

“A Land in the Making”

The Paraguayan Chaco lay outside the path of colonization much longer than other parts of South America due to Indigenous resistance and settler ideas that the region was devoid of resources. Things changed in the late nineteenth century, after Paraguay entered the Triple Alliance War against Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The ramifications were catastrophic. At the close of the war in 1870, nearly 90 percent of all Paraguayan males were dead, half the country's territory was ceded to the victors, and financial solvency gave way to crushing debt.¹ Though that war was not waged in the Chaco, nearly all of the land in that region at the time, which was *tierra fiscal*—owned by the state—was sold to pay the post-war debt. Between 1885 and 1887, the Paraguayan state subdivided and offered for sale more than 186,000 square kilometers of the Chaco—two-thirds of the territory—to financial speculators on the London Stock Exchange, the majority of which were British and Argentine.² The Paraguayan state had previously claimed all lands in the Chaco via the 1825 Government Act, thereby codifying the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from land rights, though the Chaco land sale was the first material action to appropriate Indigenous lands.³ Upon arriving in the region, British Anglican missionaries described the process of propertizing the Chaco in the following terms:

This they succeeded in doing by marking off the bank of the River Paraguay into sections a league wide, and drawing imaginary lines due west to the frontier. In a very short time the Government has sold the entire country, even the few reserves they had at first determined to maintain. The early missionaries were therefore confronted with the anomaly of a country as large as Great Britain practically unexplored, its inhabitants heathen barbarians, no centre of government or representative authority in the whole of the vast interior, and yet the whole land, although unsurveyed, sold by the Government and bought by speculators.⁴

Aside from a handful of riverine settlements used as lumber camps for logging and tannin extraction, no settler colonies or state officials were present in Paraguay's

Chaco before the land sale.⁵ The 1825 Government Act provided the legal means to facilitate colonization of the Chaco by actors who were not Paraguayan but primarily foreign investors. The process illuminates differences in the dynamics of internal colonization as described by Casanova and promoted by agrarian reforms from those of settler colonization where the state’s intent was to entice foreign investors to establish permanent settlements and extractive industries to facilitate state territorialization.⁶

This chapter focuses on how Anglican missionaries helped establish settler political economy in the Bajo Chaco that created a racial geography defined by land-labor relations and cattle ranching. I assess early Anglican missionary accounts to trace the inception of settler colonialism in the Bajo Chaco to its roots in cattle ranching. The Anglican Mission in Paraguay played a pivotal role in establishing the discursive, political economic, and material structures through which settler colonialism has expanded and operated across the Chaco. The enclosure of Enxet and Sanapaná territories by ranchers and private land investors required dispossessing Indigenous peoples *in place*, then creating a new racialized class of laborers to work on the ranches built on stolen lands. Such dynamics are central elements in the geographies of settler colonialism that spur my interlocutors’ ongoing struggles to reclaim their lands and lifeways. To understand contemporary Enxet and Sanapaná resistance, one must grapple with the historical role of missionization and cattle ranching and their intimate relations with settler colonialism in this region.

Private property in land is imperative to the production of racial geographies. It mediates relationships between people, often in ways that spatially inscribe and reinforce racialized difference.⁷ But making private property in land did more than create a racialized regime of ownership in the Bajo Chaco; it also ensured that cattle would come to have greater occupancy rights than Enxet and Sanapaná peoples on whose traditional territories they graze. The Right Reverend Edward Every, the highest Anglican official directly responsible for overseeing the church’s South American mission in Paraguay at the turn of the nineteenth century, provided prescient remarks in his 1915 writings:

The Chaco is still a land in the making, consisting of vast dreary plains covered with anthills, palm trees, and low scrubby forest, and broken up by numerous swamps. Hence, as no white man coveted it, it formed for centuries a natural indian reserve. The conditions, however, are now rapidly changing, as the land has been found valuable for running cattle, and the indian no longer has the country to himself.⁸

If the Paraguayan Chaco was a “land in the making” in the early 1900s, when Every wrote these words, cattle ranching has since “made” the Chaco. Nothing has had a more significant impact on ecology and social relations in the region than ranching, a practice that has radically reconfigured the dynamics of land control through new racial geographies.

Popular accounts of development in Paraguay’s Chaco erase the role of Indigenous peoples by centering settlers as protagonists of progress, while Indigenous peoples are framed as victims of development, confined to radical alterity, or omitted entirely from the narrative.⁹ However, I argue that Indigenous labor has been vital to making the Chaco; it has always been central to that process, though rendered invisible.¹⁰ Yet the actual labor used in Chaco cattle ranching was, and in large part still is, Indigenous. The “making” of the Chaco has always been a project whereby the production of new spaces for cattle capitalism is intimately tied to efforts to create new Indigenous subjects whose labor is necessary to the settler political economy. The racial geographies that my interlocutors work to unsettle are thus conditioned by class relations of an Indigenous peonage working for non-Indigenous landowning patrones. In this regard, we should think of racial geographies as less like “the effects of imposed unitary structures of colonial or neocolonial power—of pillaging, extermination, and dispossession . . . and more as social processes that unfolded and enfolded over time.”¹¹ Through a critical reading of Anglican missionary documents and reflection on Enxet and Sanapaná memories of life on cattle ranches, this chapter foregrounds the role Enxet and Sanapaná labor played in “making” the Bajo Chaco. I follow the nascence of settler colonialism in the Bajo Chaco to show how racial geographies produced through Indigenous peon and settler patrón labor relations endure in the present, playing out as processes of oppression, resistance, ambivalence, and resurgence that I trace throughout the book.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I briefly discuss the roots of cattle ranching in Paraguay, then link that to the role Anglican missionaries played in establishing the practice in the Chaco. Next I engage Anglican missionary accounts to trace the inception of settler colonialism in the Bajo Chaco to show how social-spatial relations between non-Indigenous patrones and Indigenous peons persist to the present and continue to influence Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles. My aim, however, is not to detail a history of Anglican missionization but to consider how the Mission and its ranches were instrumental in creating a racial geography in the Bajo Chaco, an ordering of people, political economy, and space that reveals how settler colonialism works as a structure *and* a process.¹² Second, I suggest that investigating settler colonialism through the lens of patrón-peon labor dynamics brings nuance to understandings of how the structures of settler colonialism operate as transhistorical, racial, and gendered processes distinct from internal colonization.¹³ State-led agrarian reforms incentivized mestizo campesinos to occupy lands east of the Paraguay River in what was the country’s most significant effort to spur internal colonization.¹⁴ However, early colonization of the Chaco almost exclusively relied on non-Paraguayan actors—from the foreign investors who capitalized on the land sale to Anglican missionaries used to establish a presence in the region and, later, to Mennonites who founded large agricultural settlements in the central Chaco. The process of colonizing the Paraguayan Chaco was distinct

within the country and exhibits a clear dynamic of Indigenous land dispossession and large-scale enclosures to support non-Indigenous settler life that persists to the present through the region's demography and distribution of land control. Third, I frame how Enxet and Sanapaná labor functions as a form of infrastructure alongside the fences and ranches built with that labor. Viewing labor as infrastructure, I show how the Anglican Mission recast Enxet and Sanapaná from "heathen barbarians" to peons, a process with social and spatial ramifications for how settler colonialism has unfolded in Paraguay's Chaco.

THE LEGEND OF SEVEN COWS AND ONE BULL

In an extensive presentation on the history and evolution of cattle ranching in Paraguay, the country's oldest and most influential rural producer organization, the Asociación Rural del Paraguay (ARP; Rural Association of Paraguay), contends that the country's relation with cattle started with the introduction of seven cows and one bull in 1545.¹⁵ Arguing that "the first bovines in Paraguay saw that the country was a paradise [where] they found the best and most beautiful pasturelands and watering holes in the world," the document frames the country as a fecund territory populated only by animals and well suited for the introduction of settler colonialism's ultimate companion species.¹⁶ The ARP presentation follows the evolution of ranching from the introduction of eight bovines through many waves of colonization and state expansion by which the "troop" expanded through varied means: the expulsion of unwanted settlers (i.e., the Jesuits in 1768) and confiscation of their herds; incorporation of new colonizing genetics like Hereford, Angus, and Brahman; technological innovation from the establishment of canned, conserved meatpacking to the first refrigerator ship to export fresh meats to international markets; and widespread biosecurity campaigns to regularly vaccinate all cattle against foot and mouth disease, among other bovine plagues. Throughout, state officials and ranchers celebrate the growth and expansion of cattle capitalism as a "miracle" produced not through divine intervention, but the hard work and labor of visionary patrones whose investments have transformed Paraguay's so-called green hell into productive spaces through which the national character is founded.¹⁷

It bears noting that the ARP was founded in the years immediately following the Triple Alliance War, an era when land rights were radically reconfigured by the privatization push used to fund war debts and empower a class of large-scale landholders that still wields considerable political influence in Paraguay.¹⁸ Kleinpenning's encyclopedic economic geography of rural development in Paraguay underscores the importance of the postwar period to the enduring land tenure inequality, of which cattle ranching was one of the principal economic sectors that most benefited.¹⁹ Drawing from a broad compendium of government documents and secondary analyses written from 1870 to 1963, he shows that cattle have

been necessary to smallholder livelihoods and long complemented a diversified farming strategy. On the other hand, Kleinpenning notes, commercial ranching in Paraguay has always been land-extensive, with herds greater than five hundred head, and commercial operations dominate ranching practices; this trend persists.

The three departments that comprise the Paraguayan Chaco simultaneously have the largest cattle herds and, not surprisingly, some of the highest levels of land-tenure inequality in the country measured by the GINI coefficient.²⁰ Miguel Lovera and Inés Franceschelli of the Paraguayan research organization Heñoi argue that the structure and politics of cattle ranching are “oriented to enrich an oligarchic group of society that is fundamentally feudal, tracing their establishment from the close of the Triple Alliance War to our current time and that their subsistence derives from cattle capitalism [*capitalismo ganadero*].”²¹ With the help of Anglican missionaries, Anglo settlers first established cattle ranching on Enxet and Sanapaná territories of the Bajo Chaco, then gradually pushed their practice north and west toward the borders with Bolivia and Argentina.²² Cattle ranching now defines settler political economy and conditions Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles.

My analysis begins with a critical reading of Anglican accounts because the Mission fomented cattle capitalism while simultaneously making new racial subjects—an Indigenous peonage. Ranching in Paraguay’s Chaco has relied on Indigenous labor from its inception to the present. If racial capitalism is at its most basic “a theory of the inseparability of race and capitalism,” as Pasternak suggests, then it is impossible to extricate the Anglican Mission from how it actively racialized Enxet and Sanapaná “others” as the disposable labor force from which ranching advanced.²³ Thus the history of Indigenous labor exploitation flags the co-joined nature of settler colonialism and the specific form of racial capitalism present in Paraguay’s Chaco. In the Chaqueño context, ranching has long been framed as the path to modernity by making the region a space for Christian beliefs, private property, and state territory via agrarian development.²⁴ These are the hallmarks of the region’s enduring racial geography forged through settler colonialism.

RACIAL ORDERS AND THE RIGHT DISPOSITION

The Anglican Church was intimately connected to Britain’s efforts to expand its reach through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with missionary efforts present on six continents by the late 1800s.²⁵ The South American Missionary Society (SAMS) funded the Anglican Mission there. With robust efforts afoot in Argentina, SAMS began planning the Paraguay mission in 1887, on the heels of the great land sale.²⁶ The Anglican movement into the Bajo Chaco was influenced by British investors who had purchased land in the area. For example, the British consul in Asunción shared a direct relationship with a consortium of British investors who purchased nearly 250,000 hectares in the Bajo Chaco and core members

of the SAMS decision-making committee who had also purchased land in Paraguay.²⁷ Throughout its hundred-year history working in the Bajo Chaco, SAMS missionaries established twelve mission-stations beginning at Carayá Vuelta on the Paraguay River and moving west some 200 kilometers.

Arriving in Paraguay from a short stint in Tierra del Fuego, Wilfred Barbrooke Grubb led the Anglican Mission in Paraguay's Chaco from 1889 to 1919. With support from SAMS, Grubb and his team worked for decades to "pacify" the Enxet and Sanapaná peoples of the Bajo Chaco so that British-backed ranching interests could expand in the region. This point is made clear in several historical accounts, such as those popularized in travelogues by the British Anglican Margarette Daniels.

When one thinks that but ten years ago it was dangerous to one's life to venture into the Chaco, while now there are numerous *estancias* [ranches] on the border, and one can now go for a hundred and more miles into the interior with comparative safety, it shows that the missionaries have got the "thin edge of the wedge" well thrust in. These men and women are making savages into reasonable, peace-abiding people, and—what touches the commercial world more—they are making what was once considered a piece of waste land, the size of England and Scotland, of real commercial value. Landowners in the Paraguayan Chaco owe all this to the English Mission, and especially to Mr. W.B. Grubb, the pioneer and backbone of the whole undertaking.²⁸

Daniels's account, from her book *The Makers of South America*, foregrounds the role of the non-Indigenous pioneer as the protagonist of change. This trope resonates with a narrative that centers the labor of settlers while marginalizing the role Indigenous labor played in the Mission's "success" and expansion of ranching. I have heard many versions of productive pioneer narratives while living, working, and researching in Paraguay, retold in different forms by ranchers, cab drivers, campesinos, and state officials across the country. It goes something like this: "The Indigenous don't want to work. When they get land, they don't produce anything and look to the state for handouts. The [insert settler archetype: *pioneers, Mennonites, ranchers, etc.*] are the ones who have made something out of the Chaco." The productive pioneer narrative works discursively to place Indigenous peoples spatially, as those outside the property system but whose labor is necessary to convert "waste lands" into sites of agrarian accumulation. The narrative simultaneously occludes the fact that the "productivity" of the pioneer is predicated on the alienation of labor through which the production of space, like "making" the Chaco, is achieved. Thus the pioneer—a racialized white/non-Indigenous male-gendered subject—is exalted while racialized Indigenous laborers are rendered "savage," invisible, and/or outside the productive system.

Grubb embodied the pioneer archetype through his missionary work and travelogs. Indeed, he played the definitive role in expanding the Anglican Mission in the Bajo Chaco and forging a new geography based on racial and class difference. An avid writer and later lecturer for Oxford University, his cataloged missionary



FIGURE 2. Enxet children playing in front of the church at Makxawáya circa 1938. The Paraguayan flag flies atop the steeple. Photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Anglican Church of Paraguay.

efforts provide some of the most detailed written accounts of the initial colonization process. In his writings, Grubb makes clear the rationale for the Bajo Chaco mission: “The South American Missionary Society gave instructions to their men, not only to enter into and dwell in their [i.e., Enxet] land, whatever the risk, but to attempt no less a task than that of opening up this unknown land, of revolutionizing the native customs, habits, modes of life, and laws.”²⁹ By “opening up” the Bajo Chaco, Grubb’s missionary work also served as a surrogate for state territoriality. Pictures from the era show that Anglican churches built in the Bajo Chaco provided a space to worship and pledge allegiance to Paraguay, where the nation’s dual images—the Christian cross and Paraguayan flag—were often displayed side by side. Given that the Paraguayan state had no presence in the Chaco before the arrival of the Anglicans, the Mission helped establish a new order of social and spatial relations along the country’s western frontier.³⁰ As a result, Paraguayan officials named Grubb *Comisario General del Chaco y Pacificador de los Indios*—the Chaco’s Justice of the Peace and Pacifier of the Indians.

Grubb’s work with the Mission produced racial geographies as social-spatial governmentality based on indoctrinating Enxet and Sanapaná in the “right” modes of conduct and proper disposition of things.³¹ SAMS magazines circulated in Britain in the early 1900s make clear this vision. One article read, “Those who have an interest in Chaco lands can surely not fail to see the benefit of a numerous, trained and willing population of workers with whom to develop the lands in

which they have placed their capital. The question of suitable labour will always be an important one in this world. . . . We are practical enough to not neglect such training as will fit these people to take their *proper place* in the world.”³² Narratives from early missionary work show that the “proper place” for Enxet and Sanapaná peoples was as a central yet always marginal(ized) facet of broader imperatives to territorialize the Chaco as a site for the expansion of settler interests, whether through ranching or state territoriality. Enxet and Sanapaná peoples were thus first interpellated as part of the Paraguayan state through their relationship with the Anglican Mission. On this point, I return to Grubb, who stated, “[SAMS] sought to form not only a Christian Church among these savage and nomadic tribes, but also industrial communities, and was entrusted by the Paraguayan Government, who claimed that the region was their territory, with the task of binding the tribes together in unity, and of *instructing them in government*. The policy of the Mission was to endeavor to *make the people rule themselves*.”³³ Grubb’s accounts detail not only the governance of Indigenous life, but the settler governmentality of the Mission that hinged on establishing a particular social-spatial order.

Such accounts also assume that Enxet and Sanapaná lived in a state without rule or order before the Anglican arrival. “Our task was,” Grubb argued, “to give them a system of government; to raise them to the level of property-holders; to induce them to adopt an industrious, settled, and regular life[;] . . . to awaken a desire for culture and progress; to fit them to receive the offer of the Paraguayan Government and citizenship in that Republic; to make them useful members of a society.”³⁴ Grubb’s words presuppose that order derives from a Euro-modern ontology and its concomitant social-spatial relations, the co-joined processes of colonizing to spread Christianity and the reach of capitalism. An implicit racial logic is also evident in Grubb’s words when he equates Anglican interventions as devised to raise Indigenous peoples to the “level of property-holders,” simultaneously inferring a hierarchical stratification based on property and indexing liberal ideals of humanity with property rights. Actively working to disrupt existing Indigenous norms and spatial relations, Grubb argued that Enxet and Sanapaná lifeways were morally reprehensible and ontologically impossible.³⁵ The goal was thus to supplant Indigenous lifeways with two interwoven orders: the divine order of Christianity and capitalism’s political economic order.

OF PROPERTY AND LABOR

The floodplains of the Bajo Chaco, where Grubb focused his work, are the territories of the Chanawatsan Enxet, Sanapaná, Angaité, and Maskoy peoples, whose lifeways were fluid like the braided streams that reach east to the Paraguay River, moving across the open floodplains with the interannual flood and drought cycle.³⁶ The new property-rights regime inscribed throughout the Chaco required a spatial order that limited Indigenous mobility so new landowners could run

cattle and harvest timber. One Anglican missionary working in the area where the present-day Xákmok Kásek community is located wrote the following in the SAMS magazine in 1944: “The indian’s hunting grounds are cut across by fences; the stealthy tread of the camouflaged ostrich hunter has given place to the galloping cowboy and bellowing cattle; the ring of the lumberman’s axe is heard in the forest instead of the hunter’s calls. . . . [T]he indians have had to give way to cattle.”³⁷ This account, like that of Hunt’s framing of the Chaco as a land in the making, shows that settler territorialization of the Chaco has been predicated on creating spaces for cattle life and demanding that Indigenous peoples abide by that political economic order.

Although the enclosure of the Chaco predated most of my interlocutors’ lives, many elders recounted stories of how “closing” the land affected Enxet and Sanapaná lifeways. Sitting with Teofilo, an Enxet elder from Sawhoyamaxa whose eyes shine but reveal the cloudy spread of cataracts, once recounted to me, “They closed it with wire. Before that, the land used to be open. The Indigenous used to be free to go where they wanted before the estancias. When I was a boy people talked about how we would move here and there. We had different areas. But all of that changed.” Like Teofilo, several of my interlocutors referenced times when the land used to be “open” and would often equate those times with greater freedom. “We used to live in the forest. All of this was forest. Nice forest!” Gladys explained, as we sat in front of the small home she had recently built on an old cattle pasture that members of Sawhoyamaxa had reoccupied. “But they grabbed up all our land, cut the trees, and put up fences. Now it’s just cows, and the Indigenous have no place but by the highway.” Teofilo’s and Gladys’s accounts resonate with Felipe’s story in Rupture One. These stories collectively recount how enclosure limits Indigenous lifeways. The fences that closed the Chaco perform private property in land by ordering relations between Indigenous peoples, missionaries, and non-Indigenous landowners.

Such orderings and their performance are not inherent but must be learned, or coerced. To settle Enxet and Sanapaná life and create a labor force that would work on the privately owned cattle ranches of the Bajo Chaco, missionaries had to compel Indigenous peoples to abandon collective, mobile life. Imparting the ownership model of private property—that with “a unitary, solitary owner, appropriately engaged in self-regarding actions that concern him or herself alone and the things owned”—was imperative to achieving this end.³⁸ In his homage to Grubb, the Anglican reverend Hunt described the Mission’s strategies to coerce Enxet and Sanapaná to adopt this sedentary life, namely, through the ownership of private property: “A more permanent type of house was to take the place of the grass huts so easily built and even more quickly demolished. The possession of tables and chairs, beds and kitchen utensils, together with cattle, was to be an offset against their old ways, causing them to settle down more quietly and to check their wandering instincts.”³⁹ Notably, the ownership model the Anglican missionaries

promoted was one based on goods, not land. Indigenous peoples were excluded from the ownership model in land, though they had to abide by its dictates or risk violent retaliation. Therefore, as Nichols suggests, “‘making’ property refers not to the creation of a new material object but to a new juridical and conceptual object—an abstraction—that serves to anchor relations, rights, and ultimately, power.”⁴⁰ The new regime of property ownership spurred by the Chaco land sale and reinforced by material enclosures through fencing sought to anchor Enxet and Sanapaná peoples in place. Such dispossession in place operated alongside the education received at Anglican mission-stations to reinforce social relations based on thwarting Indigenous mobilities and instilling notions of private ownership predicated on sedentary life. Performing the ownership model of property in land is thus an act of writing the world, a geo-graphing that helped codify racial difference vis-à-vis unequal access regimes and the production of clear social hierarchies.⁴¹

The (re)ordering of life through the imposition of settler law and normative discourses equates private property with civilized life in ways that translate to racial hierarchies where landholders are viewed as superior to the dispossessed.⁴² Here it is important to note that such hierarchies resonate with different forms of patronage. Historical accounts show that Christian missionaries were discursively framed as superior to indio “barbarians” without religion.⁴³ The missionaries controlled access to purported spiritual salvation through conversion to Christianity. Similarly, property-owning ranchers were framed as superior to the newly formed landless Indigenous peonage because they were seen to bring value to the Paraguayan state through agrarian production. The first Anglican missionaries thus sought to create an Indigenous peonage that was “civilized” enough but not so much that it would organize resistance. In this way, the racial hierarchy between settler patrón and Indigenous peon allowed a certain degree of alterity while demanding an embrace of select “modern” principles, namely, language, religion, and a new work ethic. In spatial and political economic terms, such hierarchies manifest as highly unequal land-tenure relations. Limited access to income outside of ranching created a structure of social, economic, and ecological relations that maintain Indigenous dispossession as a *de facto* source of labor for ranches. For decades, landholding elites across the Americas and in Paraguay’s Chaco bought and sold land, with Indigenous peoples considered part of those sales, consequently establishing varied forms of exploitative labor relations from debt peonage to slavery. As lawyer and member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Vine Deloria Jr. argues with regard to the United States, “Discovery negated the rights of the Indian tribes to sovereignty and equality among the nations of the world. It took away their title to their land and gave them the right only to sell.”⁴⁴ The right to sell labor is predicated on the assumption that landholders and patrones pay for that labor. In the Latin American context, scholars have shown processes similar to those discussed by Deloria, but they also underscore the prevalence of debt peonage, slavery, and dispossession/alienation dynamics that fuel settler capitalism.⁴⁵



FIGURE 3. Sanapaná men and their Anglican supervisor taking a break while digging a well near Campo Flores, circa 1939. Photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Anglican Church of Paraguay.

DISPOSSESSION AS THE DISPOSITION

As the Anglican Mission in Paraguay grew, so did the cost of operating it, which required a concerted effort to generate local revenues. Grubb established the Paraguayan Chaco Indian Association in 1901 that operated an industrial school and ranch at Maroma that they called El Paso. Started with an initial investment from SAMS, El Paso grew to become a sizable ranch with 3,500 head of cattle by 1907 and later converted to a private company that British investors acquired. Stephen Kidd, an Anglican missionary turned anthropologist, argues, “The major significance of the venture [El Paso] was that it was the first cattle ranch to be established in the interior of the Chaco and served as an example to the other landowners of the economic possibilities.”⁴⁶ Operations like El Paso also played an important role in Anglican efforts to teach Enxet the ways of property and labor in the settler economy. Grubb stated that his goal with this mission-station was to “enable the [Indigenous] people to obtain profitable work and industrial training, and thus to localize them at the mission-stations, where they could be more efficiently dealt with.”⁴⁷

I read Grubb’s notion of relocating Indigenous peoples to missions with an eye toward efficiency through Michele Foucault’s vision of government as “the right disposition of things, so as to lead to a convenient end.”⁴⁸ Mobile populations without private property or interest in wage labor posed a challenge to the stable spatiality of property in land and ranchers’ need for laborers.⁴⁹ Thus creating a

way to efficiently organize Indigenous peoples on ranches and bring them into the settler political economy would lead to a convenient end for missionaries seeking souls to save, ranchers seeking laborers, and state officials seeking to territorialize the Chaco. Achieving this end thus required teaching Enxet and Sanapaná peoples Spanish or Guaraní, acculturating them to Paraguayan social norms, and creating a disciplined workforce. Consequently, the Anglicans created industrial schools at their ranches that they used to educate Enxet and Sanapaná in skills like logging, fence building, and running cattle, all of which supplied labor to the mission-stations and local ranches. Apparently, becoming a good Christian also meant adopting the cultural norms of the Paraguayan nation and capitalist class relations. For Grubb, the right disposition of things was both spatial and social. By creating a space for the Anglican Church, the Mission's actions reinforced the Chaco's newly formed private property rights regime that placed the Chaco within the Paraguayan state while simultaneously replacing Enxet and Sanapaná lifeways with a burgeoning settler society.

Here I want to note that the mission-stations had an impact on Enxet and Sanapaná territories in general but are directly related to the labor and land histories of the Yakyé Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek communities. The El Paso ranch is significant because it was built on the site of *yakyé axa*, the eponym of the Yakyé Axa community. The Enxet who labored at El Paso for Anglican missionaries continued to live on the ranch after it was transferred to private ownership; many now live just outside its gates, where they continue to demand land restitution, which I explain in depth later. Missionaries also established "substations," smaller temporary outposts from which they expanded their influence. In 1939, missionaries established a substation at "Tlhagma Kasic" on land owned by the International Products Corporation (IPC), a site now known as Xákmok Kásek.⁵⁰ In accordance with agrarian reforms of 1940, IPC subdivided its landholdings and sold over 100,000 hectares to three former employees, who started Eaton & Cia, the company that built Estancia Salazar on the site of the Tlhagma Kasic Mission substation, where members of Xákmok Kásek would live and labor from the 1940s until 2008.⁵¹ In addition to operating Mission ranches, SAMS missionaries often represented British financial interests in the region. Missionaries living near Loma Porã helped ranch operations by policing Indigenous peoples who did not abide by established property limits and also representing the company's interests in relation to other ranches in the region.⁵² Loma Porã is the core ranch constructed on Sawhoyamaxa's traditional territories where many community members lived and labored since the Anglican arrival until the late 1990s, when they demanded the lands be returned to the community. To be clear, each of the mission-stations had a central living area and a church but "were essentially cattle ranches run for profit."⁵³ By 1949, the Anglican Mission in the Bajo Chaco derived the majority of its income from cattle ranching.⁵⁴

The Anglican mission-stations' reliance on ranching for subsistence and income generation ultimately facilitated the spread of commercial cattle ranching by preparing a workforce and establishing the infrastructure to transport cattle from interior ranchlands east to the Paraguay River. To support their mission-stations, Anglicans developed the first road networks in the region, which settlers used to scout potential ranchlands and eventually run cattle to the Paraguay River for transport.⁵⁵ With the expansion of ranching, non-Indigenous settlers enclosed more lands, and more Indigenous peoples were drawn into the ranching economy as laborers on those ranches, often with close connections to the Anglican Church. In 1930, the missionary Andrew Pride reflected on the Mission's impact: "The Mission does not take credit for the present area of the Chaco now occupied, but for the lands occupied on the main road from the Riacho Negro to Nanawa and for lands occupied on either side of that road to an extent of at least ten leagues [i.e., the Anglican Zone] it can claim credit for their occupation. Years ago, the owners of the various estancias admitted that they were established in their positions owing to the presence of the Mission in the Chaco before them."⁵⁶ Such historical accounts demonstrate the importance of the Anglican Mission to the establishment of non-Mission ranches in the Bajo Chaco "Anglican Zone" from which they expanded farther into the Chaco.⁵⁷

THE COLONIALITY OF SETTLER INFRASTRUCTURES

During its first forty years of work in the Bajo Chaco, the Anglican Mission in Paraguay created an infrastructure from which settler colonization of the region would follow, beginning with direct state territorialization. Although the Paraguayan state had laid legal claim to a vast territory in the Chaco following its independence from Spain in 1811 and sold much of those lands later that century, the border with Bolivia had never been formally established; each country claimed overlapping parts of the Chaco. With rumors of vast petroleum deposits spurred by competing oil companies, Standard Oil working in Bolivia and Royal Dutch Shell in Paraguay, both countries began building forts deep in the Chaco to establish their land borders and claim the resources therein.⁵⁸ A brutal war ensued, lasting from 1932 to 1935. Paraguay's victory was due in large part to the extensive infrastructure built by Anglican missionaries, the expanding tannin industry established farther north on the Paraguay River, and the role of Indigenous scouts whose deep knowledge of the region aided Paraguayan troops.⁵⁹ By the start of the Chaco War, Anglicans had built over 700 kilometers of cart tracks and the northern tannin industry over 500 kilometers of small-gauge railroads that the military relied on for troop movements and resupply lines during the fighting.⁶⁰ The roads and buildings constructed to facilitate the spread of Christianity and cattle capitalism thus laid the groundwork for the Paraguayan state to mobilize troops and

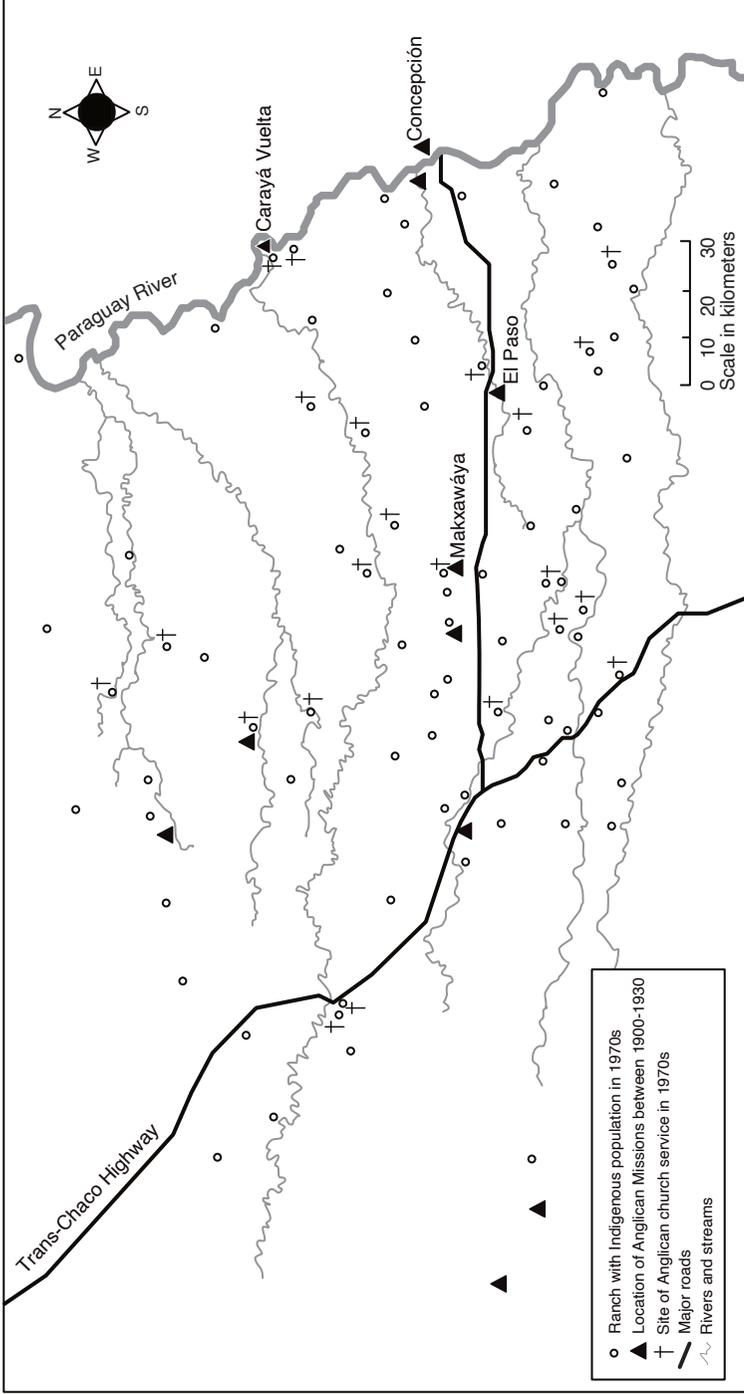
assert a direct physical presence in the region. Although the war was fought north of Enxet and Sanapaná territories, the supply lines carrying goods and soldiers to the front lines traversed their territories and several mission-stations were used as field hospitals.⁶¹

One prominent cattle rancher whose family operated the largest ranch in the Bajo Chaco from the 1930s through the 1960s, Estancia Salazar, shared with me some accounts about helping Paraguayan soldiers during the war.

During the Chaco War there was a place called Nanawa that was established next to an English [Anglican] mission. . . . And the road from Nanawa [that] goes toward the English mission was a road that my grandfather had established. During the battle of Nanawa, the Bolivians had cut the road. So they [the Paraguayan troops] discovered my grandfather's trail that brought them from Nanawa to Fortin Río Verde and there from Salazar to Isla Po'i. [Paraguayan] Coronel Estigarribia ordered that they found a *fortin* [fort] halfway between Salazar and Isla Po'i and another fortin at Salazar because if Nanawa fell they were aware that the aim of the Bolivians was to cut off communications at Isla Po'i. . . . They established a hospital in Salazar and a communications center in Salazar. My grandfather turned in his house to the fort and moved to where the center for Salazar is now.⁶²

He continued to explain how his grandfather and father led convoys of Paraguayan troops to key sites near the front lines. At the close of the war, Paraguay withdrew most of its troops and again relied on the missionaries and settler colonists who remained to act as state surrogates whose actions served to advance new state policies of assimilation.⁶³

The enduring influence of the Anglican Mission on patrón-Indigenous labor relations is evident in its more recent efforts to incorporate Enxet and Sanapaná within the ranching economy. Paraguay's 1944 Agrarian Statute was intended to break up large-scale "unproductive" landholdings in the Chaco by forcing landowners to either convert their properties to direct production or subdivide and sell them. The move further incentivized enclosing the Chaco by spurring a wave of smaller ranching operations that arrived in the wake of the Anglican Mission. With increasing land enclosure, the prospects for life outside of what became a near-total ranching system diminished, effectively forcing more Enxet and Sanapaná onto ranches for subsistence.⁶⁴ Kidd recorded the impacts of the land enclosures: "By the 1950s the landowners' control of Enxet territory was total, and the Enxet themselves had been almost entirely deprived of their freedom. They could only reside where they were given permission to by the owner of the land and were therefore restricted to villages next door to the Paraguayan ranch settlements. Economically, they were completely dependent on the will of the landowners who severely restricted their freedom of movement and frequently denied them permission to hunt, gather, fish, garden, or keep livestock."⁶⁵ In other cases, according to expert witness testimony in the IACHR judgment on the Xákmok Kásek land claim, English and US ranch owners "ordered the Indigenous into different



MAP 2. The approximate location of all Anglican missions in Bajo Chaco, 1900-1930, and ranches with Indigenous populations, 1978. Information based on an NGO census documenting 3,616 Indigenous peoples living on seventy-six cattle ranches. The 1981 national census recorded 5,048 Indigenous people in the same area. Map adapted from Powell 2007.

villages in the area to integrate and go live near the core of the ranch in order to have more control” over the population.⁶⁶

Such orders recall the “efficient” disposition of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples onto the Anglican industrial schools and ranching mission-stations like El Paso that played a central role in facilitating this geography of dispossession. Written in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Anglican Mission in Paraguay, the historian David R. Powell’s homage to the Mission’s work clearly shows the indelible mark it left on ranching. Some twenty-three ranches either housed Anglican pastors or held formal church services through the 1970s, all of which also enclosed Indigenous communities that served as the ranch’s labor force.⁶⁷ By the mid-twentieth century, the Mission’s “thin edge of the wedge” strategy had made the Bajo Chaco a space of settler cattle ranching reliant on Indigenous labor. In 1991, over 93 percent of Enxet lands were enclosed by private ranches of more than 1,000 hectares in size.⁶⁸ Today, the President Hayes administrative department, where the Anglican missionaries worked, is home to the largest concentration of cattle in all of Paraguay and the longest continuing ranching operations in the Chaco.

THE INHERITANCE

The Mission adopted a new approach in the 1980s that attempted to reconcile the adverse effects of land dispossession and labor exploitation on Indigenous well-being produced by the cattle economy. State and mission policy at the time promoted assimilation, and the church sought to achieve this by enabling Enxet and Sanapaná to become landholding agriculturalists. La Herencia (The Inheritance) resettlement initiative marked the culminating Anglican assimilation project. The Mission purchased nearly 45,000 hectares of land through La Herencia to establish three communities of “Indigenous colonists” who would adopt the agrarian production systems of Paraguayan campesinos and the protestant morals of Anglican missionaries.⁶⁹ Two primary goals listed in the original La Herencia project proposal are to ensure that the Indigenous colonists first “form settled, ordered and fully functioning village communities” and to ensure that they “understand the values of [their] country.”⁷⁰ The project proposal is testimony to the assimilationist legacies of the church that helped shape social relations of Indigenous peonage. La Herencia did succeed in securing the few titled Indigenous lands at the time that became important spaces for Enxet, Sanapaná, and Angaité peoples to establish independent communities. However, the vision of creating self-sufficient agrarian communities of Indigenous colonists never came to fruition. For one, farming in the Bajo Chaco is hard. The region is a large alluvial floodplain highly influenced by seasonal rainfall that results in a cycle of flood and drought that accentuates the effects of the clayey soil’s high salinity content. When summer rains arrive, much of the area quickly floods, turning into a vast swampland. For these reasons, large-scale agriculture has never taken root

in the Bajo Chaco, yet cattle production has.⁷¹ The three Indigenous communities created by La Herencia served less as self-sufficient agricultural settlements and more as de facto labor camps for local ranches.⁷²

Several Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors recounted to me memories of living and laboring on ranches, often evoking the sentiment that ranchers valued their lives less than those of settlers. Ignacia, a Sanapaná woman from Xákmok Kásek whose family had lived for decades on Estancia Salazar, minced no words when she spoke of times on the ranch:⁷³ “We had to hunt because there was no money. They did not give us money. They made the people work but didn’t pay. They would give very little, rice, dried corn, toasted mandioca flour, corn meal, and bad cooking fat.” Recalling each item, she frowned. “That is what they [ranch owners and staff] gave then. One old peach can full per person. That’s it. In a little bag. That’s what you got for eight days. And for those eight days you did not go to the ranch store. No! You had to use the food well for eight days. You had to go and look for fish to feed your family. That was the only way.” Looking across her yard toward one of her sons who was listening to music on a small radio, she commented, “Now people have more options to work and get money. Back then, no. The Indigenous struggled there. There was no money. You would exchange anything you could to get money. The Indigenous suffered. They gave so little food, so little meat. They gave more to the [non-Indigenous] Paraguayans who worked there. But the Indigenous, no.” Pointing to her small house, she said, “There was no tin roof, only houses with grass roofs. It was cold, cold. There were bugs. That’s how we lived. The Paraguayans lived well in nice houses. But the Indigenous, no. We were, I don’t know, forty maybe sixty families, all crammed into four hectares.” Ignacia evokes common themes that many of my interlocutors revisited in their stories of life on ranches. Indigenous peoples could live on ranches but were paid almost nothing for labor provided, instead given insufficient food staples that required reliance on hunting and fishing—two practices that were later prohibited by the owners of Estancia Salazar and the other ranches where members of Yakye Axa and Sawhoyamaya lived. Moreover, the few non-Indigenous Paraguayans who worked on the ranches were always reported to have better living conditions, from houses and pay to food.

Serafin López recalled the following story one afternoon as he, his wife, Ramona, and I drank tereré while his daughters listened from the shade of their home. “Many people who worked did not earn what they deserved,” he stated, referring to the times working for the ranch built on his community’s ancestral territory. “In terms of food, very little. I worked all the time. In the morning, at six, you were at the office waiting for orders.” Holding up his pointer finger, “If you were late they would forgive you one time. If you did it again, you would no longer have work. They’d give it to someone else. They never paid what you deserved.” Gesturing as if to put something in his mouth: “Only that,” Ramona chuckled. “They only gave workers a little food. You know the old cans for conserved meat? They filled that

with yerba, sugar, and toasted yucca flower. That was all they got for one day. That was their food.” Serafin jumped back in. “You would go out to cut down *karanda’y* [palm trees], three and a half meters long with an ax,” he said. “You’d go far, really far. Then you’d load it onto a trailer. There were two trailers. Sixty-five [palms] fit on a trailer so you had to load 130. Sometimes you’d go in a group of four, each one cutting twenty-five to thirty *karanda’y*. Cut, measure, cut, then load by hand.” With that he shook his head. “The Paraguayans didn’t do anything. They would sit, drink *tereré*, or look around, but do nothing. We would do the work and load the trailers. They just drove. You’d return around 2:30 and unload. If you were lucky there’d be food. If not, the ranch store. We’d get a little can of meat or maybe some buns and sugar. If not, there was nothing. It was hard.”

Ranching *patrones* needed Indigenous labor. They still do. In this regard, Indigenous peoples have become a central component in the (re)production of settler colonialism vis-à-vis infrastructure. If settler colonialism is a structure of social, spatial, and political economic relations, not merely an event that has passed, as Wolfe’s influential formulation suggests, I argue that it is imperative to also query the infrastructures that allow such oppressive systems to persist.⁷⁴ Infrastructure can be understood empirically as the “things” that enable system function but so can the labor and life taken from peoples coerced to build the material things so often considered infrastructure—like the fences, corrals, stock ponds, pastures, roads, and buildings that enable ranching to work. Thus, through decades of resettlement and reeducation projects, Anglican missionaries created both the material infrastructures from which settler colonialism has expanded in the Chaco and the labor force that has always been central to that project but rendered invisible by it.⁷⁵ The doubling of Enxet and Sanapaná life, as both the target of salvation and a necessary labor force, reveals how extractive relationships shape everyday life in ways through which “Indigenous bodies (violated, neglected, annihilated) become the raw material for the making of the settler subject and the settler state,” as Razack powerfully argues.⁷⁶ Eulalio, a spiritual leader from Xákmok Kásek, once described this process to me in plain terms: “The ranchers just used up the Indigenous. They worked us hard. . . . If you died, you died.” I revisit conversations with Eulalio in detail in the next chapter but highlight his thoughts here because it is important to flag that I am not using infrastructure metaphorically. The violence of assimilation initiated by the missionary efforts, replicated on many ranches and later adopted as state policy, is a hallmark of the eliminatory logics that animate structures of settlement.

The inheritance left to Enxet and Sanapaná peoples by the Anglicans’ missionary work, its relationship to the expansion of ranching, and its role in Indigenous dispossession shapes but does not determine the arc of Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles. Resettlement of Indigenous peoples and exploitation of their labor on mission-stations was a targeted project that resulted in what the Mission and the state saw as the “right” disposition of people in place. By all means, the project

intended to assimilate by creating a self-governing labor force that would meet the needs of the burgeoning ranching economy. In this context, “making” the Chaco as a site for ranching was always a racial project, one mediated by private property in land coded as white space. Indigenous peoples were long excluded from that system of ownership only to be included as laborers who could not own land. Although assimilationist policies intended to change the issue of landownership, the dialectic relation of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion resonates with conditions of social, geographic, and legal liminality that permeate Enxet and Sanapaná relations with settlers to the present.

SETTLER FRONTIERS AS RACIAL GEOGRAPHIES

Bringing Indigenous labor to the fore of analysis instead of dwelling solely on the way land was taken focuses attention on how racial capitalism is woven into the social fabric of settler colonialism and its spatial expression. Such geographies are inextricably tied to the production of new racial orders mediated through the distribution of private property that upholds settler colonial regimes and their concomitant violence. Though this is not a story of their choosing, Enxet and Sanapaná have been active agents whose role has long been overshadowed. It is a role that many of my Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors view in dramatically different ways, from a source of oppression to one of pride. Charting a history of violent dispossessions that began with the Anglican Mission helps reveal the processes and patterns of social-spatial relations that produced the racial geographies from which my Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors have endured and mobilized their resistance.⁷⁷

There are important distinctions that shape the structure and effects of settler colonialism in different geographies. Indigenous peoples in Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia were frequently dispossessed of land *and* forced to work that land for white settlers through the auspices of Christian missionary efforts.⁷⁸ Indeed, Speed argues that “labor regimes (*encomienda*, *repartamiento*, *hacienda*) were often the very mechanisms that dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, forcing them to labor in extractive undertakings on the land that had been taken from them.”⁷⁹ On the other hand, King argues for a focus on conquest instead of settler colonialism in Latin America, suggesting that white settler colonial studies rely too much on land, thereby decentering Indigenous genocide and erasing the violence of settler colonialism.⁸⁰ Keeping violence central is imperative. I employ settler colonialism as an analytic here due to the specific dynamics at play in the Bajo Chaco, a region that was not conquered through early Spanish or Portuguese efforts but one that was slowly colonized by settler ranchers, a process Indigenous peoples of the region have always resisted.

Chaqueño ranchers need(ed) laborers, and many prefer(red) cheap, readily replicable labor, not unlike Maya peons working for ladino patronos on Guatemalan

coffee plantations or *jornaleros* picking cotton in Peruvian fields.⁸¹ Indigeneity, in Paraguay's Chaco, and beyond, is thus often inextricably linked to histories of emplaced and embodied labor relations.⁸² Those relations are embodied in the settler patrón–Indigenous peon dynamic that has reordered life and land in the Bajo Chaco. The Anglican missionary presence in the Bajo Chaco is minimal today, but the social and spatial relations that the Anglican assimilation strategies produced are the norm in a region where cattle ranching dominates land and economy. It is imperative to understand how labor regimes imbricated with, and created by, settler territoriality in the service of (re)producing racial geographies shape the present and future politics of Enxet and Sanapaná struggles, to which I now turn.