# The Politics of Isolation: Refused Relation as an Emerging Regime of Indigenous Biolegitimacy

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Isolation: describes the situation of an indigenous people or part of one that occurs when this group has not developed sustained social relations with the other members of national society, or that, having done so, has opted to discontinue them.

———Article 2, Peruvian Law Number 28.736

Isolation may be the beginning of terror; it certainly is its most fertile ground; it always is its result.

———Hannah Arendt 1968, 172

AN EMERGENCY IN THE CHACO

In November 2010, international attention was briefly focused on the plight of a handful of nomadic Ayoreo-speaking people living concealed in the dwindling forests of northern Paraguay. This attention took the form of a controversy over a scientific expedition proposed by the London Natural History Museum. The expedition was to be comprised of sixty ecologists, biologists, and other experts on nature, and its aim was to document the biodiversity of the Gran Chaco forest, a region described in a British newspaper article as "one of the most inhospitable, impenetrable and mysterious places on Earth" (Swain 2010). The expedition would have been the first to quantify the biodiversity of this under-studied area that also boasts one of the highest local deforestation rates in the world (see Killeen et al. 2008).

The British expedition was denounced by an NGO self-described as the "Isolated Peoples Protection Group" that claimed to represent the concealed

Ayoreo-speaking groups in the area. The NGO director declared on BBC News and National Public Radio that the expedition was equivalent to an act of genocide against the isolated Ayoreo. As he put it during a 9 November 2010 interview on BBC Radio 4, "It would be tantamount to genocide if an involuntary contact actually occurred, which would mean that there could be fatal consequences on both sides and the life-model of these people would break down, would collapse, and also the territory they belong to. This is tantamount to a genocide-like situation." Shaken by such accusations, government and museum officials suspended the expedition less than a week later (Gill 2010; Vidal 2010a; 2010b).

The relation this media event claimed—between the gathering of scientific facts and genocide—rests on the assumption that the concealed Ayoreo-speaking people are pure if fragile Others who "live in another world" (Glauser 2007: 220). Their exceptional alterity, according to this widely circulated argument, is derived from two sources. First, their bodies and souls are believed to be inseparable from certain threatened domains of Nature. As the NGO director put it in his BBC interview, the Ayoreo "live in complete interdependence with nature … in a great extension of completely virgin forest." Second, they are imagined to be the bearers of an uncontaminated culture that has not yet been "eroded" by contact (Glauser 2006: 192). The director described this place-specific collapse of pure Nature and pure Culture—upon which his protest against the expedition depended—as "a principle of life."

Anthropologists and other theorists, of course, have long critiqued the primitivist trope of Native populations that exist beyond "contact," history, or social relations as an enabling principle for naturalized inequalities, structural violence, or imperial nostalgia; a justification for the on-going dispossession of indigenous populations and the pathologization of local knowledge or memory; and a political field in which the positivist pretensions of anthropological expertise may be uncritically played out (see especially Fabian 1983; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Mbembe 2001; Myers 1988; Rosaldo 1989; Sahlins 1993; Taussig 1993; Trouillot 1995; Wilmsen 1989; Wolf 1982). Difference itself, we now presume, is a function of longer *durées* and wider relations. The efficacy of this established critique and a shifting sense of what is at stake in the contemporary means that most theorists are no longer interested in "uncontacted" or "primitive" populations as an object for ethnographic inquiry. The discipline has moved on to concerns that it considers less problematic and more pressing. Such trenchant critiques may be taken for granted by anthropologists (including the author), but they register in different ways or not at all in the realm of popular politics.[1]

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[1]  The purpose of this article is not to summarize or reprise these important critiques, and it takes for granted that the notion of "uncontacted tribes" is no longer an analytical heuristic for theoretical anthropology as an empirical, rather than metadiscursive, reality. Instead, it signals how this

Despite exhaustive ethnographic evidence and scholarly arguments to the contrary, the well-traveled fantasy about a form of cultural life conserved beyond the limits of the social persists in rising again and again. From blockbuster films like *Avatar* and "first contact" tours in West Papua to recent United Nations Human Rights initiatives, best-selling books, and the Youtube sensation created by aerial photos of remote Brazilian tribespeople, the figure of the isolated primitive remains central to the global imaginary. The notion of such "uncontacted," "unconquered," or "unreached" humankinds may be put to rest by anthropology, but it is one whose contemporary reanimation is instrumental within the political formations and techniques that ostensibly define the limits of life within late capitalist modernities.[2]

Today, new political norms, moral arguments, and infrastructures of protection are being organized around the pressing imperative to police the boundaries of "voluntarily isolated" life. Those rallied to its defense are evoking subjective horizons, managerial logics, and human contents based on the urgency of preserving its imperiled form. This essay does not attempt to unmask the obvious artifices of isolation, enhance the techniques for its protection, or redefine its contents. Indeed, a critical analysis of the recent controversy around the expedition based on an appeal to the more empirically real would miss the point. Rather, I examine how contradictory political definitions imbue isolation with an uncanny social force; one that presses against human life and thus demands ethnographic accounting of its instrumental effects. The following is intended as a protest against certain impoverished understandings of human capacities and the premature explanations by which the futures of those few Ayoreo-speaking people who remain in the forests of northern Paraguay are currently being governed and foreclosed.

## THE POLITICS OF ISOLATION

This article describes how the moral defense of isolation as a "principle of life" articulates precisely the contradictions that occur when cultural preservation becomes indistinguishable from the biopolitical governance of certain indigenous populations. In it, I suggest that this resurgent interest in isolation-as-life reveals more than the enduring romance of the primitive or the recycling of its metaphors. Rather, this essay is concerned with how the hyper-real subject of isolation may be an instantiation of violence for those internally colonized subjects interpellated by the label of voluntary isolation, and how

category persists despite these critiques, and how it increasingly is able to shape the global biopolitics of indigeneity.

[2] For more details on the range, estimated number, and distinct national politics around "voluntarily isolated" groups in Latin America, see especially Parellada (2007). Here, I am interested less in the precise empirical contents of the category of isolation, and more in the ways it acts as a generative imaginary for politics.

mobilizing around its protection is a speculative practice that reformulates the kind of life that the contemporary politics of indigeneity is interested in.

Specifically, I argue that the politics of isolation constitute a new regime of what Didier Fassin (2009) has called "biolegitimacy"—or the uneven political authorization of the terms of legitimate life—within global formations of indigeneity. What is unique about the contemporary politics of isolation is how they redefine the topography of cultural activism around indigeneity in general. Within the rubric of isolation, the category of indigeneity brackets not a universal essence but a universalizing form: one that is fully capable of eclipsing, evacuating, and generating anew the particular contents (biological, cultural, ontological) through which it is politically intelligible. Moreover, the vertical edges of isolated life are by definition rigidly co-terminous with the limits set around "pure culture" in multicultural states; that is, isolation redistributes the human content assigned to the "serious fiction" of culture as a bounded, stable whole whose true manifestation is restricted to spatiotemporal displacement or absolute difference (see Clifford 1988; also Abercrombie 1998; Jackson 1995; Jackson and Warren 2005; Myers 1988; Sieder 2002; Turner 1999).

Many scholars have rightly noted how such narrow definitions of authentic culture are a primary medium by which the hard-fought gains of indigenous rights movements may "boomerang" and blur into familiar colonial hierarchies and the techniques of neoliberal governmentality (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12; see also Albró 2006; Gordillo 2004; Hale 2006; Muehlmann 2009; Warren 1998). But the politico-legal category of isolation does something more. It presumes that social relation itself is a line of exclusion cutting through the category of culture. It thus parses indigenous kinds of life into opposing regimes of authenticity based on degree of associative relations, which are then set against one another and vertically ranked by politics. In such ways, the protection of isolated life extends a fundamental contradiction of contemporary indigeneity: the authorization of contradictory cultural limits constitutes an anticipatory biopolitics that may be set against the life-contents these forms purportedly name and protect. At stake is not merely a new technique of the self, but the uneven ascription of meaning and value to a kind of life imagined legitimate only to the degree it remains the precise opposite of the ideal subject of Network Society.

To explore some of those points at which the divergent politics of otherness link up with the politics of viable life, in what follows I draw from forty-one months of fieldwork experiences among Ayoreo-speaking people of the Bolivian and Paraguayan Gran Chaco. It was long considered a domain of wilderness and savagery, "an obscure region where the hand of civilization has never penetrated" (Pelleschi 1886: 11). Now, this dense shrub forest is being transformed into the scene of industrial-scale agriculture and ranching. In the Chaco (as elsewhere), isolation is a mobile frontier (see

Gordillo 2006). It is displaced beyond an ever-expanding capitalist topography, on the other side of ruler-straight roads and bare pastures like pieces of Kansas or Manitoba laid somewhere they do not belong. Any attempt to reach its elusive geographic locale means passing thousands of ex-primitives. These people are the descendants of the nomadic Ayoreo-speaking groups who successfully fought off outsiders for centuries. As "uncontacted" people they too once gained international notoriety (Maybury-Lewis and Howe 1980; Perasso 1987). Most of these formerly semi-nomadic foragers were contacted by missionaries between 1947–1986.[3] Now they are among the most marginalized of any native peoples in this region where Indians are often held in conditions described as slavery (Bedoya and Bedoya Garland 2005; Kidd 1997). In 1998 and 2004, small bands of the Totobiegosode-Ayoreo sub-group emerged from the forest, fleeing ranchers' bulldozers and fearing for their lives. Today, two or three additional groups of Ayoreo-speaking individuals still pursue a nomadic existence in the shrinking forest of the Bolivia-Paraguay borderlands.

It is worth clarifying at the outset that the kind of non-relational life conjured by isolation does not correspond to the existential state of those few Ayoreo-speaking holdouts, who number perhaps as few as thirty individuals in total. Much like Ishi a century ago, their lives have been reduced to the practical problems of concealment from the beings they believe seek to hunt them down and consume them (Kroeber 1961). The seventeen members of the Totobiegosode-Ayoreo group which emerged from the forest in 2004 are closely related to one of the bands remaining in concealment, with whom they lived in a single group until 2001. They told me that the concealed people are constantly in motion, and routinely camp in the 15 meter-wide strips of brush left as wind-breaks around vast cattle pastures. They go long periods communicating only with whistles. If they hear a chain saw or see a boot-print they flee far and fast, leaving everything behind. These people do not inhabit a pristine wilderness but the literal margins of industrial agriculture. They are not the bearers of a vestigial purity, but piece together the means of survival from imperial detritus—grease buckets, forks, tires, telephone cables. They are by no means isolated, but they have developed a way of life around the daily logistics of eluding starvation, capture, and death.

Nor does the imperative to preserve isolation resonate with many of the approximately six thousand Ayoreo-speaking people who now occupy thirty-eight settlements, mission stations, and temporary work camps around the periphery of their ancestral territories (see Canova 2011). During my fieldwork, many of these more settled Ayoreo-speaking people contrasted what they perceived as the ignorant, sinful space of the forest-past, *Erami*, with the space

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[3]  Although I do not address it here, the history of "contact" with Ayoreo-speaking populations began long before 1947. Eighteenth-century Jesuits had sustained relations with Ayoreo-speaking bands from 1711–1745. See Combés (2009) for more on these encounters.

of present life, *Cojñone-Gari*, or "that-which-belongs-to-non-Ayoreo." Life and agency in *Cojñone-Gari* was defined by a moral ecology of metaphysical forces controlled by the Christian God. It was considered to be inhabitable only for humans whose form and content had been evacuated and reconstituted through the ruptures of contact and conversion (Bessire 2011). Many Ayoreo-speaking people (but not all) thus joined other colonial interlocutors in arguing that the moral imperative to care for and protect the concealed groups did not imply their preservation *in situ*, but rather, actively seeking out contacts and converting them to Christianity.[4] In other words, their concealment was often perceived as a socio-moral boundary to be overcome.

Political violence adheres to the gaps between this external category and both of these diametrically opposed contemporary Ayoreo life-projects. During my fieldwork with Ayoreo-speaking people in Bolivia and Paraguay, it was impossible to ignore the real social force that the neocolonial fantasy of the isolated Indian exerts within and through Ayoreo life. It was a national legal category, a rallying cry for several competing NGOs, and a form of moral reasoning about causality which most Ayoreo-speaking people rejected, all at the same time. I gradually came to see the category of isolation as a complex matrix of governance, political agency, and disavowed mediation that demanded more thorough ethnographic attention.

It was also a formation of violence. Actual Ayoreo-speaking subjects are stripped of rights and exposed to elimination to the same degree that the hyper-real isolated subject is imbued with human rights and vital content; that is, to the degree isolation becomes a reliable tenet or indexical sign whose reality is imagined to be constituted independently of representational processes and relational ontologies (see Wilmsen 1989: 4). For isolation defines the humanity of living Ayoreo-speaking people in relief. It diverts attention away from the political investments in denying the capacity for self-objectification to the concealed groups. At the same time, it offers yet another justification for classifying more settled groups as the degraded biological "shadows of humanity" that remain when a cultural system is "broken" or "killed" (Escobar 1988: 37), or the ways they are routinely treated as sub-human matter out-of-place: a *lumpen* labor reserve for axe work or charcoal production, souls already won, a threat to civic hygiene, a source of myths and dissertations and fungible bodily substances, and so on. Both outcomes—the creation and moral defense of isolated life and the amplification of violence against actual Ayoreo subjects—emerge as mirror effects of a single set of intelligibilities.

The biopolitical force of isolation emerges from the shared investments in this hyperreality by several characteristic and seemingly opposed structures of

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[4]  While this was the prevailing attitude I noted during my fieldwork between 2006 and 2008, it is important to note that it is rapidly changing as more Ayoreo-speaking people articulate with international rights movements and fora.

the contemporary: multiculturalist state politics, international human rights law, global humanitarianism, genetic science, and anthropological expertise. This situation has two implications for the following analysis. First, it means that although isolated life is politically effective to the degree it is perceived as a fixed or self-evident form of absolute difference, in practice it is a disordered form of intelligibility and always-emergent "structure of feeling"[5] whose contradictions mirror the frictions between the diverse global projects that appear to coalesce via their shared interests in the indigenous. Here, the category of isolation operates as a particular kind of what Ann Stoler refers to as an "imperial formation," or a structural inequality based not on formal exclusions but "gradated forms of sovereignty and what has long marked the technologies of imperial rule: sliding and contested scales of differential rights" (2008: 193). Attending to (and tripping up) the instrumental incoherence between the awkward scales of practice by which isolation circulates globally requires an analysis that works with and not against such disjunctions (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003; Taussig 1987; Tsing 2005).

Attempting such an analysis may also pose distinct questions to relation itself. How does the apparent refusal of association, attributed or otherwise, so quickly slip into the relational idioms of naturalized inequalities, as well as salvation or sacrifice? What kinds of politics are entailed through or against the persistent appeal of such imagined anti-communities? Social life in the so-called Network Age is often presumed to be an outcome of the ever-expanding possibilities of associative relationships. For some theorists, this means that "actors are network-effects" (Law 1999: 5), or that "attachments are the real center of the social world" (Latour 2005: 238). The rise of isolation as a legal category, speculative biopolitics, and technique of the self calls attention to how the structuring opposites of networks may be equally constitutive of the everyday politics of indigeneity. Specifically, it suggests how colonial habits of segregation may be extended within present contexts of revised use (Stoler 2002).[6] In this case, the figure of culture not only marks a new state of exception, but also a new form of exclusion and dispossession. My emphasis is not so much on finding social connection where there appears to be none, but rather, on the ways the contradictory investments in protecting isolation constitute a crucial practical method for rebordering culture and life within the transnational political fields of indigeneity.

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[5] That is, a "specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and in what are often its most recognizable forms, particularly deep starting points and conclusions" (Williams 1977: 134).

[6] The insight that isolation may figure as an important colonial history of the present is being formally developed in conversation with David Bond and Emily Martin. Elsewhere, we explore in greater depth how isolation is a foundational feature of neoliberal state practice, scientific techniques, and imperial technologies of rule often overlooked by Network Analysis, in which refused relation can only be registered as a failure of the social if it is registered at all.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISOLATION

The word isolation comes from the Latin *insulatus*, the state of being like an island or land cut off by the sea. Its English variant was first adapted from the French *isole* or *isole'd* in the mid-eighteenth century. Until quite recently, isolation was considered an obstacle for the realization of humanity, both for groups at the periphery of moral society and individuals at its center. For Aristotle, Augustine, Marx, Durkheim, Freud, and Arendt, an isolated subjectivity has no place within a healthy and moral society. Today, something has changed. While the isolation of individuals at the center of capitalist modernity may still be pathological, the isolation of certain groups at its edges is considered a virtuous set of vulnerabilities that demand exceptional protection within neoliberal states.

Isolation has been a foundational concept within political theory since its inception. For Aristotle, proper man was *zoon koinonikon*, "the connecting animal" whose humanity is only guaranteed and buttressed by social relations (Pagden 1982). Wild Men in ancient Greece were sub-human because they dwelt beyond laws, cities, and all the material ensurers of such connections, lurking "just out of sight, over the horizon, in the nearby forest, desert, mountain or hills" (White 1972).[7] Fixing isolation as the limit of moral humanity consolidated this Aristotelian infrastructure of connection. Beginning with Enlightenment moralists, isolation was not applied to groups outside of society, but to detached individuals within it. For scholars like Denis Diderot (1772), Jean de la Bruyere (1885 [1688]), George Keate (1779), and Thomas Carlyle (1843), isolation might have been morally reprehensible and "the sum total of wretchedness to man," but it was a consequence of rational choice unbounded by social norms.[8]

Marx inverted this scheme. For him, the capitalist objectification of labor meant that *homo economicus* was isolated not only from others, but also from his "natural self." Isolation for Marx is a form of false-consciousness; the aberrant and typical condition of the self-alienated proletariat that is antithetical to

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[7] What deeper starting point for the modern image of primitive Others than the iconic image of the Wild Man and its many historical incarnations? See Pagden (1982) and White (1972) for illuminating descriptions of the historically fluid parameters of what constitutes wild humanity.

[8] In his famous *Encyclopedie*, published 1751–1772 at precisely the time the word was adopted into English, philosopher Denis Diderot defines the *isole* as an individual "separate from the rest, alone," much like a statue in a garden or a figure on a table. The isolated man is not a savage at all, but an active participant within high society who chooses to be "free and independent" of accepted social norms. This choice also deprives him of life's pleasures and renders the isolated man morally reprehensible and vulnerable to danger, "much easier to damage"(8:927). Jean de la Bruyere's 1688 critique of the Courtier describes him as *isole'd* not because of an intrinsic defect, but because he is willing to sacrifice his dignity and honesty in the interest of ambition. For la Bruyere, isolation is the natural consequence of immoral action. The Courtier is grouped with those who are excluded from society because "He no longer calls things by their names," his speech does not reveal his true thoughts, and is thus, "physical, bestial and mechanical."

true human nature and society (in Tucker 1978: 133).[9] Similarly, Durkheim described isolation as a malaise indicative of the breakdown of a moral society based on "organic solidarity," a collective consciousness, and the perfect integration of the individuals that constituted it. Hannah Arendt further developed Durkheim's notion of isolation as a dangerous form of *anomie* by arguing that "the completely isolated human being" is a necessary condition for the workings of totalitarian government (1968: 22).[10] For Arendt, state violence begins and ends with the isolated subject (ibid.: 172).

Freud considered isolation to be a pathology not of the collective but of the individual consciousness. He distinguished it from repression as a central "mechanism of defense" for neurotic individuals, one that does not require forgetting but rather strips an experience from its "associative connections," and separates ideas from affects (1926: 121–24). For Freud, isolation is a potent psychic aberration because of its interference with healthy associations; a conclusion that informed a range of social projects aimed at diagnosing, punishing, restoring, and governing individual psyches, most notoriously within the asylum, prison, and concentration camp (i.e., Chodoff 1970; Eissler 1959; Grassian 1983; Niederland 1968). In sum, each of these important thinkers— Aristotle, Enlightenment moralists like Diderot, Marx, Durkheim, Arendt, and Freud—offers a strikingly consistent definition of isolation despite their divergent political projects. It is the antithesis of those connections that are imagined to border healthy, moral, or natural human society at any given historical moment.

Even such a cursory overview reveals that isolation has never had a fixed object or subject. It has been applied to nomadic European, Asian, and African groups in the third century BC, Amerindians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, estranged members of the privileged class in eighteenth-century France and Britain, noble savages in the nineteenth century, alienated working class individuals of the twentieth century, citizens of totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany, neurotics, "emotionally anaesthesized" concentration camp survivors, those with autism or schizophrenia, and prisoners or

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[9] Marx describes isolation as a kind of "psychological pain" resulting from the alienation of man from his own labor power and social relations, the illusory individuality of homo economicus upon which the capitalist enterprise depends and operates. The dominant class, he argues, experiences self-alienation as "a sign of its own power, and possesses in it the appearance of a human existence." Sub-altern classes, on the other hand, find in self-alienation a sense of destruction and impotence, "the reality of an inhuman existence." The capitalist objectification of man and nature, he argues, leads to "total isolation from others and the natural self," and the denial of true human nature (in Tucker 1978: 133–34).

[10] One of the primary concerns of all tyrannical governments, Arendt claims, is to bring a "pre-totalitarian" isolation about through fear and impotence. "Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian government … bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging in the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (1968: 173).

other wards of the state. In each case, isolation refers to a moral imperative for the non-isolated to police the boundaries of moral society by protecting themselves or curing others from the malaise of a detached subjectivity. In the United States today, of course, isolation is also one of the most extreme forms of legal state punishment (see Wacquant 2010). Although long offset by the tropes of romantic primitivism or natural solitude, until quite recently a similar definition of isolation as a threat to social integrity was extended at times to the collective subjectivity of native groups. For instance, in the 1971 Declaration of Barbados, one of the foundational documents of the Latin American indigenous rights movement, isolation is described as a danger. States are called upon to fulfill their responsibility toward "isolated tribal groups," not by preserving their state of isolation, but through "establishing contacts with [them]."

Traces of these earlier meanings persist within its contemporary deployment as a descriptor of exceptional life-forms; isolation narrates its own polysemous history. It still refers to a technique of poetics and governance, a form of false-consciousness, the fetish power of alienation, and an analytic habit by which experience and affect are segregated. Like past applications of the term, its present uses imply an actionable moral imperative for the non-isolated. But the political project it evokes is not based on protecting ourselves from isolation nor on incorporating those afflicted by it. Rather, it implies a moral responsibility to protect certain isolated groups on the periphery from connections with us. This responsibility is premised on the existence of a certain humankind that refuses association, one increasingly given the forceful presence of legal fact.

### THE RIGHT TO ISOLATION

The legislation of isolation as an international human rights issue began as a response to a particular problem; that is, through intense mobilizing by indigenous organizations and NGOs in Peru and Brazil against the disastrous effects of multilateral development projects for certain indigenous populations (Huertas-Castillo 2002; Napolitano and Ryan 2007). These largely successful mobilizations prompted a series of meetings funded by the InterAmerican Development Bank and the United Nations in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010 to establish an effective international lobby around isolation as "a fundamental human right" and domain of expert knowledge (Brackelaire 2006; Parellada 2007).[11] In the last six years, the United Nations, the Organization of American

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[11]   The major impetus for the legislation of isolation came from reactions to the 2003 Camisea oil exploration project in the Peruvian Amazon, financed by the InterAmerican Development Bank. The disastrous effects of the project and intense lobbying by regional indigenous organizations and international legal experts created a situation in which the Bank's loan payments were made contingent on concrete steps taken to protect isolated peoples.

States' Human Rights Commission, and a series of precautionary measures issued by the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights have begun to legislate isolation as an exceptional collective right, defined by a general state of vulnerability. The legislation of isolation, in other words, was developed as a last-ditch effort to develop an apparently universal solution to a particular set of urgent problems.

The clearest formulation of isolation as a shared existential state is found in the 2009 "Draft Guidelines on the Protection of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and in Initial Contact," by the UN Human Rights Council. This document uses three criteria to define isolated peoples: (1) "They are highly integrated into the ecosystems which they inhabit and of which they are a part, maintaining a closely interdependent relationship with the environment in which they live their lives and develop their culture…; (2) They are unfamiliar with the ways in which mainstream society functions, and are thus defenseless and extremely vulnerable in relation to the various actors that attempt to approach them or to observe their process of developing relations with the rest of society, as in the case of peoples in initial contact …; (3) They are highly vulnerable and, in most cases, at high risk of extinction. Their extreme vulnerability is worsened by threats and encroachments on their territories, which directly jeopardize the preservation of their cultures and ways of life…" (United Nations 2009).

A similar definition of isolation has become national law in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia.[12] The legal government of isolation draws from two significant precedents. The first is the guarantee to self-determination as the fundamental indigenous right. The condition of isolation, jurists have argued, is "the clearest and most unequivocal form in which they exercise their right to self-dermination." Thus, legally protecting their human rights requires "a guarantee of respect for the no-contact principle … which represents the highest expression of their will." The second precedent is the right to culture. In the UN Human Rights Council document, the human rights of isolated peoples are linked to their status as "very vulnerable peoples whose cultures are at permanent risk of disappearing." Preserving these cultures both preserves "a valuable public good for humanity," and "protects the existence" of isolated peoples (ibid.: 5–11, 14, 18). The legal case thus presumes that the condition of isolation is the maximum expression of Native desire or will, and that the validity of this life is entirely contained within the limits of uncontaminated culture.

In such definitions, isolated life is inseparable from pure Nature, as well as pure Culture. Today, isolated people legally resemble endangered non-human elements of nature in their rights to an absolute difference. Contrary to the life-forms that are viable within capitalist modernity, this regime of Culture/Life

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[12] This includes the 2006 Peruvian Law 28736, Article 57.21 of the Ecuadorian Constitution, and Article 31 of the 2009 Bolivian Constitution.

does not disrupt natural ecosystems, but is an integral part of them. As the NGO director who protested the expedition put it, "Without them something would be lacking in the forest, something related with their vitality and the validity of what we call biodiversity" (Glauser 2004: 12). In such ways, isolation may be a legal slot reserved for the latest reincarnation of Natural Man (Trouillot 1995). Thus, a pioneering indigenous rights group, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, can describe the concealed Ayoreo-speaking people in all seriousness as "a single, inseparable unit with their habitat … with which they live together in close communion" (IWGIA 2010: 21). Because it grants rights to a form of life that it cannot locate, isolation presumes a subject that is intelligible only in its sovereign absence. Paradoxically, it presupposes a legal subject that must remain outside of law itself.

This means that isolation may at times allow for new forms of imperial guardianship (alongside real protections), in which various state and transnational institutions compete to become the legitimate trustees of certain kinds of life. By claiming the power to authorize itself or third parties to act as guardians *ad litem* for isolated groups, the state prefigures the isolated as wards or dependents. This also applies to international jurisprudence. The recent precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to protect isolated groups, for instance, stem from a process called "third-party petitions," in which a third party can submit petitions on behalf of another if the actual injured party is deemed unable to submit a petition for itself (Boecher 2009: 89). The legal efficacy of isolation is predicated on such slippages between absence and agency. It presumes a kind of life that is only sovereign to the degree it reborders the human/non-human; that is, to the degree it is subsumed entirely into an external sign from which its vitalism is simultaneously excluded. This basic premise is not questioned by those actors and stakeholders which are now competing to represent isolated groups and manage the resources marshaled on their behalf.[13]

The legislation of isolation is in part derived from the ways in which the value of cultural diversity and biodiversity have become quantitatively the same within the logics of global capitalism (Maffi 2005). Those working in international conservation, development, and human rights regard each as a global public good, an underprovisioned resource whose benefits ideally reach across borders, generations, and populations (Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern 1999: xxi). As Ismail Serageldin put it in a 1999 UN Development Program Report, "Culture is an end in itself … it contributes to a society's ability to promote self-esteem and empowerment for everyone" (Serageldin

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[13] See Picanerai (2007). The complex political negotiations currently undertaken by Ayoreo organizations and their representatives on this issue are rapidly evolving and merit further investigation. Due to constraints of space and the delicacy of these processes, here I have focused instead on the wider structures within which such mobilizations are co-constructed and gain traction or not.

1999: 240). Yet whereas this cultural diversity is a value based on the recognition that "differences in human societies are parts of systems and relationships," and thus mutually constitutive effects of politics, history, and personhood, isolation presumes the inverse (Appadurai 2002: 16–19). The value of isolation rather depends on a cultural difference that exists prior to, independent of, and in opposition to associative relations. Such a radical form of difference is inevitably contaminated by becoming available to wider networks, even though, like natural resources, its external value is only objectifiable by reference to the logics of market exchange.

## ISOLATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

The legislation of isolation presumes and creates contradictions within national multiculturalist policies as well as international law. The current mobilizing around isolation is only possible because of the well-documented juridical reforms across Latin America in the last two decades, particularly the rise of multiculturalism as an official state policy in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Paraguay, and Venezuela. Scholars have described how creating a pluralist and ethnically heterogenous state based on respect for human differences instead of their erasure promises "a radically new politico-legal order and conception of citizenship" that in effect redefines the national project in Latin America (Sieder 2002: 5; also Brysk 2000; Postero 2006; Yashar 2005). The emancipatory potentials of such reforms reside largely in their promise to decrease inequality by increasing political connectivity through new forms of citizenship and rights. Yet, as Jackson and Warren (2005) aptly point out, multicultural reforms remain unevenly spread and deeply contradictory for indigenous peoples in Latin America. This is even more complicated in places that have long been at the very margins of state rule, like the Paraguayan Gran Chaco.

As Turner (1999) argues, multiculturalism transforms a Herderian concept of culture as a distinct worldview into a foundational human right. Thus, Article 98 of the 2009 Constitution of Bolivia argues that cultural diversity "constitutes the essential base of the Communal Plurinational State.… The fundamental responsibility of the state is to preserve, develop, protect and distribute the cultures that exist in the country." Multicultural citizenship, in other words, presumes a humanity that is defined by the universal capacity to intentionally produce cultural selves; a process that is a function of certain degrees of mutuality and interdependence with others (Kymlicka 1996). The politico-legal category of isolation carries multiculturalist logics to such an extreme that they double back upon themselves. Isolation-as-right is premised on an appeal to a pluralist society built not around tolerance for diversity, but around a state that polices the boundaries of culture as permanent borders that must be defended. The protection of this imperiled difference is not meant to insure a society in

which everyone participates equally, but rather one in which segregation is the only possible form of solidarity with isolated subjects (even while their territories are being actively transformed into the sites of hydrocarbon and timber extraction or industrial agriculture).

While multiculturalist logics may make the state protection of isolation possible to imagine in the first place, the particular notion of culture implied by the category of isolation stands the legitimating premises of such protections on end. The key difference lies in how isolation establishes a state policy around protecting a subjectivity which is intrinsically incapable of changing the terms of culture or participating in its essentialization. The culture of the isolated subject is not envisioned as a set of shared capacities for self-production or reflexive metaobjectification as Myers (2004) and Turner (2009) have convincingly argued for indigenous peoples elsewhere, but a *sui generis* and immutable essence. Here, the instrumental polysemy of the culture concept which was previously the source of its unifying politial efficacy—as in venues of "strategic essentialism"—is impossible. If the isolated subject does not produce his culture, his humanity is confined to its ahistorical and ecological limits.

Thus, the state protection of isolation is imagined within Peruvian Law 28.736 as the only way to "guarantee [isolated peoples] their rights to life and health, while safeguarding their existence and integrity." In such a schema, the most valid cultural life can only exist outside of multicultural society. For instance, the concealed Ayoreo groups are described as "living according to their ancestral cultural norms, in another world; their knowledge of the modern life culture of encompassing society is reduced to isolated fragments, which they are able to incorporate into their own worldview without altering its coherence" (Glauser 2007: 220). Such familiar colonial conceits not only resonate with older representations of a racialized Ayoreo humanity as "an archaic culture," "mythical consciousness," or "wild and savage horde" (Bórmida 1984; Janzen 1962: 3; see Gordillo 2006 for a trenchant critique), but they also contradict the fundamental aims of multiculturalism by denying certain indigenous populations agentive control over processes of self-production, and thus, the full content of human being.

Isolation thus demarcates a new state of exception within indigenous (human) rights law, multicultural state policies, and Network Society, all at the same time. What is unique about the legislation of isolation is how it instantiates the increasing value attributed to the perceived "outside" to capitalist modernities, even as it remains a floating signifier whose vital contents are intrinsically unlocatable. It is defined not so much by the absence of positive law as the possibility of what Marc de Wilde (2006) describes as a "depersonalizing juridical violence" typical of contemporary states of exception. (It is hard to imagine a more completely depersonalized and profoundly theological legal

subject than isolated man.) In such ways, the legal government of isolation may imply what Benjamin (1999 [1921]) called "law-making" or law-instating violence, a force capable of founding and reordering the relations which law is supposed to reflect and formalize. As Benjamin suggests, such dynamics reveal a fundamental lawlessness at the core of legalizing isolation, in which laws are incapable of constraining the violent excess upon which their application seems to depend (see Butler 2006). Moreover, in the case of isolation in the Gran Chaco, the state enforcement of law is itself precarious and expeditionary. Thus, a new set of authorities have arisen to translate the category of isolation into political practice, and to manage its particular economy of scale. This entails additional forms of de- and re-humanization for Ayoreo-speaking people.

ISOLATION AND HUMANITARIANISM

What is most important about the isolated subject as legal instantiation, of course, is what can be done with it in practice. One month after the successful NGO protest against the planned Chaco expedition, the Attorney General of Ethnic and Gender Rights ordered a raid on its offices by national police (Duerksen 2010a; 2010b; Vidal 2010c). This action was widely denounced by other NGOs in Paraguay. POJOAJU, an association of Paraguayan NGOs, promptly issued a statement in which they "energetically repudiate this abuse of power," and described the raid as a "disastrous precedent of state action against the organizations of civil society in the Chaco" (POJOAJU 2010). International organizations quickly followed suit, with Amnesty International condemning the state's actions against these "human rights defenders" as a punitive reprisal for their denouncements against the expedition (Amnesty International 2010).

In each case, the state's regulatory actions were described as attacks not against the NGO per se, but as against the rights of the isolated Ayoreo the NGO supposedly defends. As the Amnesty International statement concluded, "This case demonstrates once again the void in the Paraguayan implementation of relevant international standards for indigenous peoples' rights." That several elected Ayoreo leaders themselves had requested the intervention against the NGO—for reasons unrelated to the expedition—was largely ignored (but see Duerksen 2011a; 2011b). Paradoxically, the presumed will of the isolated subject supplanted the voices of actual Ayoreo leaders, and rendered them inaudible in the name of self-determination.

The unquestioned reading of NGO agendas as the human rights of isolated Ayoreo subjects reveals the degree to which NGO labor has been crucial for translating the clear universals of isolation-as-legal-category into the messy practice of everyday politics. Such institutions are the medium by which the divergent global values of isolation may become a single regime of authorized life. In Paraguay, advocacy NGOs have replaced evangelical missionaries as

the arbiters of "unreached" people (Johnson 1966; Johnston 1985).[14] One of the results of the post-dictatorship state reform project was the "NGOization" of Paraguay civil society, and the *de facto* privatization of cultural difference and its preservation (see Blaser 2004; Horst 2003; Hulme and Edwards 1997). Until the recent rise of the Federation for the Self-Determination of Indigenous Peoples (FAPI), there had been no national indigenous movement in Paraguay (see especially Horst 2003 and 2007, for more detailed discussion). And during my fieldwork in 2006–2008, NGOs still largely occupied the role filled by indigenous federations elsewhere. Even today it is rare to find an indigenous community in the Chaco not affiliated with at least one NGO. While several provide critical services, many exist only as "briefcase NGOs" (Fowler 1997) designed to capture aid money. A common joke during my fieldwork was, "You got fired from your job and you're broke? Me too. I guess we have to open an NGO."

Two NGOs have organized themselves around defending the rights of isolated Ayoreo-speaking people in Paraguay. When international funders began to view indigenous organizations as their ideal clients in the early 2000s (see Brysk 2000; Jackson and Warren 2005), each of these NGOs supported the formation of a separate Ayoreo tribal organization that they fund, administer, and attempt to control. Not surprisingly, these institutions are also involved in a bitter and long-running conflict with one another. One institution—A—is affiliated with the most recently contacted bands of the Totobiegosode-Ayoreo sub-group. The second NGO—B—successfully protested against the London museum expedition. Run by a Cambridge-educated European who was a former member of A, this NGO describes how their work has created an "Ayoreo policy of recuperation and revitalization … [which] is bringing the cause of the modern Ayoreo (out of the forest) ever closer to that of the isolated groups, and the protection of them [is] becoming their own cause" (Glauser 2007: 230). In such descriptions, the figure of the culturally pure isolated Ayoreo becomes a metaphor for the value of all contemporary Ayoreo people, even as the NGO's objective is glossed as the agenda of all Ayoreo-speaking people.

Despite their bitter disagreements, both NGOs produce similar imagery about isolated groups as a form of life that has "not yet had any contact whatsoever with modern civilization" (Glauser 2004) and is in danger of imminent

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[14] A group of former businessmen from the American Midwest organized the New Tribes Mission in the 1930s for the sole purpose of contacting the "unreached" Ayoreo-groups of eastern Bolivia. These missionaries still believe that the Return of Jesus and the Rapture of the Faithful cannot occur until all people have heard the True Word of God. For them, the state of isolation or "uncontact" is what made Ayoreo-speaking people into "Brown Gold," vital resources for the redemption of Christendom and the spiritual economy of evangelism. Missionaries of six denominations made contact with most Ayoreo-speaking groups between 1947 and 1977, followed by a string of highly visible "contacts" in 1986, 1998, and 2004.

extinction. They both invoke the sanctity of this imperiled life as justification for their intervention, and use it to connect to wider humanitarian narratives and global NGO networks. Survival International has been particularly effective in raising awareness around the plight of the concealed Ayoreo groups in the Global North, beginning with its exposé of the deadly New Tribes Mission "human hunts" that targeted concealed Ayoreo bands in the late 1970s (see Holland 1980). In recent years Survival has focused on the unchecked deforestation of Totobiegosode lands, and organized several direct actions around the issue, including popular demonstrations in 2010 at Paraguayan embassies across Europe by thousands of protestors waving signs that read "Save the Ayoreo." The narrative of saving this "Tribe that Hides from Man" from extinction is a predominant one; website visitors are urged to donate or support Survival's work by statements such as "The Ayoreo Need You," or "Their Future Is in Your Hands."

Such imagery reinforces the notion that isolated life exists only as a state of emergency: the sovereignty of this life is contingent on the moral actions and financial charity of those in the Global North. This commonsense moralism prefigures NGOs as life-saving institutions that "do good" by "giving voice to the voiceless" or taking anti-hegemonic positions against states and markets and empowering grassroots aims (Fisher 1997; Hudock 2000). Thus, commentators have noted: "In Paraguay, civil society organized through NGOs plays a crucial role in promoting the protection of the territories and rights of the Ayoreo indigenous families in the Gran Chaco. In this process, [B] is distinguished as an NGO at the forefront of this protection, promoting as it does a unique participative model" (Rivas 2007: 86). Such impressions are necessary to insure the continued funding of these NGOs, mainly via charity groups and foreign aid offices of Norway, Holland, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the European Union.

These NGO actions have been instrumental in raising awareness around the plight of the concealed Ayoreo, including the rampant destruction of their ancestral territories. In practice, though, the imagined constituencies of such NGO politics may also require erasing the unsettling voices of those actual Ayoreo-speaking people who are indifferent or opposed to the redemptive potential of the concealed groups. During my fieldwork, this was achieved by attempts to manipulate the information given to tribal leaders; real threats to withhold vital services from client communities if they disagreed with an NGO position; or by paying certain leaders to sign non-disclosure agreements, attend meetings, and express NGO agendas as "community opinion." This process of bureaucratizing and domesticating valid indigenous life is always reductive. And it is enabled by the emergence of the isolated subject as the fullest expression of what Alcida Ramos has called the hyperreal Indian, "clones … [that] exist as if in a fourth dimension, a being with whom one enjoys having close encounters of whatever kind" (1998: 277).

NGO labor has produced isolation as a schema in which the global projects of accumulating profit, moral expenditure, romantic primitivism, and cultural activism are seemingly reconciled. When fixed through these arbitrary institutional biopolitics, isolation blurs the boundaries between the brute force of Benjamin's "law-preserving violence" (in this case against Ayoreo-speaking people), and "iatrogenic violence" (ostensibly in favor of Ayoreo-speaking people), or violence as the inadvertent product of care that Laurence McFalls (2010) has located at the center of global humanitarianisms. Such inversions are possible because of the particular conditions of indigeneity in the Paraguayan Chaco, a zone in which endemic corruption and contradictory legal protocols mean that enforcing any law in favor of indigenous peoples is determined by wider political interests and unpredictable outbursts of a state authority which is itself expeditionary (see Blaser 2004; Gordillo 2004; Nickson and Lambert 2002).

Advocacy NGOs are funded as alternatives to this system, but in practice they rarely challenge its defining structures. Whereas indigenous groups elsewhere have "turned to cultural forms of political struggle in direct defense of the reproduction … of their lives" (Turner 1999), both Paraguayan NGOs act as if preserving pure culture requires denying indigenous peoples the capacity for self-objectification. While their funders assume that defending cultural autonomy contributes to the "struggle to reassert the powers and values of human self-production" (ibid.), these NGOs produce the opposite effects in practice. In this system, efforts to protect isolated life from capitalist pathologies actively reinforce the suppression of Ayoreo human rights and the denial of their capacities for self-objectification.

As part of my fieldwork, I worked for two years as an ad hoc advisor to a newly formed Ayoreo tribal organization. During a 2007 visit to the UN Permanent Forum, we were able to arrange for Native leaders from Ecuador and Peru to visit the remote Ayoreo communities in Paraguay. It was agreed that the purpose of the visit was to formally invite the Ayoreo organization to participate in a new transnational intiative being formed with InterAmerican Development Bank funds in order to assert indigenous protagonism in efforts to protect the rights of isolated groups.

During the subsequent meeting, Ayoreo leaders performed two distinct discourses: one for the visitors in Spanish which supported the international alliance to protect isolation as a human right, and another in the Ayoreo language, which voiced the divergent local meanings attributed to "contact" and concealment. In other words, isolation's transnational appeal is what makes this category able to exert real force within and against the everyday lives of Ayoreo-speaking people, who may interpret "contact" in culturally specific terms but routinely confront distinct definitions (see also Myers 1988). In this case, the legal category of isolation may well create the problems it presumes to solve through the very appeal of the ideal order it establishes. By

subscribing to isolation-as-intelligiblity, humanitarian regimes authorize NGOs to translate these fantasies into regimes of governance on the ground. Ayoreo-speaking people are forced to respond to this external objectification of themselves, either as one of the only possible resources for gaining financial or political leverage in the severely attenuated spaces of post-contact life, or as a form of moral reasoning to which they stand in principled opposition, or both at the same time. For many Ayoreo-speaking people, then, managing isolation is an unavoidable part of the daily pragmatics of survival. This paradoxical situation is possible because, on a transnational scale, legitimate Ayoreo life is increasingly intelligible only as isolated life.

ISOLATING LIFE

A common conceit is that the boundaries of life itself are increasingly porous under the conditions of late capitalism, as biomedicine, organ transplantation, or genetic manipulation realigns life around an array of newly discrete deployments (Franklin and Lock 2003: 14–15). Whereas scholarship has tended to focus on the relationships enabled by these shifts in science and technology, the rise of isolation over roughly the same time period suggests an alternative regime of biopolitics predicated on the inverse, or managing a form of life defined by the refusal of relation.

This process—in which the category of isolation evacuates and stands in for Ayoreo humanity to an ever greater degree—is mirrored in the techniques and concerns of genetic science. Ascriptions of isolation have oriented the study of Ayoreo biology since geneticist Francisco Salzano discovered a set of "unusual blood genetic characteristics" in Ayoreo samples (Salzano et al. 1978). As part of a well-documented research agenda first developed with James Neel in the 1950s, Salzano and his colleagues collected biological material from groups they believed most closely approximated prior stages of human evolution, targeting especially those they deemed most isolated, genetically diverse, and "precivilized," including the Yanomamo (see Santos 2002; Santos and Maio 2004). An attributed state of isolation was already generating its scientific validation *ex post facto*. Perez-Diez and Salzano (1978) thus describe their work on Ayoreo as furnishing "data from one of the few remaining relatively unacculturated South American Indian tribes" (254). Much of this research was funded by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, since elucidating the full range of pure genetic structures was considered necessary for understanding possible mutational damage caused by radiation. As Salzano's mentor James Neel put it, "If we would understand modern man, we must study such primitive groups as still remain" (quoted in Santos 2002: 89), in order to generate inferences about earlier stages in a supposedly universal human history.

Building on this legacy, isolation remains a technique by which scientists visualize, interpret, and evaluate the biological contents of Ayoreo being. In a

recent set of papers based on blood samples collected in the 1970s and 1980s, scientists have concluded that Ayoreo are "genetically peculiar" in two ways. First, they are defined by a relatively low rate of heterozygosity, or genetic variation within the group. Second, they are described as outliers that represent a maximum expression of genetic difference relative to other indigenous groups in South America, including neighboring Chacoan peoples. According to these studies, this exceptional biological difference is evident in blood proteins and gene expressions, as well as "an extremely reduced" number (2), kind (C/D), and distribution of mitochondrial DNA haplogroups (see Dornelles et al. 2004; Goicoechea et al. 2001; Goulart et al. 2008). These genetic traits, in turn, are interpreted as evidence of "founder-effect" or isolation (Dos Santos et al. 2009). Today, Ayoreo DNA not only stands in for the political subject (Hogle 2003: 92); it also reduces its political subjectivity to biological indices of isolation that exist outside of time and personhood.

The vision of Ayoreo humanity staged and objectified through genetic science is based on the same tense tautologies found in law, humanitarianism, and ethnographic expeditions in search of tradition. This kind of genomic politics, as Mike Fortun suggests in another context, is fundamentally promissory. It "marks places and acts where a future has crossed back—or will have been crossed back—onto the present: future-looking statements, hype, anticipation, volatility and perhaps most of all, speculations" (2008: 12). The speculative promise of a geneticized isolation, though, is retrospective as well as anticipatory. The value of the isolated genome may be premised on a redemptive expertise, but this depends on simultaneously reassigning value to a humankind that exists outside of time itself. Through such techniques, the renewed scientific value of the isolated subject is segregated not only from politics but also from actual bodies. Thus, the significant infrastructures dedicated to preserving Ayoreo blood in the form of plasma and glycerolized red cells, kept frozen for decades in labs across Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Here, the desire to extract and preserve isolation produces it as an object for genomic management. And at this point, the particular disembodied objectifications of isolation—myth, tradition, culture, blood, gene, law, victim, sacrifice, donation—become interchangeable.

Meanwhile, actual Ayoreo-speaking people remain among the most severely marginalized indigenous populations in the northern Gran Chaco. The backdrop of Ayoreo village life is composed of tattered clothing, stagnant water, the exposed bones of the hungry. The pet parrots in one village imitate tubercular coughing. People have little money, and often suffer profoundly from starvation or preventable diseases. Ayoreo-speaking people have been pushed into marginal labor, and they are actively sought out to work in illicit economies believed to fit their uncivilized nature, such as begging, sex-work or clear-cutting and burning vegetation for charcoal. The survivors may seem dangerous and unsettling, particularly when they make camp in the heart of modern cities (Canova 2011). Several times in the last decade, they have

been driven away from urban spaces in Bolivia and Paraguay by armed soldiers as a threat to public hygiene, carted off in cattle trucks back to "their habitat." They are routinely harassed, beaten, raped, or murdered.[15] No longer isolated, they become matter out of place, disenfranchised as subhuman. Meanwhile, the rampant devastation of their ancestral territories continues unchecked.

There is little place here for history, politics, or humanity. Materials that are purely biological or purely cultural are self-contained signs, much like those painted figures from Brazil, shooting arrows at the circling planes over and over on Youtube. As the value of the isolated Ayoreo subject escalates, the value of the recently ex-primitive plummets. Humanizing the hyper-real isolated man presumes dehumanizing Ayoreo personhood in the present; Ayoreo humanity is prefigured as dying or already dead. The only hope for such degraded figures is a project of revitalization or being brought back to life. However, the terms of valid life are already claimed by more powerful others and partially fixed through the category of isolation. Thus, anthropologists like Miguel Bartolomé can argue: "In the moments that I am concluding these pages, March 2000, the great hope of Ayoreo cultural revitalization resides in the next exit from the forest of the 'uncontacted' Totobiegosode, who have not undergone the deculturating impact of the evangelical ethnocide. As such, they are bearers of the ancient knowledge and cultural wisdom which their sedentarized countrymen have been obliged to renounce…" (2000: 308).

In this schema, legitimate Ayoreo life is increasingly tethered to isolated life; isolated life only snaps into focus as petrified culture, and vice versa. Thus, the most legitimate form of Ayoreo humanity is that which is "still fully alive among the uncontacted groups" (IWGIA 2010: 14). Yet even these small groups that remain hidden in the forest are prefigured as fossils of themselves, ideally conserved by outsiders as a resource for a foreclosed future but already "rejected into death" by the immutable borders of relational impossibility in a zone of ecological devastation (Fassin 2009: 52). It is thus no surprise that the same NGO director can only imagine one option for their future, and not a practical one at that. Echoing the laboratory workers safeguarding Ayoreo blood samples, he has argued in print that "freezing the moment of contact" with isolated Ayoreo bands is the sole hope for preserving "the essence of their being" (Glauser 2006: 200; 2007: 232).

Yet neither life as such nor particular life-projects can be entirely contained by such categories and the relational worlds they evoke. This is at the root of Ayoreo critiques of modernity and their refusal of such extant political

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[15] Here, my point is to suggest that there is a significant and previously ignored correlation between global mobilizations around the protection of the "isolated" Ayoreo-speaking bands and the marked contemporary dehumanization of actual, more settled Ayoreo-speaking people. Elsewhere, I characterize these dynamics as a form of indigenous hypermarginality finely targeted by criteria of cultural performance, class and place; one that is intrinsic to the structures of exclusion upon which the neoliberal state depends.

definitions of culture as meaningful forms of self-objectification. It is, I believe, what is being rejected by Paraguayan Ayoreo spokespeople when they have protested in local media sources against attempts to quarantine recently contacted groups, or "los científicos" who want to keep them "like animals in a zoo," and otherwise block their attempts to "integrate ourselves into civilized society" (see Hein 1990: 216). It is also what Ayoreo-speaking people seem to imply by the concept of *pucuecaringuei*, a phrase that literally means something like "searching for what is emanated from oneself," but is translated as *vida*, or "life." This is a concept that foregrounds becoming over being, and frames each as processes that are contingent on more than the forces contained within bodily limits. As one elder said to me, "Pucuecaringuei is something that is outside but inside. Inside but outside. It is something you try to catch." He smiled. "But it is fast."

## AN EMERGING REGIME OF INDIGENOUS BIOLEGITIMACY

In sum, the politico-legal category of isolation reiterates an extreme version of what Eric Wolf referred to as the "pool hall model of the world," in which certain domains of pure Culture/Nature/Life are newly endowed with the qualities of billiard balls: disaggregated, bounded, and brightly colored objects colliding and spinning off one another (1982: 6–7). What is most striking about this development is the degree to which an anti-associative humanity is taken as a self-evident expression not of colonial histories but of indigenous self-determination, and thus imbued with force to act through and against the limits of viable human life. Moreover, the politicized domains of humanity premised on this essentialist sleight-of-hand may at times threaten to overwhelm or nullify the agentive possibilities residing in more nuanced and painstakingly developed definitions of what constitutes legitimate culture or cultural difference for many indigenous peoples. And isolation is often politically effective to the degree that it erases or disavows the mediations—of history, empire, culture—by which indigeneity has become a meaningful category in the first place.

Of the many contradictions articulated through the speculative politics of isolation, this redefinition of self-determination and cultural difference is perhaps the most crucial. The category of isolation establishes a vertical hierarchy of cultural legitimacies within the transnational politics of indigeneity, in which bounded, ahistorical, and anti-relational difference is privileged over and above the kinds of difference asserted within local ontologies or those taken as the product of unequal relations and imperial histories. It thus articulates a post-self-determination framework for operationalizing indigenous rights. What is new about this framework for moral action uncritically assumed by a wide range of stakeholders (including many indigenous rights activists), is that it extends the ways in which such uneven cultural legitimacies are politically legible only as biological legitimacies, and vice versa—a linkage that is

itself partially the cumulative result of ongoing negotiations within indigenous rights movements. Through mobilizing around the category of isolation, the parsing and ranking of oppositional schema for understanding cultural difference creates and becomes fused with those differential legitimacies attributed to "indigenous" forms of life. That is, cultural legitimacy becomes indistinguishable from bioinequality.

This process entails more than the simple naturalization of difference. Rather, it also marks a shift in the kind of indigenous life that global politics is interested in. This shift—from a Native subject who is encapsulated by imperial power but ideally self-determining to one who can only exist outside of social relations and representation in general—refracts the similar shift from "the life of the refugee" to the "life of the sick" that Didier Fassin uses to explain biolegitimacy as a general mode of contemporary governance. For Fassin, these changes are fundamentally about the fluid stakes "with respect to the sort of life which is defended today and which can enter at some point this state of humanitarian exception" (2009: 52). What is strikingly distinct about isolated life is not its unique eligibility for inclusion into the exceptional states of already existing politics, but rather, that it is a form of life created by such stagings of humanitarian exception and the transnational government of emergency. Here, the state of exception produces the only indigenous subject that is capable of fully fitting within its pregiven boundaries. A product of the uninterrupted epistemic labor of colonial categories, isolated life is thus unbound and doubly exclusionary. It is the sole kind of indigenous humanity eligible for such dubious inclusions and exceptional rights. This becomes a form of violence to the degree that it implies a vertical ranking of political legitimacies, and the displacement of the life-projects of actual indigenous peoples in the name of the self-determination of a fantastic isolated subject.

The question remains: what relational worlds might these politics of isolation also imply for a critical public anthropology of indigeneity? Is it enough to find connections where there appear to be none, or put ethnographic poetics at the service of more effectively policing the borders of isolated life from the many who would otherwise seek to dispossess or extinguish it by brute violence?[16] Does public anthropology require playing by already given rules? I don't believe so. Another alternative is suggested by envisioning a right to

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[16] To be clear, this article is not intended to undermine the human rights unequivocally guaranteed to the concealed Ayoreo-speaking people, but the precise opposite: as a call to reimagine a sub-set of exceptional rights based on an ethical engagement with the lived experiences of actual Ayoreo-speaking subjects, instead of the imagined dilemmas posed by a neocolonial fantasy with universalizing pretensions. How to envision an alternative policy framework to isolation is a pressing concern, but regrettably, I do not have the space to develop such a framework in this essay. It is extremely clear, however, that any attempt to do so can only begin by fostering broad Ayoreo protagonism in mobilization around the topic; effective regulation of para-statal organizations such as missionaries and advocacy NGOs; the implementation of enforceable cross-border protocols for regulating the undeniable and starkly asymmetrical relations that already exist with

cultural difference predicated on the model of culture that Terence Turner derives from Kayapó perceptions of the originary differentiations of humans/non-humans: "Culture comes fully into existence when the ancestral humans … become able to objectify and replicate the processes of objectification … by which they are produced: how to use fire, how to ferment manioc to make manioc beer, or how to transform the surface forms of their bodies with painting or ornaments, to produce or regulate in culturally standardized ways the internal bodily processes of transformation that give rise to aspects of social personhood" (2009: 23).

Ayoreo notions of mythical human/non-human differentiations—and thus "culture"—closely resemble the Kayapó-Turner formulation (Bessire 2010). In such native-inspired schema, culture and human life are not restricted to the accuracy with which an *a priori* tradition may be replicated, but rather, are constituted through gaining and exercising the capacity to continually reset the terms of self-production and self-transformation. As Turner notes, "What is involved here is not merely classification, or even a simple cognitive or perceptual process of objectification, but a reflexive process of meta-objectification, in an abstracted and generalized form: that is, of the process of objectification itself" (2009: 22). In these terms, culture *requires* meanings that are intrinsically unstable, fluid, and based on rotational social time. Humanity is thus not located in any biological essence nor in reproducing any given formal practice, but in the capacity to manage and objectify the terms of instability itself.

This stands in such stark contrast to the limits of humanity at stake in the category of isolation that the continuity of one kind of culture implies the discontinuity of the other. This perspective urges analytic attention to the dehumanizing and lawless violence instantiated through the interplay of universalizing categories and particular practices at the center of the contemporary politics of isolation. And it suggests that the challenge for a public anthropology is not how to more effectively assert an ascendant truth within already established criteria of evaluation, but rather, how to set the effects and the terms of dehumanizing logics against one another. The question becomes how the imaginary of a willful refusal of relation is a technique for realigning the contradictory transnational venues for objectifying authorized life. Ethnographically attending to the uncanny social figures created by the differential legitimacies of such a process may be one tentative step in this direction.

### THE HAUNTED FOREST

In northern Paraguay, the concealed Ayoreo are palpably present. They have assumed the same "nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence" of a

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the concealed people; and the immediate titling and policing of a sufficiently large territorial base to allow for their continued survival in the manner which they so choose.

sacrificial violence that is life- and voice-giving as well as world-ending (Benjamin 1999 [1921]: 287; Gordon 1997). Teenaged soldiers warn travelers to take care, the savages are everywhere. "They aren't like you and me," a park ranger near the Bolivian border told me, "They can be anywhere, we cannot know." Some went about their work fully armed, snapping shots at shadows. Pale men in SUVs travel the backroads inquiring after sightings and tracks. One rancher told me he could tell when the savages were near, because the dogs acted up like they smelled a wild cat or a storm.

Rumors about the concealed people blow through Ayoreo settlements like dust. The forest people have been cornered on this ranch or seen over there or shot at near here. "How much money," an Ayoreo leader once asked me, "do you think we can get if we can capture them? Enough for a pickup?" Some advocate tracking them down. Someone found their tracks and tried to follow. A man heard them whispering at dawn, invisible in the brush near his garden. They must have taken that lost bag of seeds or that one red shirt. They must be close. They must be coming back. People waited for them. But each time they slipped away.

Fragments even arrive far away from the Chaco, pieced together through radios and cell-phones and facebook. Precisely a year after the controversy around the expedition, I heard about a possible contact with one of the concealed bands, and was told to pack my bags. Something had happened, but no one knew what or where. One person said that twelve naked Indians had been caught on a ranch near Chovoreca. Another that a group had run away from the bulldozers working by Cerro León and laid down their spears, despondent, at the feet of a rancher. Someone surmised a band had been captured by an NGO. The government sent a delegation. They returned two days late, having found nothing but the strange rectangular tracks of *parode* sandals and stories of naked brown bodies glimpsed at dusk.

Some Ayoreo-speaking people are convinced they have already become spirits. Once every two or three months during my fieldwork, a story would arrive over the two-way radio that the forest people had been murdered by a rancher. Their bodies buried in a pit, their camp dynamited by an airplane, their water source poisoned. An oil prospector found the corpses of six naked savages lined up head to toe under a tree in Bolivia. A Paraguayan peon confessed that his boss drove him to a massacre site and made him stack the bodies of ten savages in a pile and burn them and he could not forget the smell. People took these rumors hard. Three times, I heard women sing the sobbing song of death for their relatives after hearing such news. The details were always vague, the sources difficult to find. No one pursued the stories; they lingered with others like heat waves.

In this land of linear pastures and bulldozers that never stop, isolated life presses against the senses. It is a haunting figure of crisis and salvation, its functions supplanted by its sign. It manifests nothing more and nothing less than

those speculative zones in which categorical violence and subjective immanence are inextricably entangled with the boundaries of livable life.

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Abstract: This essay describes the politics of voluntary isolation, an emerging category of indigeneity predicated on a form of human life that exists outside of history, the market, and wider networks of social connection. It traces a

recent controversy around one such "isolated" population—Ayoreo-speaking people in the Paraguayan Gran Chaco—to suggest how these politics of isolation may represent a new regime of what Didier Fassin has called "biolegitimacy," or the uneven political parsing and authorization of valid human life, within global formations of indigeneity. Here, I identify how international human rights law, multiculturalist state policies, humanitarian NGO programs, and genetic science all share an investment in the moral defense of isolated life. I explore how this investment may divide the kind of humanity authorized or claimed as "indigenous" into opposing legitimacies that are set against one another and vertically ranked. The essay argues that what is at stake in this process is not merely a new technique of the self or the enduring romance of the primitive, but the redistribution of the meaning and value assigned to those domains of human life imagined in opposition to social relation itself.