ones (Cochrane 2014). I believe it is more important that Shiva and to a lesser degree other eco-feminists see the urgency of the need for change on the ground as well as their ability to bring together multiple issues as they realistically play out in the lives of people like Presencia.

seeds grab on to one's leg. These traveling seeds are as stubborn as *mal de ojo* when it takes over. Holding the plant in her hand Presencia explained how to use the plant for medicine: "You must first boil the leaves, then take them out and wrap them in the cleanest, finest cloth you can find. Squeeze it. Squeeze it tight to get the liquid out. That is what you want. This is the fluid that you must put into the inflamed eye."

As we talked about this and other health issues, we were four generations of women together: Presencia's twenty-four year old daughter Cati had three of her daughters with her. And she was very pregnant with another child. Presencia told me that she had lots of *historia*. Of course, she was not the first or last person to want to tell her story to someone who was willing to listen. But hers was an especially poignant one: Her eighty year old father had been hospitalized for a ruptured stomach. One doctor pressured his intestines the wrong way, causing a hernia. He then had to be rushed to the emergency room. Presencia was able to grab one of the rural buses that only came through twice a day to get to be with him in the hospital. He whined and called out when she was there, but later when she peeked in on him, he made no sound. He had gotten better and returned to Presencia's house where he had lived for decades.

"And your mother," I asked?

"I never knew her," she said, looking down at the plant she held between her hands. And with this, she began an agonizing tale: Her father had taken her away from her mother. What happened to her mother, she has never known:

Where is she? Is she alive? I pray, I tell my story. I talk about it and talk about it, no matter what, so that I don't lose hope.

When I was thirteen, my father passed me off to this old man. He was about thirty. Soon I was pregnant, passed off to a thirty-year old man, a horrible thing. By the time I was fifteen, I already had two children. He beat me, spanked me like a child because he was

jealous. I thought about how one day I would be eighteen and either I would be on my own or I would leave him.

And then one day with one baby in my arms and one in my *panza* (belly), holding my little daughter's hand, I said: 'Today is the last day that you are going to hit me. I am leaving.'

And he said, 'Oh yeah, if you leave, you are not taking her with you!' And he seized my daughter. He took her! And I never saw her again!

Where is she? Where could she be? Every night I pray to god, to the Virgin—'please, please, before I die, let me be able to see my daughter again. Let me be able to find her.' Where is she? What has become of her?

I was left speechless by this double disappearance revealed to me in the middle of the road. My mind first went to an image of scouring the countryside in search of her lost daughter. Where could she be, how to find her? Unable to bear silent witness to her story and believing I could say to her what any human it seemed would need to say, I asked first: "Why do you take care of your father, given all of this? Why do you not demand from him to tell you about your mother? You have a right! Every human has a right to know about our mother."

"No," Presencia said sadly. "He will only be silent, he will only yell. He says she is probably dead anyway. There is no way to find her."

And then she told me how her uncle, her father's brother had died, without telling her important things. But afterwards, people had talked. They told her when she was younger that her father killed her mother out of jealousy. He wrapped the *piola* (rope) around her neck, tied stones to it and threw her in the river.

"Could he have done this?" Presencia asked me, gesturing as though cradling a baby in her right arm. "With me in my mother's arms? He threw her in the river, killed her! My uncle never told me what happened, he could have told me what happened, why didn't he? If I find out one day that my father killed my mother I will kill him in *un golpazo* (one blow)!"

Tears flowed down Presencia's aching face, and it was hard for me to hold back tears as well.⁹⁹ Her daughter lingered a few paces back. I reacted to console her, to give her even a half embrace around her shoulders. And when I did so, she stayed still, long petrified in trauma, muscle, and grief, accustomed to bearing it all in her lonely, historied body. She went on to tell me that she believed her father would not tell her what happened, because he knew she would throw him out. Then no one would care for him. And if he was told that he must tell you about your mother? I asked, searching in vain for some alternative possibility. "Oh no, he won't tell. He will be silent. Do not say anything to him!" she said, fear in her eyes. It was clear that this was a violent man, with a violent history. "After all," Presencia said, "everyone knew he had killed a man when he was just fourteen."

I walked with the women back to the strip of asphalt road that led out into Guatambú, to the *secadero* and to her home in the *vivienda*. My daughter Iris played with her four grand daughters, as their mother walked along with us. Cati walked along in her knee-length skirt, at some point ahead of us, her fine brown calves flexed in the sunlight, legs of just a girl. She was quiet for her twenty-five years, and had already lost most of her front teeth as people do in the poor neighborhoods of both country and city in Argentina.¹⁰⁰

Before Presencia turned to the right to walk down toward the creek and over the small rise in the road that led to the *yerbales* she told me: "I tell people that one has to take care of your children. You have to take care of your children, because they are the ones who will take care of you some day. I take care of my children." Along the way, she had picked an orchid from

⁹⁹ I have always been bad about holding back tears, even when I worked as a mental health therapist. Much has been written about the psychoanalytical concept of "countertransference" which is how a person's narrative and actions invoke sentiment on the part of a therapist.

¹⁰⁰ This is likely both caused by nutritional deficiencies in the diet as well as lack of both knowledge and practice of dental hygiene.

a tree which she gave to me; “There are so many more plants that can be used for good things there in the weeds,” she said.

“Do your daughters know?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, “I always tell them everything. I tell them they are all from one woman, the same woman, and they have to get along, have to be friends. And they are all friends.”

I never asked Presencia how she came to have so many children. There was only one woman in Montecarlo who I had heard had more children—twenty-two. But Presencia explained to me that the babies came and came. Right in front of her husband on another day she told me how her oldest son finally went to him and told him the he had better allow her to have her tubes tied. Her husband sat quietly without comment as Presencia told me the story.

“They had filled his head with things,’ Presencia explained, “like that I would have cancer if I got my tubes tied.”

If Presencia had been free of blows from the early part of her life, her body would not be free for many years. Another version of the story had gone like this: Three months would pass and I would be pregnant again. My older son told his father, ‘what do you want, papa, for mom to die having more kids?’ And he finally agreed, and the doctor said. “Presencia, we are going to tie your tubes.”

It was impossible to believe: How could one woman bear such pain? Presencia’s mother have been taken from her by an act of violence and then years later, her daughter too. I realized only in writing up this story how that day the losses were so many that there was no logic in how stories began and ended. Like some of the female survivors of violence I had worked with as a clinical social worker, Presencia talked to survive. In this talk, was a stream of loss, which could only be kept from overflowing to the point of devastation by telling the story. Because of the

lack of knowledge of how to recognize trauma and work to heal it, Presencia was left to seemingly unravel. But I knew that in spite of this unthinkable pain, she was more intact than many around her.

The Bitter Feminine: What is a Commodity's Gender?

Calling for a politics of action, Wendy Harcourt, Arturo Escobar and their collaborators from all over the world took up the issue of women and place in their 2005 collection *Women and The Politics of Place*. In reorienting “globalacentric” narratives about neoliberalism they returned to the local for “what happens in the spaces of homes, work (economy), and place is often enmeshed with what happens to landscapes and ecosystem” (2005: 10). They argued:

By following women through each space and level—farm, field, community, organization, and so on—one can learn to appreciate how landscapes are embedded in social relations and vice versa. Landscapes appear as gendered terrains that are always under construction through ecological and social relational webs, not as inert backgrounds for human action (2005: 10).¹⁰¹

This call echoes that of eco-feminist theorists such as Ariel Salleh who has reiterated the need for an “ecological economics” and an “embodied materialist epistemology” that is not based on idealisms like “the essential feminine” or “the noble savage” but rather “on the day to day experience of negotiating humanity-nature relations [...] that refutes the self-comforting liberal contention that affluence and post-materialist values are what give rise to environmental consciousness” (Salleh, 2009: 297, 300).

The stakes of not taking on the vital importance of the ways women around the world negotiate “humanity-nature” relationships in the everyday have been illustrated most vividly by

¹⁰¹ Although this echoes almost exactly what numerous anthropologists have argued for some time, a fundamental difference is the way that this call goes beyond so-called cultural critiques to a call for more urgent political action (Hale 2008; Speed 2006, 2008).

the globe's most prominent eco-feminist and indeed feminist scientist, Vandana Shiva. Shiva emphasizes the fundamental importance to humanity of subsistence or sustenance economies, and forcefully argues that their devaluation creates ethnic and cultural crises (Shiva 2010: 44). The intertwining of ecology, a commodity economy, and gender violence in Presencia's life necessitate that taking into account localized violence against women as a fundamental part of defetishization of *yerba mate*. Moreover, if we move toward reprioritizing working agricultures, we must fight the ways that everyday gender violence can undergird them.

Presencia had labored in multiple jobs throughout her life, but the *yerbal* had been a central site of labor given that she has worked in the harvest at times during her life and that her father was himself a lifelong *tarefer*. Her current husband of over thirty years has worked for almost forty plus years in the heat and dust of the *secadero*. When the mill was running during harvest time, women and girls walked the paths of the *yerbales* for generations to deliver food to the men who labored in the heat and dust to turn green leaf into *yerba mate*.

Families such as Presencia's had been connected to this economy. All roads began and ended in the *yerba* economy for them. Among poor Argentines, there is a hierarchy in which urban residents are considered less poor than those who live in small towns, while those who live in dispersed rural areas are poorest of all. Women specifically in rural areas have less education and are more likely to be poor. The more children a woman has, the poorer she is likely to be. While rural areas are faced with rural exodus, small towns in rural Argentina are growing as a result of out migration, and these poor neighborhoods are scavenged by the inequality that makes such fertile earth for germinating social violence (World Bank 2001: xi).

In years before I met Presencia, I had worked even farther off the grid with farm families who sometimes lived without electricity deep in the subtropical countryside. I remember María

who depended on her wayfaring husband completely for she was illiterate. Her sharp intelligence and efficient work, though, were the ones that often ensured family income. So too do I remember a trip we took out to her eldest sister's remote farm on a foggy rain-drenched Sunday. I had a car, and this was the chance for María to get to see her sister who she had not seen in years. That day I learned how her sister had nearly committed suicide years before and saw the way her husband lurked in the back of the house, drinking the quarts of beer his young teenage daughters had purchased for him at the country store. Women, I saw, both white farmers and others of multiethnic roots, suffered. And too often they were replaced by much younger women, a pattern I saw played out many times throughout Misiones.

In the context of the patriarchal *yerba mate* industry that I have already described, women suffered secondary discrimination due to a patriarchal family structure in which women were expected to do all household labor and had little control over their bodies ((Federici 2009, 2012). Moreover, women had worked for generations in the *yerbales* without being formally recognized as employees; their male companions were paid for work that they completed, and there is some historical record that money was often squandered by the men in the household.¹⁰²

Presencia's home, Guatambú, was the beginning of a rural town, the beginning of urban on this rural-to-urban continuum. It fell out of visibility in the scheme of provincial tourism and its promotion of "The Route of the *Yerba Mate*". In everyday hegemony, defining out-of-the-way place, it was the hegemonic "way". That "way" configured on all maps and loomed as a shadow, both seductive and inferiorizing for a woman like Presencia who was not included. She carried "the way" in her head because she saw it on television. People like herself rarely appeared there. This was important because in places like Guatambú "the way" was driven into

¹⁰² See Nicklison 1914 and Ambrosetti 1891.

people's consciousness through cable television which made it to the house of virtually all people who had electricity. For those who lived in "in-the-way" spaces, someone like Presencia did register in the everyday. This configuration of who lurks/resides in the shadows in the everyday of another resonates powerfully in discussions about the rural and urban. The urban tends to cast presence over the rural but not vice versa. Speeding along Route 12, the key route of commodity traffic for *yerba mate*, the route ends in Iguazú, the summit of tourism, and home to the governor's sparkling yet shady tourist enterprises. But Guatambú was only one of so many centers where the dispossessed eventually flocked to gain access to survival. It was only one example of the rural housing projects which are the *villas* which form precursors in space and time for the so-called *villa miseria* (the term for urban slums in Argentina).

How Dry Love Heals

On a sunny morning a few weeks after Presencia had come to my house after the blockades, I went to hers. I had a longtime interest in herbal medicine, and we had talked about going to search for medicinal plants in *la capuera*. Wearing a white cap, frayed around the edges, with *Fora de Agricultura Familiar* (Forum for Family Agriculture) inscribed on it, carrying a plastic bag for collections, Presencia was ready to go in her customary flip-flops. Her husband was outside too, having not gone to work because the *secadero* was closed. Not enough green leaf had been harvested to make it worth running the fires all day long and paying workers to do so.

We decided to take a walk near Presencia's house, heading down her block to the end where it hit another dirt road making a T intersection. Crossing that road, we entered into the field that marked the end of the *vivienda*. At its entrance, people had dumped some trash and desiccated cuttings of other weeds. The field was grown up, an old *yerbal* that had been planted

with pine. What was left was one of those confused fields that could be found throughout Misiones which contained a material map of the struggles for income and trends to get more of it. At one time, farmers were encouraged to plant pine in their *yerbales* for double income. It turned out, however, that the pine needles ruined the *yerba*, the intense bitterness of their needles contaminating the green leaf. In many cases, the *yerbal* itself was ruined, and the pine was left to grow until the day that it would be harvested.

Presencia and I walked down path that had been worn in the middle of a row of trees, fringed by knee high weeds. She remembered that she and others used to cut *yerba* in this same *yerbal*, but noted that it was now grown up in *capuera*. She explained to me that a woman she knew in Paraguay, her *comadre*, had taught her many things about what she called backyard plants. There was no need to ask Presencia questions really for the plants themselves invoked storytelling. Each plant brought a story of medicine, and of medicine applied. The giving of life, prolonging life and healing, was also accompanied by threats to life and violence: “My last boy was born, just a tiny thing. The doctors said I couldn’t take him home. But I did anyway. I said, ‘if he is going to die, he is going to die with me.’ Slowly the baby began to take form and he made it. He made it through homemade medicine.”

There was *chircamilosa* with its yellow-white flower with long leaves. It was used to heal wounds and was also great for lice. You boiled it first and left it out for a while in the sun. An hour later more or less, you washed the hair and the head. Then you let your hair dry in the sun. Presencia’s daughters had shared with others their mother’s method for getting rid of lice. You could also put onion on the head, cutting it up first and use the juice. If you added the juice to honey and took this at night, it was perfect. It stuck to everything.

As took notes in my field journal, Presencia told me that she had tried to learn to read over the years but had never been able to do so. When one of her children was born, the judge told her that was the last time he was going to write her name for her. The next time, he expected her to write it herself. So just before she had the next child, her husband wrote her name on her hand. She then was able to copy it, not write it, on the birth certificate: “I have gone to those programs the *si lo puedo* (yes I can!) but I did not learn how to read. I get angry and I yell.”

Presencia leaned down to another plant. This was *escobadura* (hard broom). As she explained its uses, she moved into a counter narrative to the healing that we searched for on the green floor beneath our feet:

There was always this hitting. We grew up in the *yerbal*. One day when I was weeding they asked me to take care of a little baby and weed at the same time. The baby cried every time I put him down. Then the woman (Presencia’s stepmother) came and said, ‘You didn’t weed anything!’ ‘I couldn’t,’ I said, ‘because the baby cried every time I put him down.’ The woman grabbed a stick and hit me in the back of the head. See here? Can you feel that? Feel that knot? It’s still there.

Presencia beckoned to me to feel the back of her head, and I could feel a large knot in the very center of her skull several inches up from her neck. *Escobadura* also made her remember her father’s violent past and the consequences it had for her own life.

I remember when we were in Paraná, and there had been a party to celebrate the end of the harvest. I was only eight years old. Before we used to have a party when the harvest ended. With parties came a lot of drinking, trouble. There were eight men in the street in front of the store waiting for my father after he had caused some trouble. They waited for him and then hit him. He had a knife in the pocket of his coat. When he fell, he hit the man with the knife, a Paraguayan: ‘Keep still, friend. Kill him! Damn Paraguayan!’ He came home cutting the *escobadura* with the knife that he had stabbed someone with. ‘What happened, father?’ I asked. ‘Take this and hide it deep in the shit,’ he told me. He meant the shit in the outhouse. I hid the knife. An hour later the police came looking for him. ‘What’s up?’ my father asked, ‘I was just sleeping. I didn’t do anything. I only scratched him, cut him a bit. I almost lost my hand.’ But they took him in, and he went to Posadas to jail where he spent a year.

When Papa got out of jail we were with my stepmother in Paraguay. It was all crazy. She didn't stay in the end. But she came back years later with her suitcase and her children. She had lost everything. The stepdaughter escaped with a man and later came and robbed the stepmother and my two brothers. She left. They all left. They were all raised together. I was left alone with my father. With father, she had eight children, she already had five children when they got together and later had seven. They treated each other terribly. He made me spend the whole night under the table once, because he hit her because he said she had another man.

Now he says 'the man who hits a woman is not a man'. And to think that my stepmother who now lives in Posadas, is blind from being hit so much. My husband just looks and looks at him. *No digas nada, hija.* (Don't say anything, daughter. *Aguantálo.* Just take it easy.) I am the only daughter of my mother. *Calláte, hija,* says my husband. Be quiet.

Escobadura could also be used with *artemesia*, a plant a bit like rag weed. It was good for a child's tooth pain, hair loss, and for headaches. You beat it well, put it in water and washed your head really well. Then you let it dry. *Artemesia* was good for those headaches from the sun. Presencia had had work all her life in fields in the midday sun with her children. That's when the headaches came. Again we came across *espina colorada*, the red thorn that Presencia had shown: "They spread rumors that someone dug up his grave. I went running, running desperate to know that this could not be true! I remember running barefoot across the red thorn only to find that the grave was still there, intact. Then I had to run back, over the red thorn again."

The *espina colorada* (red thorn) was a nettle good for the kidneys, especially those who had trouble urinating. Then there was *chichita* (little tit). This small leafed plant was good for tooth pain and ulcers in the mouth. "Use the shell," Presencia dictated, "Boil it, and then wash the mouth with cotton. This is good for injuries that are stubborn to heal. First wash with common soap, then apply and wait for it to dry."

Amor seco (dry love) was another good one. This small leafed plant with a jagged leaf was good for diabetes. When children get chicken pox, you could boil the whole plant on the

third day. Then you let it cool off. Once cool, you washed the child's body with common soap, soaping up the body good, *todito todito*. That way all the wounds would soften up with the moisture. You would take it all out with the first wound and then the second time just apply with the plant mixture. The child was allowed to go naked, drying in the fresh air. Presencia had healed her daughter Natalia this way, and she healed without scars.

Chicoria (chickory) had many uses: It was good for salad. But you could also take the root, wash it and put it on to boil. You could drink it in your *mate*. It was good for fever when someone did not have an appetite. You could put the whole plant in the tea. *Doctorcito capuera* (little weed doctor) was good too. You could use the small, newest leaves to make a tea. If a child was *empachada* (with an upset stomach) you it would help them burp right away. Once a man had become sick in the *yerbal*, and Presencia and others had prepared this tea for him. Shortly, he had vomited up everything and was better after that. *El viudo del pato* (the duck's widow) was good for the gall bladder and you needed to take the whole plant. *Yerba de lucero* (plant of first dawn's light) was good for babies and adults for the person who had been cast an evil eye. It was good too for what the doctors call meningitis, when it seemed like the head was going to burst and the child cried and cried.

Girl to Woman—The Pain of a Fertile Life

As we walked crouched low to the ground looking for other plants, they only seemed to multiply as did their medicinal uses. We actually covered very little terrain that day, but within this terrain, a mother of seventeen could be confronted with a deluge of memories. And much of this memory had to do with what it meant to be a woman—to be born one, to become one, to give life, sustain it, and have it taken away. Being a woman, as Presencia told it, was to endure enormous and continuous suffering. Through plants she told her story of pain and healing.

Arroz de mono (monkey's rice) was to be used for hemorrhaging, especially the kind that can happen to a woman around childbirth. A tea could be made using the seed, leaf and root together. You beat and then boiled it with burnt *corcho* (cork) then you put the mixture on top of burnt *corcho* and you took it in. Presencia remembered the moment she went from being a girl to having womanhood thrust upon her.

When I was thirteen or so my period came, and no one was there to tell me what it was. I had no idea. I was bleeding, and I didn't know what to do. Someone found out and reported to the police that I had been raped by my father. There was a process in front of a judge, but I told him what was going on. My father said to *la señora*, 'Take her. She is just a problem for me.' Right there, in front of everyone, he just gave me away. And I went to live there with that woman. She always treated me horribly. And when I was fourteen, her husband raped me. And from there came my first child. And then they gave me away to a man who was thirty three who beat me and from there came more children.

This story laid bare another painful reality in the countryside: Gossip was an everyday practice, and there were not limits on how cruel the rumors got. But I had also heard many times about extensive sexual abuse in both country and city in Misiones. "The grandfathers," one woman told me with a sad, fearful mask over her eyes "you really have to look out for the grandfathers." All over Misiones, at all class levels, there were cases of older men trading in their aging female partners for much younger girls. Often times this was done through extramarital encounters, but total separations occurred as well. Most often the new partners were girls still in their teens. And children almost immediately followed. In some instances, there was a mixing of ethnicity, with those of white European descent taking in younger brown-skinned girls. Whatever the case, a girl, very early on, was a target for sexual exploitation.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ An elder *tarefero* with whom I worked a great deal, had raised thirteen children with his wife. Now still raising his youngest along with his granddaughters, he told me of his one granddaughter whom he was sending to the private school in town. Everything had gone fine for a while. But as she waited for the bus to the country, she began to be stalked by a man who

Like so many girls in the countryside, motherhood had been thrust upon Presencia. There was almost no such thing as a psychologist and psychological thought or theory, in Western sense, seldom manifested in the conversations I had across farms in Misiones. People had other ways of describing feelings and what was seen to be normal or not, healthy or unhealthy. “Did you ever have a problem after your children were born such as feeling sad or funny in any way?” I asked. Presencia answered this way:

I have days when I yell all day long at everyone. Then I take off. I come back to see what they have to say to me. If they answer me right way, I stop yelling. But if they don't, I keep going. After one of my kids was born, I felt a great rejection for people. I just didn't want to be around people. But only one. Now I feel something strange in my head at night. I feel like something leaves me. I don't tell anyone. I don't want people to worry about me. I don't want my husband's children to think he died worrying about me. So I keep silent.

Peludilla blanca (little fluffy/fuzzy white) was good for treating the beginning of cancer of the uterus. You could drink it as a tea and in food as well. A woman took it for six months and later became pregnant and never again had a problem. Now she was fifty-three years old. You took the whole plant. In this ecology of healing, Presencia drew from her ecological habitat things to sustain and to soothe; *la capuera* endured as place for finding not menace but medicine. As the sun grew stronger, Presencia told me of how she was struck with chronic headaches in the back of her head: “I have this pain, this headache in the back of my head. It is as though my brain hurts. I feel anger at people. Instead of thinking, I yell. For me the country, the field is a place of peace. I hear no one. I see no one. And no one sees me.”

would stare at her the whole time, a man with a car. She became afraid. One day the father grew tired of the situation and went into town, with a gun hidden in his clothes. Once he was close to the man, he made the gun obvious and told the man: “I know what you are up to. If you ever lay a hand on her, you will eat the barrel of this gun and you will be gone.” In spite of this, the girl stopped going to school. She dropped out and stayed back into the house, bound to be protected by her grandfather but bound to be trapped in a house where four generations already lived.

We headed back toward her house and on the way back, Presencia pointed out other things, things that were missing. Before the yellow daisies were full of butterflies, and now they just didn't come around anymore. *El veneno está matando todo*, she said, the poison was killing everything. There are a couple of other leaves pressed into my field journal from that day. A very fine lace-leafed plant for fever. *Hoja de guayava* for diarrhea and colitis. *Caatai* for mange. Finally the pages run blank after cat's claw.



Figure 29: Presencia gathering medicinal plants (Photo by Author 2012).

A Poisoned Embodied Fertility

Months before I met Presencia, I had gotten to know the *vivienda* by going to the small clinic which perched on its very edge, just two blocks up from Presencia's corner lot. It was on my way to the clinic that I had first taken note of Presencia's beautiful garden. For some time, on spring mornings I would drop by la *salita de salud* to talk with those who attended the clinic. Most helpful was Clara, the nurse often on duty, who spoke to me of social problems as we

leaned against the open doorway looking out into the day. Our view was of a garden with trees that ended with the street. We could see houses with open patios and people walking by.

Everyone knew everyone.

It turns out that much of what we discussed had to do with fertility. From Clara's point of view as a community nurse, there was the problem of excess fertility as people continued to have large families even though they could barely sustain them. She and others talked of how every kind of birth control was available through the clinic —pills, injections, condoms— and girls still kept having babies. It seemed so simple, just come and get it. That was the purpose of the *salita de salud*.

But one day when I was giving a ride to Edna, a teenager I knew who lived on the edge of the *vivienda*, she let me know that something else was at play: “The boys get together and plan who they are going to get pregnant. They do this, just to *joderla*, screw her over. They know that once she's pregnant, that's it, her life's done for.” But this did not register with Clara. Too often, pregnancy and having babies was all a girl's doing. After all, she knew these girls and talked to them. Later Edna told me that she didn't care if hormones would make her fat, as many girls and women claimed that they did. Worse still, Edna argued, would be to get pregnant as a teenager. This conversation occurred in 2011, but by 2014, I heard that Edna was about to deliver her first child at age seventeen.

Clara talked freely and she really did express dedicated concern about what was happening to the people who were under her care. There was that beautiful young girl with a defective arm, cut off in its formation at the elbow. How she tried to work, in spite of this. How others in her home sat around doing nothing. How many problems there seemed to be in the area, how much cancer, epilepsy and birth defects. Meanwhile in town a German woman I knew

shared her own raw emotion when her daughter suffered a miscarriage. Burdened with the fact that her grandson was afflicted by a mysterious illness in which tests were being sent to the Mayo clinic, she told me once “And look at all these people, *los negros*, having kids. No problems. And the government pays them for it!”

Indeed with the new populist welfare state, the burden of fertility has changed. These tensions revealed an important dialectic about fertility, its good and bad sides. But fertility became all the more complicated when examined through the frame of the “slow violence” possibly caused by agrochemicals (Nixon 2011). I now return where I began, to the *cabeza de vaca* and all that it evokes in terms of gender, fertility, and commodity fetishism.

La Cabeza de vaca

After Presencia finished telling the story of the way her uncle had pretended to hit her, she went back to the *cabeza de vaca*. Importantly, most families in the *vivienda* where Presencia lived did not participate in the same scavenging she did. After all she had gotten the heads from a butcher down the road who would have thrown them out. Others would either have been ashamed to eat the *cabeza de vaca* or would have found it repugnant. But Presencia had no choice. She was a mother of seventeen children and had lived in poverty all of her life. Growing up with no electricity and precarious shelter, her husband had gone out asking for work, while she had gone in search of food for her children. Her children had had children and now some of these even had children some of whom were running around the patio as we talked. Even though she now had a house in the *vivienda*, Presencia kept to her old customs and at least some of her daughters were learning the same.

As the day progressed, Presencia was joined by two of her daughters. They came to work on processing other parts of a cow. There were four *patas de vaca* (cowfeet) that needed to be

skinned and then washed. Presencia skinned the cow ankle while Cati held it down. Presencia struggled to get the final skin off at the very base. The cow feet would be boiled for three or four hours and then prepared with black beans. In the bottom of the sink was a bar of soap next to a large section of cow stomach curled up in the corner that also had to be made into food. The *tripas* (intestines) were also boiled for hours until they turned white and eaten with *asado* (grilled meat). Presencia reported that this was “real vitamin” for a woman who was not producing enough breast milk.

Another daughter who had come from Paraguay leaned on the table watching, dressed in a deep green blouse, the straps of a black bra along her shoulder. When Cati’s new son began to fuss, she sat with him and offered the baby her own breast. The little guy latched on, his full head of hair now exposed as his tiny hoodie had slipped off. Everyone got a kick out of this. This meant Cati could keep up with the work on the *mondonga*, the internal part of the cow’s stomach. Dressed in a pink and white striped tank top, her recent post partum belly pressed against the elastic of her blue shorts with white stripes on the hips. She stopped and wiped her perspiring face on her upper left shoulder. Her right hand dangled at her side with a large knife going dull. The cow’s stomach seemed like a creature fetched from the sea and slung upon the wooden table, steam rising from its surface. Cati scraped away the fuzzy wool-like gray lining and threw it on the floor for the orange cat and a yellow hound with dark brown ears to indulge in. Another *cabeza de vaca* sat waiting for her on the table, lying on its nose. This had been an animal with horns for one could see how they had been sawed off, an interrupted bar that now formed a scroll of bone above its eye sockets which protruded outwards on the sides. I could see the round tube where its head was severed from its spinal cord, a plumber’s pipe, with tendrils of flesh and tendon streaming down the back of the head.



Figure 30: Presencia with *la cabeza de vaca* (Photo by Author 2012).

The back patio was full of life. A red pitcher for water sat on the table next to a yellow sponge. Clothes hung to dry on a line strung above the table. A pot boiled on the fire built on the floor against the wall that lined up to the back yard. The floor ran with water from all the processing. The ringer washer stood against the orange house wall plugged in. I could see the way water and electricity *convivían*, coexisted precariously on this patio the way they did in so many houses in Misiones. I saw the plugs, I felt the humidity in the air, saw the water running in the sink, stepped through the river of water running on the floor, tracked through by the dogs and the kids. It made me nervous. Another grandson with a crew cut walked about barefoot eating a popsicle, half red, half yellow. He wore a Mickey Mouse shirt and his frequent smiles revealed big chunky teeth.

Lurking on the edge of the back patio in a green sweater and white collar was Presencia's father who strained to be in on the conversation. He had on jeans and wore a pair of older leather brown shoes with brass buckles. His shadow hovered on the dust-streaked edge of the patio, an

especially grotesque kind of Quixote. I had never seen him do anything in other visits, but he was anxious to talk about himself and tried to do so with me. He lit a cigarette and took in the smoke. With his neatly groomed silver hair, slim frame, and his eagerness to tell stories, no one would ever know that he had done the things Presencia had recounted.

He was eighty-three, he told me, and had been a *tarefer@* all his life. His brother died years ago in a fire. He had tried to light a fire in the room to get smoke to keep the mosquitos away but the mattress had then caught fire. He tried to go in and save the man, but there was only one door. He was completely burned up inside and the brother had burns on his head and face. He showed them to me. It was hard for me to listen, as I felt the internal conflict of what Presencia had told me about him.

I asked him about his early years. What of Presencia's mother? I asked. She had followed him when he was fifteen, or kind of threw herself at him, he said. She liked other men. I ask him her name and he told me she was Victoria. Later Presencia said to me and her husband:

See how he lied to you about my mother's name? He does not want me to know anything about her. You know they almost killed him in Paraguay and he crossed the river for treatment here. I stayed in the hospital with him for twenty-two days. Yeah, he came from Paraguay at twelve. At fourteen, he killed a Brazilian. At fifteen he came back. At sixteen he was with my mama.

The sun shone through the front patio, now abandoned because all the activity has moved to the back porch and to the inside. Presencia and her husband had taken care of her father for thirty-one years, it turned out. Finally Presencia reached a good stopping point in her work, and we sat down together outside. I had brought her photos of her garden and of the day we spent

together in *la capuera* looking for plants. “My garden this year was stunning,” she said, “but now the freeze has nipped away all the bloom.”¹⁰⁴

We sat outside near that clothes that hung on the line. The back yard was littered with wood chips, and there was a circle just beneath the clothesline of an old fire, a pole left propped up against the chain link fence. Her husband joined us. He was nicknamed “The Toad” perhaps because of his body type and calm nature. This gave me a chance to talk a bit more about his life, as well as his life with Presencia. He had begun work as a machine operator when he was eighteen. At the end of the *yerba* harvest one year, he had been invited to work in the *secadero* where he worked until he retired in 2012. I invited him to tell me more about Presencia who he had met when he was thirty-five:

I already had one child from one woman and three kids with another. Some women were wild and rebellious (*retovadas*) in those days. I worked day and night. I knew about her life, how she lived, how her father abused her. We all lived in the same neighborhood, and she lived with her father and her kids. He was abusive, and he beat one of his wives. He would beat her. If he did not go to the *yerbal*, he beat her. Her face would swell, her eyes, everything. That neighborhood was just like this one...everyone could see everything. I saw how much she suffered and probably we understood one another. And I was good with women. I got together with her when I was thirty-five and she was twenty-four. She already had six kids.

¹⁰⁴ Presencia’s house often is full of people. I could never tell exactly who lived there and who was visiting. That day a young couple has come to visit from Paraguay, some relative of Presencia’s. They are freshly dressed to get on the bus to go back into town to catch the boat to Paraguay. The handsome young father wears a red and white striped shirt with a blue collar. He has a brand new tiny baby girl who wears a pink hat, an orange and white furry bib. She sleeps with her tiny hands folded together. One of Presencia’s grandchildren, a girl with a head of curls dressed in a long sleeved blue button down shirt spent the whole afternoon doodling on paper that I gave her with just a pen. Her concentration was remarkable. The more I complemented her drawings the more determined she was to draw all the more. Her little cherub face was set with intensity as she tucked her little blue school notebook underneath her arm and headed off to make more art. “She is so talented,” I said to Presencia. “Yes, I hope she continues on in school. She’s got to go on. What else will become of her?” Presencia responded.

Sapo talked about the old days when *tarefer@s* were paid better and things were cheaper. Before their had been lots of jobs, the *yerba* was clean and it was weeded. There was work to be found weeding, clearing with machetes, *raleo* (hauling wood) of eucalyptus, pine and *calivero* (the pine that doesn't have thorns). Before on Saturday and Sunday, he and Presencia had collected tung (a fruit that can be converted to oil) in order to pay for our electricity. All the kids had come with them. We sat talking together late into that afternoon. Presencia passed the *mate* around. The *yerba* she used was the *Aguantadora* brand, that of the local cooperative.¹⁰⁵

The Dialectic in the Production of Life

Bringing to light Presencia's scavenging of food sources like *la cabeza de vaca* helps reveal contrasts, both real and symbolic, in everyday life in urban areas and rural abodes at the site of food production. Indeed a *cabeza de vaca* with greater symbolic value resounds throughout Argentina, that of the Spanish explorer Alvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the man who some allege to be the first European to see Iguazú Falls. Presencia's home was located just one hundred and twenty kilometers to the south of the falls. Cabeza de Vaca was famous for having survived captivity by multiple Native American groups in the 16th century. Once a slave trader who studied and recorded the "other" long before anthropology was officially inaugurated, he was eventually persecuted in Argentina, sent to Spain and died a pauper there. Ironically, part of the way he survived was to become a *curandero*, or a healer. His enduring fame as a singular European masculine figure, whose relationship with the natural New World usurps the historical importance of multiple indigenous peoples, stands in contrast to the invisibility of people such as Presencia. Indeed she is only one in generations of women dispossessed, scattered into the countryside and forgotten over time, while Cabeza de Vaca has been immortalized. His memory

¹⁰⁵ *Aguantadora* means enduring or resilient.

feeds into the way the history of the falls, the province of Misiones, and all things *yerba mate* have been channeled into a portrait of the single masculine.

Presencia's story appears another view of history, the view of the labor that actually sustains life or produces life. As she worked to make food out of the *cabeza de vaca* before her, her bloodied hands inverted the mystique surrounding *la cabeza de vaca* and appear the real process of the giving and taking of life. In bringing working agriculture into view, we may tend to cast away the view of the eyes and brain of the cow, and go for its fleshiest part only. In Argentina, after all, the flesh of the cow is heavily fetishized. Being able to eat more meat is a sign of status, while the best meat is now exported to Europe. But *la cabeza de vaca* is obliterated in everyday consumption, its great jaws cast to the side. By gleaning the head of the cow, Presencia used what others have thrown out in order to feed her children. To have to turn to the refuse of a *cabeza de vaca* would be unthinkable to many, would bring shame because of the intense feeling of eating something which others consider noxious. But Presencia turned to the *cabeza de vaca* for sustenance, and her vital gleaning, her practice of making due in the face of scarcity instead of participating in an economy of waste is vital to all of our future. Many around her, in fact more and more people, now hope to avoid this kill scene and to be able to go in to a supermarket with money in hand and ask for food already prepared. To walk out as clean as they came in. Most of Presencia's children had left the countryside when they could and relied upon government welfare to make ends meet. But defetishization means that her labor and its value must be appeared.

Conclusion

As I wrote up Presencia's story, I realized how she reminded me of other women whose remarkable and irreverent lives have been documented by feminist anthropologists, in particular

Ruth Behar's *Esperanza* (1993) and Anna Tsing's *Diamond Queen* (1993). *Presencia* was unruly, she was bound to go off, to yell and threaten dogs with sticks. Yet it was almost impossible to match both her extended suffering and her resilience. Twenty years after those lives were written, it is becoming more and more difficult to find these "marginal 'hillbillies'" as Anna Tsing described the diamond queen (1993: 7). Eco-feminists such as Shiva though, for all the critiques waged against them, have not wavered in keeping their finger on the map to remember sites of such dwelling in which gender violence, ecological destruction, rural exodus and heightened food insecurity go hand in hand.

In this chapter, I have hoped to show not only the fine grains of *Presencia*'s life but also the value of her experience in the "production of life" (Mies 1986). In the end, what is the difference between places in the middle of nowhere and the local, per Harcourt and Escobar? Wendell Berry as invoked by bell hooks in her memoir *Belonging* believes that "the particularizing force of imagination is a force of justice... the highest earthly result of imagination is local adaptation." (Hooks 2009: 167). Berry and hooks together recall a "backwoods ethic" and an art of survival of the black folks in the Kentucky countryside where most blacks were "skilled in the arts-of-make-do and subsistence" (167). When they moved to cities in mass migration "all of this know-how was suddenly of no value" (hooks quoting Berry 1968: 181). hooks writes of "estrangement from our agrarian past" and the "trauma that took place when country life lost meaning and visibility" (181). Her memory allows her to entwine the narratives of historical trauma endured by the most marginal of folk, 'embodied materialism' (Salleh), and working agricultures as I have invoked them here. Indeed she vividly describes the same forces at play in *tarefer@* communities in Northeast Argentina.

Presencia, a subaltern trapped in a place of exploration and exploitation in the shadows of Iguazú Falls and the *yerba mate* economy, is forgotten officially. But in the everyday, bodies such as hers have been used as sites to play out male violence inflicted on men who then must inflict it on women and children in their lives. Her father's status as the most stigmatized laborer, *el tarefero*, takes another turn in accounts of the incredible power he wielded over the women whom he battered and possibly killed. Gleaning and gender violence intertwine to unveil a gendered dispossession in which the bodies of women and children are sites on which the scaffolding of violence unfolds.

The vital ethic of gathering and gleaning in order to feed and sustain the life of those that she cares for is the same labor that Berry and hooks speak of in Appalachia. Being poor and living from what she could, Presencia practices an "environmentalism of the poor" that both eco-feminists and other theorists have argued is so fundamental to all of our survival (Nixon 2011; Salleh 2009). Her imprint maintains a balance in the working agriculture of her countryside (Williams 1973), the balance that the practitioners of agro-ecology both inside and outside of the academy have argued is essential for preserving life on earth (Perfecto et al 2009). It cannot be that her only option is to leave the countryside, migrate to the city and become reliant on the fickle trickle of government subsidies to feed herself and those whose lives she sustained.

Taking Harcourt and Escobar's call to write women's bodies in their "embodied places" together with an eco-feminist "embodied materialism" sheds light on anthropologies of place in which place involves being trapped. We must take this singular place-making emerging from female embodiment and the violence inflicted therein seriously. What has happened to Presencia in her life, what has been done to her body over time affects deeply her sense of belonging in the world. Nature both menaced and rescued her. The violence against her took place in natural

theaters and natural objects were used to beat her. As Presencia tells her life, violence is continuous, it varies across time. And the types of violence done to her body vary, but the violence does not cease, and the scars don't fade. Presencia's life presents a strong case against limiting categories of violence against women and looking to broader social and economic forces that facilitate and prolong this violence.

Presencia was above all a motherless child and then a mother, forced into motherhood over and over again. Motherhood formed the walls of her world, back to what she imagined she felt and thought as a motherless child. By recounting her story, she refused to let her mother's memory sink forever to the bottom of the Paraná River. No matter what, if she continued to tell the story, she might find her lost daughter too. These two terribly deep wounds could only be endured with an eternal hope of reunion. In her embodied, material way as symbolic as bosom, Presencia refused to be a motherless child. Even if her mother was disappeared from her, she vowed to talk of her, in order to stay connected to her so that she would not be left alone forever. Propelled into the fiercest kind of protection of herself, she carried on as a motherless child, wounded but strong at sixty.

I confess my own deep connection to Presencia as we knelt together in the *capuera* parsing through green leaves. This was what I had done in my own unruly childhood, off the grid on a whole other continent. We somehow understood one another from the moment we met. Perhaps it had to do with being mothers or for a passion for the world of plants or that we had both spent long hours in the weeds in open air where we worked through injustices in our imaginations. Presencia, of course, endured a burden a thousand times heavier than any of mine and had carried it for many decades longer. For this reason, I listened to her story with great care. I have now told it, as she was bound to tell it, in the memory of her mother.

When my family and I left Guatambú, we had to get rid of the few things we had accumulated in order to live day to day as a family. In the days before we left, a couple of people came by to see if we wanted to sell or give anything away. We had two very valuable items that most *tarefer*@ families could never afford: a small refrigerator and a semi-automatic washing machine. We sold the refrigerator to the widow next door at her request. But the washing machine would not be sold. On our very last day in Misiones, we loaded it into the car and drove off to the *vivienda*. It seemed to us that Presencia's patio was the perfect home for the washing machine, given that she had spent so many decades of her life washing the clothes of many by hand.



Figure 31: Presencia in her garden (Photo by Author, 2012).

Conclusion

Here We Are, Who We Were: The Making of *Tarefer@* Pride

Remembering May Day 2012 Guaraypo, Misiones

On a beautiful autumn day, Celia and Cándido organized their annual May Day *asado* (bbq) for their field crew and family. Some workers in rural Argentina still await a gesture of generosity from their employers on May Day, although it often never comes. The couples' feast represented a particularly dedicated gesture on their part as both *yerba* contractor and field boss. The roasted pig came from their farm along with boiled manioc from the field just across the way. Celia shared with me how she relished the chance to play host, for she had spent her life just like any other *tarefer@*, working as a child in the *yerbales*, camping far away from home in makeshift tents during harvests, and pushing through hardships like the death of her father when she was a child. Many times both Celia and Cándido expressed to me how unimportant money was to them. They dressed simply and kept a simple house. Neither drank or spent money at the casino. Rather, for them, the best way to spend their earnings was to share them with family and friends through celebrations such as this one.

A duo from the nearby city of El Dorado played through the afternoon. The young, dark-haired men wore matching blue blazers, white collared shirts, jeans, and snow-white tennis shoes. With an electronic keyboard, guitars, and two large amplifiers set upon on the red-soil stained cement floor, they played at the edge of the *quincho* that had been built when Celia's

mother was still alive. Dogs crossed the makeshift dance floor as members of Celia's crew went back and forth to order beer from Celia's female relatives through the open window in the wooden house. It was a mix of the past and present: Just several feet outside of the kitchen window were wooden shelters occupied by pigs soon to be converted to food; open green space divided the houses acting as both a soccer field and parking lot for a few cars; and an aging motorcycle stood parked in the sun.

The open country setting made for a place where people moved as they liked: A group of Celia's nephews and nieces pushed my one-year old daughter Luna in the stroller in the sun. People sat in dark green plastic chairs under both the *quincho* and the big shade trees, which cast leaf-shade patterns on the ground. Two men from Celia's crew shared a bottle of beer, passing it back and forth as they listened to the music. Her brother Hugo hung out at the side of the duo, throwing jokes into the microphone when he could. Celia sat in a sleeveless bright pink tank top with her trademark flip-flops and ever-present silver watch on her left wrist. She tapped on her cell phone with her fingers to the rhythm of the music. One of her sisters, Virginia, sat next to her, sporting a new haircut. She was slowly getting back to herself since her beloved husband Ramon's premature death from lung cancer just months' previous.

The duo rehearsed their version of *Tu Cárcel* (Your Prison), a classic ballad written by Marco Antonio Solís, the famous singer from Michoacán, Mexico. The song has been performed in countless theaters throughout the world and interpreted by many Latin American singers including *Los Enanitos Verdes*, the Argentine rock group. *Tu Cárcel* recounts a story of a poor woman who leaves her love for a rich man. The chorus warns: "But remember, no one is perfect and you will see – that you will have more than a thousand better things, but you will never have sincere affection" (Author's translation). As a consequence of her adventure, the woman would

never be able to leave “her prison”. Perhaps this song is so beloved, because it speaks to the power that a humble person feels when he or she is in love, no matter their material circumstances, and at the same time, to the dream that love alone might be enough. This sentiment was in the air that afternoon in Guaraypo, for in spite of their lack of money and social power, those at the dance enjoyed their own cultured circles of togetherness and affection. The song was sweetened by views of the red dirt roads all around us, the subtropical heat, and the harmony of the young men’s voices.

Don Pedro, a veteran *tarefero* who had worked with Celia for years, danced with one of Celia’s nieces. The girl kicked off her sandals and took to the floor with the elder, skilled dancer who wore a blue and white baseball cap and polished black shoes. She was slim, her long black hair pulled up, and her face cut in the unmistakable angles of the Cuba family. The couple danced in an alternating toe to heel motion to the beat of the music, Don Pedro’s left hand placed just under the girl’s right shoulder blade. Around them, four men played cards all afternoon as they smoked their cigarettes. Several people stood around to observe the game. Don Pedro and the girl danced a number of songs, and then he joined the others at the card table.

As the afternoon wore on, some *tarefer@s* got drunk. One of them, Miguel, eventually collapsed in the grass: “Such a shame,” Celia said to me, “He is a brilliant *tarefer@*, always harvests just about a 1000 kilos. But the drink has taken him over.” I knew that making alcohol available at the festival was part of the tradition and to not do so would not be well received. The feast went on for hours that day until dusk began to fall, and we all headed home to ready ourselves for the next days work.

Over two years later, now back in the U.S., I learned about Don Pedro’s death via Facebook messaging with Celia’s daughter-in-law, Carolina. It was just months before I was to

finish this dissertation. He had died from lung cancer too, just as his fellow *tarefero* Ramón had, back in the hot summer of 2012. I remember working with him in *la quebranza* and was so awed by the pace at which he worked and the way he mastered his trade. Just as Ramon's death left an aching, empty space in the crew, so too did Don Pedro's. His absence would be felt sharply in the truck, in the *yermal*, in the moments of rest, and at the May Day parties, for he brought laughter from the jokes he told and respect for his outstanding performance. As he flew around the *yerba* trees, cigarette dangling from his mouth, everyone remembered the bittersweet story of how he raised his children on his own, his wife having moved on to another. He had been one of Celia's own, and for her, another loved one had passed on before his time.

Beyond Total Suffering: A Feminist Ethnography of Connectedness and an Empowering Subjectivity

As I wrote this dissertation, I often thought back to this bright May Day and how moments like this feast compelled me eventually to frame this writing of lives as an ethnography of connectedness. Indeed this single May Day event, far off the cultural grid of Buenos Aires, was not a minor one. Rather, these kinds of sweet spaces and moments of people coming together in spite of bitter conflict and tragedy in “a politics of cooperation” are vital to our future “if we are to survive at all” (Sennett 2012; Williams 1973). I believe ethnography can contribute to bringing moments like a dance on an open-air stage to the forefront of how we contemplate social problems and their resolution, particularly in rural spaces. There are at least two approaches that I believe to be fundamental to making this possible.

The first regards the body of work on social suffering that has circulated for decades now in anthropology—how to document suffering for the sake of assuaging it and how to intervene to interrupt its force. Anthropologist Joel Robbins recently reflected on the intricate accounts of the

complex layers of suffering that many of us find in our field sites around the globe (Robbins 2013). He suggests a move toward an “anthropology of the good” in which we focus on “the ways people work on themselves so as to be able to realize the good in the creation of their moral selves” and “explore the ways they foster the good in their social relations”. Might we make a place in ethnography for “these aspirational and idealizing aspects of the lives of others” (458)?¹⁰⁶

I concur wholeheartedly with this view. But unfortunately, Robbins’ call highlights what I consider to be a tragic flaw in much of the work in anthropology that currently holds power: He builds his analysis exclusively from contemporary anthropology, mostly male authors, rather than such disciplines as social work, community psychology, and public health where both academics and practitioners have long used the very analytical lens that he considers to be novel. For example, in the decades that anthropologists built the body of work on suffering, many social workers and psychologists worked to do exactly what Robbins calls for with vulnerable people. In their offices, social service agencies, and in their writing, frontline workers worked side-by-side people in the everyday to help them gain empowerment for themselves and their communities. Indeed, I have both seen this practice in multiple settings and practiced what Robbins suggests in my own work. And social workers trained me how to do this work more skillfully. Why is it then that there is not a body of anthropological work that studies these ‘good’ practices?

Given the record so far, might it actually be time for anthropologists to work *together* more often with those trained to be frontline workers rather than producing single author monographs on social suffering that critique those very workers (Sennett 2012; Carr 2011)? I

¹⁰⁶ I am grateful to Stuart Kirsch for bringing this work to my attention.

believe that anthropology has a singular potential to inform better practices meant to assuage social suffering, and I have seen and practiced this firsthand. But I hope that this dissertation has made the case for contemporary anthropologists to work more *together* with those from other disciplines to generate interventions that assuage suffering. Indeed those conducting engaged anthropology in Latin America have long taken an interdisciplinary approach to intervene in the suffering that fills the pages of their ethnographies (*See e.g.* Speed 2008, 2006; Rappaport 2008, 1990; Escobar 2008).

The second dimension of combatting the trope of suffering involves using ethnography to pinpoint and realize interventions to alleviate that suffering. Even as I used my past training in law and social work in Misiones to work with people, I learned how valuable the tool of anthropology via ethnography can be. So many contemporary anthropologists encounter lives akin to that of Catarina whom João Biehl wrote of in his study on Vita, an asylum in Porto Alegre, Brazil where people are left to die.¹⁰⁷ Biehl's description of this kind of field site parallels those from which so much current ethnography is built:

Zones of abandonment make visible realities that exist through and beyond people...the fundamentally ambiguous being of people in these zones, caught as they are between encompassment and abandonment, memory and nonmemory, life and death" (Biehl 2005: 4).

Ethnography for Catarina, he argues, helps to "historicize the apparent intractability of her conditions and to propel new events" (209). To this end, Biehl became an advocate in her life, trying to advocate for improved services for her. Hence the work ahead is not merely to write an account of suffering and precarity but also to act on it some way or another.

¹⁰⁷ I am grateful for Ruth Behar's reminder that I return to Biehl's work in finalizing this dissertation.

Unlike the acute suffering experienced in an asylum, the suffering I saw in Misiones was spread out across the landscape, hidden in green spaces and far down red dirt roads. But at key times, this suffering was made visible when people visited hospitals or when *tarefer@s* gathered in the union barn. There the suffering became both evident and concentrated when people gathered together to try to press to get their needs met. This dissertation brings this kind of agrarian portrait out of the corner of history to link it to urban anthropology. Rather than taking up urban poverty as the birth site of suffering as urban anthropology often does, I prioritize the continuum of rural exodus in which poverty forces rural residents like those born in Misiones out of the countryside into urban poverty in cities like Buenos Aires.

I also use the construction of the bittersweet dwelling in *mate* country to inform studies on subjectivity across the disciplines. In my work in Misiones, I worked both listen empathically to stories and as an advocate by connecting people in need to resources that might help them. My past practice as a social worker also fortified my labor solidarity work in the sense that I was able to work with people both from a psychological standpoint and with an ethic of social justice. Importantly, this involves focusing on empowerment and highlighting strengths already present in individuals and communities that have literally kept them alive. Part of seeing sweetness in everyday life is to see the remarkable resilience of those like Presencia who have managed to sustain other lives in spite of her own suffering. The work of anthropology informed by social work can be to acknowledge these strengths and work together to lend a hand to enhance empowered selves and communities.

Writing into the body of literature on abject suffering whose ground floor was formed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes' seminal work *Death Without Weeping* (1992), Paul Farmer writes:

It's not acceptable for those of us fortunate enough to have ties to universities and other "resource rich" institutions to throw up our hands and bemoan the place-to-place complexity. Underlying this complexity is a series of very simple first principles regarding human rights...(Farmer 2005: 229).

He defends an ethic of "pragmatic solidarity" which includes "bringing to light the real story" and "taking a stand by the side of those who suffer most" (229, 246). Scheper-Hughes herself has gone on to enact a 'militant anthropology' in response to human suffering (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 2000, 2009). Many other examples abound, and this ethnography aims to contribute to these multiple ethics of solidarity.

This dissertation actively works to break down the walls between agrarian and environmental studies, psychological anthropology, and clinical social work. Too often work on landscapes and environment is constructed *apart from* work on mental health crises that plague many poor communities in Latin America and around the world. My work in Misiones connects environment and historical landscapes directly with the psychosocial wellbeing of those who inhabit it. The bittersweet dwelling and suffering are linked to environmental histories and dispossession. Excellent ethnography on New Mexico demonstrates how the two are directly linked: In his work on forests in New Mexico, Jake Kosek alludes to a heroin epidemic as he writes of "chronic struggles" which link to "popular discourses on cultural loss and the backward rural economy of northern New Mexico...[these] depoliticize Hispano poverty and racism and target their source as the "culture" and "tradition" of the isolated community rather than the political economy and the cultural politics that have produced the region's social conditions" (Kosek 2006, Preface). In turn, Angela Garcia's compelling work on heroine addiction in the same state addresses "historically situated pains" which creates the terrible conditions for which heroine addiction brings down entire families (Garcia 2010: 72).

I found this same spirit in Misiones, but I must confess that my own views transformed from the time I was in the field to the years that I was writing in the dissertation. Upon return from the field, I carried with me certain bitterness about how ugly everyday interpersonal relations can be in such environments ranging from malicious gossip to people living on guard from ongoing theft of livestock and property used to achieve a livelihood. Over time, I did my work as a researcher that involved reading more to understand what I had seen and experienced on the ground in Misiones. This permitted me to offer a more informed understanding of these patterns, and I was challenged to look at my own visceral reactions with a critical eye. Otherwise, I would have fallen into making generalizations and blame.

But it is vital to point out that those who are immersed in everyday life of this kind have no access to important kinds of relief: These include the luxury of going off to study in university settings where one might develop critical views of race and class and question one's own stances to the luxury that most scholars enjoy which is coming and going from the field. Rather, complete and exhausting immersion in the sharpness of everyday interpersonal politics leaves people bitter and exhausted and creates the kind of "endlessness" that Garcia discussed in her tragic portrait of Alma, a woman who eventually died of a heroin overdose (Garcia 2010). With no relief, people slip back into everyday dark cynicism in which race and class prejudices thrive.

I witnessed this in the context of my long-term ethnographic relationships with Rubén, Celia, and Sara who all were fiercely good people but at times lapsed into bitter releases about such matters as people stealing from them, engaging in corruption, or filing labor lawsuits based on invented truths. But this dissertation has also contributed to the politics of memory that highlights the lives of those who struggle in the day to day to do the right thing, in spite of other

practices all around them. I do not view my critique of these lapses, no matter how stubborn and prolonged they may be, to be sufficient to the extent that my work is done. Rather I believe that it is the work of anthropologists in environments such as these to move beyond cultural critique and to work together with others to intervene actively in the very cultural and socioeconomic conditions which lead to this kind of damaging prejudicial de-politicization. This dissertation does so by taking up the lives of rural workers and linking critical agrarian studies to social work and psychological anthropology in order to break down the walls of disciplines. This permits a more holistic understanding of the everyday social problems that affect working people. And I also hope to do this via an enduring commitment to future collaborations with the communities in Misiones that I have worked over these years.

The Bittersweet in Working Agricultures: Contributions to Social Work and Agrarian, Commodity, Womens's and Labor Studies

In this dissertation, I have journeyed to the heart of spaces of 'working agricultures' in *yerba mate* country like the one I have just described. In crafting a feminist ethnography of connectedness, I have labored to bring the lives of people such as these out of the shadows of history and onto the page, revealing their bittersweet dwelling both in and out of the *yerbal*. In doing so, I contribute to the growing body of work that scrutinizes more fair practices in commodity production by focusing on relationships. I invoke anew the ethic of 'creative practice' per Raymond Williams of countering hegemonic patterns in which we confront "a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships" (Williams 1977: 2012). It is through these relationships that the hidden violence and suffering in the commodity fetishism of *yerba mate* and other commodities can be unveiled and countered in the spirit of creating more equitable working agricultures on which all of our

future survival relies (Williams 1973; Shiva 2012; Perfecto et al 2009). Although this dissertation concerns a regional economy, it speaks to making connections across multiple fields including anthropology, agrarian studies, psychology and social work, and gender, labor and environmental studies. In this sense, I hope that the politic of connectedness extends both throughout and beyond anthropology. Twenty-first century depictions of inequality ranging from works such as Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums* (2007) and Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (2010) to the more recent groundbreaking examination of global inequality by Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) show the urgent need for us to both write and work across disciplines in order to capture the global state of things and intervene when possible in the lives of the world's most vulnerable.

In challenging the trope of total suffering, I argue that the ethnographic affect of bittersweet illuminates simultaneously both the need to focus on exploitation at the production site and the ways in which people who labor and live in green spaces also gain vital strength from the natural world. Those whose lives I have told in part in this dissertation reflected much of what bell hooks writes of when she rediscovers the healing power of the natural world in the lives of the rural black folk of her Kentucky childhood home: "Their strength came from knowing they could look at the hills and be restored—that no matter the deathly deeds of humans, the earth would stand as their eternal witness" (hooks 2009: 201). Moreover, a politics of connectedness begins with the principle that defetishizing *yerba mate* means connecting *my* life to those in this book, indeed all of *our* lives to theirs. It means that I recognize the *value* of their lives and the *loss* of those lives such as Don Pedro's, rather than moving on as though they had not lived.

On the one hand, the loss of life that I have experienced of people I came to know in Misiones leaves the feeling of heavy nostalgia that so often haunts all things related to the countryside and renders it a space of the past (Williams 1973). Here, I am reminded of the famous folksong of Argentine folksinger Atahualpa Yupanqui called “*Preguntitas Sobre Dios*” (Little Questions About God) in which a boy asks his grandfather where God is. He does not answer, so he asks his father, who also has no answer. In fact, no one has an answer for “God sits at the table of the boss,” not of poor, exploited workers.¹⁰⁸

Yet if a future for working agricultures is to be contemplated, the death of Don Pedro, Isaías Carré, Roberto Aichelero, and Leroy Hertzfeld—at least some of the people I knew who have gone, cannot be read with such bitterness. And it is in this music of this last May Day dance for Don Pedro, that the other side of dwelling in *yerba mate* country is found which must be told: There is sweetness too in the *yerbal* and in the lives of those who inhabit it. There are dances, festivals, laughter, joking, friendships and helping hands in the everyday all over *yerba mate* country, in spite of much bitter conflict and distrust.

Moreover, in my account of *tarefer@s* resistance, I make contributions to labor and agrarian studies by bringing into focus the intergenerational intersections of biography and protest that build toward both everyday and organized resistance to exploitation and erasure in *la tarefa*. Through an examination of the power felt in space and place in Chapter Four The Taking of the Green Gold Highway, I have shown that *tarefer@s* find and practice dreamscapes of power and community, particularly through the incredible dedication of activists like Rubén Ortiz. In Chapter Five, Everyday Litigants, I worked to understand everyday labor conflict and

¹⁰⁸ Yupanqui’s song goes: *Abuelo murió en los campos sin rezo ni confesión, y lo enterraron los indios, con flauta de caña y tambor* -- Grandfather died in the country without prayer or confession and the Indians buried him with flute and drum.

lawsuits through the eyes of those who produce food for others. Rather than righteous condemnation of the labor practices of small farmers, I have tried to see what the everyday labor of food production entails and see ways in which people work together the best they can to improve the livelihoods of each other. Everyday resistance also takes on the form of caring for another, no matter what. But I have exposed too the poisonous practices of both the corrupt state and laws that turn pernicious once they play out on the stage of patronage politics. Resistance to this corruption continues.

Finally, through writing the life of Presencia, I have labored to unveil the gender violence at play in the countryside together with the vital labor of gardening, gleaning, scavenging, healing, and raising children that a woman like Presencia engages in so that the lives of others might be sustained. In doing so, I have invoked for further discussion some of the fundamental precepts in ecofeminist theory which take seriously the role of women in ‘the production of life’ together with the way violence against them and the natural world so often intertwine (Mies 2009). From here forward, it is my hope that agrarian studies and academic production on commodities takes as fundamental the life-sustaining work of women at play in rural landscapes around the globe and the gender violence that intervenes in devastating ways (Shiva and Mies 2014).

I have argued that a *politics of connectedness* forces each of us to feel both the pain and the joy of *another* rather than rendering “the other” invisible. In bringing to this page and putting to *memory* the creative practices at play in both labor and resistance of those in *yerba mate* country (Taussig 1980), I have worked to place the trope of total suffering firmly to the side. The bittersweet dwelling that ensues in Misiones means that with joy comes pain: In my own mid-life writing, I can say that if I want to return to a place where people still double over with laughter

even as they will invite a stranger to a mouthwatering home cooked meal, I will return to the homes of some of the people who inhabit the pages of this dissertation. This kind of agrarian joy, inflected with the impalpable synergy of things bittersweet in *aire libre* (fresh air), is the energy that has inflected working agricultures for centuries, and yet is threatened by the massive force of rural exodus around the globe (Berger 1979). In Misiones, as certain as it was that I witnessed suffering and hard lives deep in the countryside, I could not compare this to the festering violence at play on the poor peripheries of Montecarlo and Oberá where the sharp inequality right next door breeds social violence in the everyday. Eliminating green spaces and forcing producers out of the countryside only interrupts the capacity of people to cooperate together (Sennett 2012).

Having begun this dissertation in the past forest harvest of *yerba mate* in the brutal system of debt peonage, I end it with this question: Who gets to have a future, and who is condemned to the past? I hope to have made clear through the twin practices of connectedness and memory that those who have been erased most by the fetishism of *yerba mate* deserve a future both in the way their lives are written and in the way their lives are played out on the ground in the everyday spaces of Misiones. This dissertation finally demonstrates that developing ‘continuing relationships’ per Raymond Williams is at the heart of conducting engaged or collaborative anthropology. I do not believe the point is to assess how macro or micro the intervention might be, but rather to make a goal of enduring connections (Williams 1976). As Williams reminded us, we have to strive toward a habited countryside (1973). During the space and time of this dissertation research and writing, I have intensified my collaborations in Misiones, even though from afar. I have done this through continuing labor solidarity work with the *tarefer@* union in Montecarlo such as organizing food and transport relief in order for

tarefer@s and teachers to afford to go to Buenos Aires to testify before Congress about unfair events occurring in Misiones. In Misiones, I have created a memorial scholarship in memory of Isaías Carré for high school youth who live deep in the *colonia*. That scholarship was inaugurated in July of 2014 with the first recipient, Fabrizio Da Silva, graduating in December of 2014 from the Escuela Familia Agrícola (EFA) of Dos de Mayo, just miles from Isaías's farm. In recognition of people like Presencia, I continue to make the issue of violence against women and children a central concern in my solidarity work with both the teacher and *tarefer@* union. But at the end of a good day's work is the need for a celebration...

A *Tarefero* Sings: Labor Solidarity and Contributions to Collaborative Anthropology

During and after the highway blockades of the late summer of 2012, I observed that many of those who most put their body on the line were least recognized. They had shown up day after day, making long journeys in the hot sun to make their contribution toward improving the price of green leaf, but they remained anonymous, disappearing back into their spaces of private suffering. Thinking toward the politics of memory, I initiated a conversation with Rubén about a way in which we could both recognize and celebrate their contribution. After all, I had observed how the *colonos* heartily celebrated their victory. Why not a celebration for the *tarefer@s*? What I had that perhaps no one else had was the resources to help make a celebration happen. When I had applied for and was awarded the National Science Foundation's Graduation Research Fellowship Award, I promised that my research would have "broader impacts". Given that my NSF stipend was in dollars and when changed to Argentine pesos, those dollars gained value, I calculated that I could contribute the funds necessary to provide food and drink for a sizable group of people in a commemoration ceremony. But I knew I was leaving soon and I knew that

we could do more. What I had discovered through the years was that although people did not read so much, they were very much interested in photos.

Therefore on May 12, 2012, about two months after the victories achieved in the 2012 highway blockades in Montecarlo, we organized a commemorative celebration for those *tarefer@s* who had most contributed to the struggle. In the long days leading up to the celebration, we worked hard to organize the feast. How could our recognition contribute to making *tarefer@* memory? Drawing on research from social work and community psychology as well as my knowledge of themes of empowerment during civil rights struggles for African Americans, Chicanos, women, and gay and lesbian people, I suggested that we create two large photomurals of recent history of both life in the *yermal* and in *tarefer@* organizing since 2009. These murals would provide a “sweet” contrast to the union banner which depicted *tarefer@* suffering in informal camps. It was a collaborative process: I contributed photos from the *yerbales* and many others, particularly Rubén, his wife Iris, and Rudi Gimenez contributed photos from protests. Federico and I used our own past practices in activism to write together empowering refrains of poetry that would frame the murals. We inaugurated them at an *asado* that we held at the rural high school in Santa Rosa, right down the road from where we lived. It was the same school where Rubén had taught high school for some seventeen years, and the same community in which the union had incubated that hot summer of 2009 when hunger had taken the community over. At the commemoration, we presented certificates of acknowledgement to the core of women who worked so hard to keep the union running in the day to day. So too did Don Villalba perform several songs that he had written about people he felt had made the world a better place. I had learned of his talent in the *yerbales*. Federico “Chila” Chilavert helped organize the ceremony from beginning to end, for he is the former

student of Rubén’s who brought the hunger to light and today operates as an invaluable organizer in the union. It was the first time in history that such an event had occurred in which *tarefer@s* were celebrated for their culture, resistance, and contribution to the *yerba mate* economy all at once. The twin photomurals still hang in the *galpón* today: They travel with *tarefer@s* to highway blockades, marches, and even to the streets of Buenos Aires. Then they are returned to the union walls for people of all generations to see the *making of tarefer@ pride*.



Figure 32: Singer songwriter Don Santos Villalba performs at a commemoration ceremony for *tarefer@s* while Federico “Chila” Chilavert provides support (Photo by Author, May 2012).



Figure 33: Photomural of *tarefer@* empowerment hangs on the wall of the *galpón* (Photo by Author, May 2014).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The poetry reads: *Del yerbal al Parlamento luchamos con dignidad y cosechamos nuestra historia para decir una verdad: EL ORGULLO DE SER TAREFER@* (From the *yerbal* to

Ayeres y mañanas¹¹⁰

Thousands of miles from *la tierra colorada*, I imagine a tomorrow where all greens emerge clearly in the light that falls upon a walled cemetery. The deep and powerful Paraná River flows just meters to the west, its traitorous currents churning in wait, its fog-whispers creeping inland. There is a freshly dug grave piled high with every color of flower, cut just for a queen. When the heat rises in the early afternoon during the time that all seek shade, there comes a trio of folk who sit near the fresh grave and pull from a knapsack a red and white plastic thermos, a small cone-shaped silver metal cup, and a bag marked *Buen Día*. A woman opens the bag and pours from it finely ground leaf. She then stretches forth her hand to *la capuera* and plucks from it a plant. She adds this fresh green leaf to the faded green mélange of roasted branch and leaf, pours cold water from the thermos, inserts and adjusts the *bombilla*, taking her first sip of *tereré*. The sound of the water breaks through and she draws out the last of the water from the bottom, the staccato sound breaking the thick, wet air. She fills the *mate* again and passes it to the man beside her: The round of *tereré* has begun in memory of a great *tarefera*. From her life, grows the green leaf, and so too the memory of hers and so many others' *hands on the green leaf...here they are, who they were*.

Parliament we struggle with dignity and harvest our history in order to tell one truth: We are proud to be *tarefer@s*)

¹¹⁰ From a story Celia told me about her love for green leaf, about pressing on in the face of a storm to gather green leaf, about the way other *tarefer@s* were mystified by her love for the *yerbal*, and what her truck driver proposed to do in her memory the day she passed on.



Figures 34: Celia Cuba at rest in the *yerbal* near Cuatro Bocas, Misiones (Photo by Author, July 2012).



Figures 35: Celia's' tools and work product in the *yerbal* near Cuatro Bocas, Misiones (Photo by Author, July 2012).

Bibliography

Agarwal, Bina

2010 *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence within and Beyond Community Forestry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

—
2001 A Challenge for Ecofeminism: Gender, Greening, and Community Forestry in India. *Women & Environments International Magazine*. Toronto: Fall, Issue 52/53, p.12.

—
1998 Environmental Management, Equity, and Ecofeminism: Debating India's Experience. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 25, 4, July.

—
1994 *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Agencia Hoy

2015 January 28. Montecarlo: Barreto se reunio con tareferos para que suspendan protestas.
http://www.agenciahoy.com/notix/noticia/politica/68239_strongmontecarlo-barreto-se-reunioacute-con-tareferos-para-que-suspendan-protestasstrong-.htm . Accessed March 13, 2015.

Albrecht, Glenn

2005 Solastalgia: a New Concept in Human Health and Identity. *Philosophy Activism and Nature* 3: 41-44.

Alsina, Juan.

1905. *El obrero en la República Argentina*. Buenos Aires, Impr. calle de México, 1422.

Altieri, M.A. and Toledo, V.M..

2011. The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38:3: 587-612.

Altieri, Miguel A.

1995. *Agroecology. The Science of Sustainable Agriculture*. Boulder: Westview.

Álvarez, Rivadulla, María José.

2012 Clientelism or Something Else? Squatter Politics in Montevideo. *Latin American Politics and Society* 54:1:37-63.

Ambrosetti, Juan Bautista

2008 Primer y segundo viaje a Misiones por Juan Bautista Ambrosetti: Comentado por Juan Carlos Chebez y Barbara Gasparri. Buenos Aires: Editorial Albatross. Fundación de Historia Natural.

Anderson, Jon Lee

1997 Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life. New York: Grove Press.

Appadurai, Arjun

1996 Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—

1986 Commodities and the Politics of Value. *In* The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. A. Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aranda, Darío

2003 October 19. La yerba de la resistencia. Página 12.

<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-26992-2003-10-19.html>. Accessed August 31, 2014.

Argentine Government Websites

Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social <http://www.anses.gov.ar/> Accessed August 21 2013.

Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas website <http://www.mecon.gov.ar/> Accessed August 21 2013.

Asociación de Servicios de Promoción Laboral.

2003 Lo Que Hemos Vivido: Luchas de Mujeres Bananeras. San José, Costa Rica: ASPL.

Auyero, Javier

2012 Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina. Duke University Press.

—

2007 Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—

2003 Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests and the Quest for Recognition. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

—

2000. Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks & the Legacy of Evita. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

- Auyero, Javier, Pablo Lapegna and Fernanda Page
2009 Patronage Politics and Contentious Collective Action: A Recursive Relationship. *Latin American Politics and Society* 51:3:1-31.
- Bachelard, Gaston
1969 *The Poetics of Space*. Boston, Beacon Press
- Badgeley, C. Moghtader, J. Quintero, E. Zakem E. Chappell, M.J. Aviles-Vazquez, K. Samulon, A. and Perfecto, I.
2007 "Organic Agriculture and the Global Food Supply", *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, Vol. 22: 86-108.
- Bandera Proletaria 1926-1928.
2012 *Órgano de la Unión Sindical Argentina*. Cited in Victor Rau 2012.
- Barrett, Rafael
1908 *Lo que son los yerbales*. Montevideo: Talleres Gráficos "El arte".
- Bartolomé, Leopoldo
1975 Colonos, plantadores y agroindustrias. La explotación agrícola familiar en el sudeste de Misiones. *Revista Desarrollo Económico*, No 58, Vol 15, Buenos Aires, IDES.
- 2000 Los colonos de Apóstoles. Estrategias adaptativas y etnicidad en una colonia esclava en Misiones. Posadas: Editorial Universitaria de Misiones.
- Basso, Keith
1996 *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- 1996 *Wisdom Sits in Places*. In *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research.
- Bateson, Gregory
1972 *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Behar, Ruth
1993 *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- 1997 *Death and Memory*. In *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* 34-89. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Benson, Peter
2008 El Campo: Facility and Structural Violence in Farm Labor Camps. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(4): 589-629.
- Benson, Peter and Stuart Kirsch
2009 Capitalism and the Politics of Resignation. *Current Anthropology* 51(4):459-486.
- Berger, John
1979 *Pig Earth*. New York: Vintage International.
- Berry, Wendell
1989 *Healing the Wound*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Besky, Sarah
2013 *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bitlloch, Eduardo and Sormani, Horacio A.
1997 Los enclaves forestales de la región chaqueño-misionera. *Ciencia Hoy, Revista de Divulgación Científica y Tecnológica de la Asociación Ciencia Hoy*, Vol 7:37.
- Biehl, João
2005 *Vita: Life in a Zone of Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bolsi, Alfredo
1986 Misiones: una aproximación geográfica al problema de la yerba mate y sus efectos en la ocupación del espacio y el poblamiento. *In Folia Histórica del nordeste*, No 7, Instituto de Historia, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, Resistencia.
- 1980 El primer siglo de economía yerbatera en Argentina. *In Folia Histórica del Nordeste*, Número 4 Instituto de Historia, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de Nordeste, Resistencia-Corrientes.
- 1976 El proceso de poblamiento pionero en misiones (1830-1926). *In Folia Histórica del nordeste*, No 2, Instituto de Historia, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, Resistencia.
- Bowles, Jennifer S.
2010 Don't Forget Me: Cultivating a Politics of Trust Among Agricultural Workers in the Hinterlands of Northeast Argentina. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, Vol 3: 143-154.
- Brass, Tom
2014 *Class, Culture and the Agrarian Myth*. Leiden: Brill.
-

- 2011 Labour Regime Change in the Twenty-First Century: Unfreedom, Capitalism and Primitive Accumulation. Leiden: Brill.
-
- 2010 Capitalism, Primitive Accumulation and Unfree Labour. *In* H. Veltmeyer (ed.), *Imperialism, Crisis and Class Struggle: The Enduring Verities of Capitalism – Essays Presented to James Petras*. Pp. 67–149. Leiden: Brill.
-
- 2007 Neoliberalism and the Rise of (Peasant) Nations within the Nation: Chiapas in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective. *In* Sarah Washbrook (ed.), *Rural Chiapas ten years after the Zapatista Uprising*. Pp. 235–275. London and New York: Routledge.
-
- 2007 “A World Which is Not Yet”: Peasants, Civil Society and the State. *In* Raju Das (Ed.) *Peasant, State and Class*, A special issue of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 34, Nos. 3&4: 582–664.
-
- 2003 *Latin American Peasants*. London: Frank Cass.
-
- 2000 *Peasants, Populism, and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth*. London: Frank Cass.
-
- 2000 Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the (Re-) Emergence of a (Post-) Modernized (Middle) Peasant. *In* Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. Pp. 127–162 London: Verso (article first published in 1991 in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*).
-
- 1999 *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour. Case Studies and Debates*. *The Library of Peasant Studies*, 16. London: Frank Cass.
- Brass, Tom and Marcel van der Linden (Eds.)
 1997 *Free and Unfree Labour. The Debate Continues*, *International and Comparative Social History*, 5.
- Burtnik, Oscar José
 2006 *Yerba mate: Manual de producción*. 3rd ed. INTA Agencia de Extensión Rural Santo Tomé. INYM. Instituto Nacional de la Yerba mate. Corrientes Argentina.
- Brave Heart, M., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B.
 2011 *Historical Trauma among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations*. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43(4), 282–290. doi:10.1080/02791072.2011.628913.
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & DeBruyn, L. M.
 1998 *The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief*. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 8 (2): 60–82.

- Brennan, Teresa
2004 *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Brown-Rice, Kathleen
2014 *Examining the Theory of Historical Trauma Among Native Americans*.
<http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org/examining-the-theory-of-historical-trauma-among-native-americans/>. Accessed March 16, 2015.
- Brusco, Valeria, Marcelo Nazareno and Stokes, Susan C.
2004 *Vote Buying in Argentina*. *Latin American Research Review*, 39:2: 66-88.
- Cabral, Salvador
1990 *La agricultura de los guaraníes, en Misiones una provincia Argentina en el corazón de América*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor.
- Caminos, Celia
2013 April 4. *El mate, una pasión popular en Argentina*. *El País (Costa Rica)*
http://www.elpais.cr/frontend/noticia_detalle/7/66760. Printed.
- Caceres, Daniel M.
2006 *Agrobiodiversity and technology in resource-poor farms*. *Interciencia*, Vol. 31 No.6: 403-10.
- Carr, E. Summerson
2011 *Scripting Addiction: The Politics of Therapeutic Talk and American Sobriety*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press.
- Casey, Edward S.
1996 *How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena*. In *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research.
- Cerutti, Marcela and Alejandro Grimson
2013 *Neoliberal Reforms and Protest in Buenos Aires*. In *Neoliberalism, Interrupted*, eds. Mark Goodale and Nancy Postero. Pp.109-36. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Chebez, Juan Carlos and Hilgert, Norma
2003 *Brief History of Conservation in the Paraná Forest*. In *The Atlantic Forest of South America: Biodiversity Status, Threats and Outlook*. Eds. Carlos Galindo-Leal and Ibsen de Gusmao Camara. Washington: Island Press.
- Ciulla, Joanne B.
2000 *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*. New York: Random House.

- Clastres, Helene
1993 *La tierra sin mal: El Profetismo Tupi-Guarani*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del sol.
- Cochrane, Regina
2007 *Rural Poverty and Impoverished Theory: Cultural Populism, Ecofeminism, and Global Justice*. *Journal of Peasant Studies*.
- Cowan, Brian
2005 *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cortes, Rosalia and Gabriel, Kessler
-- *Argentina's Welfare Regime: Protection, Social Capital, and Citizenship, 1991-2005*.
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/cpa/spring06/welfare/corteskessler.pdf>.
Accessed February 15, 2014.
- Crawford, Matthew B.
2009 *Shopclass as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. New York: Penguin Press.
- de Certeau, Michel
1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- de Sagastizabal, Leandro
1984 *La yerba mate y Misiones*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina.
- Das, Veena
2007 *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Daumas, Ernesto
1930 *El problema de la yerba mate*. Buenos Aires: Compañía Impresora Argentina.
- Davis, Mike
2007 *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso.
- Del Campo, Eduardo
2013 *Rafael Barrett denuncia la esclavitud en 'Lo que son los yerbales'* (1908).
<http://www.fronterad.com/?q=rafael-barrett-denuncia-esclavitud-en-%E2%80%98lo-que-son-yerbales%E2%80%99-1908> Accessed March 25, 2014.
- Demombynes, Gabriel and Dorte Verner, et al.
2010 *The Invisible Poor: A Portrait of Rural Poverty in Argentina*. Washington, D.C.:

The World Bank.

Dominguez, Virginia

2000 For a Politics of Love and Rescue. *Cultural Anthropology*, 15/3: 361-93.

Doucet, M., & Rovers, M.

2010 Generational trauma, attachment, and spiritual/religious interventions. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, 15: 93–105. doi: 10.1080/15325 020903373078.

Duffy, Mignon

2007 Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 21 No 3: 313-336.

Duran, E.

2006 Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and other Native peoples. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Duran, E., & Duran, B.

1995 Native American Postcolonial Psychology. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Echo-Hawk, H.

2011 Indigenous Communities and Evidence Building. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43 (4): 269–275. doi:10.1080/02791072.2011.628920.

Evans-Campbell, T.

2008 Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23 (3): 316–338. doi:10.1177/0886260507312290.

Desmarais, Annette Aurélie

2007 *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*. London: Pluto Press.

Duffy, Mignon

2007 Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 21 No 3: 313-336.

Durrenburger, E. Paul and Karaleah S. Reichart, Eds.

2010 *The Anthropology of Labor Unions*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.

Durrenburger, E. Paul

2012 The Anthropological Study of Class and Consciousness. Edelman, Marc 2001 *Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics*. *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 30:1: 285-317.

- Escobar, Arturo
2008 Territories of Difference: Life, Movement, *Redes*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- 2001 Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization. *Political Geography* 20:139-174.
- Farmer, Paul
2005 Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Federici, Silvia
2012 Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle. Brooklyn, New York: Common Notions.
- 2009 The Devaluation of Women's Labour. *In Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice*, ed. Ariel Salleh. London: Pluto Press.
- 2004 Caliban and The Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Ferguson, James
1988 Cultural Exchange: New Developments in the Anthropology of Commodities (Review Essay). *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol .3, 4: 488-513.
- Ferrante, David de and Perry Guillerm E. Franciso H.G. Ferreira and Michael Walton
2004 Inequality in Latin America: Breaking with History? Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Ferrara, Francisco
2007 Los de la tierra: De las ligas agrarias a los movimientos campesinos. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.
- 2007 Entrevista con Francisco Ferrara: El campo en movimiento. Buenos Aires: Lavaca Editora.
- Fischer, Edward
2014 The Good Life: Aspirations, Dignity, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Fischer, Edward F. and Peter Benson
2006 Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Fisher Ted
2010 July 10 A Positive Anthropology
<http://anthropologicalobservations.blogspot.com/2010/07/positive-anthropology.html>
Accessed April 14, 2015.
- Folch, Christine
2010 Stimulating Consumption: Yerba Mate Myths, Markets, and Meanings from Conquest to Present". In Comparative Studies in Society and History 52(1): 6-36.
- Fornos, Carolina
1996 Explaining Voter Turnout in Latin America. Master's Thesis Louisiana State University.
- Fortunati, Leopoldina
1996 Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia.
- Foster, Robert J.
2008 Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fox, Jonathan
1994 The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico. World Politics 46:2:151-184.
- Frank, Dana
2005 Bananeras: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America. Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.
- Freire, Paulo.
1970 Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Seabury.
- Fricke, Tom
2006 Imagining Yhebe: Of Friendship and the Field. Michigan Quarterly Review 45(1):196-217.
- Gaffen, D.J., and R.J. Ross
1999 Climatology and trends of the U.S. surface humidity and temperature. J. Climate, 12: 811-828.
- Galindo-Leal, Carlos and Ibsen de Gusmao Cámara
2003 The Atlantic Forest of South America: Biodiversity Status, Threats and Outlook. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Gallero, Cecilia and Krautstofi, Elena

- 2008 Construcción de identidades en el marco de una provincia pluriétnica, Misiones Argentina. Congreso Argentino de Antropología Social, 2008.
- Garay, Candelaria
2007 Social Policy and Collective Action: Unemployed Workers, Community Associations, and Protest in Argentina. *Politics & Society* 35:2:301-328.
- Garcia, Angela
2010 *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession Along the Rio Grande*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giarracca, Norma (ed.)
2001 La protesta social en la Argentina. Transformaciones económicas y crisis social en el interior del país. Buenos Aires: Alianza.
- Ginneken, Wouter van (ed.)
1991 *Social Security for the Excluded Majority: Case Studies for Developing Countries*. Geneva: ILO.
- Giberti, G.C.
1992 Yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*). *In Cultivos marginados: otra perspectiva de*
1492 Hernández Bermejo, J.E. y L. León (Eds.). Pp. 245-252. Roma: Colección FAO, Producción Vegetal 26.
- Giraud, Eva and Grove, Samuel
2013 Posthuman Politics Under Biocapitalism. At http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/posthuman_politics_and_er_biocapitalism) Accessed April 14, 2015.
- Giraudy, Agustina
2010 The Politics of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Reproduction in Argentina and Mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 2, 2: 53-84.
- 2007 The Distributive Politics of Emergency Employment Programs in Argentina 1993-2002. *Latin American Research Review* 42, 2: 33-55.
- Gledhill, John
2002 Anthropology and Politics: Commitment, Responsibility, and the Academy.” *In The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory, and Critique*. Pp. 438-451. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers:.
- Gone, J. P.
2009 A community-based treatment for Native American historical trauma: Prospects for evidence-based practice. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 77 (4): 751-762. doi:10.1037/a0015390

- Gone, J. P., & Alcántara, C.
 2007 Identifying effective mental health interventions for American Indians and Alaska Natives: A review of the literature. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13 (4): 356–363. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.13.4.356
- Goodkind, J. R., Hess, J. M., Gorman, B., & Parker, D. P.
 2012 “We’re still in a struggle”: Diné Resilience, Survival, Historical Trauma, and Healing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 22 (8): 1019-1036. doi:10.1177/1049732312450324.
- Goodkind, J., LaNoue, M., Lee, C., Freeland, L., & Freund, R.
 2012 Involving Parents in a Community-based, Culturally Grounded Mental Health Intervention for American Indian Youth: Parent perspectives, Challenges, and Results. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40 (4): 468–478. doi:10.1002/jcop.21480.
- Gordillo, Gastón
 2008 The Clientelization of Ethnicity: Party Hegemony and Indigenous Political Subjectivities. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 17:3: 335-348.
- 2004 *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinian Chaco*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gortari, Javier
 2007 *El Tractorazo: hacia una economía política de la yerba mate*. Posadas: Editorial Universitaria de Misiones.
- Graeber, David
 2004 *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith
 1971 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Greear, Jake
 2013 Perception and Practice in the Agrarian Environmentalism of Wendell Berry and Martin Heidegger.
https://www.academia.edu/2002889/Perception_and_Practice_in_the_Agrarian_Environmentalism_of_Wendell_Berry_and_Martin_Heidegger. Accessed January 12, 2015.
- Gregory, Paul Roderick
 2013 No One Ever Learns (or do They): The Argentine Price Freeze.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2013/02/04/no-one-ever-learns-the-argentine-price-freeze/> Accessed February 10, 2015.

- Gutiérrez, Gustavo
1988 A Theology of Religion: History, Politics, Salvation. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Hale, Charles R. (Ed.)
2008 Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- 2001 What is Activist Research? Social Science Research Council. 2(1-2): 13-15.
- Harcourt, Wendy, Ed.
2012 Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods: Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Harcourt, Wendy and Arturo Escobar, Eds.
2005 Women and the Politics of Place. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Harper, Dennis A. and Helene M. Lawson, Eds.
2003 Introduction. The Cultural Study of Work. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Harrison, Rodney
2013 Heritage: Critical Approaches. Milton Park, Abingdon, New York : Routledge.
- Harvey, David
2003 The New Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Healey, Mark A.
2011 The Ruins of the New Argentina: Peronism and the Remaking of San Juan after the 1944 Earthquake. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Heatherton, Todd F. and Robert E. Kleck, Michelle R. Hebl, Jay G. Hull
2000 The Social Psychology of Stigma. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Heguy, Silvina
2009 Misiones, the Jesuits & The Guaraní Tribes: A Unique Experience. Buenos Aires: The Golden Company.
- Heidegger, Martin.
1977 Building Dwelling Thinking. *In* Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, D. Krell, ed., pp. 319-39. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hilgers, Tina

- 2012 Democratic Processes, Clientelistic Relationships, and the Material Goods Problem. *In* Tina Helgers (ed.) *Clientelism in Everyday Latin American Politics*. Pp. 3-22. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- 2009 Who is Using Whom? Clientelism From the Client's Perspective. *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 15:1: 51-75.
- Hodges, Donald C.
1988 *Argentina, 1943-1987*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Holmes, Seth
2013 *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farm Workers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hooks, Bell
2008 *Belonging: a Culture of Place*. New York : Routledge.
- Ingold, Tim
2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. New York: Routledge.
- 2000 *The Perception of Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- Jaffee, Daniel
2007 *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California.
- James, Daniel
2000 *Dona María's Story: Life History, Memory and Political Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- 1988 *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1955-1976*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kahn, Peter H. and Patricia H. Hasbach
2012 *Ecopsychology: Science, Totems, and the Technological Species*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kaplan, Martha
2007 *Fijan Water in Fiji and New York: Local Politics and a Global Commodity*. *Cultural Anthropology* 22(4):685-706.
- Karush, Matthew B.

- 2012 Blackness in Argentina: Jazz, Tango, and Race Before Perón. Past and Present 216 (1): 215-45.
- Kirsch, Stuar
2002 Rumor and Other Narratives of Political Violence in West Papau. Critique of Anthropology 22(1): 53-79.
- Kleinman, Arthur
2006 What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life amidst Uncertainty and Danger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kopytoff, Igor
1986 The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. *In* The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective. A. Appadurai, Ed. Pp.. 64-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kosek, Jake
2006 Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kweifio-Okai, Carla
2014 August 14 Which Development Studies Book Should Students Read? <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/aug/27/development-studies-books-students-read-review> Accessed April 14, 2015.
- La Nación
2012 Febrero 16 Diputados opositores quieren citar Nilda Garré para que informe sobre el "Proyecto X" <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1449244-que-es-el-proyecto-x-de-espionaje> Accessed August 14, 2014.
- Lagier, Jerónimo
2008 La Aventura de la Yerba Mate: Más de Cuatro Siglos de Historia. Self-published with corporate sponsors including INYM. Argentina.
- Lanza, N. and Valeggia, C.
2012 Transitions and reproduction in an indigenous community of northern Argentina. *Revista Argentina de Antropología Biológica* 14(1):33-43.
- Lapegna, Pablo
2013 Social Movements and Patronage Politics: Processes of Demobilization and Dual Pressure. *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 28, No. 4. DOI: 10.1111/socf.12059.
- Lassiter, Luke Eric

- 2005 Collaborative Ethnography and Public Anthropology. *Current Anthropology*. 46(1): 83-106.
- Lassiter, Luke Eric, Hurley Goodall, Elizabeth Campbell, and Michelle Natasya Johnson
2004 *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Lazar, Sian
2008 *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lawrence
2015 <http://anarchy101.org/user/lawrence> Accessed March 13, 2015.
- Levin, Shana and Colette van Laar
2006 *Stigma and Group Inequality: Social Psychological Perspectives*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Levins, Richard
1990 The Struggle for Ecological Agriculture in Cuba. *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, Vol. 16(3):7-25.
- Lewis, Michael
1992 *Shame: The Explored Self*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Linebaugh, Peter
2007 *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- López, Ann Aurelia
2007 *The Farmworkers' Journey*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- López, Adalberto
1974 The Economics of Yerba mate in Seventeenth-Century South America. *Agricultural History* 48, 4: 493–509.
- 1976 *The Revolt of the Comuneros, 1721–1735: A Study in the Colonial History of Paraguay*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company.
- Luongo, Matthew T.
2014 Argentina Rediscovered its African Roots. *The New York Times*.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/travel/argentina-rediscovered-its-african-roots.html>
Accessed 9/18/2015.
- Lyon, Sara

- 2011 Coffee and Community: Maya Farmers and Fair Trade Markets Boulder: University of Colorado Press.
- Machón, Jorge
2005 San Francisco de Paula y Los Kaingang de las Altas Misiones. Jardin de America, Argentina.
- Martin, Mike W.
2007 Everyday Morality: An Introduction to Applied Ethics 4th Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Marx, Karl.
1977 Part VII of Volume I “Result on the Immediate Process of Production.” In Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Karl Marx, Vol I. New York: Vintage Books.
— 1967 Capital I. New York: International Publishers.
— 1964 The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. New York: International Publishers.
- Mattio, Juan
2013 August, 8 Yerba Mala: Cómo viven los trabajadores detrás del mate. InfoJus Noticias. <http://www.infojusnoticias.gov.ar/provinciales/yerba-mala-como-viven-los-trabajadores-detras-del-mate-362.html>. Accessed August 21st, 2014.
- Mies, Marie and Vandana Shiva
2014 Ecofeminism. London: Zed Books.
- Mies, Marie
1998 Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. London: Zed Books.
- Mintz, Sidney W.
1985 Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History. New York: Penguin Books.
— 1974. Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Misiones Online
March 1, 2012. El precio de la yerba volverá a definirse por laudo de la Nación. <http://www.misionesonline.net/noticias/01/03/2012/el-precio-de-la-yerba-volvera-a-definirse-por-laudo-de-la-nacion> Accessed March 10 2014.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade

- 2003 Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moorehead, Virgil
2012 Native American Health Center Digital Storytelling Workshop: A Consensual Analysis of Participants' Experiences. (Dissertation for Psy.D. UC Berkley, shared with Author)
- Movimiento Agrario de Misiones (MAM).
July 2007 Someter, emprobecer, y expulsar de la tierra. Documento Publicitario del MAM. Obera: s.n.
- Myhra, L. L.
2011 "It Runs in the Family": Intergenerational Transmission of Historical Trauma among Urban American Indians and Alaska Natives in Culturally Specific Sobriety Maintenance Programs. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 18: 17–40.
- Nardi, María Andrea
2011 Rural Development and Territorial Dynamics in the Province of Misiones, Argentina. Sweden: University Lund.
- Nash, June
1979 We Eat the Mines, and the Mines Eat Us. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Necker, Louis
1990 Indios guarníes y chamanes franciscanos. Las primeras reducciones del Paraguay (1580-1800). Asunción: CEADUC.
- Negri, Antonio
2009 The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Neigh, G., Gillespie, C., & Nemeroff, C.
2009 The neurobiological toll of child abuse and neglect. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 10(4): 389–410. doi:10.1177/1524838009339758.
- Nichter, Simeon
2008 Vote Buying or Turnout Buying: Machine Politics and the Secret Ballot. *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 19-31.
- Niklison, José Elías
1914 Investigación relacionada con las condiciones de vida y de trabajo del Alto Paraná. Buenos Aires: Boletín del Departamento Nacional del Trabajo Número 26.

- Nora, Pierre
1989 Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, special issue on “Memory and Counter-Memory,” 26:7, 13–16.
- Oliver, Mike
1997 Emancipatory Research: Realistic Goal or Impossible Dream? *In* Doing Disability Research. Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer Eds. Pp. 15-31. Leeds: The Disability Press.
- Olivo Campos, Carlos, Gary Prevost, and Harry E. Vanden (Eds.)
2012 Social Movements and Leftist Governments in Latin America. London: Zed Books.
- Orlove, Ben
2002 Lines in the Water: Nature and Culture at Lake Titicaca. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ortíz, Fernando
1947 Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar. (translated by Harriet de Onis). New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Ortiz, Ruben
2015 Vidas entre Ponchadas. Posadas: Universidad Nacional de Misiones (Forthcoming).
- Ortner, Sherry B.
2006 Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal. *In* Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject. Sherry B. Ortner (Eds.). Pp. 42-62. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Parsons, Donald O.
2012 Mandated Severance Pay and Firing Cost Distortions: A Critical Review of the Evidence. *In* Reforming Severance Pay: An International Perspective. Robert Holzmann and Milan Vodopivec (Eds). Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Patel, Raj
2012 Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House.
- 2009 Grassroots Voices: Food Sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3): 663-706.
- 2006. International Agrarian Restructuring and the Practical Ethics of Peasant Movement Solidarity. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41(1-2):71-93.

- Pearson, Lon
 1997 Horacio Quiroga's Obsessions with Abnormal Psychology and Medicine as Reflected in "La Gallina Degollada". *In Twentieth Century Spanish-American Literature to 1960: A Collection of Essays*. David William Foster and Daniel Altamiranda, Eds. Pp. 58-72. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Perfecto, Ivette, and John Vandermeer and Angus Wright
 2009 *Nature's Matrix: Linking Agriculture, Conservation and Food Sovereignty*. London: Earthscan.
- Peyret, Alexis
 1881 *Cartas sobre Misiones*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta de La Tribuna Nacional.
- Pigna, Felipe
 2005 *The Myths of Argentine History: The Construction of a Past as a Justification of the Present*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma.
- Piketty, Thomas
 2014 *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Plous, S.
 2002 *Understanding prejudice and discrimination*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Pomer, León
 2008 *La Guerra de Paraguay*. Buenos Aires; Ediciones Colihue.
- Quinney, Richard
 1992 *For the Time Being: Ethnography of Everyday Life*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Quiroga, Horacio
 1987 [1926] *The Exiles and Other Stories*. Selected, translated and introduced by J. David Danielson with assistance from Elsa K. Gambarini. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- 1999 *The Decapitated Chicken and Other Stories*. Selected and translated by Sayers Peden; introduction by George S. Schade. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ramos, Alcida Rita
 2000 *Anthropologist as Political Actor*. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 4(2)- 5(1): 172-189.
- Rappaport, Joan

- 2008 Beyond Participant Observation: Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, Vol 1 2008:1-31.
-
- 1998 The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rau, Víctor
- 2012 Cosechando yerba mate: Estructuras sociales de un mercado laboral agrario en el nordeste argentino. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciccus.
- Reichman, Daniel R.
- 2011 The Broken Village: Coffee, Migration, and Globalization in Honduras. Ithaca: ILR Press and Cornell University Press.
- Relyea, R.A.
- 2005a The Impact of insecticides and herbicides on the biodiversity and productivity of aquatic communities. *Ecological Applications*, Vol. 15: 618-27.
-
- 2005b The Lethal Impact of Roundup on aquatic and terrestrial amphibians. *Ecological Applications*, Vol. 15: 1118-1124.
- Ress, Mary Judith
- 2006 Ecofeminism in Latin America. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Ricotto A., Almeida J.
- 2002 "Las ferias francas de Misiones, Argentina: una red de actores sociales y una nueva visión del mundo rural". VI Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología Rural.
- Riggins, Stephen Herald
- 1997 The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse. London: Sage Publications.
- Robben, Antonius C.G.M.
- 2012 The Politics of Truth and Emotion Among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence. *In Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader* Antonius C.G. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, Ed. Pp. 175-90. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Robbins, Joel.
- 2013 Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (N.S.) 19: 447-462.
- Roberts, Paul Craig and Matthew A. Stephenson
- 1973 Marx's Theory of Exchange, Alienation and Crisis. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press (Stanford University).

- Robinson, P.J.
1998 Monthly variations of dew point temperature in the coterminous United States. *Int. J. Climate*, 18: 1539-1556.
- Rodríguez Molas, Ricardo
1985 *Los sometidos de la conquista*. Buenos Aires: Centro editor de América Latina.
- Rosaldo, Renato
1998 "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 1–21. Boston: Beacon Press.
- 1993 *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Roszak, Theodore
1995 *Ecopscychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Sierra Club book for children.
- Ruiz de Montoya, Antonio
1639 *La conquista espiritual de Paraguay*. Madrid: Imprenta del Reino. Cited in Gortari, 2007.
- Saito, Leland T.
2009 *The Politics of Exclusion: The Failure of Race-Neutral Policies in Urban America*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Salleh, Ariel
2009 *From Eco-Sufficiency to Global Justice*. In *EcoSufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*. New York: Pluto Press and Spinefix Press.
- Scott, James
2009 *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 1985 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy
2009 Making Anthropology Public. *Anthropology Today* 25 (4):1-3.
- 2000 The Global Traffic in Human Organs. *Current Anthropology* 41 (2): 191-224.
- 1995 The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 36(3): 409 – 420.

- 1992 *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schenfner, Jon
2008 *The Illusion of Civil Society: Democratization and Community Mobilization in Low-Income Mexico*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Schuler, Ruth Sydney and Syed M. Hashemi, Ann P. Riley, Shireen Akhter
1996 December Credit programs, patriarchy and men's violence against women in rural Bangladesh. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 43:12, 1729-1742.
- Sennett, Richard
1998 *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- 2012 *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 2003 *Respect in a World of Inequality*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Shever, Elana
2012 *Resources for Reform: Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Shiva, Vandana
2010 *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. New York: South End Press.
- <http://seedfreedom.info/> Accessed April 14, 2015.
- Sitrin, Marina
2006 *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*. Oakland, C: AK Press Distribution.
- Slatta, Richard W.
1992 *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier*. Omaha: University of Nebraska Press.
- Smith, Daniel B.
2010 Is There an Ecological Unconscious?
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/magazine/31ecopsych-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. Accessed January 12 2015.
- Smith, E.A. and Oehme, E.W..
1992 The Biological Activity of Glyphosate to Plants and Animals: A Literature Review. *Veterinary and Human Toxicology*, Vol. 34: 531.43.

- Solomon, E. P., & Heide, K. M.
2005 The biology of trauma: Implications for treatment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20 (1): 51–60.
- Sotero, M. M.
2006 A conceptual model of historical trauma: implications for public health practice and research. *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice*, 1(1): 93–108.
- Speed, Shannon
2008 *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- 2006 At the Crossroads of Human Rights and Anthropology: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research. *American Anthropologist*, 108:1 March 2006: 66-76.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty
2010 Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Rosalind Morris, Ed. New York : Columbia University Press, c2010.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D.
2012 *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice (6th Ed.)*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Stewart, Kathleen
1996 *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Svampa, Maristella and Sebastián Pereyra
2003 *Entre la Ruta y el Barrio: La Experiencia de Organizaciones Piqueteras*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.
- Taussig, Michael
1980 *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Taylor, Julie
1998 *Paper Tangos*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Territorio Digital
2012 April 5 “Ortt: “Es vergonzoso que se venda yerba a 40 pesos el kilo.” <http://www.territorioidigital.com/nota3.aspx?c=5797092214388525> Accessed October 15, 2012.

2012 February 22 “Espiaron a tareferos de Oberá bajo el protocolo del Proyecto X.”
<http://www.territorioidigital.com/notaimpresa.aspx?c=5156632469430898>. Accessed
October 15, 2012.

2010 June 5 “Sangre Italiana en Misiones.”
<http://www.territorioidigital.com/nota2.aspx?c=1631903985610315>. Accessed October
15, 2012.

2010 October 2nd. “En el camión nos mandaron directamente al matadero”
<http://www.territorioidigital.com/nota2.aspx?c=3255492303553909> Accessed October 15,
2012.

Thich Nhat Hanh

2006 The Energy of Prayer: How to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice. Berkeley: Parallax
Press.

Tickamyer, A., Henderson, D., and Tadlock, B.

2007 Does welfare reform work in rural America? A 7-year follow-up. University of
Kentucky Center for Poverty Research Discussion Paper Series, DP2007-06. Retrieved
[Date] from <http://www.ukcpr.org/Publications/DP2007-06/pdf>. Accessed September
2013.

Tilly, Charles

2006 Regimes and Repertoires. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Topik, Steven, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank

2006 From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of
the World Economy, 1500-2000. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Trusty, J., Looby, E. J., & Sandhu, D. S.

2002 Multicultural counseling: Context, theory and practice, and competence. New
York, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt

1993 In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place.
Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Valente, Marcela

2012 Informal Sector Work Survives Economic Boom in Argentina. InterPress Service.
<http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/09/informal-sector-work-survives-economic-boom-in-argentina/> Accessed August 28, 2013.

Varela, Alfredo.

1943 El Río Oscuro. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina.

- Viejo Rose, Dacia
2011 *Reconstructiong Spain: Cultural Heritage and Memory after Civil War*. Brighton ; Portland, Oregon : Sussex Academic Press.
- Villalon, Roberta
2007 *Neoliberalism, Corruption, and Legacies of Contention: Argentina's Social Movements, 1993-1996*. *Latin American Perspectives* 34:2:139-156.
- Walters, K. L., & Simoni, J. M.
2009 *Decolonizing Strategies for Mentoring American Indians and Alaska Natives in HIV and Mental Health Research*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(S1), S71–S76. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2008.136127.
- Warren, K.J.
1994 *Ecological Feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Warren, K.J, Ed.
1997 *Eco-feminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wartman, Jesse H.
Dew Point and Climate Change. Twentieth Century Changes in Dewpoint Temperature Throughout the Upper Midwest. Iowa State University Undergraduate Program Mentors: Daryl Herzmann and Eugene S. Takle IEM Assistant Coordinator and Professor of Atmospheric Science.
- Weisband, E.
2009 *On the Aporetic Borderlines of Forgiveness: Bereavement as a political form*. *Alternatives*, 34(4): 359–381.
- Weisberg, R. B., Bruce, S. E., Bruce, S. E., Machan, J. T., Kessler, R. C., Culpepper, L., & Keller, M. B.
2003 *Nonpsychiatric Illness Among Primary Care Patients with Trauma Histories and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. *Psychiatric Services*, 53(7): 848–854.
- Weiss, S. J.
2007 *Neurobiological alterations associated with traumatic stress*. *Perspectives In Psychiatric Care*, 43(3): 114–122. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6163.2007.00120.x.
- Weitz-Shapiro, Rebecca
2006 *Partisanship and Protest: The Politics of Workfare Distribution in Argentina*. *Latin American Research Review* 41:3:122-147.
- Wendt, D. C., & Gone, J. P.
2012 *Rethinking cultural competence: Insights from indigenous community treatment settings*. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 49(2): 206–222. doi:10.1177/1363461511425622.

- Whitbeck, L. B., Adams, G. W., Hoyt, D. R., & Chen, X.
2004 Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3-4): 119–130.
doi:10.1023/B:AJCP.0000027000.77357.31.
- Wilde, Guillermo
2009 *Religión y poder en las misiones de guaraníes*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sb.
- Williams, Raymond
1977 “Structures of Feeling.” *In Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1977 “Creative Practice.” *In Marxism and Literature*, pp. 206-12. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1973 *The Country and the City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolff, Jonas
2007 (De-)Mobilizing the Marginalized: A Comparison of the Argentina Piqueteros and Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39:1:1-29.
- Yehuda, R., Halligan, S. L., & Bierer, L. M.
2001 Relationship of Parental Trauma Exposure and PTSD to PTSD, Depressive and Anxiety Disorders in Offspring. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 35(5): 261–270.
- Yehuda, R., Bierer, L. M., Schmeidler, J., Aferiat, D. H., Breslau, I., & Dolan, S.
2000 Low Cortisol and Risk for PTSD in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 157(8): 1252–1259.
- Yehuda, R., Schmeidler, J., Wainberg, M., Binder-Brynes, K., & Duvdevani, T.
1999 Vulnerability to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 155: 1163.