

Paraguay

Unión de Nativos Ayoreo de Paraguay
Iniciativa Amotocodie

THE CASE OF THE AYOREO



IWGIA Report 4

IWGIA Report | Paraguay | The Case of the Ayoreo

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Preface | AYOREO MAP

TICIO ESCOBAR

Art critic, writer and anthropologist
Currently Minister of Culture of Paraguay

This publication is aimed at demarcating the territory of the Ayoreo people by blending two editorial approaches: on the one hand, that of objective data, measurements and diagnostics by Western experts; and on the other, the voices of the Ayoreo people themselves, who are asserting their right to the preservation of their culture and ownership of their land, and who are demanding political self-determination, a corollary to and fundamental pillar of those basic rights.

Territory is much more than the physical land: it is the map sketched by the history of peoples who have lived there since time was the ally of their origins and their own destiny. Territory is not merely soil or physical land, but rather the place shaped and marked by deeply symbolic interventions that draft the cartography of habitat and effectively prepare a site for the development of particular ways of living, creating, believing and growing collectively. Territory is the area that protects the remains of ancestors, provides the exact foodstuffs that a people needs, and shapes the habitat where different communities recognize themselves in one another, linked not only by bloodlines but by constellations of meaning.

The natural environment forms part of this geography reinvented through the continuous passage of hunters and gatherers, imprinted with furtive signs, marks that are invisible to the eyes of outsiders but full of significance for those who know the forest's landmarks and stamp them with moving words. The lands of the Ayoreo, delineated by tracks, scars and furrows that record daily and millennial history, are called *Eami*: a term that could be translated from a Western viewpoint as “homeland”, as long as this word is not interpreted in a nationalistic sense –protected by borders, coats of arms

and stereotypes– but rather as a shared space inspired by common imagery and the constant desire to preserve and create community. Perhaps the word *Eami* could also be translated as “polis”, in the sense of a specific public space that carries this meaning, among others.

These cultural territories built up over centuries in complicity with the environment –these settings marked by a people's own unique way of understanding the world– are seriously endangered today by the voracious greed of a system incapable of respecting differences and comprehending the value of biodiversity. The planet has been brought to the verge of collapse through the loss of *Eami*, which have many different names in different corners of the world. And nevertheless, the devastating advance of global neocolonialization continues to crush the last vestiges of meaning guarded by alternative cultures: it is not held off by the wisdom of shamans, who know how to maintain the balance of the earth and the order of species; it does not hear the whisper of the first words, or the clamour of the last chants.

This publication raises an urgent call of alarm. If the legislation in force continues to be ignored, if the usurpation of the Ayoreo people's territories and destruction of their physical and symbolic habitats are not stopped, then within a very short time, we will have lost not only the rich complexity of the natural environment, but also the power of a living, struggling culture, tenaciously taking refuge in the forest or willing to tackle the transcultural conflict in accordance with its own models and the laws of its own unique worlds.

One can only hope that the government and we, the rest of society, will heed this serious warning, on which the democratic future of our country will largely depend.

By way of introduction

BENNO GLAUSER | Director
Iniciativa Amotocodie

Non-indigenous society began to invade the vast territory of the Ayoreo only 50 years ago, with the goal of taking possession of the land.

From that time forward, group by group, the Ayoreo were deported to mission stations and sedentarized by force. Today, there are still Ayoreo living in the forest, in six or seven group territories that have always belonged to them. During the Paraguayan dictatorship, most of the northern Chaco region was divided into lots, and what was once Ayoreo territory was turned into a commodity for the benefit and profit of a few hundred private landowners. Until today, they are permitted to deforest or otherwise transform their landholdings as they wish, to pursue productive activities that –under close scrutiny– serve exclusively their own interests. The future of the Chaco forest, of those Ayoreo who continue to live there as isolated groups, and of a territory that is still the territory of the Ayoreo people, now depends on these landowners: Paraguayan citizens, Mennonites, foreigners, agro-industrial and cattle ranching companies, and oil prospecting firms. They are responsible for determining the future of the only significant continuous forested area left standing in Paraguay.

The state, until now, has not intervened in this matter in any meaningful way, and has failed to assume its responsibility: to protect the public good and public interest, to enforce the country's laws, and to protect human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Non-indigenous society is not even aware of what is happening in and with the northern Chaco. “Public opinion” has no opinion on the matter. The international community is only very slowly beginning to recognize the Chaco, the Gran Chaco, as a vital ecosystem not only for the Ayoreo and other indigenous peoples, but also for the future of non-indigenous peoples and for humanity as a whole.

Today, the Ayoreo people are watching what is happening to their territory, which is their home and the foundation for both their way of life and their livelihood.

They do so in a state of poverty, uprooted from their land, precariously clinging to the margins of the society of their invaders and a culture that is not theirs and never will be. Today, through this publication, the Ayoreo people are speaking out to those who are in charge of the state, and to all non-indigenous people in Paraguay and the rest of the world.

They are speaking out because they need to be seen, and because they need the injustices and human rights violations of which they have been and continue to be victims to be seen, recognized and reparated. They need non-indigenous people to assume their role and to accept their responsibility in this very recent colonial history, open to everyone's view. They are speaking out to voice a call for the justice that has yet to be extended to peoples and cases like theirs.

Today the Ayoreo people are standing up and reaching out. They are not reaching out to beg or ask for favours. They are taking a stand and demanding to be heard and respected, reaffirming their dignity and their right to their own distinct way of life.

THE AYOREO PEOPLE AND THEIR TERRITORY

“

Our territory, the territory of the Ayoreo people, stretches across the entire northern Chaco, from Paraguay to Bolivia.

We, the Ayoreo people, as is the way of our culture, lived in different local groups that each had their own leaders, and that moved within their own areas. Each of the groups knew their territory. Ayoreo territory is the sum of all of the territories where the different local groups lived.

Our territory, *Eami*, is a living being that shelters us and which is illuminated when we are present. We express ourselves through our territory, and our history is etched in every stream, in every waterhole, on the trees, in the forest clearings and on the salt flats. Our territory, *Eami*, also expresses itself through our history, because the Ayoreo people and our territory are a single being.

But sadly, up until now, the Paraguayan government seems to be unaware of where we lived, where we came from, and where our uncontacted brothers and sisters continue to live today. Uprooting us from our territory, they ignore who we really are.

We can locate on a map the territories and areas where we the Ayoreo people used to live, and where the uncontacted Ayoreo continue to live. It is like a map of Paraguay, but it is an Ayoreo map. On the white men's maps, no one has ever mentioned the Ayoreo territories. It is as if they had erased our history, as if the Ayoreo people had never been there, and as if no Ayoreo continued to live there.

The white men say that we merely claim that these are our territories, that there is no way of knowing if they are ours. Or they say that these were Ayoreo territories, but they stress that they “were”, and that now the situation is different because there are new owners, or because they are national parks. We cannot show a land title, but there in our territory there are still signs of our presence from the past and from today, which prove that it is our territory. For example, there in our territory are our huts, our paths, our crops planted in the forest and the holes carved in the trees from where we harvested the honey. The white men can see them with their own eyes; these are our property documents. And in addition, we have the living memory of our history; as soon as we come near our territory, it comes alive. Our elders continue to tell our children and our grandchildren where we lived, where we came from, and how we communicated with our *Eami*.

For us, our territory is suffering, but it is still alive, even now, in this moment.

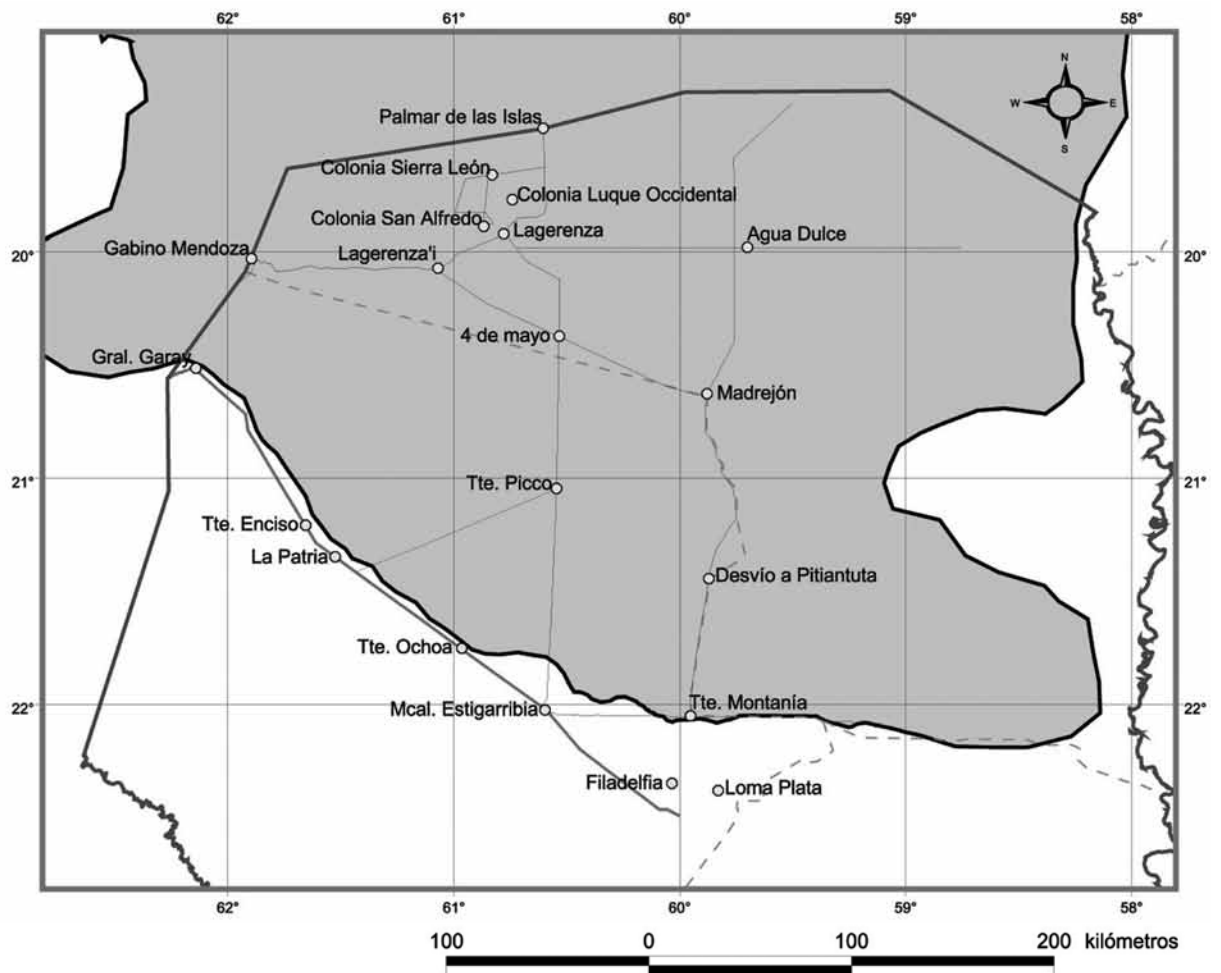
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MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI

President of the UNAP

The Ayoreo people and their territory in Paraguay

The Ayoreo are a people of hunters and gatherers whose vast territory of more than 30 million hectares (300,000 km²) encompasses almost the entire northern portion of the Gran Chaco region of South America, bordered by the Paraguay, Pilcomayo, Parapetí and Río Grande Rivers. Their territory does not extend, however, to the areas along the banks of these rivers, which are the territories of other indigenous peoples. From north to south, the Ayoreo's territory stretches from the mountain ranges of Chiquitanía in Bolivia to the area now occupied by the Mennonite colonies in the Central Paraguayan Chaco.



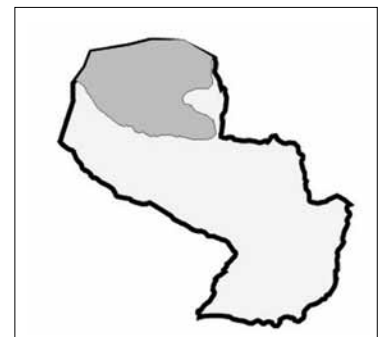
AYOREO TERRITORY ON THE MAP OF PARAGUAY TODAY

- Paraguayan border
- Ayoreo territory
- Main roads
- Trans-Chaco Highway
- Departmental borders

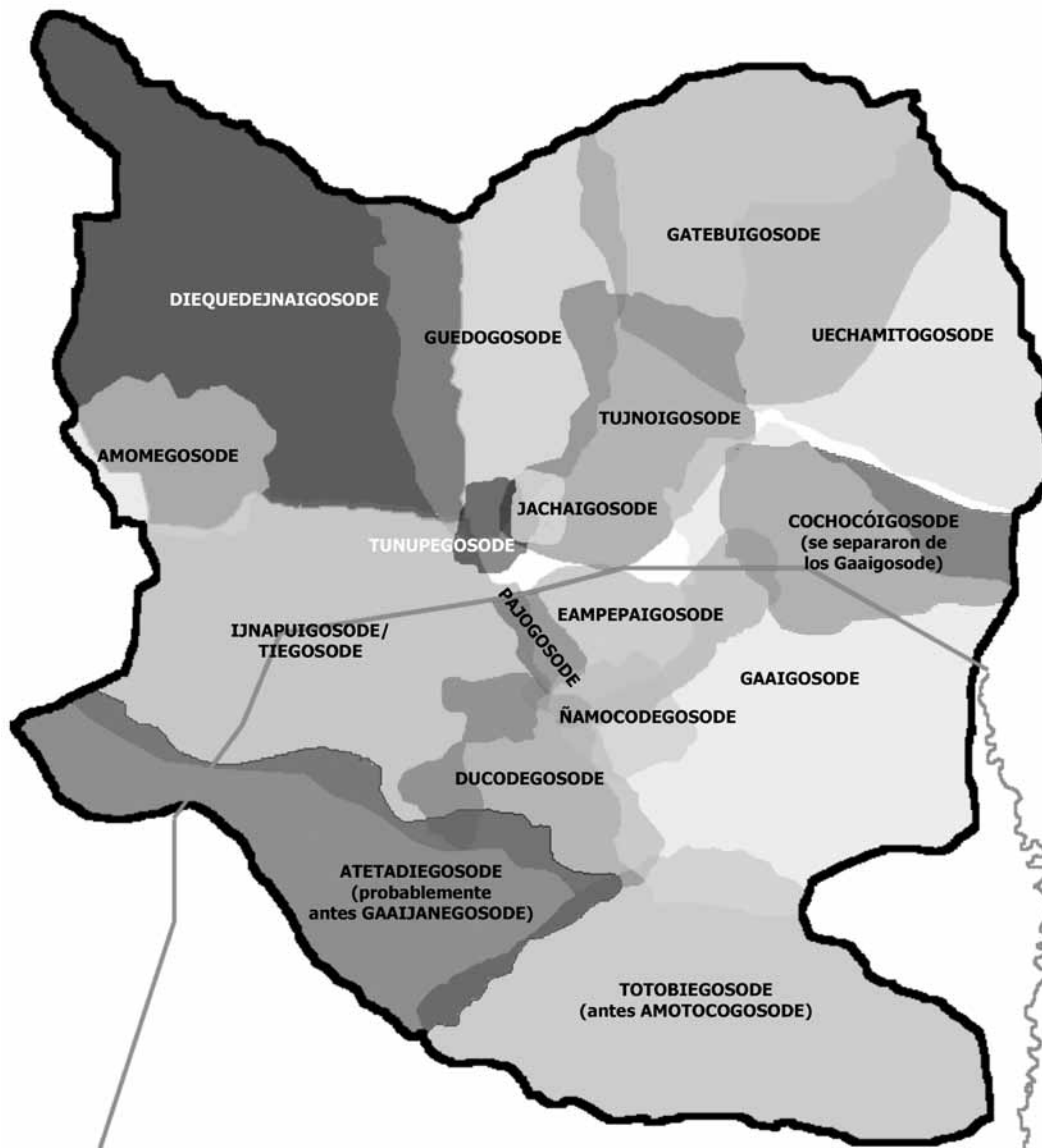
AYOREO TERRITORY IN SOUTH AMERICA



AYOREO TERRITORY IN PARAGUAY



Local groups within the Ayoreo territory



In the times of their traditional way of life, before contact, the Ayoreo were politically organized into more than 50 local groups. Their territory was divided up and shared by these different groups, who each moved around within extensive territories of their own.

Each local group enjoyed a high degree of political autonomy and independent leadership in relation to the other groups. In accordance with the needs and circumstances of a nomadic life in constant movement, these local groups could divide into sub-groups and temporarily separate, joining together again at a later time.

Local groups and group territories were not permanently established, but rather flexible and subject to change, based on divisions that sometimes led to the disappearance of one group or the creation of a new one, mergers between different groups, and changes in name, with the consequent changes and redefinitions of the group territories.

This political organization conveys a sense of dynamism, of constant social mobility, an absence of concepts such as hierarchical order and a centralizing principle, and an extraordinary capacity to adapt to changing circumstances in life.

Today, these local groups continue to exist, mixed together in the various settlements of those Ayoreo who no longer live in the forest.

SIGNS THAT IDENTIFY THE NORTHERN CHACO AS AYOREO TERRITORY



Photograph from 2003, showing the remains of a hut abandoned five years earlier.



Two of three Ayoreo lances found together while clearing the forest to build a new road for a cattle ranch in 2007.



In September 2006, Ducubaide Chiquenoi contemplates the clan markings that he himself carved in the bark of a *palo borracho* tree over 20 years earlier, when he still lived in the forest and was the leader of one of the uncontacted groups.



Palo borracho tree felled by uncontacted Ayoreo to extract honey from its inside. The cut marks at the base and on the bark are clearly identifiable as having been made with traditional axes used by the forest-dwelling Ayoreo.



Holes carved to extract honey from a *quebracho* tree, at a height of six metres. Only the Ayoreo carve this type of hole.

Footprint left by an uncontacted Ayoreo in May 2009 while crossing a road that joins two cattle ranches. The rectangular shape of the sandals typically used by forest-dwelling Ayoreo is clearly recognizable.



“We cannot show
a land title, but there
in our territory
there are still the signs
of our presence
from the past...”

**PROPIEDAD
PRIVADA
PROHIBIDO
ENTRAR**

“ The spirit came in the form of a crow,
it carried me up and said to me:

‘Look at *Eami* tonight.
You can see many fires burning.
They are the fires lit by your people, the Ayoreo,
illuminating everything.’

We continued to fly and the lights went out one by one.

‘This is the future of your people.
The forest is growing dark
because the Ayoreo do not live there anymore.
Everything is turning to darkness.’

My grandfather sang this to me when I was a boy.
And I, Oji, remember his song.
And now my people know that my grandfather sang the truth.

”

OJI ETACORE, elder from the village of Ijnapui

HISTORY OF THE AYOREO PEOPLE IN THE LAST 50 YEARS

“

We Ayoreo are like the trunk of a tree that used to grow in the Chaco. But the missionaries came and took our territory from us. That was like cutting down the life of our people. Our people are that tree that was cut down and is dying.

But the wind had already carried off the seed of that tree, and in the sandy soil of the northern Chaco the seed grew into a new tree with branches and new fruit. That tree is our people in the forest, and the new generations born among us.

It was the missionaries who made it impossible for us to continue living in our territory. Beginning in the late 1950s, Mennonite missionaries, evangelical missionaries from the United States and Catholic missionaries moved all of the Ayoreo off of the lands where we used to live. It was as if the missionaries used their evangelization to clear the territory that belonged to the Ayoreo people. That made it easy for the cattle ranchers to buy up almost all of our land, and a few powerful white men took over our territory just like that. They say there are no longer any Ayoreo living there. Today they continue to sell our territory over and over again even though our uncontacted Ayoreo brothers and sisters are still living there. They are still illuminating our *Eami*. *Eami* is our mother. *Eami* is our forest.

The missionaries wanted to do away with all of Ayoreo culture and our beliefs. The missionaries wanted the Ayoreo to accept their God, the God of the white men. Even today the Mennonite missionaries and the missionaries from the United

States continue to pursue this goal, but we think it is a bad idea, because believing in their God means we must feel ashamed of speaking our language and being the way that we Ayoreo are. They prohibited our songs and our vision of the world. They say that all we need is to believe in their God, and that we do not need our territory, but they do not realize that emptying out our territory meant emptying out our very way of being. They still think that they are the masters of the Ayoreo, they want to tell us what to do and how to live.

The missionaries continue pressuring us, saying that we have to go out and look for our brothers and sisters in the forest, who are living in sin because they do not know their God. They also say that they have the right to live a better life and enjoy everything that the white people have to offer them. But now we know what the white people offer us. Why should they leave the forest to come and live in poverty and in fear of being themselves?

We are repeatedly calling on the government authorities to stop allowing the ongoing manhunt against our uncontacted brothers and sisters who are living in their own territory and their own culture. We do not want their culture, our culture, to die.

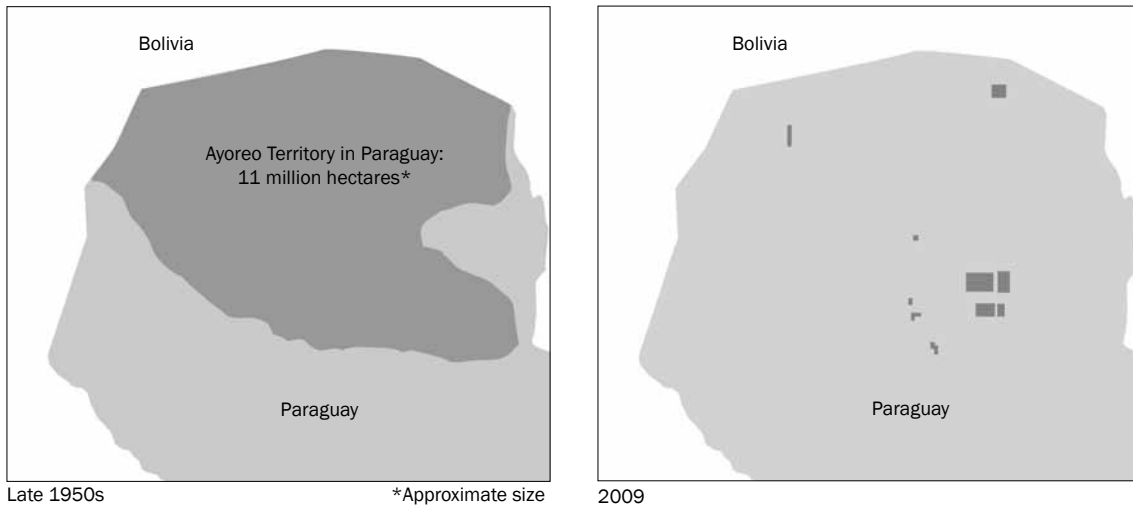
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MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI

President of the UNAP

The usurpation of Ayoreo territory in Paraguay

The usurpation of the vast territory historically occupied by the Ayoreo by non-indigenous colonizers and the surrounding society has led to major transformations and obvious deterioration, not only of the natural environment in the Chaco region but also the quality of life of the Ayoreo. Ancestral practices based on a balanced coexistence with nature were abruptly interrupted when local Ayoreo groups who inhabited and gave life to a vast area of forest in the Gran Chaco were taken from their habitat, deported to missionary settlements, and forced to adopt a sedentary lifestyle.



Late 1950s

*Approximate size

2009

Today, as a result of forced sedentarization, the territory of the Ayoreo people in Paraguay has been reduced from an area of approximately 11 million hectares to 190,000 hectares of land to which they have been given legal title, or to which legal title in their name is currently being processed.



“They brought us to the world of the white people and locked us up in this concentration camp. We felt like refugees.”

AQUINO PICANERAI

Cerro León, 1968.

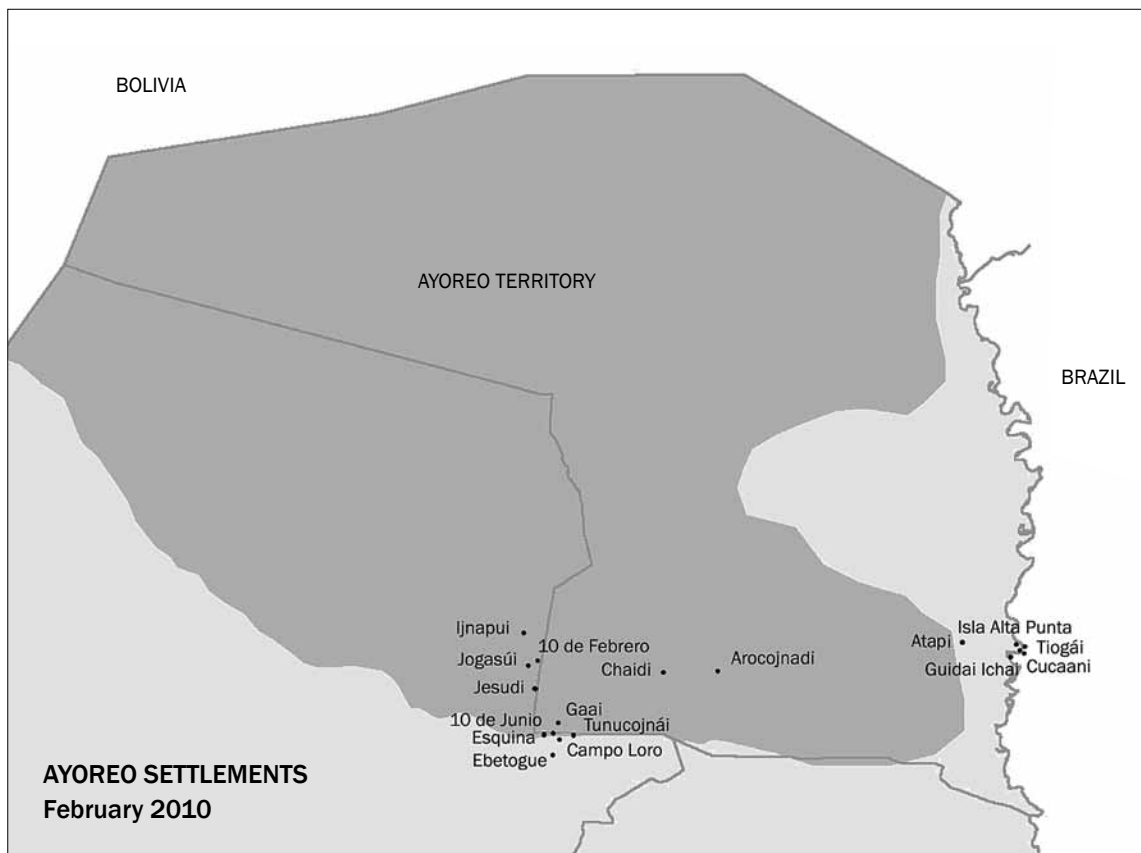
The Ayoreo people today

The total number of members of the Ayoreo people is currently around 5,600, made up of roughly 3,000 people living in Bolivia and 2,600 in what is now Paraguay.

Approximately 100 Ayoreo continue to live in the forest without contact with the outside world. In Paraguay they are referred to as “forest dwellers” or “uncontacted”, while internationally they are known as "isolated" peoples or groups.

The majority of the Ayoreo in Paraguay were contacted and deported from their territory in the forest over the last 50 years. Today they live in fixed and permanent settlements. There are currently 19 Ayoreo settlements in Paraguay.

Six of these settlements are on the banks of the Paraguay River, to the south and west of the Carmelo Peralta Colony, on land that was formerly occupied by the María Auxiliadora Salesian Mission. These settlements are Cucaani, Isla Alta, Guidai Ichai, Tiogái, Punta and Atapi.



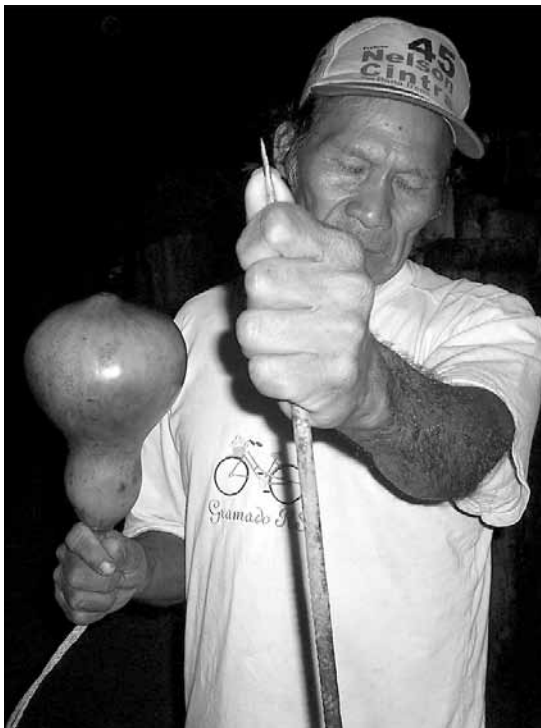
Thirteen settlements are located in the area of the Central Chaco: Campo Loro, Ebetogue, Tunucojnai, Gaai, Esquina, Jesudi, Jogasui Km 32, Ijnapui, 10 de Febrero, 10 de Junio, 2 de Septiembre, Arocojnadí and Chaidi. The last two are Ayoreo settlements made up of members of the local group Totobiegosode, whose contact with non-indigenous society is more recent, and who are therefore still in a state of *initial contact*.

The number of settlements has tended to grow, increasingly reflecting a return to the traditional social organization typical of Ayoreo culture: that of small, dynamic and variable groups.

Current situation of sedentarism and survival of Ayoreo culture

Lured into leaving their life in the forest with false promises and deported to live in large, permanent settlements established by missionaries, under a non-indigenous economic model that was totally alien to their culture and way of life until then, the Ayoreo people's close and unique relationship with the forest and with nature gradually began to diminish and change.

Today, the current situation of the Ayoreo reflects the results of an accelerated process of impoverishment, a growing loss of autonomy, and a growing dependence on the system of life of the surrounding society. At the same time, they lack the opportunities needed to achieve a standard of living through means that are different but at least compatible with the principles of their own culture and the continued integrity of the environment. A significant number of Ayoreo currently live near the centres of the greatest concentration of non-indigenous population, in severely disadvantaged conditions, seeking precarious occasional employment as day labourers in an insecure, irrational and discriminatory labour market. Many young Ayoreo see no prospects for the future and lack any sort of constructive opportunities.



A shamanic vision, in the song of Uguijamui.

The cultural expressions, attitudes and philosophy of traditional Ayoreo culture are still practiced and fully alive among the uncontacted groups. Among the majority of the Ayoreo, those who have been taken from the forest and sedentarized, while coexistence with society around them may have changed their external and material ways of life, their basic attitudes and positions continue to reflect, in each situation encountered in their new lives, the essence of their traditional culture and way of life: a high degree of mobility; a lack of interest in the accumulation of material possessions; a deep trust in nature, in the world and in themselves; a high degree of personal autonomy within the structures of collective organization; and an attitude of equality – not superiority – towards the world and nature, among other aspects.

Testimony of MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI



We came from Cerro León, we came down from there. They had already taken my brother to the Salesian Catholic Mission run by Father Bruno Stella. My brother was already living in the civilization camp, and this missionary sent my brother with Iquebi to look for my father,

and so they came as if they were messengers of civilization. They went to look for our mother and our father.

When he found my father and his group, Iquebi told my father that the missionaries wanted to gather all the forest people and make a mission. He said, 'If you come out and live with the white people, they will take care of you, they will give you what you need, they will build you houses to teach you about their god, the god of the white people.' My father and his group said, 'We want to try it out. We want to try it out to see if it is true, and if anything happens, we can come back.' But when my father went to where the white people were, that was the end of him. Another 85 Ayoreo died of measles along with my father just after that first contact.

Testimony of YACAMÁI CHIQUENOI



This is the first time I have ever told this story. It happened here, in Cerro León.

I remember my mother's frantic screams. I remember how I ran to see what was happening. I told my wife to wait for me, I dropped everything and ran to the road. And I saw them there, sitting on their horses. The four missionaries. Cojñones blocking the road. I kept running forward, without thinking. I didn't feel anything, I could only think of attacking them. I saw my brother Pojone running towards them

as well. But then we heard some words in Ayoreo, which said:

'The missionaries have come to look for you and to ask you to leave your area, your territory, because cojñones are going to come and they are going to kill all of the Ayoreo who are still living in *Eamone* [the plural of *Eami*, which means the entire territory as a whole], but they won't kill you if you decide to come with us.'

It was an Ayoreo that the missionaries had brought to persuade us. He continued, saying, 'We want to kill the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode, they have killed a lot of our people, we need you to join us to go and attack them. We want to attack them all together, with your group and with Jonoine's group.'

I told the men in my group to go and tell my people to stop running. I said we would go and talk to the missionaries to try to understand what they were talking about.

This is the first time I have been back to visit my territory, 40 years later.



Like they did in the past, in their life in the forest, the women who live in the Ayoreo settlements in the Central Chaco or Alto Paraguay regions today continue to weave bags and other articles. Rather than the production of consumer goods, objects for everyday use or handicrafts for sale, sitting with other women and weaving is simply part of a way of life.

Ayoreo women do not weave to sell. And although they do not sell anything, they will continue weaving. While they weave, they listen, talk, laugh, think, feel, and all of this is expressed in the colours and patterns of their weaving, unique and unrepeatable: their mood, their way of seeing the world, the sorrows and dreams that live in each one of them.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The Ayoreo people have their natural and traditional form of organization, but today they also have a number of new political organizations in Paraguay, created to defend their interests when dealing with non-indigenous society:

- Unión de Nativos Ayoreo de Paraguay (UNAP), the Union of Ayoreo Natives of Paraguay, which represents 17 of the 19 Ayoreo settlements or communities.
- Organización Payipie Ichadie Totobiegosode (OPIT), the Payipie Ichadie Totobiegosode Organization, which represents the two Ayoreo-Totobiegosode communities.
- Consejo de Líderes de Alto Paraguay, Council of Leaders of Alto Paraguay, which represents the six Ayoreo communities on the banks of the Paraguay River.



ISOLATED AYOREO GROUPS

“ There are still Ayoreo who shun all contact with the outside world. They live in the territories where all of us used to live. You white people call them isolated indigenous peoples or groups. They have maintained the same way of life that they have always followed, which is our traditional culture.

Since 2005, the Union of Ayoreo Natives of Paraguay has been working for the protection of our uncontacted Ayoreo brothers and sisters, with the support of Iniciativa Amotocodie, which has been active as an institution since 2002, protecting the territory used by our brothers and sisters in the forest.

We know that there are at least six uncontacted groups of Ayoreo living in Paraguay. One of these groups is the Ayoreo Totobiegosode.

Three or four of the groups are in the southern part of the Ayoreo territory. The other three groups are in the north, in areas bordering on Bolivia, living on both sides of the border. One is in the area of Médanos del Chaco (Chaco Dunes) National Park, another is in the area north of Defensores del Chaco National Park, between Agua Dulce and Palmar de las Islas, and the last for which we have confirmed data is in the area of Chovoreca; this is a large group, with more than 25 members.

We have no doubt that they are Ayoreo, because they move within our territory and the signs that they leave show that they are Ayoreo. In addition, with the be-

ginning of our monitoring work, the elders have begun to share their memories about the groups or families who stayed in the forest because they did not want to go and live with the white people.

These groups are in great danger. Ever larger areas of forest are being cleared for cattle ranching throughout the northern Chaco. Those responsible are Brazilians, Dutch, Uruguayans, Germans, Mennonites and also Paraguayans who are buying up all of our territory, with no consideration whatsoever for the lives of our brothers and sisters in the forest. Another serious problem that we are very concerned about is all of the lines that are being cut in the forest in the area of Gabino Mendoza, by white men looking for oil. Evidence of the presence of our people is constantly turning up in this area.

In order for our uncontacted Ayoreo brothers and sisters to live peacefully in the areas they inhabit, there are laws, regulations and international agreements which protect isolated indigenous peoples. These groups have the right to legal ownership of the territories where they are living. The right to self-determination of our people in the forest should also be respected. And in order to ensure that they are left in peace, the laws must be enforced, for example, the prohibition to enter or work in these areas, and to sell the land where they are living.

They are not interested in living with any missionaries or white people. All they want is to live in their own habitat, with the gods who are known only to the



Amotocodie, 1998. Wooden staff with shamanistic feather-signs, left by one of the forest groups in order to bar the entrance to their territory.

Ayoreo, and they have the right to decide how they want to live. If they want to come out they will come out, but in the meantime they must not be pressured. They have their way of life in harmony with the forest. The forest, *Eami*, gives them what they need and protects them, and they take care of the forest. Before the white men came, we Ayoreo lived in our territory without changing the face of our mother, the forest, *Eami*.

We are deeply concerned about what could happen to our people in the forest. We do not want them to suffer what we went through, dying like flies because of contact with the outside world, living without freedom and without respect, living in poverty.

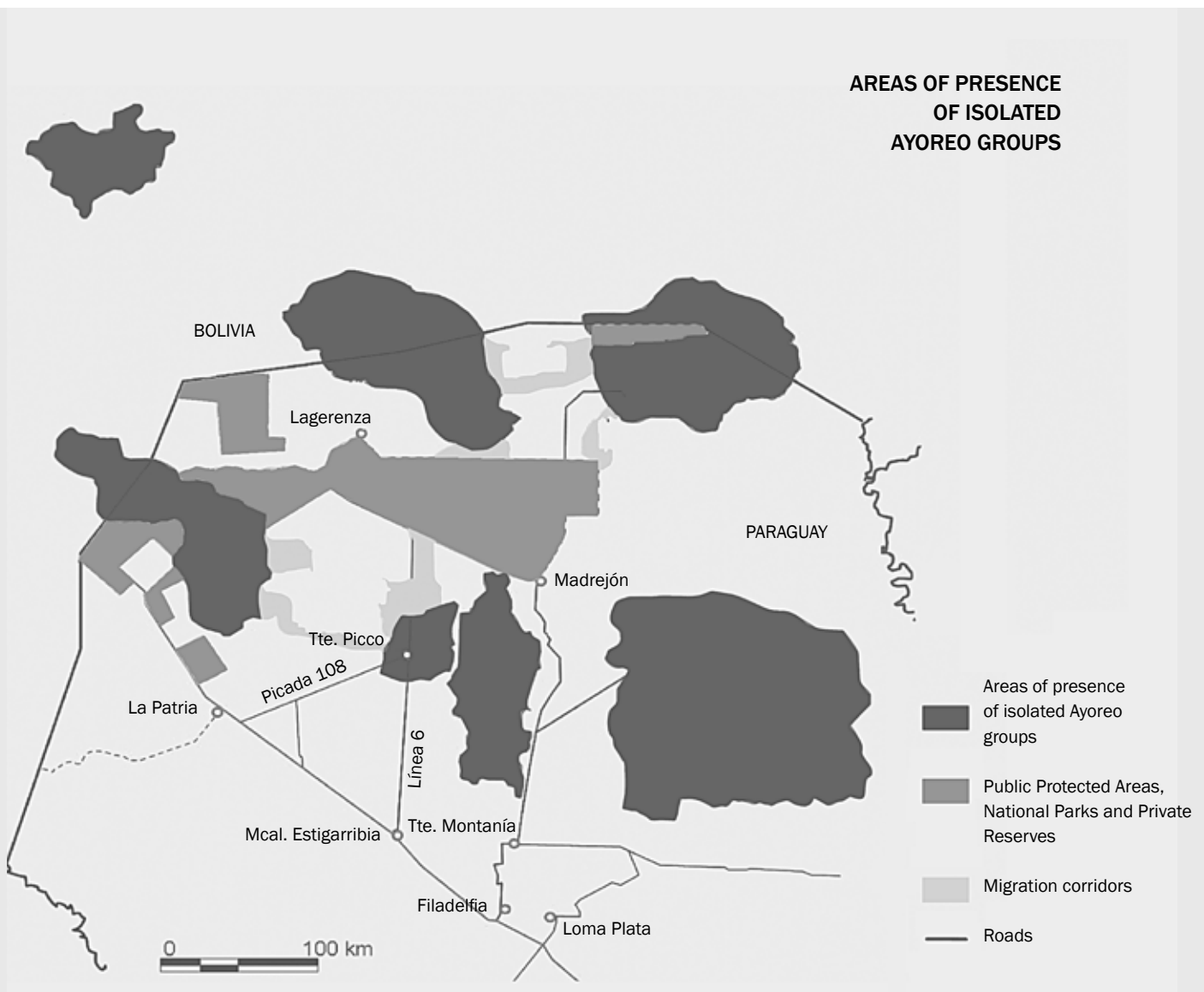
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MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI
President of the UNAP

Isolated Ayoreo groups: general situation and geographic location

The totality of the territories/habitats in use by isolated Ayoreo groups are occupied by private properties (a considerable number of which were illegally acquired) and by National Parks or Public Protected Areas.

The Unión de Nativos Ayoreo de Paraguay (UNAP) has been carrying out surveillance of these groups and their territories since May 2005, with constant visits to the areas to collect data and monitor the situation. UNAP also uses these visits to implement local protection measures in cooperation with the NGO Iniciativa Amotocodie (IA), which has been carrying out monitoring and protection efforts since January 2002. This monitoring makes it possible to record and certify signs of the presence of uncontacted groups. As of mid-2009, more than 150 signs of Ayoreo presence had been registered and certified by UNAP/IA, but several areas had not been covered yet by systematic monitoring activities.



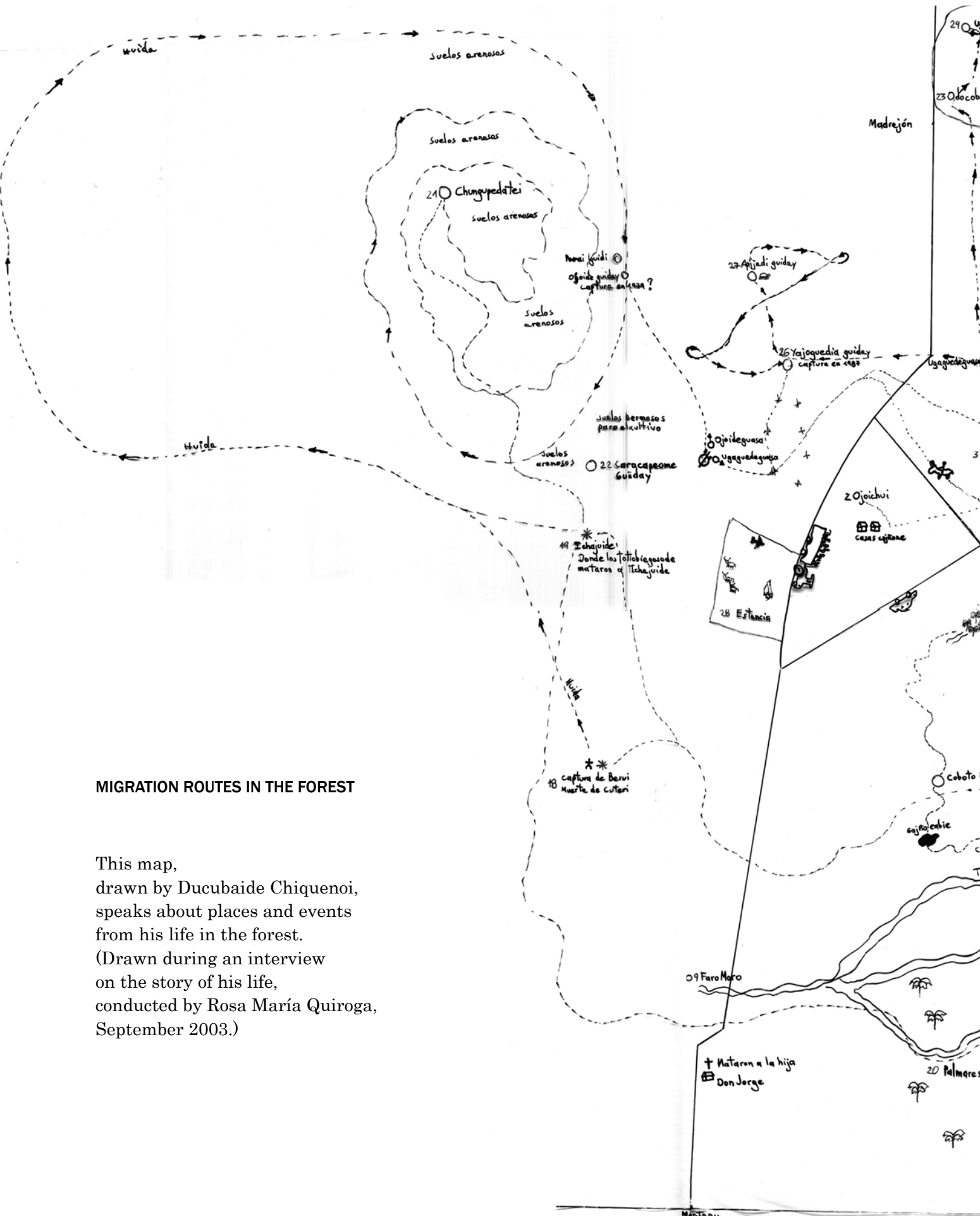
One of these uncontacted groups belongs to the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode *local group*, while the others belong to unidentified *local groups*, but they all form part of the Ayoreo people.

They continue to practice their traditional nomadic way of life, based on hunting and the gathering of wild fruit and honey, as well as fishing and growing small crops of food planted “along the way” during the rainy season. They form a single, inseparable unit with their habitat – high and low forests, palm groves, open fields, dry riverbeds, streams and lagoons – with which they live together in close communion.

All of these uncontacted groups live and move within the traditional territory of the Ayoreo people. While no one has direct contact with them, their presence can be felt and confirmed through signs such as footprints and holes carved in trees to extract honey. In some cases, they have also been sighted from a distance.

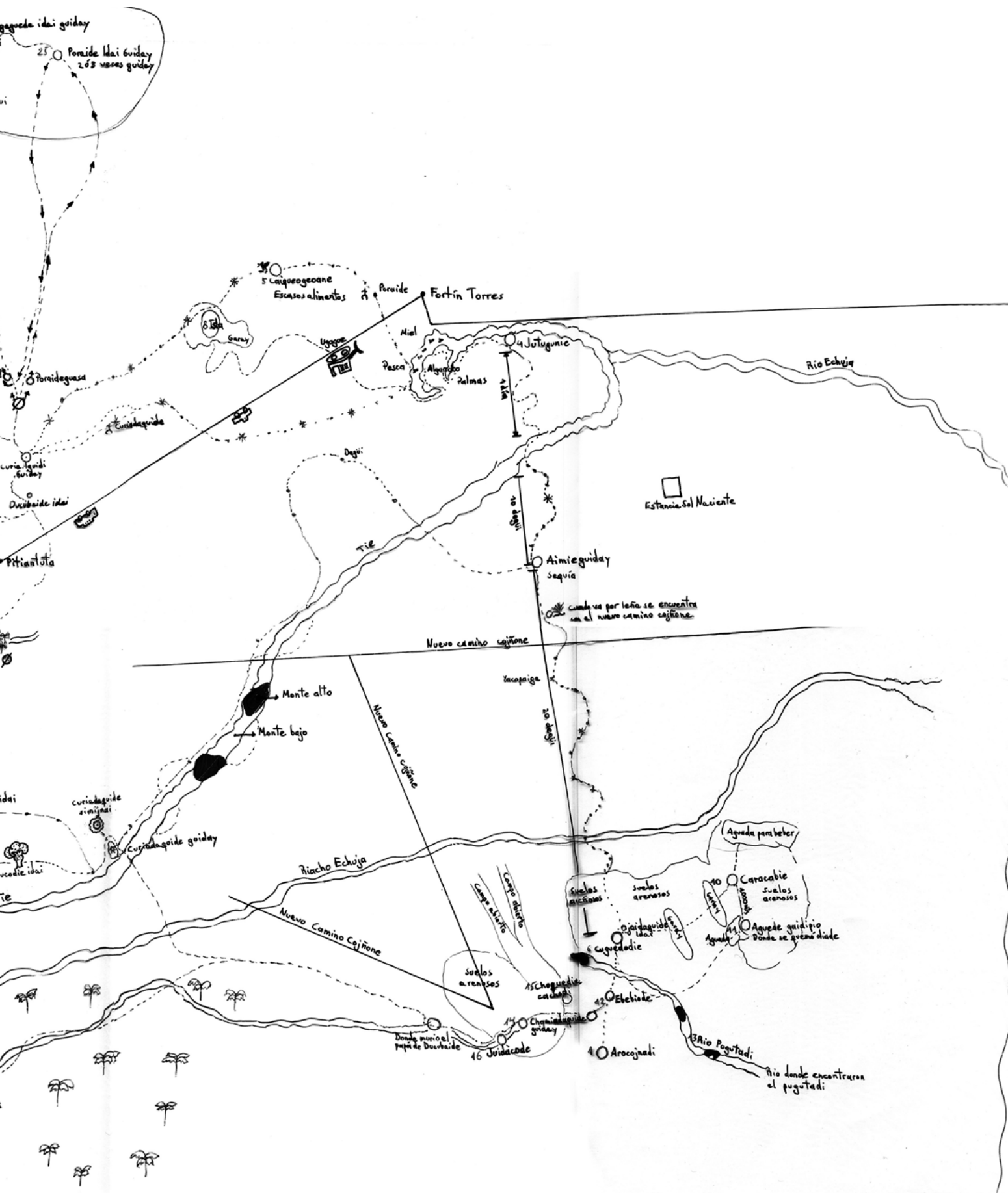


Sign of presence of an uncontacted group. A hole dug into the trunk of a *palo borracho* tree, used to store seeds, food, arrows or other objects for everyday use.



MIGRATION ROUTES IN THE FOREST

This map, drawn by Ducubaide Chiquenoi, speaks about places and events from his life in the forest. (Drawn during an interview on the story of his life, conducted by Rosa María Quiroga, September 2003.)

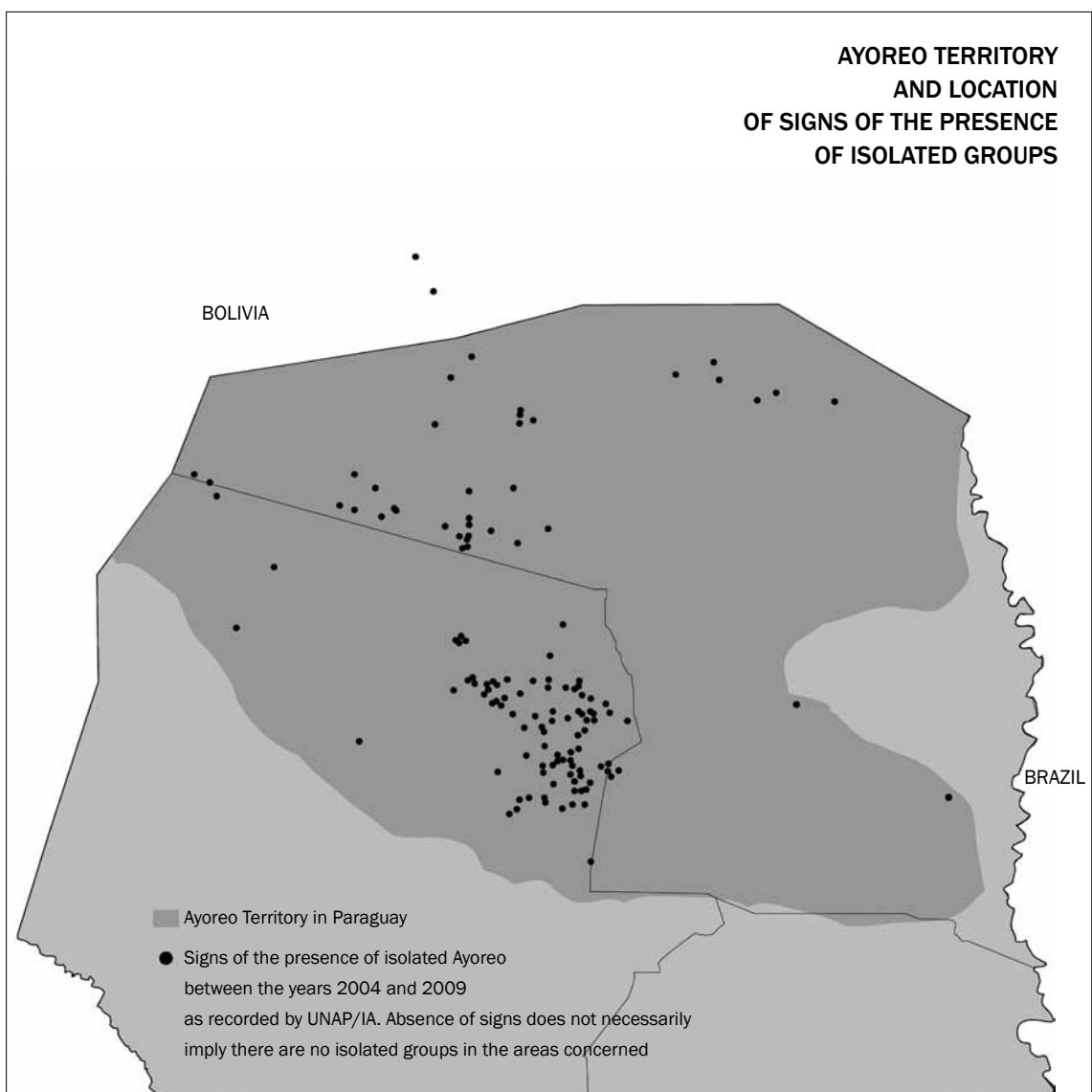


Threats from the non-indigenous world

- The expansion of **cattle farming**, accompanied by extensive and irrational **deforestation**, often in contravention of the country's laws or with environmental permits granted without fulfilling the necessary legal requirements. Consequences: constant decrease in the size of territories in use and growing pressure on these territories and on the uncontacted groups who use them; destruction of lagoons and waterways, with negative impacts for vast ecosystems; loss of vital resources and food sovereignty; increased risk of involuntary contact; growing loss of self-determination.
- Land speculation: **large-scale sale and illegal allocation of land** in Agrarian Reform colonies to the military, cattle ranchers, Mennonites (institutionally and individually), foreign investors (many of them from Brazil), and agro-industrial companies. Consequences: exposure of natural resources to irrational exploitation and destruction, thereby eliminating vital means of survival for isolated groups.
- **Oil prospecting and seismic testing** by companies granted concessions by the government without prior consultation with the indigenous peoples affected, the Ayoreo and Guarani-Ñandeva. Consequences: for seismic testing, a large number of lines are cut through the forest in the affected indigenous territories, sometimes every 500 metres. This leads to profound alterations in the forest's biodiversity, and leaves the territories open and exposed to subsequent predatory incursions, as well as increasing the risk of involuntary contact.



- **Clandestine activities by missionaries promoting and seeking to force contact.** Such activities are led by U.S. evangelical as well as Mennonite missionaries, sometimes with the support of ranch owners eager to free themselves of the legal impediments that could be posed by the presence of isolated indigenous peoples. Such activities –illegal under Paraguayan law– constitute a clear attempt to “cleanse” the territories under the guise of evangelization. Consequences: risk of forced contact, with potentially violent and even fatal results; threats to the life and physical integrity of the isolated.
- **Illegal harvesting and sale of precious wood and wild animals.** Consequences: decrease in biodiversity and alteration of natural ecosystems; risk of involuntary contact.
- Violation of Ayoreo territories by **disrespectful scientists, adventurers and sports enthusiasts** –sport hunters, car rally participants and their fans– and others. Consequence: risk of involuntary contact, destruction of natural resources.



Situation in the areas of presence of isolated Ayoreo groups

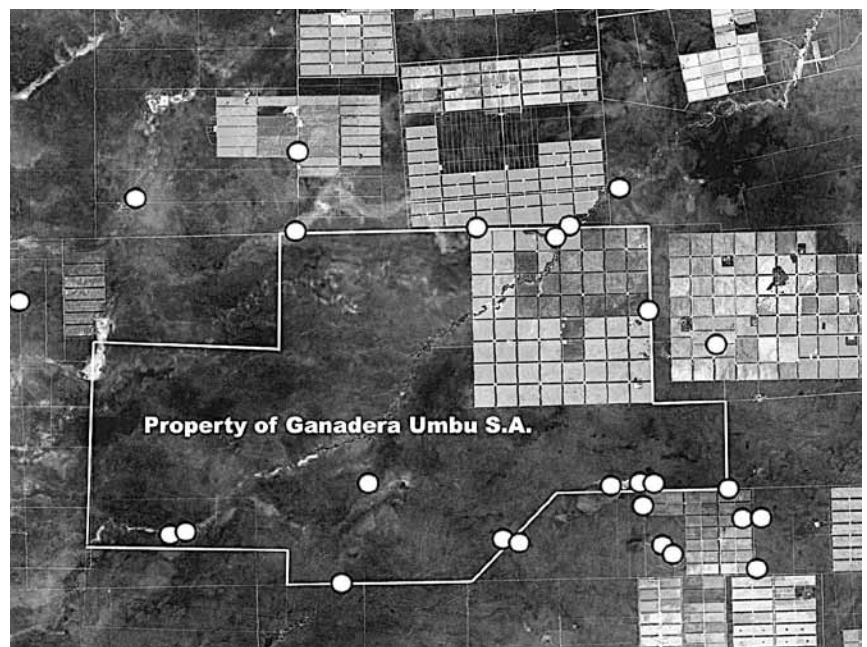
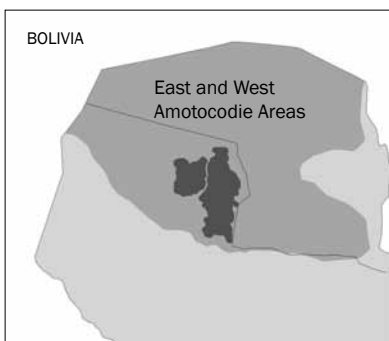
East and West Amotocodie Areas

These are areas **under extreme threat** as a result of uncontrolled deforestation for the creation of cattle ranches. The most recent sign of the presence of uncontacted Ayoreo was a sighting in March 2010. These are areas with a permanent presence of isolated Ayoreo.

The cattle ranching frontier is rapidly advancing from the south and east of these areas. To the south, the new clearing of forested areas on the land of the Fernheim Mennonite colony is exerting pressure on the territory inhabited by forest-dwelling groups. Many cattle ranchers in the area hire Ayoreo workers as farm labourers and use them as “a protective barrier” (in the words of the Ayoreo) between the uncontacted groups and the ranches. When footprints or other signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo appear on the ranches –as was the case, for example, in March and April 2009– the ranch owners prohibit their workers from reporting these findings to the UNAP or the authorities, under the threat of being fired if they do so. This situation was denounced by UNAP to a delegation of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April 2009.

In the centre of the East Amotocodie area there is a settlement of Ayoreo who were contacted in the 1960s. The settlement’s inhabitants have recorded a growing number of signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo over recent years, and with the help of UNAP, they have been able to prevent a number of situations that could have led to contact. The most recent sign of Ayoreo presence was recorded in January 2010, after a marked increase in such signs since late 2008, including sightings of isolated Ayoreo crossing roads in the area.

In the northern part of this same area lies the region of Chunguperdatei, which is home to one of the largest waterways in the semi-arid Chaco. This site is currently



○ Signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo between 2004 and 2008.

occupied by the Brazilian cattle ranching company Umbu S.A., which has been granted authorization to deforest 24,000 hectares of the 40,000 hectares of land it owns, including the territories in Chunguperdatei to which the Ayoreo people are demanding land rights.

Between June 2007 and October 2008, the company cleared 8,000 hectares of forest. For the uncontacted groups living in the area, this signified the loss of vital water resources and areas crucial to them for hunting, gathering and planting crops.

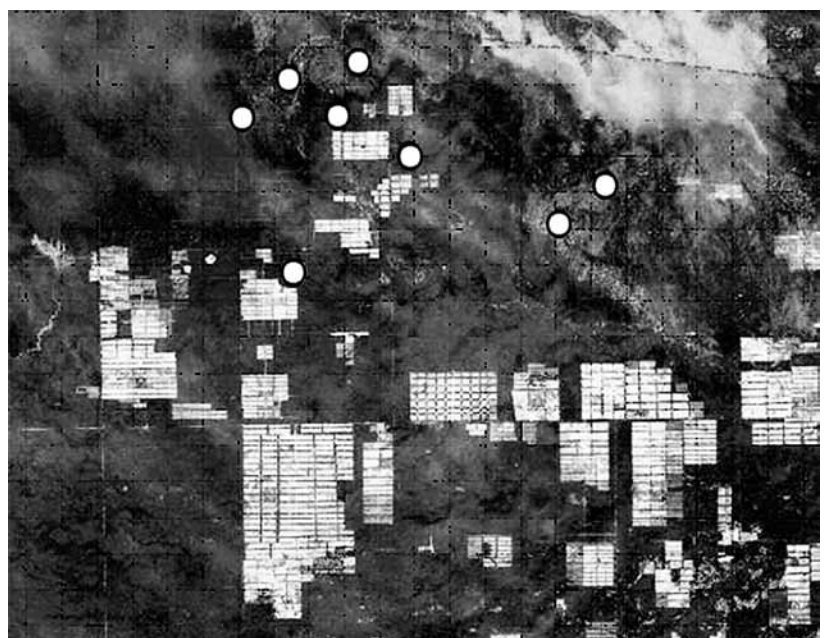
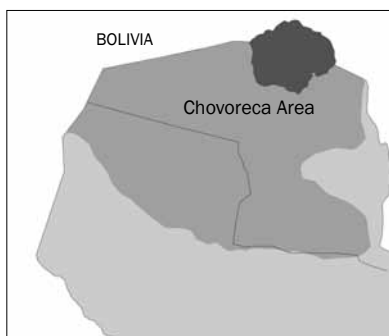
The impact of this deforestation on the ecosystem in this river basin is enormous, and the damage caused is irreversible.

In the West Amotocodie area –which directly borders on the above-mentioned Chunguperdatei region– signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo groups have been recorded by IA/UNAP since 2002 and over the subsequent years. In 2008, the arrival of a large number of new foreign landowners to the area and the clearing of huge areas of forest signalled growing pressure on the habitat of these isolated groups.

Chovoreca Area

This area is part of the transborder territory of an uncontacted Ayoreo group of considerable size (estimated at around 25 people). On the Bolivian side of the border it includes sections of Otuquis National Park. Most recent sign of the presence registered in July 2009.

This territory is **seriously threatened** owing to an increase in deforestation by Paraguayans, Mennonites and foreigners.



○ Signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo between 2006 and 2008.

Palmar de las Islas Area

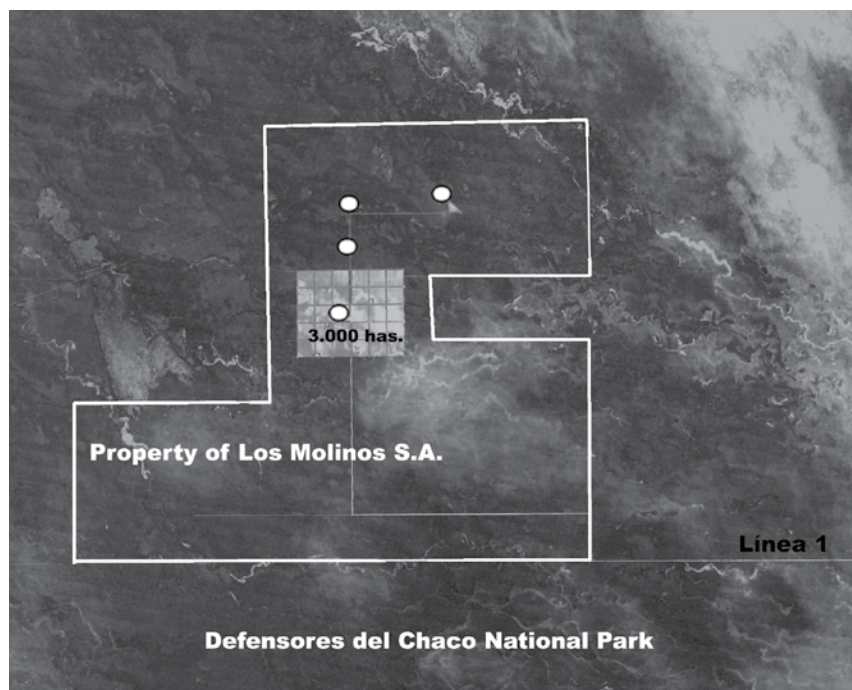
This transborder territory encompasses the region of Palmar de las Islas on the Paraguayan side of the border and the Santiago and San Miguel regions and salt flats on the Bolivian side, as well as the area north of Cerro León and Agua Dulce.

It is the habitat of a group of isolated Ayoreo, of unknown size. The most recent signs of their presence were recorded in January 2010.

This habitat is currently **threatened**, in the section north of Cerro León, by the deforestation of large tracts of land. In 2008, the clearing of an area of forest forced an uncontacted group to flee the area (see satellite image). Over the course of the same year, the area attracted significant interest from foreign investors –from Brazil, Uruguay and the Netherlands– who purchased plots of land designated for Agrarian Reform, with plans to establish cattle ranches. In some cases, a large number of these plots were joined together to form landholdings of 60,000 hectares or more.

The presence of isolated Ayoreo has also been recorded within the perimeter of Defensores del Chaco National Park. Along the northern border of the park, cattle ranchers from the area cut a 40-metre wide trail through the forest stretching 40 kilometres, apart from other smaller trails and roads cleared within the park's buffer zone.

Over recent years, there have been repeated reports of illegal sport hunting within the limits of the national park, although the competent authorities have done nothing to intervene. These activities pose a serious threat also to the uncontacted Ayoreo living in the area.



○ Signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo in 2008.

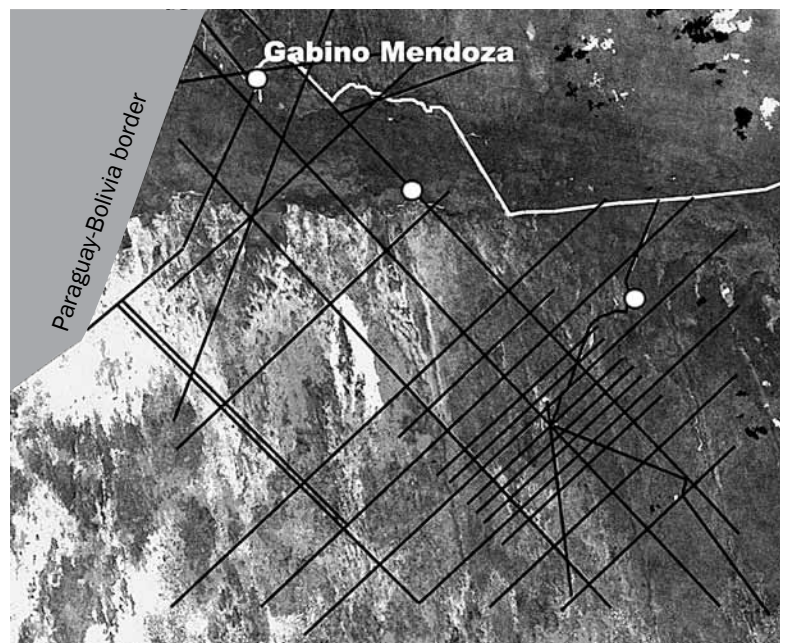
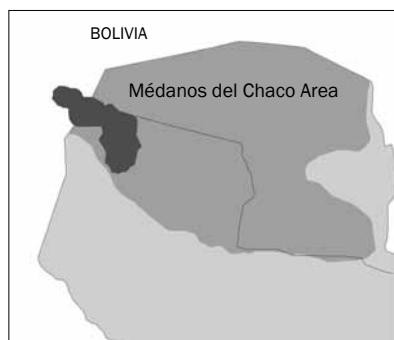
Médanos del Chaco Area

This large transborder area encompasses Médanos del Chaco National Park and Teniente Agripino Enciso National Park, while Defensores del Chaco National Park is a short distance away to the northeast and east.

This territory is used by at least one group of uncontacted Ayoreo of unknown size. The most recent sign of their presence was recorded in November 2009.

This area is **under extreme threat** as a result of oil prospecting activities. The area is criss-crossed by lines cut through the forest to open trails or for seismic testing, even within the boundaries of Médanos del Chaco National Park. This alteration of the forest has had serious effects on the isolated Ayoreo in the area, as well as on wildlife and biodiversity. This portion of Ayoreo territory borders on the west with the territory of the Guaraní-Ñandeva people, who have also been impacted by oil industry activity.

The concession to conduct oil prospecting surveys was granted by the Paraguayan government without any prior consultation with the indigenous peoples affected.



- Signs of the presence of isolated Ayoreo in 2008
- Oil prospecting/seismic lines
- Gabino Mendoza-Lagerenza'i road

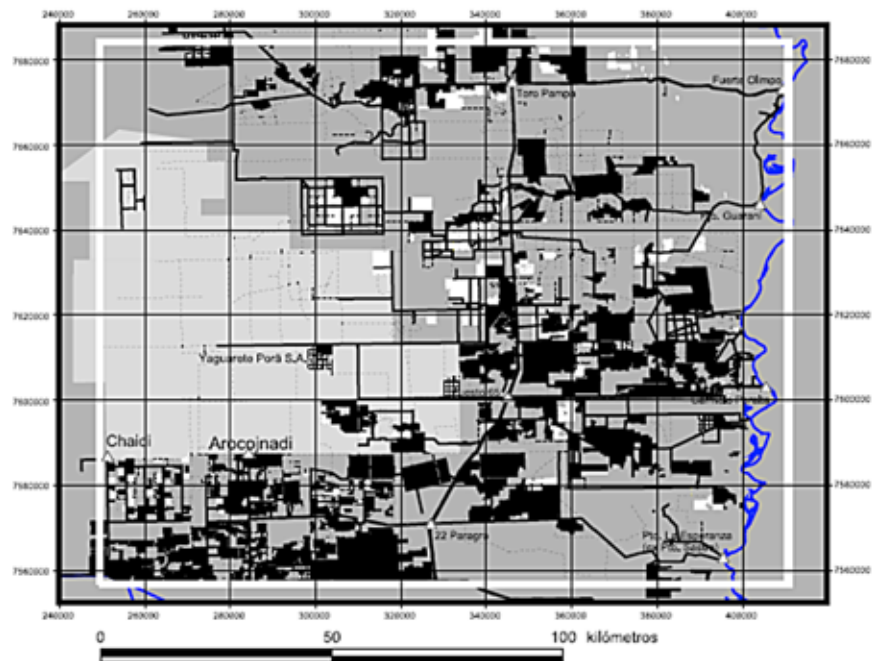
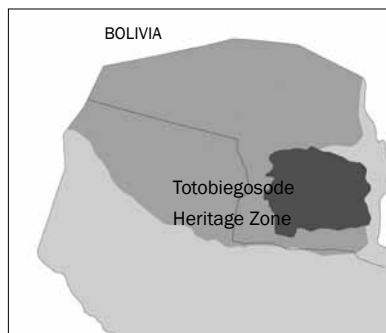
Totobiegosode Heritage Zone and areas west of the Paraguay River Basin

This area, which covers the eastern portion of the territory of the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode local group, was the object of the first indigenous land claim in Paraguay, put forward in 1993 by the NGO GAT (Gente, Ambiente y Territorio) and the Ayoreo association OPIT (Organización Payipie Ichadie Totobiegosode). The area claimed was declared the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode Natural and Cultural Heritage Zone by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Along the southern edge of this area are the two Ayoreo-Totobiegosode

settlements of Arocojnadi and Chaidi. The majority of the Ayoreo living in these settlements belong to the category of indigenous peoples in initial contact. They differ from other Ayoreo groups for having entered into contact with non-indigenous society much more recently, and are therefore in a more vulnerable state.

Some of the signs of the presence of isolated groups, recorded in the eastern portion of this area, were found just 25 kilometres from the banks of the Paraguay River.

This extensive area, the habitat of at least one uncontacted Ayoreo group, is **under extreme threat** due to the high density of cattle ranches, primarily Brazilian-owned, which are in constant expansion. In the course of one year alone – between August 2008 and August 2009 – 69,000 hectares of forest were cleared in the area visible in the illustration below. Some of this deforestation took place on the properties of the Brazilian companies Yaguarete Porã and River Plate S.A., whose landholdings extend into the territory claimed by the Ayoreo and even into the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode Natural and Cultural Heritage Zone. Up until now, the land claim spearheaded by the Ayoreo association OPIT has led to the securing of ownership rights to a mere 100,000 hectares of the total area of 500,000 hectares claimed, due to the heavy political resistance they have met.



- Ayoreo-Totobiegosode Natural and Cultural Heritage Zone
- ▲ Reference sites
- ⚡ Roads
- ⋯ Old trails or property boundaries
- Areas deforested before 30/08/2008
- Areas deforested between 30/08/2008 and 30/08/2009



Measures for the protection of isolated Ayoreo groups

Legal measures

A number of legal instruments jointly express and affirm the obligation of the state and society to protect the basic rights of isolated indigenous peoples and groups. These rights include:

- The right to self-determination, which includes the right to maintain their current way of life, to remain isolated from the surrounding society, and to not be contacted.
- The right to the protection of their way of life and of the customary and necessary resources for their survival.
- The right to the integrity of their territory and the protection of this territory from depredation and destruction.
- The right to legal ownership –registered in their name– of all of the territories that they occupy and use.

LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

National Constitution of Paraguay.

Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) / National Law 234/93.

Paraguayan law 904/81 – Statute of Indigenous Communities.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Draft guidelines on the protection of Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation and in initial contact of the Amazon Basin and El Chaco (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

Resolutions and recommendations adopted at international conferences (conferences of the parties to international conventions, IUCN World Congresses, etc.).

Policies or government measures

Paraguay has yet to adopt a public policy that addresses the protection of isolated indigenous peoples, as well as of contacted groups living in a state of initial contact (Ayoreo-Totobiegosode contacted in 1986, 1998 and 2004) and of groups returning into voluntary isolation after having established contact (such as the Mby'a in San Rafael).

In the 1990s, the Attorney General's Office played an active preventative role through protective measures in specific concrete cases, in both the Totobiegosode Heritage Zone and the eastern part of the Amotocodie area. Today, the Attorney General's Office limits its role to the supervision of eventual government measures and to intervention in the case of legal violations that have already taken place, with no preventative role whatsoever. Other state entities have only intervened in specific cases in certain areas, or have been virtually absent.

At no time has the state adopted any measures to protect the uncontacted groups in the Médanos del Chaco, Palmar de las Islas and Chovoreca areas and their respective territories. UNAP's warnings about the existence of these groups and the dangers they face have been ignored.

LOSS AND DESTRUCTION OF THE AYOREO TERRITORY

“ Our most serious concern today is when we see how the cattle ranchers are destroying our whole territory. Every day we see them changing the face of our forest, of the forest we know.

The cattle ranchers with their land use plans, and the government that gives them the necessary environmental permits, do not consult with the Ayoreo. Nor do they think about our brothers and sisters who are still living in the forest.

If they cut down the whole forest and all of the trees, what will happen to the Ayoreo who are still living there? Where will they find their food, for example, the

honey they find inside the tree trunks, and the wild animals that eat the roots of certain plants? If those plants are no longer there, they will die. All of the other animals will die too, and the people will die. They will die of thirst, because everything is being cut down and burned.

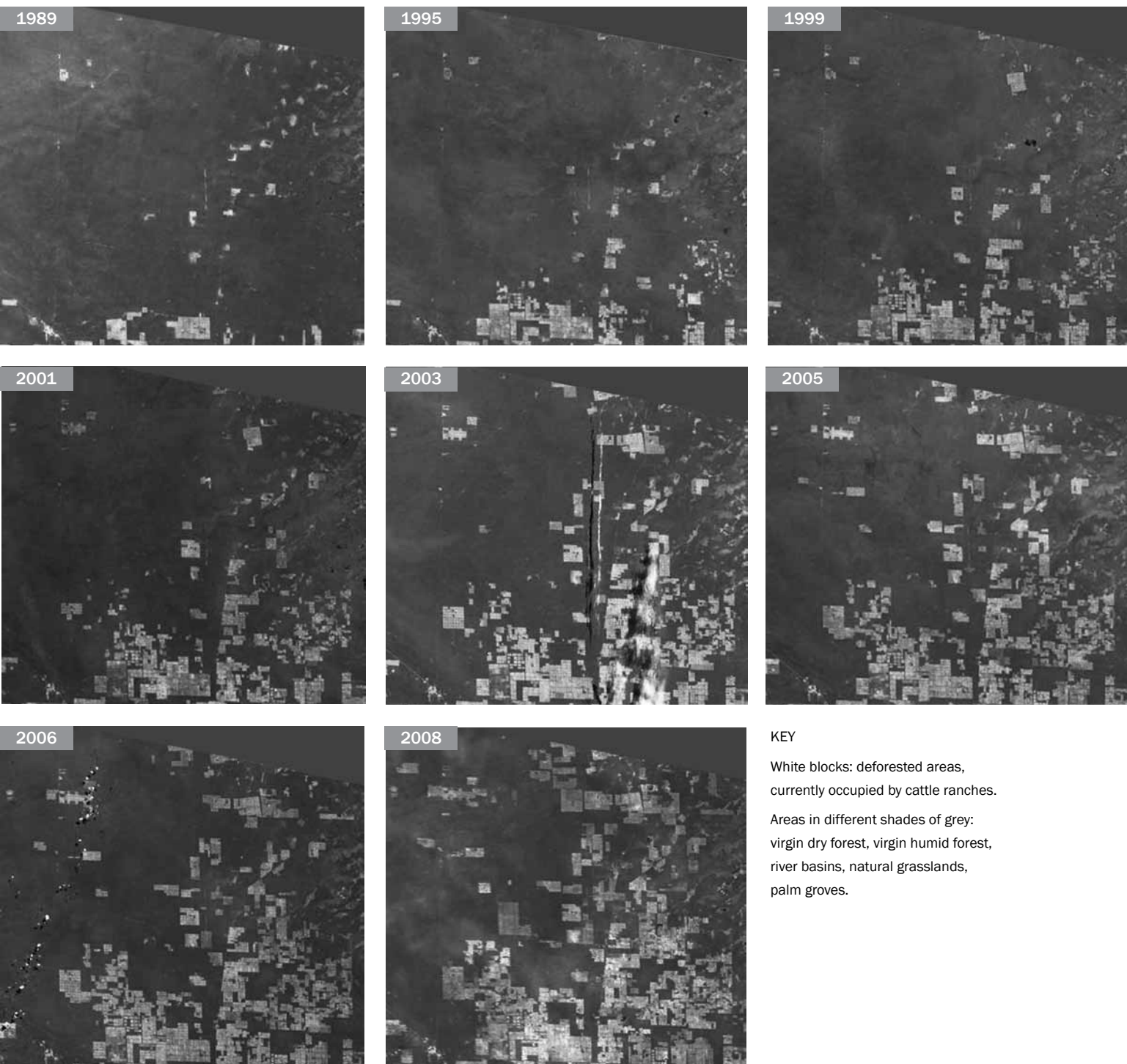
Every day we watch with great sadness how the white men are destroying the forest, and along with it, how they are destroying our future.

”

MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI

President of the UNAP

Expansion of the cattle ranching frontier



These satellite images taken between 1989 and 2008 show a sequence of views of the Amotocodie area. They show the progressive advance of deforestation carried out to establish new cattle ranches. This is one of the areas of the greatest expansion of cattle farming, which poses an extremely high threat to the groups of uncontacted Ayoreo who live there. For them, this area is particularly rich in small forest clearings which are ideal for planting crops during the rainy season. In addition, it contains one of the most important waterways in the northern Chaco, with lagoons that never dry up.



“When we lived in this forest we didn’t put up fences or signs, this whole national park was our territory, and it continues to be today”.

POJONE CHIQUENOI
Cerro León, August 2004

RECOVERY OF THE TERRITORY AND OF THE AYOREO PEOPLE'S FUTURE

“

We need to recover and to protect our territory. We want it to be protected for our brothers and sisters who still live in *Eami*, and we want to recover it for the Ayoreo elders who were taken away from it and are still alive, and also for the future generations.

We, the Ayoreo people, suffered a great injustice when they moved us from our territories and took away everything that was ours. Now our territories have strange names and signs that say they are not ours.

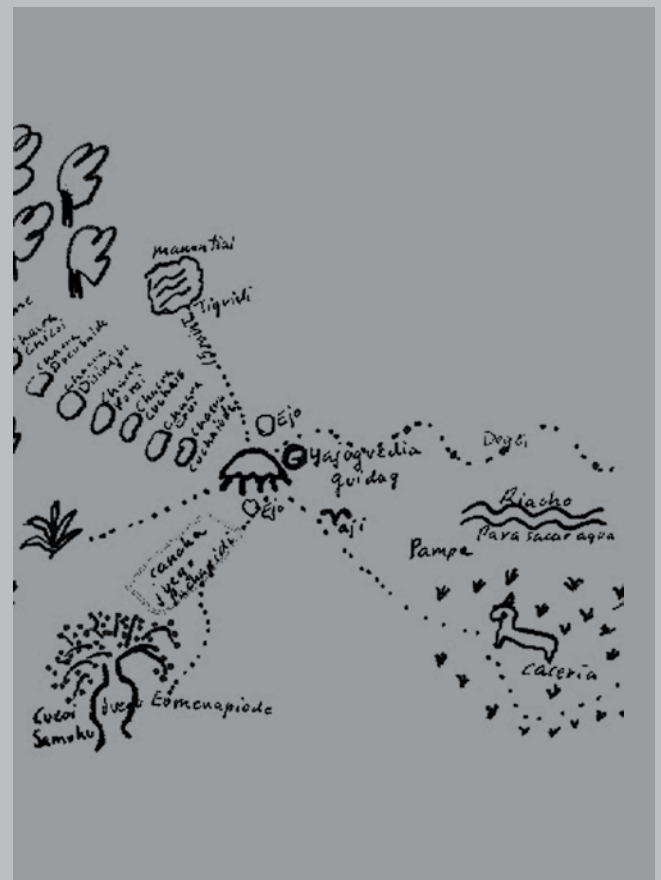
The Paraguayan government authorities must realize that now is the time to do justice and to give back what was taken from us. In this way they will give us back the possibility to have a future and to continue to grow like Ayoreo, not like the white people who want to have too much and end up destroying everything. We can see that if they continue destroying our *Eami*, no one will be able to live in the Chaco anymore, neither we Ayoreo nor the white people.

We see our territory that has been turned into national parks, without anyone ever asking us if we wanted this. We see that the white people are not even able to take care of the parks. In the meantime, they say that they are afraid of the indigenous people because we are going to loot the parks, but nobody comes to us to ask how we would like to and be able to take care of them.

The recovery of the territories that were stolen from us means that we, the

Ayoreo, will once again have access to the foodstuffs that we know and are familiar with and that give us strength. Our people will recover their strength. Our *Eami*, together with the Ayoreo people, will also recover and be filled with our aliveness.

Without our territory it is difficult to continue being Ayoreo. We want development, too, but a development that will allow us to grow within our own way of life, our culture, within our *Eami*.



Sketch of an Ayoreo village in the forest, drawn by Toje Etacoro during an interview on the story of her life, conducted by Rosa María Quiroga, September 2003.

Today, the Ayoreo elders, our traditional leaders, weary of living among the white people, have begun again to teach our youth about our way of life, our beliefs, our ways of eating, growing food and moving through the forest. And the Ayoreo youth are learning how to live in accordance with our identity, which will grow and become stronger living on our territory.

Today there is a strong desire awakening in our people, led by these traditional leaders who want to go back to their territories with all the members of their groups. Among them are the Tiegosode, the Atetadiegosode and the Garaigosode.

What is happening now reminds us of a shaman who had a vision more than 150 years ago, before we Ayoreo were taken from our territory:

‘I see our people; our people are walking with their hands covering their eyes. They come to where the white people are, and when they open their eyes, they no longer recognize themselves as Ayoreo. The children begin to play the white people’s games. Our people do what the king of the white people tells them to do. After two generations, the Ayoreo will want to go back and live in their grandparents’ territory.’

”

MATEO SOBODE CHIQUENOI

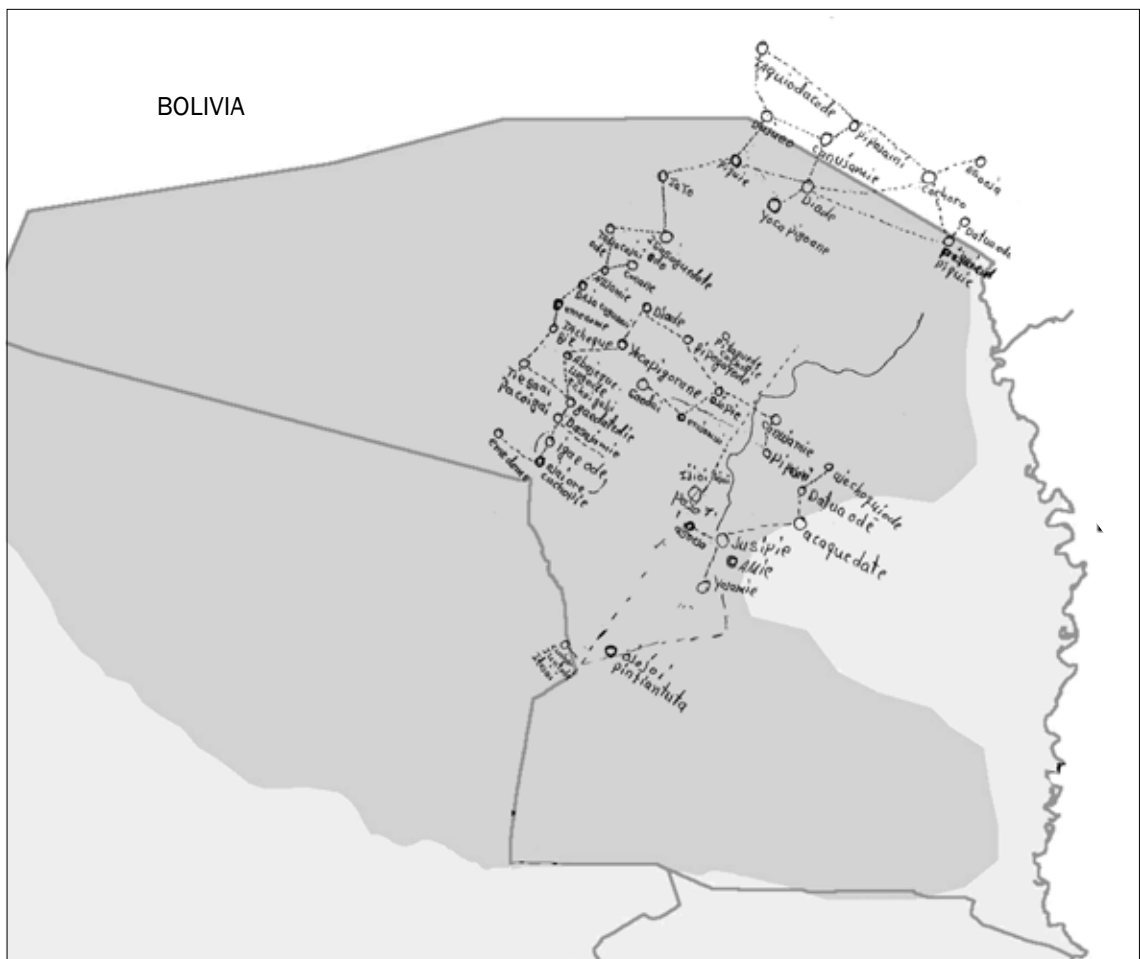
President of the UNAP

Superimposed maps



The map shown here was created by Ayoreo elders in 2004, with the help of UNAP leaders (left), following a trip that represented their reencounter with the territory that had been stripped from them 50 years earlier. The drawing of this map was the first step on the long road towards recovering their territory.

Superimposed on this map of the northern Chaco are the lines that mark the political border between Paraguay and Bolivia and the borders between the different departments of Paraguay, together with the landmarks drawn by elders from one of the Ayoreo local groups. The drawing portrays forest dwelling sites on the migration routes and other sites filled with the group's history.



THE AYOREO PEOPLE ADDRESS THE PARAGUAYAN GOVERNMENT AND NON - INDIGENOUS SOCIETY

Because of everything we have expressed, denounced and explained in this publication:

- We need the Paraguayan government and Paraguayan society to learn to perceive and see the injustices that they have committed against our people, and also against all other indigenous peoples of Paraguay:

They have stripped us of our forest and our territory and taken over what is ours, turning our territory into their own private property and into state-owned national parks.

Stripping us of our territory, they have deported us with misleading and false promises and against our will to missionary stations; in order to deport us, they have often forced our own Ayoreo brothers to act as their accomplices and to serve as the agents of contact to move us out of the forest.

Many of our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters have died in the process of contact itself or during deportation; others fled into the forest and we never heard from them again; we have lost important leaders who died from exposure to contagious diseases.

They have forced us to live a sedentary life and to break with our culture and way of life; they have forced us to keep silent and to forget what is ours, our culture, our beliefs, our knowledge and wisdom.

Today, they force us to witness the destruction of our forests and our territories, in the name of the right to private property, and they deny us the right to defend them.

- We need the government and society to publicly and officially recognize the injustices that have been committed, and to take responsibility for compensation and reparations through punitive, corrective and compensatory measures, as the case may be, including among such measures the restitution of our territory, bearing in mind that the Ayoreo people cannot live without their territory.
- We need the government and society to recognize the human rights violations committed against the Ayoreo people, and to actively accept the consequences, taking responsibility for the reparatory measures.

- We demand that the government recognize our territory as indigenous territory, in existence before any other subsequent forms of land use, and that it recognize that the theft of our territory does not mean that it has ceased to be ours, or that we have surrendered our right to it.
- We demand that the government recognize us as an indigenous people in all our diversity, and that it enforce the fulfilment of our corresponding constitutional and legal rights, in particular our right to self-determination and our right to choose our own way of life and development as a people.
- We demand that the government and society respect our organization, the Union of Ayoreo Natives of Paraguay (UNAP), and all other Ayoreo organizations.
- With regard to policies, projects or measures that involve or affect our people, our interests or our territory, we demand that the government enforce the fulfilment of our right to consultation and prior, free and informed consent, and that it respect and ensure respect for our own way of making decisions.
- We demand that the government guarantee the Ayoreo people's right to the protagonism and role that duly correspond to them in the administration and protection of their territory and its resources and wealth.
- We demand that the government itself without delay fulfil its duty to effectively protect our Ayoreo territory against the depredation, destruction and commercialization of its natural resources, flora, fauna, water resources and biodiversity, whether as a result of massive, irrational deforestation for cattle ranching, agro-industrial monoculture plantations, oil prospecting and exploitation, or any other causes.

At the same time, with regard to our brothers and sisters living as isolated groups:

- We demand respect for the right to self-determination of our Ayoreo brothers and sisters living as isolated groups, and in particular their right to remain in their territories and with no contact with non-indigenous society.
- We demand that the government provide them with the necessary protection to ensure the fulfilment of the above-stated demand, by delimiting and legalizing their ownership of the territories that they use and inhabit.
- We demand that the government effectively enforce the prohibition of any efforts to pursue contact with our brothers and sisters living as isolated groups, whether it be the efforts of missionaries for the purpose of “evangelization” or any others.



Madrejón, Paraguayan Chaco, 14 January 2007.

The sign reads:

Ancestral territory of the Ayoreo people, ODOCOBUI.

Original name which in the Ayoreo language means
clean forest with many rabbits.

"The removal or relocation of their habitat without their express
consent is prohibited" (Art. 64 of the Paraguayan National Constitution).

*This publication is dedicated to the memory of Leo Klemm,
who explored the intangible lines that cross from world to world
and found the resonance of the Ayoreo people
in other parts of our planet.*

Territory is much more than the physical land: it is the map sketched by the history of peoples who have lived there since time was the ally of their origins and their own destiny. Territory is not merely soil or physical land, but rather the place shaped and marked by deeply symbolic interventions that draft the cartography of habitat and effectively prepare a site for the development of particular ways of living, creating, believing and growing collectively. Territory is the area that protects the remains of ancestors, provides the exact foodstuffs that a people needs, and shapes the habitat where different communities recognize themselves in one another, linked not only by bloodlines but by constellations of meaning.

TICIO ESCOBAR

Art critic, writer and anthropologist

Currently Minister of Culture of Paraguay

