

Layered Histories: Perspectives on Colonization from the Chaco

Miriam Rudolph

An artist book of twelve original intaglio prints including digital prints of a rough sketch map of the Central Chaco by Seymour Hawtrey 1900, a rough map illustrating Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb's Journey through the Chaco 1910, a map of the Anglican mission station Makthlawaya by Walter Regehr 1979, and satellite images of the Paraguayan Chaco Region from Google Earth 2017. Printed on Honen paper and mounted on Somerset satin white paper.

The typeface used for the text is Utopia and for the headers it is Berlin. The text pages are printed digitally on German Etching paper at Martha Street Studio, Winnipeg, Canada.

Printed by the artist in 2022.

Miriam Rudolph 2022

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Artist Statement

Layered Histories: Perspectives on Colonization from the Chaco is an artist's book that explores the complexities of colonization of the Paraguayan Chaco region through delicately layered etchings and diverging narratives of experiences and history from the perspectives of Enxet and Enlhet indigenous people, Anglican missionaries and Mennonite settlers. This collection of prints and texts has emerged from an invitation for an artist residency from the Santo Domingo Centre for Excellence in Latin American Research at the British Museum. Along with other artists, I was invited to engage with and create an artistic response to the Paraguay collection that is housed in storage at the British Museum in London. The collection consists of indigenous artefacts, mainly from the Enxet Sur, collected by Anglican missionaries Seymour Hawtrey and Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb in the early 1900s. This project gave me the opportunity to research the early colonization history of the Lower Chaco from the Anglican perspective, and to further explore the colonial history of my own roots – the settlement of Mennonites in the Central Chaco beginning in 1927, which resulted in the displacement of the Enlhet Norte.

I spent several months reading firsthand accounts by the missionaries, journal publications, and academic papers, publications by Mennonite settlers and scholars, as well as accounts by indigenous elders of their displacement process, in order to gather information that later informed my images and became part of the content in the form of text excerpts. The prints and text excerpts trace the events of early contacts between European missionary explorers and settlers through the changes in landscape and ways of living of the indigenous people to today's attempts at indigenous assertion of their rights and tentative perspectives for the future. While the histories of interaction between the Anglican missionaries and the Enxet Sur on the one hand and between Mennonite settlers and

the Enlhet Norte on the other hand are not the same, I felt the general colonization processes were so similar that they lent themselves well to juxtapose the different perspectives on the history of the region.

Through printmaking, I am building a visual narrative alongside the texts that not only analyzes but also embodies the issues I am addressing. The square format, the inclusion of digitally printed early maps, contemporary satellite imagery, and the grid, for example, pertain to land surveying, mapping, fencing in, enclosing, organizing, boxing in, and boxing up, referencing the act of collecting and storing the collection (also mimicked in the museum case that houses this artist's book), as well as the colonial imposition of a certain kind of order, of will, of a way of life, and of a way of thinking. In other instances, I print on both sides of a translucent paper, allowing the paper to embody a physical barrier between the past and the present, or allowing figures to shine through that are backers of the actors on the front. I explore the imagery of lightly or strongly etched figures of men, women, and children. The translucence of the groupings of figures suggests a non-solid, precarious presence and marginal existence, a fading past or a non-materializing future. The size and the strength of the etching of the figures reflects the power dynamics between the different groupings.

We often think of colonization as a process of history in the past. However, the impacts of colonization continue to pervade everything in our lives today: social structures and systems, our perception of land and property, the content we are taught in schools, the way we think about, interact with, and treat others on whose land we now live, whose artefacts we store, who work for us, and whose experiences are not taught in schools. This artist book invites to question our biases, our perceptions, and our understanding of history, and challenges us to decolonize our thinking.

Remembering

“We may have been poor, but that didn’t bother us because there weren’t any things. But we had the things from the bush. Our parents must have known how to work extremely well! The beads, for example, consisted of animal bones that they cut up. They used the bones of the deer, the ostrich, bird bones and a kind of wood that was hollow inside. However, the Enlhet had no knife, only the tapir’s bone, which they used as a knife because it was also sharp.”¹

Haatkok’ay’ Sevhen, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 1993

“When we arrived, we were bitterly poor ourselves albeit rich compared to these brown people. What did their poverty consist of? They were poor in clothes, for only loincloths covered their nakedness. They ate meager bush fruit, snakes, lizards, and caterpillars. Their dwelling consisted of a miserable grass hut, and they moved frequently. – But the inner poverty was even worse: their darkened heart, their face turned away from God, their life that knew of no salvation through Christ ... This gave the Lengua people [the Enlhet] the stamp of deep and terrifying poverty.”²

G. B. Giesbrecht, Mennonite Missionary, 1956

“The people were disorganized and nomadic savages, possessing nothing that might be termed property, thriftless, and never having a store of food ... The natives had few laws, and made very little attempt at government, no trades, and no ambition to rise above the level on which they stood.”³

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Terra Nullius

“We didn’t live in just one place before! *Kemhaklha-Yaanava*, *Straßberg*, *Hateelay*, these were villages of the Enlhet. Mother was surrounded by her goats in a wide circle, she had so many, and then also sheep – and although there were many, we took them with us wherever we went ... We always moved where there was enough to eat; we didn’t just live in one place before. That was our custom. We went to places where there was water; we looked for honey and game. And wherever we settled, we built houses ... I used to eat *Pehen* flour, I ate *Kenhek* too, and *Nausa*, the mealberries that grow in the bush. I also ate *Yaayet*, those black berries. And then *Hang*, another type of Karaguatá [bromeliad]; it tastes so good when you cut it up into small pieces ... We never ran out of sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes with yellow, round tubers. We had lots; my brother planted them, many Enlhet sweet potatoes. We also had peanuts, long pods with black peanuts.”⁴

Sa'kok Lhama'ay, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 1994

“The small primitive tribes for whom the Chaco region was their hunting grounds were barely noticeable in this play of natural forces; they were part of them. The map of civilization had not yet been drawn here. The Mennonites came into this untouched region of the Gran Chaco.”⁵

Heinrich Dürksen, Mayor of Fernheim, 1999

“The South American Continent is full of latent possibilities; its natural wealth is enormous; if once fully developed it would be one of the richest portions of the globe. [While parts of the land] would be suitable for European colonization, there still remains a vast area so situated climatically that only races adapted to the tropics can ever satisfactorily form the labouring class necessary for the development of these potentially rich regions.”⁶

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1919



Neocolonial Landscape

“The Enlhet had many places in the Chaco ...; a large circle describes that Land of the Enlhet. Today we live within a very small circle in Campo Largo. Nevertheless we maintain the memory of the places of our ancestors because it is very important that the young be able to compare both circles, so that we don't think it is impossible to have more space than we do today. We want the youth to learn more about the Land of the Enlhet so that this way they have a vision for the future; to ... broaden ... the possibilities that they have today.”⁷

Simeón Negro, former leader of the Enlhet community of Campo Largo, 2012

“A plane ride over the Chaco impresses the observer with the vastness of the area and the degree to which it is forested and undisturbed. But suddenly the sweep of the eye over the flat topography is broken by a man-made ordering of the environment. Abruptly the campo/forest gives way to cleanly cleared fields, geometrically laid pastures and roads, orchards, standardised farmyards, villages, and towns.”⁸

Calvin Redekop, Mennonite Sociologist, Professor at Conrad Grebel College, 1980

“The opening up of a large and practically unknown country, which has been an indirect result of the [Anglican] Mission, will seem important to those who watch with serious interest the gradual reclamation of the earth's waste places. Today it is safe for the white man to traverse some two hundred miles in a direct course west of the River Paraguay, over roads cut by the missionaries and other large areas within the Mission sphere; ... Where formerly ranchers hesitated to stock their land, for fear of Indian raids, thousands of cattle may be found today in well-fenced paddocks, tended by Indians who have been trained in the Mission and taught many useful crafts.”⁹

H. T. Morrey Jones, Clergyman and Companion of Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, 1910



Roads

“We used to move with ease and we lived well, with nothing to fear. The Enlhet walked the savanna and the bush ... Today we move with fear; we fear encountering dangerous people, Paraguayans or Mennonites, who might kill us. Our families frequently warn us against going out alone; they exhort us not to go far, though, in reality, the Enlhet no longer have much space in which to move. All that is left for us are the public roads. Access to the rest is forbidden. The young no longer know the bush. They only know the roads.”¹⁰

Sekhay'-Pva', Member of the Enlhet People, 2021

“After the Mennonites came, they began to choose *campos* [sandy land suitable for agriculture]. They went in different directions to choose *campos* and made roads through the fields of the Enlhet. The Enlhet, however, didn't want to give up their fields; they wanted to keep their sweet potatoes. The Mennonites set up posts, which the Enlhet didn't like at all: – ‘No, not here!’ they said. But there was nothing to be done ... The Enlhet didn't want to give up their fields; they didn't want roads to be built through them ... The Enlhet didn't want to give up their fields! While the sweet potatoes were growing, the Mennonites built their roads through the fields of the Enlhet, built their villages on their fields! The Enlhet didn't want to give up their fields, but the Mennonites didn't listen to them. Eventually, the Enlhet gave up.”¹¹

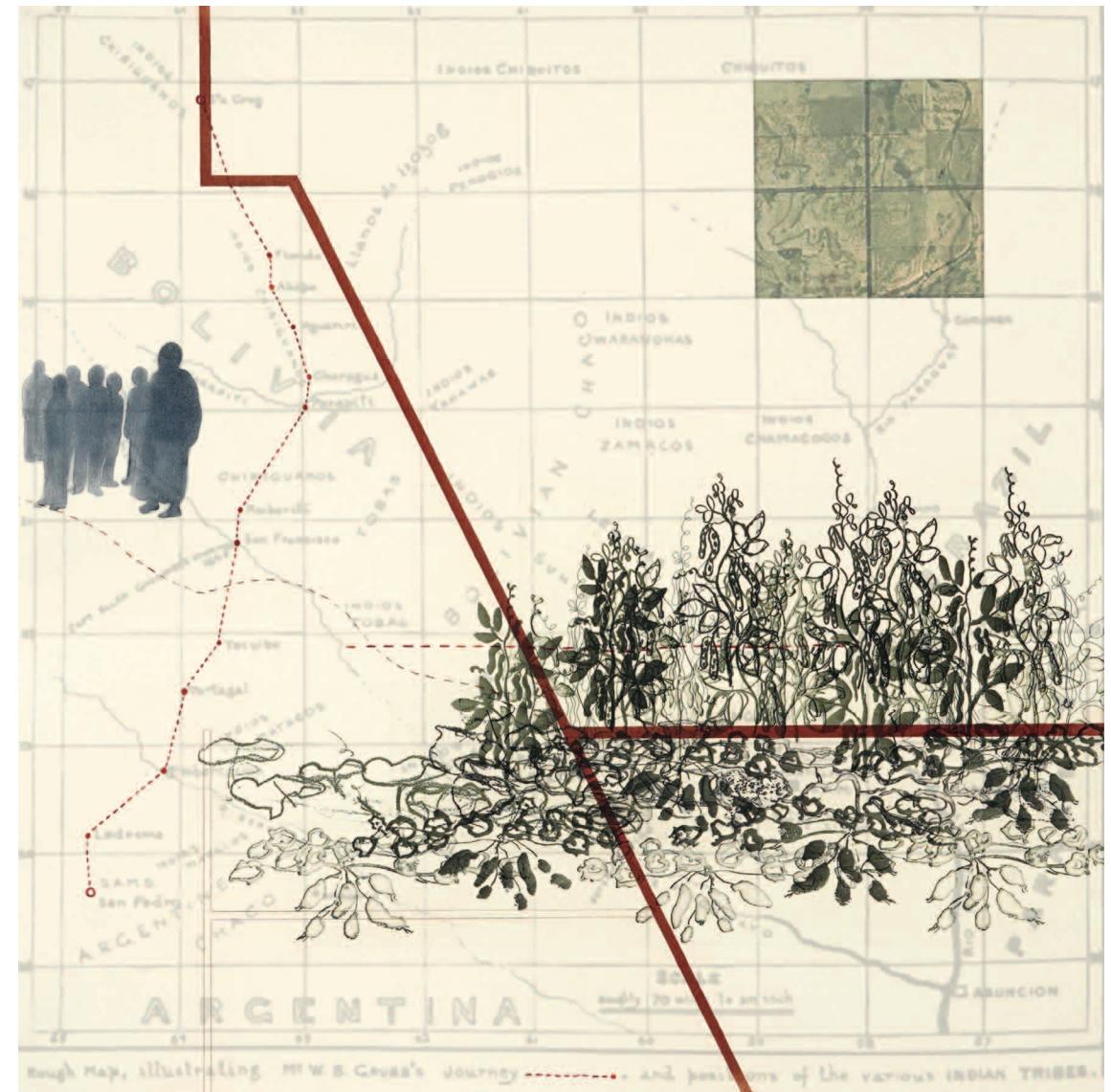
Metyeyam', Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2004

“The Lenguas [Enlhet] had their little fields on all the newly settled campos, where they cultivated certain crops ... These little gardens disappeared when the plow of the Mennonite farmers plowed over them. After a few years, there were no traces of them to be found anymore.”¹²

G.B. Giesbrecht, Mennonite Missionary, 1977

“In a country where fifteen years ago there were no tracks other than Indian footpaths resembling sheep-tracks at home, now about four hundred and fifty miles of cart-track have been made in order that the Mission bullock-carts might readily traverse the country ... It is worthy of note that the best progress made by Europeans into the interior has been along the Mission routes.”¹³

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Fences

“We used to relocate frequently ... In order to satisfy our constant desire for bush meat, our occupation was to find it. Later, however, our space was cut up by Mennonite fences. We couldn't cross the fences ...”¹⁴

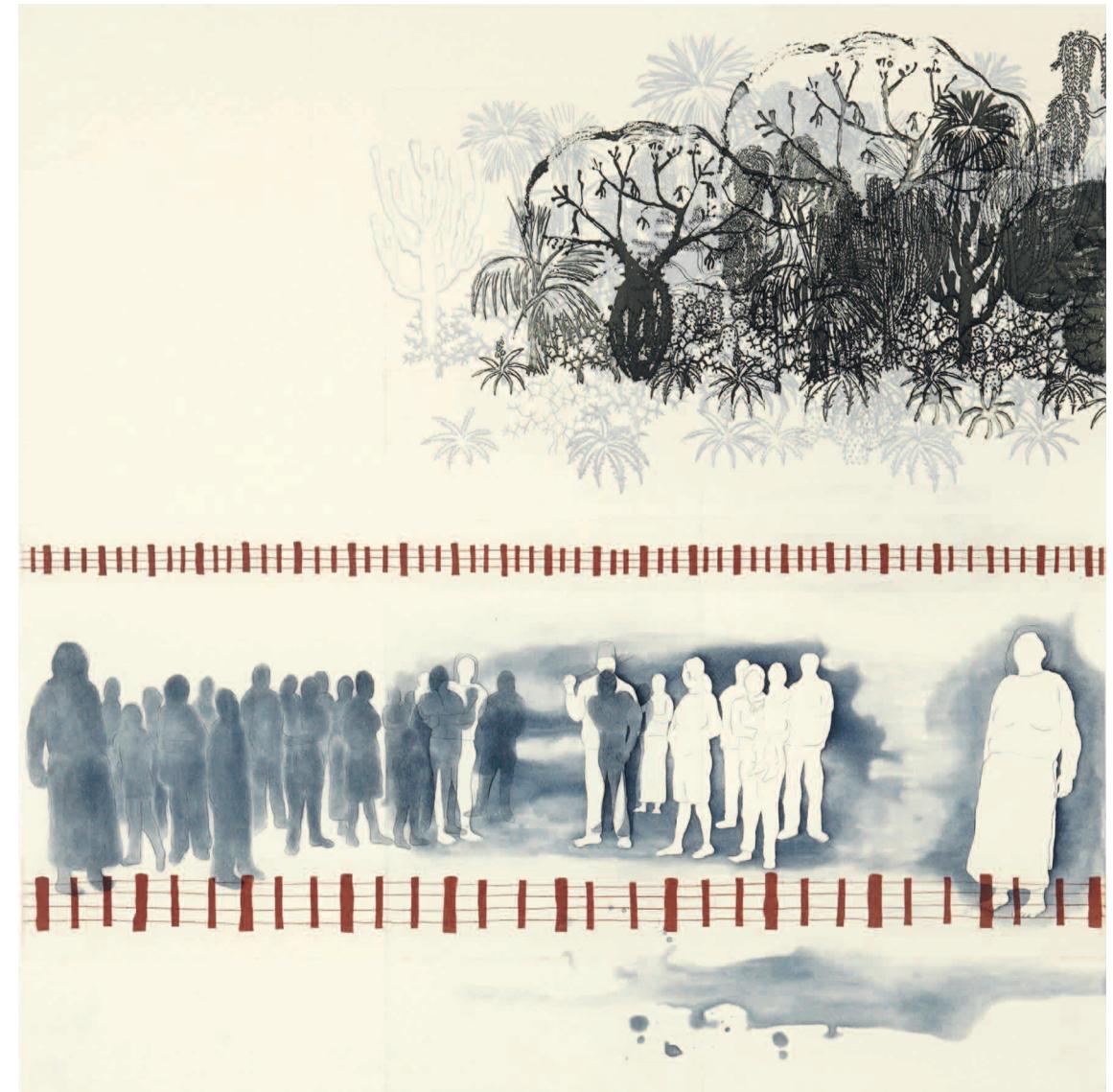
Sekhay'-Pva', Member of the Enlhet People, 2021

“We lived near the Mennonite Houses in *Nempeena-Amyep*, on the edge of the small swath of forest at the far end of their field. They had fenced off their field, but the rest of the land remained open and their cows moved freely on it. We lived on the other side of the fence, until we were approached by *Haako'-Pya'yeem*, a Mennonite from *Nempeena-Amyep*: ‘Do you want to hear the word of God?’ From then on we lived in *Haako'-Pya'yeem's yard*; no longer did we stay on the other side of the fence ... His teaching was designed to domesticate us; his actions made us tame. Yes, that's it, he rendered us harmless. From then on, the Enlhet would not react fiercely when a Mennonite berated them. They had become friends of the colonists ... Today, the Enlhet are passive and don't offer resistance. They are Christians; they have been tamed.”¹⁵

Maangvayaam'ay', Member of the Enlhet People, 2021

“The lands in their present condition [in the Chaco], provided that water could be secured, are estimated to carry safely five hundred cattle per Paraguayan league, and if this province could be developed in this way the total value represented would be immense. Fencing is an easy matter, as posts are abundant and almost always near at hand. The Indians make capital cow-boys and expert fencers.”¹⁶

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1919



Encounters

“The Mennonites ... initially thought we were dangerous. They feared we might kill them when they came. However, the Enlhet are not short-tempered, neither then nor today, although the lack of self control among the younger generations has increased considerably. That used to be different; people were kind to each other; nobody was excluded.”¹⁷

Savhongvay, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2005

“After the harvest and especially in the dry winter months, unemployment quickly set in so that the mass of Indians was, at least subliminally, perceived as a threat. This threat then became a strong motive for the settlement project.”¹⁸

Peter P. Klassen, Mennonite Historian & Author, 1991

“I knew that my safety lay in the fact that I acted without any show of power in arms; instead of threatening a native, I took it for granted that he would obey me. The course of action which I followed on this occasion was deliberately thought out. I was well aware that these Indians did not want me in their country.”¹⁹

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Dispossession

“The Enlhet did not imagine that they could be driven from their land. They wanted to help the Mennonites; they wanted to live here with them. Therefore, they did not think of driving out the Mennonites; they did not rebel against them.”²⁰

Savhongvay, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2005

“What I am telling you here also happened to us. We, too, almost became savages; we almost got angry, too. The fact is that the Mennonites took our land away from us when they came. It’s as if they stole our home from us. They invaded the bush and felled the trees. Then their rifles, with which they kept shooting around – we were afraid of that! They were excessive. This is how the Mennonites acted back then.”²¹

Haakok Aamay, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2001

“[In 1920], Fred Engen, employee of the ‘Corporación Paraguaya’, was authorized and commissioned to negotiate with the Indians and to acquire a settlement right for the Mennonites from the Lengua [Enlhet]. At the expense of the settlement society, the Indian chiefs and their people were given generous amounts of yerba [mate], galletas, caramelos [candy], and clothing as a kind of ‘territorial payment’.”²²

Hans J. Wiens, Mennonite Missionary, 1989

“The Paraguayan Government having sold every acre of land in their part of the Chaco, there is no provision whatever for Indian reserves, and an Indian has no more social rights, until he is baptized, than a tiger or other wild beast, and this is the light in which he is generally looked upon in South America.”²³

Seymour H. C. Hawtrey, Anglican Missionary, 1901



Mission

“The Mennonites disliked the Enlhet’s mobility because they needed us as a labour force. They planted cotton, sweet potatoes, corn, sorghum, peanuts, and they needed us to weed their plots. They decided to look for ways to have us stay in one place, with our own possessions. That is why they settled us on the plots, because in that way it would be easier for them to find people to work for them. It would, in a word, be part of their taming us.”²⁴

Maangvayaam’ay’, Member of the Enlhet People, 2021

“Since we’ve been dealing with the Indians of the Lengua tribe [Enlhet] from the beginning of our settlement in the Chaco, who, from time to time, have been working on our fields, we’ve gradually developed the plan to try to settle this tribe in the vicinity of our colony. The purpose of this procedure is to tie these savages more and more to the clod in order to gradually educate them to become useful, serviceable citizens of the Paraguayan state.”²⁵

Letter from the Mennonite Mission Association Licht den Indianern to the Paraguayan Government, 1935

“That there was great danger in entering their country, and much more in attempting to settle among them, has, I think, been made clear. But the South American Missionary Society gave instructions to their men, not only to enter into and dwell in their 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, mode of life, and laws, and of ameliorating the condition of the people by winning them over as Christian disciples.”²⁶

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Exploitation

“Nowadays, I am living among Mennonites. There used to be none here. When I came to the elders in *Paeklha’pe*, Loma Plata, very few lived here. But I worked here right from the start. It was I who cleared the land of trees and shrubs. I worked until I was exhausted. I cleaned *Paeklha’pe*, the town of *Paeklha’pe*. I dug out the tree stumps with a spade. However, the Mennonites don’t remember my work; they show me no kindness. They don’t consider the fact that I cleared this land.”²⁷

Haakok Metaykaok, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2002

“In the early years there was already an intimate contact with these Enlhet natives. Since this time, the Mennonites have lived together with the natives, especially the Enlhet. And other groups arrived as well, especially the Nivaclé from the Pilcomayo [River]. They approached us; they offered to work harvesting the cotton and doing other things that needed doing to earn their living here and to help build a society and an economy here in the Central Chaco ... It is important for us that we live together. We have always lived with our indigenous friends. They are our friends. They come to our yards, offer their labour, sometimes ask for alms.”²⁸

Kornelius Neufeld, School Superintendent in the Fernheim [Mennonite] Colony, 2012

“The Indian, for the next generation or so, must be content to earn his living by manual labour, but in order thoroughly to fit him for the task, and to develop his higher nature in the process, a certain amount of theoretical training is necessary. While we impress upon him that we regard him as a fellow man and brother, we at the same time leave him under no misapprehension as to his place in the world being a humble one until such a time as, in the course of evolution, he is qualified for a higher plane ... Our aim and desire are that the race may become a self-reliant, self-respecting, honest, intelligent, industrious, and Christian community, thus fitted to take their proper part in life.”²⁹

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Loss

“*Haako’-Pya’yeem* [a Mennonite from *Nempeena-Amyep*] disliked it when the wise men cured with their songs. He forbade it ... Nor did he like it when elders smoked tobacco. He took away their pipe and threw it on the fire. The elders offered no resistance; they said nothing ... The elders stopped working, and the wise men’s activities went into abeyance. My father used to comment that, when he converted, he lost his power. His powers dispersed and he could no longer heal and protect his people. He was aware that that would happen, but he converted nevertheless. The missionary insisted greatly on him doing so. ‘I have lost my power; I no longer have light’, the elders used to say when they converted. ‘I have nothing left’, said my father. ‘No longer can I save my people from suffering’”³⁰

Maangvayaam’ay’, Member of the Enlhet People, 2021

“[Mennonite] Missionary Dietrich Lepp, a young zealous worker, wanted to eradicate shamanism and sorcery. He forbade the medicine men to work at the mission station. As soon as he heard their singing, be it day or night, he went there and told them to stop.”³¹

Hans J. Wiens, Mennonite Missionary, 1989

“... my preservation during these early years was mainly due to the attitude which I had decided on in my own mind as the best to adopt in dealing with such a people: to assume at all times and under all circumstances superiority and authority ... I knew that their witch-doctors would treat me with open hostility, and that they would prove the greatest obstacle to the foundation of a mission among their people. While many of the native customs might profitably be retained, and while it was wise that the Chiefs should maintain their authority, I realized that it was otherwise in the case of the wizards. Their influence was entirely evil, and if Christianity was ever to take hold of the people, the wizards must cease to exist ... I hoped, moreover, to convince the Indians that I, being altogether superior to their wizards, was well worthy of their respect, and capable of imparting to them knowledge which their witch-doctors did not possess.”³²

Wilfrid Barbrooke Grubb, Anglican Missionary, 1911



Disruptions

“Close the roads!”³³

Jorge, Representative of Xákmok Kásek [Sanapaná & Enxet-Sur], 6 July, 2015

“... the ranchers will be mad because their products won't make it to market. They will call their representatives in congress. They will call their friends the senators and tell them to negotiate with us. The state will listen to the *patrones* because they are the ones that control the state.”³⁴

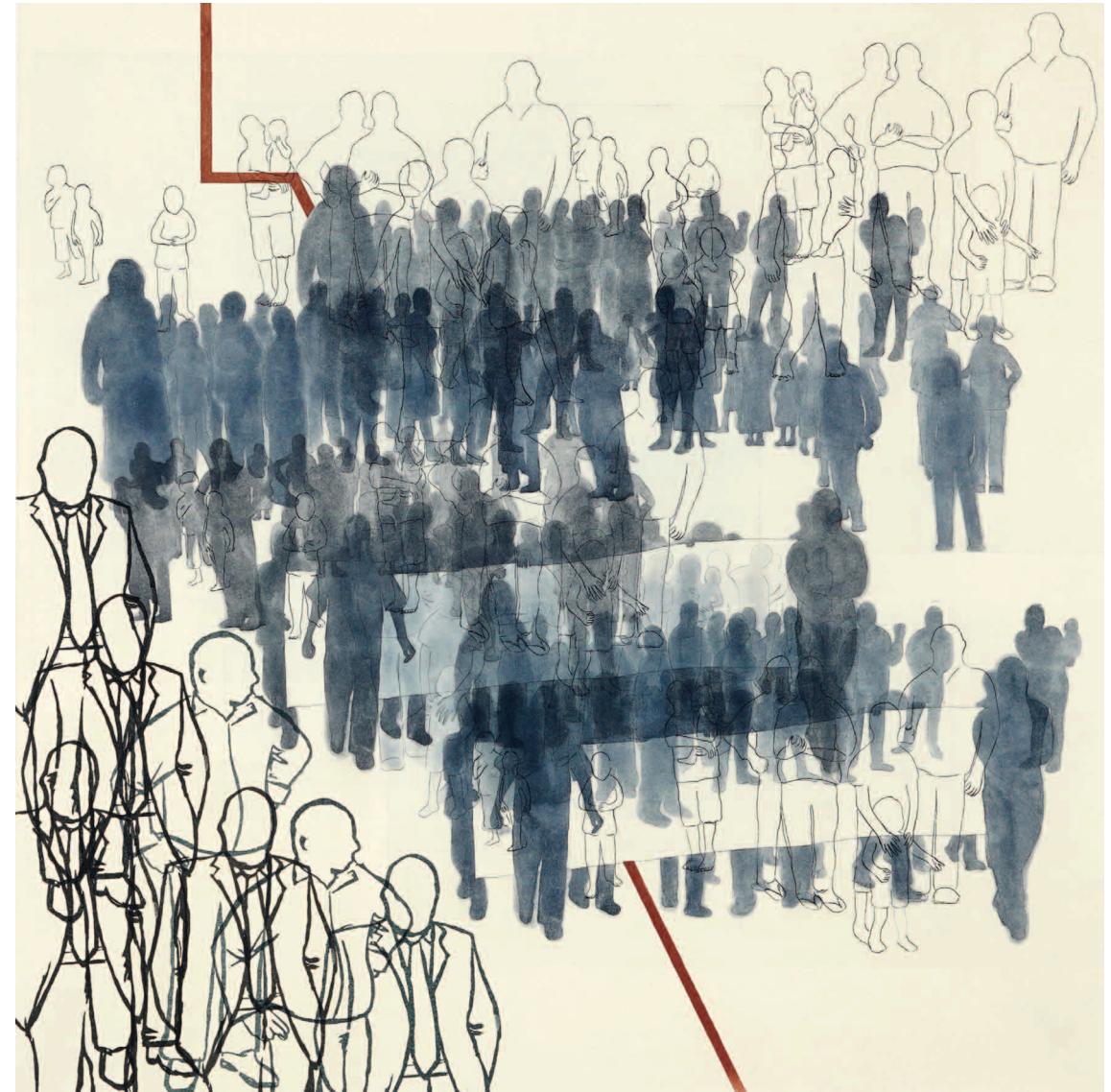
Protestor of Xákmok Kásek [Sanapaná & Enxet-Sur], Fieldnotes by Joel Correia, 6 July 2015

“... the Paraguayan state does not care about our rights. If it did it would have given us our land back a long time ago ... We know that our fight is just. The court [Inter-American Court of Human Rights] knows that too. The judgement gives us something that strengthens our fight to take our land back from the *patrones*. Without the judgment we would not have reoccupied this land.”³⁵

Ximena, Member of Xákmok Kásek [Sanapaná & Enxet-Sur], Interview by Joel Correia, 10 May 2015

“The position of the producers will of course be clear, and I also think that it is not in the best interest of the Enxet [Sur] community to get accustomed to an economy of extortion.”³⁶

Anonymous, Mennonite Commentator about highway closure by Xákmok Kásek, 2021



Re-Membering

“... [the struggle to reoccupy our land has] made us stronger. Now that we are back on our land our children can live in peace. We suffered a lot during the struggle but now we have a new future.”³⁷

Member of Xákmok Kásek [Sanapaná & Enxet-Sur], Interview with Joel Correia, 21 July 2016

“It would be good, if the Mennonites ... would take into consideration that we were already living here when they first came. It would be good, if the Mennonites always kept this in mind when they look at us. – ‘This is the homeland, the land of the Enlhet,’ they should say to themselves. ‘The Enlhet are not immigrants.’ This space in which we live here was the very own property of the Enlhet, campos and land of the Enlhet ... The Mennonites should always remember this: we were already living here when they first came.”³⁸

Kenteem, Member of the Enlhet People, narrated ca. 2001

“As strangers we came to the Chaco region where the Indians had been living for centuries ... [We came to the Indians] before the Indians came to us ... While initially there were only a few Mennonite villages that gradually fenced and worked their land, now there are huge areas of land that are fenced in, cleared and used as pastures by Mennonites. For the Indians ..., the natural landscape that was previously available to them free of charge for housing, hunting and gathering, is becoming increasingly limited ... We have recognized that we can only live well in the Chaco in the long term if the other ethnic groups in our area also have a least a minimum subsistence level. Since we have, intentionally or unintentionally, intervened massively in their way of life through our presence in the Chaco and through our economic expansion, it is only logical that we contribute to ensure that they also have their economic and cultural advancement in this new situation. This means that our cultural and economic help – in addition to missionary activity – is an absolute necessity if only in our own interest.”³⁹

Dr. Jakob Warkentin, Pedagogue and Co-Founder of the Association of Mennonite History and Culture in Paraguay, Neuland Colony, 2003



“Ninety-five years after Grubb, I too arrived in the Chaco as an Anglican missionary with a similar aim of bringing about a transformation in the Enxet people. I had read Grubb's writings but, after a few weeks residence on the mission station of Makthlawaiya, I began to suspect that Grubb's claim of having achieved a radical transformation was somewhat over-optimistic. True, Christianity had apparently taken hold, western clothing had replaced the feathers, deer skins and woolen blankets of the previous century, people gained their living as wage labourers ... yet the Enxet still remained stubbornly ‘egalitarian’ or, as they describe it, as ‘people without things.’ ... After almost one hundred years of dedicated mission work, one could not help reaching the conclusion that little, if any, progress had been made. As missionaries, we were as convinced as Grubb that the cause of that poverty was the social system, particularly the all-pervading influence of sharing. We tried our best to teach people the benefits of saving and investing their income but their attachment to an economy of immediate consumption appeared unbreakable. Fortunately, though, [my writing] is, in part, the product of a process of personal conversion. As my Christian faith withered away, I gradually developed a different perspective on Enxet culture and social life and my personal mission changed from one of transformation to a desire to share in the life of the Enxet. Rather than seeking to eradicate Enxet social practices I became increasingly committed to trying to understand – and experience – them.”⁷⁴⁰

Stephen William Kidd, Anthropologist, 2000

Endnotes

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