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Front-page: Contrasting Habitations.

*Above:* An informant's dogs, in the secluded, clean space of home's garden.

*Below:* Los Bañados, "poor" settlements between the river and the city.

## My Gratitude

Bergen, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009

At the moment of (awaiting) the truth about the quality of this work, I extend serious thanks to people surrounding me during the last two years.

First: my mother. For being a cliff, a rock-solid ground on which to bounce reflections, throw out frustration, rest and find empathy at the strangest of moments. Thank you ever so much, for all that you are to me. For her primary person in life: Svein Kleive. To me, you have been a friend, role model, companion in laughter, a therapist in practice and also, one of the few who's had the guts to tell me to shut up and shape up whenever I have been too much about me, myself, I, My Fieldwork and *My Thesis*; a self-centred, stressed out character that I hope will fade away at the eve of this work. I owe the two of you more than I can express in words.

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## ***Introduction: Personal Motivation, Preliminary Questions and Admittances***

My interest in elites rests with my interest in poverty; there would not be a “down” to study, if there was not an “up”. When I started this project, I was warned by several social scientists that I would find only already familiar “social racism” or “social fascism” among the elites. I was warned that it would be dangerous to stick my nose into “rich people’s worlds”, especially in a region where allegedly there is much crime, little respect for life, and perhaps little positive regard of social scientist. I was warned that I would probably not get close to people “properly”, that “elites” would only wash of my questions and brush me away from their social happenings in a politically correct manner, or shoot me if those measures did not suffice to get rid of me.

As I will show, I got close to people, and they did let me see their every-day lives, they answered my questions, more and more openly as five months went by in my “field”; Asunción, Paraguay’s capital. Somehow, I feel like I am lying when I say I did fieldwork in Asunción: I did, and I did not. As will be apparent, my informants’ lives unfold in exclusive zones of the city, not the city you meet if you travel through. If you see my informants in the city, it is somehow not them that you see; you see their cars, their homes, their real estates, their security personnel, all at a distance. It was a strange experience to be so free to shift in and out of their bubbles. While I, as opposed to my informants, wandered the streets of Asunción, an SUV with shaded glasses would suddenly stop and pick me up. Going from the heat, dust and noise of the streets into tranquil, clean and cool car compartments so rapidly, also made me realize how privileged I am; I had a freedom of movement that my informants do not have, and I am so glad that I do.

In anthropologese, one speaks much about “power”, about what inequities do to people’s lives, how “hegemonies” create subaltern groups that discriminate among themselves and thus maintain subaltern positions. Power in the form and shape of “elites” tend to be there in the shadows, blamed for poverty, inequity, misdistribution... but who are the elites? How do they perceive research that speaks of them, but seldom with them? And why speak of forces keeping the subjects of studies down, without personifying the forces? Does that not contribute to distancing, powerful stigma on them too? Do elites self-identify with the image of exploiters; powerful, mighty, manipulative? I was compelled to get to know “the elites” as persons, to find out whether they hold some people to be “lesser humans”, and in that case, why and how they go about this rationale.

The obtaining of *access* into informants social worlds is regarded important to describe most fieldwork initiation. I cannot fully live up to this ideal, for it would reveal the identities of my informants, a break with ethics that I will not allow. I hope that small size of the upper social strata of Asunción excuses this choice, and that my choice does not undermine the reader's confidence in my observations. I strive to account for my informants' views and actions as objectively as possible, and trust my choice of methodological relativism is credible.

There is much I got to know that I could not fit into this thesis, and there are many theoretical angles I could have employed for my analysis. It would have been interesting to investigate further perspectives on gender, and it would have been fantastic if I had been able to stay for longer and shift fieldwork sites between habitats of "the poor" and those of the upper class to investigate whether my informants have a "hegemonic hold" on the poorer segments of the population, and if there really are patron-client relationships across classes that facilitate this<sup>1</sup>. However, I had to make a choice. Many studies have been done among "the poor", and many studies focus on gender and clientilism in Latin America. Therefore, I chose to study those I here interchangingly call "the privileged", "the elite" and "my informants", and I choose to do so by employing theories that I find apt, perhaps provocatively leaving behind some "traditions" in the studies of Latin American "cases".

I will not dwell with my personal feelings throughout this thesis, but I have to say that it felt heavy to get close to people I knew I would analyse in sometimes non-flattering and revealing manners. My informants are people who laughed with me, took care of me, helped me with practicalities and revealed their sometimes very personal thoughts to me. It might have been more "morally comfortable" to study people towards whose world views and positions one feels more sympathetic – it therefore also seems the study I have undertaken is necessary; it has been a challenging of crossing moralities, sympathies and actions that I still believe to be essential if I am to take seriously a belief in dialogue, mutual recognition and social interaction as means to eradicate poverty. And I do.

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<sup>1</sup> I find what Auyero (1999:323-6) holds; that the closer one is to the centre of power, the more immersed is the idea of "the power" holders good actions plausible. I cannot say whether my informants performed as "patrons", and if they did, they and their peers might not have been neither prone to talk about it nor very conscious of its effect. Of course, it might also be that I myself was too close to power, and therefore landed in a catch-22: having flies in my eyes, and not seeing that because I had indeed, flies in my eyes (Heller 1994).

## *The Outline of this Thesis*

The segregation of the privileged from the poor is found, produced and reproduced at several levels simultaneously. To notice who did what where, and with whom, was essential as I tried to learn the ways of my informants. What distinguished my informants from others, and how they knew without speaking to someone “who they were” in society, seemed deeply integrated in my informants every day practices. Most of the interaction I had with my informants was in private or semi-private contexts, like family lunches, religious home-meetings, exercise walks and car drives; situations where they were surrounded by employees whose individuality were not distinguished.

One significant focus in this thesis is therefore how both employees and “the poor in general” were not seen as persons with agency unless their agency was perceived as dubious; when they were thought to steal, lie or consume conspicuously. This entails that when my informants noticed their socially, economically and educationally<sup>2</sup> inferior, their noticing was often pre-tainted negatively, and facilitated a non-nuanced way of seeing the other; something I argue aids my informants in keeping a mental and physical distance to the poor, enabling them to live as they do.

Through participant observations and in-depth interviews, I made observations concerning spatial segregation, security, consumption and criteria for and capability of participation in a state democracy. I will show that all these concerns incorporate means of demarcation between classes. The question of how informants can see their elevated economic stature as morally defensible, led me to additionally investigate the plurality of morals they apply, and how these depend on shifting contexts. The sum of the above foci and questions are sought to illuminate the persistence of both poverty and richness in Paraguay<sup>3</sup>.

To give a background for my observations, chapter one first provides a brief postcolonial historical outline of Paraguay, before I go on to matters concerning economic division, ethnicity and discuss methods, “fields” and informants’ positioning. Thereafter, I provide a theoretical commence for the analysis of my empirical findings.

Chapter two provides the elite’s perspectives on poverty, and describes their relations to the city of residence, Asunción. Spatial segregation based on consumption limits the visibility of poor; hence the privileged avoid observing poverty in their proximity when

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<sup>2</sup> Note that all my informants had a minimum of twelve years schooling

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted from the outset of this thesis that Paraguay was ranked 138 on International Transparency’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2008 ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)). During the election campaigns, the CNN Español and SNT (local Television channel) hosted a presidential debate where the introductory comment said Paraguay was the worlds fourth most corrupted country (CNN Español/SNT 03.04.2008). This information is essential because it forms the inhabitants’ image of themselves, that is, it influences their “social imagination” and sense of nationalism.

spending large sums of money. To a certain extent this leaves the poor “out of sight, out of mind” for the privileged, and therefore I here initiate an exploration of consumption.

In chapter three, I elaborate my informants’ use of security measures and the personification of security measures; the security guards. This forms part of a focus on elite-employee relations that is important for my topic because the employees are among the few relatively poor people my informants meet. Another arena where some informants ‘meet poverty’ is a local hospital where they volunteer, which I therefore deal with in the same chapter.

I have observed a striking demand towards people to behave according to the rules of economic stature and personal affiliation. Who belongs where, when, with whom, and in what (more or less) ascribed role, underscored the relevance of neo-liberal ideals of consumption. Plastic surgery, hairdos and clothing signals visible and embodied differences; my informants’ emphasised the poor’s “dirtiness, ignorance, crimes, laziness, lack of logical and moral sense and promiscuity”. Hence, explanations for poverty are connected bodies. I suggest that embodied consumption serves as a master symbol of differentiation. I therefore investigate further views tied to the physical state of the poor and my informants’ view of their own bodies, in chapter four.

In chapter five I address views on education and moralities, and analyse how my informants deal with conflicting, shifting and plural moralities. In the concluding chapter I depict the reasoning employed when elites stated they did not think Paraguay was ‘ready’ for democracy<sup>4</sup>. Intriguingly, it is in this chapter that we meet most of my male informants.

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<sup>4</sup> It was only a month after I left that Fernando Lugo, the former bishop of the department of San Pedro and so-called “bishop of the poor” was inaugurated. Some of my informants said Lugo would destroy business opportunities, behave “like Chavez” and chase investors out of the country – others that knew him, and had much larger businesses, cried of joy when he won. For reasons of anonymity I cannot elaborate on this. Lugo officially has followed the Catholic Church’ closer allegiance with the poor without adjoining the liberation theology, that lead to withdrawal of support from “landowning and industrial political-economic elite” of Brazil at least (Scheper-Hughes 2005:178). However, I doubt, on empirical grounds, that Lugo will abandon the political economic elite of Paraguay – thus, as claimed, the elites are key to governing Paraguay.

## *Chapter One*

### *History, Methodology, Ethics and Theoretical Commence*

#### *A brief Historical Introduction to Paraguay*

The landlocked territory now named Paraguay was the first autonomous Republic in South America, constituted in 1812. There are different estimates of when the Spaniards reached the territory, but the capital, Asuncion, was one of the first established cities in South America and functioned as a central administrative seat for the Spaniards from 1537<sup>5</sup>.

From 1814 the country was ruled authoritarily by Dr. Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, who helped “homogenisation” of the population by banning marriage within immigration groups (Nickson 1999: xv). Following Dr. Francia, in 1840 was Carlos Antonio López, who upon his death in 1862 was replaced by his son, Francisco Solano López. The latter Lopez lead Paraguay into and died during the Triple-Alliance War against Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, during which approximately 65% of the Paraguayan population was killed and Paraguay lost a fourth of its territory (Nickson 1999: xvi).

In 1887 Paraguay’s two largest political parties, Partido Liberal and Partido Colorado, were formed. Both parties are frequently called “market liberal”, although this was contested by my informants, who said the Colorado had always been “the peoples party”, and “socialist”.<sup>6</sup> I have thus not found any clear conviction of the Colorados ideological stance. It is important to note however, that Stroessner’s regime, and hence the party, took part in hunt for and torture of leftists across South America<sup>7</sup>.

Sondrol claims the political system was a classical two-party system, with all economic classes represented within both parties (Sondrol 1997: 109). From the formation of the parties the Colorados held power, until 1904 when Partido Liberal took power. During their rule, Paraguay was at war with Bolivia from 1932-35 over their shared border in the Chaco region. According to Miranda (1990) the more or less democratically elected presidents from the Partido Liberal provided neither political nor economic stability.

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<sup>5</sup> Sources are in agreement on this; for cross-reference, see Britannica Online Encyclopaedia at: [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)

<sup>6</sup> This seems very dubious, as taxation was never high-scale, landownership was held by “the aristocracy”, and the Colorados seem to have been dependent on the military for its rule at least since 1954 when Stroessner took power through a coup d’état.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Boccia Paz et.al (2007)

Through a military led coup d'état in 1948, the Colorado Party took power again. Several conflicts within the party made the political situation unstable, and the presidency changed hands four times before Alfredo Stroessner seized power in 1954 (Miranda 1990). Stroessner ruled Paraguay authoritarily as head of the Colorado Party, also known as ANR (Asociación Nacional Republicana) Stroessner ruled the country for 35 years, until 1989 when he was ousted by his own head of military, General Andrés Rodríguez (Nickson 1999).

In an article from 1967, Hicks wrote of village priest's role in the "play for power" between the political parties. The priest was then seen as the only source of political neutrality, and gained a position as "mediator"<sup>8</sup> (Hicks 1967). The political scientists Nickson and Lambert (2002) hold that the authoritarian rule(s) have maintained power through a small group of people. Primarily this has been exercised through caudillos ("strongmen"), whose families and "clients" still control the gross part of the county's resources (Nickson & Lambert 2002). "Political clientilism" is recurring theme in studies of Latin America, and frequently address the problematic of poverty struck populations who in exchange for (promised) resources support leaders who ideologically seem unlikely to relief poverty (Auyero 1999). Hicks showed that both private and public employment was controlled by affiliation with the Colorados; because employment was scarce, it was used as a reward for loyalty towards the party, implying a notion of clientilism (Hicks 1967: 279). Notably, Hicks holds that employment within the military too was restricted, under Stroessner's rule it was solely open to Colorado party members (Hicks 1967: 281). Thus, the coup against Stroessner was an internal party decision, and only gave a "correction" in the existing power structure (Sondrol 1997: 116). Sondrol maintained in 1997, that:

Paraguayan society is composed of generally interwoven chains linking thousands of patron-client relationships ... [that] cut across class-lines to separate the peasantry and other lower-class sectors from one another, while reinforcing the status and power of elites. ... distinctive to Paraguayan clientilism is the syndrome's linkage to the national political party system. This effects the politicisation of the masses, yet directs their support to reactionary elites not acting in their interest.

-Sondrol (1997: 121)

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<sup>8</sup> Hicks' (1967) observation may be a good backdrop for understanding why the former Catholic bishop Fernando Lugo won the Presidential elections in April 2008. However, many informants, as I will show, did not trust Lugo – it could be pertinent to ask whether this was because a "free" mediator could threaten their hold on socio-political positions, although some male informants had close relations with Lugo, and i think regarded him a friend and ally; it is possible to regard that an attempt at holding on to socio-political positions though.

The Colorados was manifested in all levels of society, something that may be interpreted as a vertical inclusion of people in politics (Auyero 1999). In total the Colorados stayed in power for 61 years. This phase of Paraguayan history terminated first after I left Paraguay, in August 2008.

### *Economic Divide*

Paraguay has a wide gap between a tiny upper class and vast poor population<sup>9</sup>. Estimates on Paraguayan economy – including poverty and definitions of poverty – differ. Local press stated a fifth of Paraguayans live in extreme poverty (“a niveles de indigencia”)<sup>10</sup> and one of the presidential candidates, Lino Oviedo, stated that “Paraguay has 2,5 million poor people, among which many live ‘en la basura de basura’ (the garbage of the garbage)”<sup>11</sup> Such public estimates on poverty are useful for they gives us an idea of the amount of poverty that my informants believe to be surrounded by.

Social reforms and taxation have been kept to a minimum, and especially the health system has been characterised as poor (Sondrol 1997). Corruption bound the elites to Stroessner; real wages were low, and other sources of income through state-owned enterprises and directly illegal activities including drugs<sup>12</sup> and prostitution was overlooked (Sondrol 1997: 116). Nickson & Lambert point out that the high concentration of wealth on few hands, threatened the Paraguayan democracy, and in 2002 sustained that “Paraguay’s ‘privatized state’ may simply degenerate into Latin America’s first ‘failed state’, with dangerous consequences for regional stability.” (Nickson & Lambert 2002: 173).

### *Ethnicity and Interpretations of History*

Before colonial times the territory now called Paraguay was inhabited by large groups of indigenous peoples of diverse languages. Now it has the most ethnically homogenous population in Latin America (Sondrol 1997).

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<sup>9</sup> World Bank data from 2003, show that the richest 10 % in Paraguay hold 46,1 % of all country income. Only 2,4 % is held by the 20 % poorest. The country then hit 58,4 on the gini-index, with only Colombia and Haiti holding a larger economic divide in what the Bank term “the Latin American and Caribbean Region” (World Bank Human Development Indicators). In The World Bank Country Brief, 40% of the population is counted as living in poverty, on less than 2 \$ (US dollars) a day.

<sup>10</sup> According to the press, this was an increase of 320.000 over the past year (ABC color pp, 1: 13. februar 2008)

<sup>11</sup> This debate was a joint venue with CNN Espanol, aired April 3, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Although this source, the CIA (USA’s Central Intelligence Agency), may be dubious, I quote here what they write under “transnational Issues” regarding Paraguay: “major illicit producer of cannabis, most or all of which is consumed in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile; transshipment country for Andean cocaine headed for Brazil, other Southern Cone markets, and Europe; weak border controls, extensive corruption and money-laundering activity, especially in the Tri-Border Area; weak anti-money-laundering laws and enforcement”

However, people kept telling me “there are no racial differences in Paraguay”, and yet talked of their “cultural inheritance” and others’ lack thereof, sometimes as if it was genetically determined. Sondrol (1997) classifies the Paraguayan population as “mestizo”, since they are “a mix of European and indigenous decent”. However, the notion of being mestizo is much wider and subject to large debates that I cannot pursue here. I contend that mestizaje may be seen as shifting and context-dependently invoked to describe intertwining notions of race and “culturedness” (de la Cadena 2000)<sup>13</sup>, and in this sense, my informants might be “mestizo”, and their proximate “other” “culturally indigenous”. I am however not comfortable applying these terms, and therefore assert that other depictions will serve to illuminate demarcations of differences.

Aurora, a woman in her sixties and part of a family that owned large businesses, explained her version of “Paraguayan peoples history” to me:

“After The Great War [The Triple Alliance War], there were only a hundred men left in the whole Republic of the right age!” I ask how she knows this. She continues: “Of course, there might have been a hundred-and-one, or ninety-nine, but that was how it was, and it left the women to do things they knew nothing of, like work and tasks they didn’t have the skills for. The men, those hundred, had a fantastic time, of course, and you have no idea how many fatherless children there were! That’s why so many Paraguayans have the same name, the same genes. So many Europeans came here, and they had so many wives!” She stops and just looks at me for a moment, then continues: “The Europeans, when they came, they tried to build homes here, made beds, beds that were benches during the day and beds at night. All the Indians<sup>14</sup>, they sleep in the same room, five kids, a woman and a man. They know nothing!”

Aurora’s invoking of women “without knowledge” and “fatherless children” to explain the lack of knowledge among the population writ large, matches the “profile of lower-class personality disorders associated especially with the “broken” family and its violation of patriarchal gender norms” described by O’Connor (2001: 111). From this we see a linking of transnational perceptions of “the lower classes” or “the poor” that was common among my informants.

If the somewhat different authoritarian forms of rule in Paraguay through history have common traits, one of them is the categorising of people. I suggest that in colonial times,

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<sup>13</sup> de la Cadena (2000) are among those who have discussed in depth the “mestizo” category as a cultural construct entailing more than “phenotype”. She argues that it depicts among other things educational level. Since my informants did not speak of being or not being mestizo, I only describe their “phenotype” by the term. Note though, that most informants claim not to have “indigenous blood” at all, so mestizo is not a very accurate term.

<sup>14</sup> It became clear through further conversations with Aurora that she was prone to use the term “Indians” to describe all poor people, who she said had “indigenous blood in them”, thus she might be seen as invoking the notion of mestizaje, but race is not the topic of this thesis, and I will have to leave this discussion out.



these categories could be slaves, Indians, mistresses and servants, all categories somehow intertwined with the bodily function of the subject; the slaves at the farm, the mistress in your bed, and the servants in your house. Through dictatorships and wars, a perception of bodies as disposable might have become the norm. My informants emphasized that post the two wars male bodies were scarce. That both wars “left women to rule the country” was an important part of such narratives, as was that females, in hard competition over men had accepted “low” forms of family-life. One might be able to distinguish a line of thought concerning people; that because of their relative abundance, women became disposable to men, and fatherless children and widows taking on household work for the elites, paid in room and board<sup>15</sup>, became disposable too. Arguably, sticking categories to people makes it easier not to see them as individuals, and the categories being physically dependent, is of utter importance.

Kvaal notes that a difference between the neighbouring country Argentina and Paraguay, is that “an image has been created [since 1811] of the Guaraní identity as the genuine Paraguayan identity” (2004: 52). Since my informants mostly stated that they did not know of any non-European blood among their forefathers, this might serve as a background to understand the somewhat conflicting and/or stigmatizing view they had of “the Paraguayans” – although they themselves also stated to be Paraguayan. This paradox made me pose the question “who are the Paraguayans” to them often, something I get back to in the concluding chapter. It also serves as backdrop for their “exclusiveness”. Although never said explicitly, it became clear that they perceive themselves as a group “separated” from the nation at large. This “separation” is fruitful to bear in mind through the following, as it seems used by my informants to somehow morally justifies to them their holding of most resources within the nation-state.

### ***Methods, Fields, Roles and Informants***

I find it a bit amusing that Gusterson, in an extensive review of anthropology of elites, contends that “participant observation”, relying on “face-to-face” meetings in “small” societies, “does not travel well up the social structure” (1997: 115). Admittedly, gaining access and trust among people who do not need advocacy and do best without scrutiny, is hard, but what I found is that participant observation must by far be the best method for research among elites. How else can one compare what they do to what they say (which in formal situations tend to be incredibly politically correct)? What is more, my informants all

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<sup>15</sup> This tradition is still strong, although payments now include money, as I get back to in chapter three.

knew each other by affiliation even if they did not interact frequently, so their “community” was definitely small enough.

However, I support the solution to Gusterson’s (1997) problem, found by Marcus (1995) in the notion of “multi-site ethnography”, as I could not have stuck to any one location to conduct the research I present here. Furthermore, Gusterson (1997) advocates what he terms a “polymorphous engagement”, which include looking at media-sources, something I to an extent did: I support my observations of my informant’s actions and words with a newspaper clipping in chapter five, with depictions of how social life is portrayed in the newspapers in chapter four and by stressing that my informant’s perceptions of poverty may partially be shaped on the basis of television reports of crimes and other “chaotic” events in several chapters, but I do not rely on these as main sources.

### *Elite Research and Ethical Considerations*

Anthropologists nearly always have and still do, depend on financial and political interests for funding research. This might contribute to production of particular fields of power (Archetti 2006:113-4; Shore 2002: 11). Arguably, elite research does not immediately fit into a construct of “the anthropologist” as a *social* researcher, with it’s traditional focus on “the geographical and socially marginal” (Gusterson 2001: 4417). Anthropological research on elites has tended to focus on entrance into and the keeping up of elite circles<sup>16</sup>, and as Gusterson has argued: “The cultural invisibility of the rich and powerful is as much a part of their privilege as their wealth and power, and a democratic anthropology should be working to reverse this invisibility” (1997: 115). If entrance is obtained for researchers among the rich, the degree to which it is subject to censorship by both elites and the researcher, may threaten academic autonomy and intellectual freedom (Shore 2002:11; Gusterson 1997: 115)<sup>17</sup>. I find it fruitful to quote Shore at length:

The professional codes of ethics that govern anthropological research in Britain, the USA and elsewhere have traditionally stressed that anthropologists’ ‘paramount obligation is to their research participants’ and that, where there is a conflict, ‘the interests and rights of those studied should come first’ (ASA Code of Ethics 1999: 2). This argument rests on two assumptions that have become increasingly problematic. First, that our research participants can be constituted as a unified body with a shared set of interests, and second, that anthropology, by definition, is the study of powerless ‘Others’.

-Chris Shore (2002: 11)

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<sup>16</sup> See for example Pina-Cabral & Lima (2000) and Cohen (1981)

<sup>17</sup> I am aware that my work may seem struck by such lack of intellectual freedom *if* one emphasizes description of access.

Researching elites constitutes a break with these assumptions. On a general level, it is as Shore remarks; problematic to depict any one group of people as holding agreed interests. More specifically, and especially in a study of elites, by whose standards is regarding elite rights and interests ethical? Maintaining their interests would mean not exposing their views of poverty to an audience of western middleclass intellectuals who may name them fascist. As Gusterson states; elite research does not that easily mix with the tradition of studying subjects with whom one sympathizes; fieldwork among elites can seem “psychologically unappealing and conflictual” (2001: 4417).

D’Andrade distinguishes between “an objective model, which tries to describe the object” and a moral model whose aim is to “identify what is good and bad, to allocate praise and blame, and also to explain how things not in themselves good or bad come to be so” (1995: 400). In line with this distinction, I attempted to investigate my informant’s subjective worlds without losing objectivity as a goal. I needed to be able to get to know my informants as “every-day-persons”, to be able to see what it is that they do as objectively as possible, and how that might contribute to persistent poverty around them. However, without judging them personally I, in breaking D’Andrade’s distinction, will maintain, that they are performers of structural violence.

### *Positioning my Informants*

My contentment in terming my informants “elite” rests with comparative research from the region<sup>18</sup>. The distance between my informants and the poor seems to rest a lot of the time in taken for granted habits, like not using taxis or buses, the manners in which elite bodies are modified and maintained, and their “administration” of their “others” as “non-visible”.

An apt illustration of the many aspects one needs to consider to illustrate class differences is found in Orwell’s “The Road to Wigan Pier”. Orwell places the upper middle-class not in accordance with its income, which may be below that of those belonging to the middle-class but have “no social pretensions” (Orwell 2005: 297). Orwell speaks of the English distinction between classes – and holds that it deteriorated post World War II: “Before the war you were either a gentleman or not a gentleman, and if you were a gentleman,

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<sup>18</sup> Among them, descriptions facilitated by Guano (several) from the Buenos Aires middle class, Caldeira (2000) from the Sao Paulo middle class, De La Cadena (2000) on Peruvian “mestizaje”, Casaús Arzú (2007) from the Guatemalan upper class and Teig (1998) middle class distinctions from the Dominican Republic.

you struggled to behave as such, whatever your income might be”. I find this sort of behavioural distinction more useful than that of income, since I had no way of finding out the exact incomes of my informants. I knew they were rich, which was clear in facilities, dress, and access to privileges. I knew they were politically influential – that was clear by them holding positions as among other things senators in government, and the fact they are owners of and powerful voices in the media. I knew some of their other businesses, some of their farms, some of their other estates – but I never knew everything, and one of the reasons for that, I think lies with the notion of genteel behaviour; My informants did not speak of their riches, but they spoke lowly of (newly) rich people who showed off their wealth, as will be further discussed.

I was often told that Paraguay does not have a middle class, something that in a “perfect” economy might comprise most of the population. My informants everyday life is isolated from the greater population, their homes and leisure spots secluded; their servants can seem exploited and their concerns elitist. I could easily fall into the tradition confirming elite prejudice, but I doubt that would shed any new light on the role of the rich in the persistence of poverty<sup>19</sup>.

Local norms, values and interests are not revealed in a flash, and the problem of how my informants wanted me to perceive them was a more or less constant factor during my fieldwork. As an outsider, and a researcher, I was someone to be a bit wary of. This led me to two attempted solutions: first of all, in trying to reveal what they thought of as “suitable” answers to my questions, I avoided confrontations and posed why’s, how’s and if’s around the clock for the first few months, sometimes resulting in comments that my opinions were “too discrete”. This raised question of trust, since I, by some, became suspected of either having no substance at all or attempted some sort of deception. Those who expressed this were eventually let in on more of my opinions, thus I was enabled to pose more direct questions about their incomes, positions in society, and perceptions of poverty.

The second attempted solution was to explore their more intimate spaces and habits. Ingraining myself in their everyday activities, accepting all sorts of invitations, gave way to picking up on discreet practices, meeting more people and eventually pose even more direct questions –wrapped as well as I could in “local terminology”. During the “ingraining process”, it was for instance questioned why I wanted to observe and participate in card

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<sup>19</sup> I therefore illuminate different aspects of this problematic, and pose a rhetorical question that might be given an in-between-the-lines answer throughout this thesis: is it so, that intranational hierarchies echo international hierarchies? Furthermore, does the intranational hierarchy echo itself, so that elite’s perception of the poor resonate in employers perceptions of employees, and perhaps too in men’s perception of women?

playing among my female informants; They would not feel comfortable with me present, for “no-one wants to be observed”, Anita said, when I complained to her of my need to get close to more people.

I suspect such statements were based on fright that I would see or hear something in this low-key atmosphere that could be interpreted in a non-flattering way. I suppose this means they were afraid I would harm their interest – since my interests were suspected to be conflicting. I thus never sat down to observe card play. What I did do with my informants was spend time volunteering, go to private Catholic biblical meetings, have family lunches, drive around, visit their homes to do open and repetitive in-depth interviews, walk in the parks, participate in parties, go clubbing, have dinners both at restaurants and at peoples homes, travel around the country and visit hairdressers.<sup>20</sup>

I was questioned on ideological and/or political views often. I claimed not take position and said I was interested in the gap between the rich and the poor, the inequity, as perceived by them, the ones on the lucky side of it, the ones running businesses in the “Paraguayan ordeal”. One of my politician informants held that such inequities were common all over the world, and his mother were among the many who warned me to compare Paraguayan conditions to Norwegian ones, where “everything is equal”. She said I needed to realize things were different here. A view both of them shared with most my informants, was that too many people “think they can say from abroad what is best for a country they maybe haven’t even been to”. This take was often applied in discussions of development agencies and their policies, and sometimes when discussing “democracy”.

Regarding my “role” or position in the field, I was sometimes seen as highly obtrusive, asking questions that were not necessarily pleasant. On the other hand, I think those engaged in politics often enjoyed explaining me the ordeal of Paraguayan history and current politics, and saw me as an innocent listener. For some I became a companion in exercise, an object that needed improvement through attention to my looks<sup>21</sup>, and friend during late evenings of wine and foods. For others again, I was the slightly annoying helper in their voluntary work and a person who should “start thinking of my real life”, meaning get married and have kids.

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<sup>20</sup> To me, going to the hairdressers once a month is really too much, but not enough to suit my informants who at least expected it weekly and went up to thrice a week As is dealt with in chapter three, consumption patterns including self-maintenance through exercise, hairdos, plastic surgery and clothing was important parts of everyday life to most informants.

<sup>21</sup> I was regularly “sent” to the hairdressers, I was “sent” dermatologist to tend to my skin at home and lent dresses and coats for parties, I was told about diets to get me in better shape, and I was advised on what plastic surgery I should get.

## ***Theoretical Backdrop***

The aim of this section is to start out the main theoretical argument that I develop throughout the thesis. I want to show why “studying up” is useful to understand why there is a “down” to study; studying elites is depicted here as essential for the study of poverty.

As Marcus has held, “elite” is “a term of reference, rather than self-reference” (*in* Shore 2002: 3), reminding us that it is a category applied, or status ascribed, as much as the category “poor”. I will therefore argue that the elite too, in accordance with Escobar’s (2004) understanding of “the poor”, need to be understood “in their own terms”. If this is not done, how can elites’ acclaimed “social fascism” be understood? On these grounds, I will try to twist Appadurai’s (2004) argumentation for raising the “voice of the poor” to include what conditions this voice might meet or meets among the privileged in Paraguay.

Scheper-Hughes (2005) has convincingly shown that disappearances, violence, and rumours of both have frequented in near all parts of Latin America. As Benjamin stated, a “state of emergency” is not the exception but the rule, in the tradition of the oppressed (*in* Scheper-Hughes 2005:176); The routinization – the “taken for grantedness”- of this teaches us that emergencies, exception, extremes, may all be transformed into normality.<sup>22</sup>

I will presume the factuality of Paraguayan disappearances and not further investigate them. In my understanding of Paraguay, the disappearances need mentioning to give an understanding of the “normality” of loss of life; history has a role in shaping the elite’s perception of the poor as disposable life. I do not believe my depiction is comparative to all other elites’ views of their proximate poor – but, it might serve as a reminder that humans indeed tolerate and transform into normality even the most ghastly of experiences (Kleinman 1997: 318); this is to say, in places where everyday violence like disappearances, oppression, secret – but rumoured – torture, exists over decades, human beings adapt. Somehow, historically entrenched violence, inequity, injustice, cannot be lured out of social imaginary; adaption to it lingers in worldviews. Not only can the social imaginary be of such a character that structural violence becomes normal, it can also ensure ways of rule – of governing – so deeply invested with “traditions” of dominance that it does not easily change (Sylvester 2006).

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<sup>22</sup> Scheper-Hughes are among those heavily criticised by D’Andrade (1995:400) for attempting to have “a moral career” in anthropology, as she is known to criticize “objective” science for conflating power structures, as is Rabinow (D’Andrade 1995: 402), who I will make use of later.

### *Comparative Research and Poverty Studies in Brief*

As comparative research suggest is common among upper social strata<sup>23</sup>, my informants saw the poor as not only without physical but also mental resources; stupidity, underdevelopment as humans and ignorance was frequent in descriptions of the poor, echoing Escobar's (1995: 22) depiction of how poverty has been portrayed since (at least) World War II. Such views was often voiced by my informants in conversation of employees and slum-dwellers<sup>24</sup>, in relation to which the poor's "lack of morals" was frequently brought up, and fear of (violent) crime was in some cases remarked. In sum, these ascriptions were made significant in discourses and situations where the poor directly influence the life-world of the elite. It is a "given" that groups become significant to each other when they interact, but putting emphasis on what constitutes the "given" in everyday life allows an exploration of the backdrop for the elite segregation from the poor.

I note that there are similar forms of segregation among urban middle classes in India; these call themselves "good people" and "big people", in my interpretation a distinction that underlines their higher importance and moral elevation compared to those of lower classes (Frøystad 2006: 163). In transnational compliance with this, Caldeira found in Sao Paulo that the poor's "culture" was given as a reason for both their crimes and their poverty (Caldeira 2000: 25). Both examples underline categorical distinctions between elite/middleclass selves and local "poor people" that are both economic and moral, echoed by further comparative research presented throughout this thesis.

Already in 1802, Hegel came to the conclusion that "any future organization of society would inevitably have to rely on a sphere of market-mediated production and distribution, in which subjects could only be included in society on the basis of the negative freedom guaranteed by rights" (Honneth 2005: 11). As will be demonstrated, the violation of these rights happen on the background of diverse practices, and result in a creation of "bare life" (Agamben 1998). It must first be noted, that pinning blame on neoliberal policies is classic in poverty research<sup>25</sup>. Much as the old market liberalism, or "market-mediated production", neoliberal policies are based on a belief in "every man for himself" and that "freedom" equals being economically

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<sup>23</sup> See for instance Guano (2004), Caldeira (2000) and Casáu's Arzú (2007).

<sup>24</sup> UN Habitat defines slums along five measurable indicators: lack of water, lack of sanitation, overcrowding, nondurable housing structures, and lack of security of tenure (in Di Muzio 2008: 311-12)

<sup>25</sup> In brief support of this, see for instance: O'Connor's (2001) plentiful exploration of poverty knowledge, Nonini's (2003) investigation of neoliberal policies, Appadurai's (2004) ground for arguing for "voicing" the poor (which may be seen as a statement like "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em", since he arguably wants "the poor" to acquire a mode of speech recognisable to a non-poor audience), Escobar's (2004) exploration of "globality" as an assimilation process in which "development" means capitalist neoliberal embrace. - And so forth.

unregulated. Such policies hold little guarantee for Hegel's "negative freedom", as they are characterized by low state regulation and control, implicating that social security, including healthcare and schooling is privately owned and acquired; if you have no steady income out of which to pay yourself for these services, they are not provided.

It is often claimed that poor people are stigmatized in the face of a society bent on individual advance (O'Connor 2001). Escobar has claimed that these ideas are what development policies have been built on too, something that has led an attempt at applying 'intra-modern perspectives' on development and progress worldwide (2004:210-211). Nonini, in line with this, holds that these ideas divide society in two: those who manage to follow a competitive market, and those who are marginalized and thus persistently kept out (Nonini 2003: 166). In line with this, O'Connor argues that development policies tend to term those traditionally studied, i.e. poor or peasant societies, as "underdeveloped" or "backward", thus necessitating the introduction of "a more modern, democratic way of life" among them (O'Connor 2001: 114-5).

### *Structural Violence and lack of Individual Recognition creating Bare Life-?*

In order to illustrate the connection between nationalism, body politics and the use of bodies en masse and how this connects to the persistent gap between 'the privileged and the poor', I apply the concept 'structural violence' as understood especially by Farmer (2004) and Bourgois (2004). I connect this to theories outlined by Agamben (1998, 2004) and Foucault (several), concerning sovereign power and states of exception, where I argue that the bodies of the poor exist in conditions of bare life, that is, reduced to a condition where they "may be killed with impunity" (Agamben 1998: 8).

Regarding "state of exception", it should be noted that Schmitt, who Agamben leans on, defined "the Sovereign", the supreme ruler, as he who can proclaim a state of exception" (Agamben 1998: 15). Schmitt held that the state of exception was employed when a state of emergency struck society to an extent that necessitated the (temporary) suspension of law to resolve it (Ek 2006: 365), and that "the King reigns, but he does not govern" (Agamben 2004: 2). The inherent paradox in the life of the state, Agamben argues, is that a state of exception is not very exceptional: it has become the normal form of governance, and is the outline of an *anomic*, or lawless, space in which the excluded – bare life - stands in relation to the sovereign, but *abandoned*, or banned, by law (Agamben 2004: 1, 1998: 17; Ek 2006: 365). By this argument, may depict my informants as governing, without being the formerly recognised



sovereign. We can thereby bind the state of exception to personifications of power, and find those who have a capacity of what holds more importance than that of creating law, namely that of suspending law (Ek 2006: 365).

### *Structural Violence*

Structural violence, a term first introduced by Galtung (1969), sums up all sorts of violence; it both includes and exhausts physical violence and devotes attention to indirect injuries. In Bourgois definition, structural violence is: “Chronic, historically entrenched political-economic oppression and social inequality, ranging from exploitative international terms of trade to abusive local working conditions and high infant mortality rates.” (Bourgois (2004:426). This definition provides a backdrop for my analysis and the ground for which a Paraguayan production of bare life occurs. Farmer has also written extensively on the theme of structural violence, and describes its contents and implications with these words:

Structural violence is violence exerted systematically – that is, indirectly – by everyone who belongs to a certain social order; hence the discomfort these ideas provoke in a moral economy still geared to pinning praise or blame on individual actors.

- Farmer (2001: 307)

This description ties nicely to the implications of neo-liberal ideologies shown above. As Bourgois (2004) shows, historical and geographical basis provides the structure within which poverty persists and inequity is legitimated. Therefore, the passings of time must be included in an analysis of today’s situation (Farmer 2004: 309), something that brings about the pertinent question of whether structural violence is performed knowingly, and how it is reflected in understandings of morality.

Farmer applied the term structural violence in his writing of the deprived conditions of healthcare for poor Haitians. Although geographically far apart from Paraguay, Haiti’s history of colonialism and dictatorships, it’s small and very rich elite and a large amount of people living in poverty, gives fruitful ground for its comparison with Paraguay in the comprehension of ‘structural violence’. Wacquant, among others, has thoroughly criticized Farmers use of the concept structural violence in the Haitian case, with the argument “What these examples indicate is the need for a multisited historical ethnography (...) not the deployment of a concept that somehow diffuses responsibility in order to expand its ambit.”

(Wacquant *in* Farmer 2004: 322). Wacquant also holds that the concept “lumps together” all sorts of violence and hence flattens out the contents of the term (*ibid.*). However, what Wacquant sees as “flattening out” and “diffusing” in the term structural violence, merely reflects how flat and diffuse violence striking continuously among the poor is; not necessarily done by individuals to individuals, and not easy to pinpoint.

Structural violence intimately connects to power and powerlessness. I seek to demonstrate here how the powerlessness of the poor is upheld by the social and relational powers of the Paraguayan elites. I will therefore stick to the term structural violence, for if diffusing, it is so exactly because power is diffuse and has a place in all locations and moments in history, as Foucault (1991b) has argued, thus making violence, by this same structure, equally diffuse.

### *Bare Life*

Bare life is mute, undifferentiated, and stripped of both the generality and specificity that language makes possible. If it is related and compared and evaluated, it is always in the terms and in the service of what it is not: political life.

- Norris (2000: 41)

Agamben starts by deriving the division between *zoe*, biological, bare life which belong to the sphere of the home, *oikos*, and the proper individual or political life, *bios*, from Aristotle (1998: 1-3). He builds on this by going through Foucault’s argument that biological life is included in the calculations of State power, aiming for the notion of *biopolitics* (*ibid.*). Agamben takes this notion further back in time than did Foucault and claims that the *zoe* was included and is inherent in politics from an earlier stage, namely through Roman law. There named ‘*homo sacer*’ it depicted a solely physical human being “included in the juridical order solely in form of its exclusion”, that can be killed but not sacrificed (Agamben 1998: 8). Agamben therefore holds that the production of a biopolitical body might be the original activity of sovereign power (Agamben 1998: 1, 8-9).

The term ‘bare life’ originates from Benjamin’s (1921) essay “Critique of Violence” (Agamben 1998, 2004). Agamben’s perhaps most perceptible example of the construction of bare life is that which occurs in “the camp”, a notion now applied to everywhere from refugee camps to colonised territories (Sylvester 2006). The common denominator of these spaces is that a state of exception is normalised in them, and they become “a fourth space added to that of the state, nation and land, in which inhabitants are stripped of everything but their bare life,

which is placed without recourse in the hands of power.” (Rabinow & Rose 2006: 200). Importantly, we may see the zones of *indistinction*, as a spatial manifestation of the law’s inherent paradox; the bind exclusion/inclusion. We must however note that Agamben (several) has said explicitly that his is not a sociological or other wise social scientific analysis. Therefore, I add such appliance form elsewhere, and shape Agamben’s theory to my empirical material. Sylvester (2006) are among those who further Agamben’s thoughts on the exercise of and consequences from states of exception to that issued by elites in developing postcolonial countries that, in addition to governing by management; the administration of the absence of order (Foucault 1991a, Agamben 2004: 2), do so under the excuse of having been exploited by colonialism.<sup>26</sup> This in her argument typically serves as an “excuse” to keep up states of exception in which social fascism is inherent. Formerly only sinned against, elites become sinners; that is, they apply biopolitics in the same manner as they blame colonizers for having done (Sylvester 2006: 69-70).

Agamben’s notion of bare life is criticized for appearing as to belong to “impolitical politics”, undermining the notion of governmentality, on which a state of exception is resting. In this criticism, “bare life” is depicted as unfeasible, as it separates violence from its roots and conditions, in other words separates it from its performer (Fischer 2007: 7-8). This resembles the critique of structural violence, and I will dismiss it in the same terms; a necessary condition in governing is assigning rights and duties to citizens, so it necessarily entangles the option of depriving some of political rights too; the excluded from law by the sovereign.

As we saw, Scheper-Hughes (2005) cited Benjamin to illuminate the oppression through a normalised state of exception applied in Latin America. Agamben’s extensive work on Benjamin, implies that Benjamin’s concept of ‘reine Gewalt’ (pure violence) which has no connection to the law<sup>27</sup>, is really included in the law, and exerted against the individually excepted from law; bare life (Agamben 1998: 17).

Connecting structural violence as depicted above to pure violence (the creation of bare life), allows us to look for current constructions of bare life in Paraguay without disregarding necessary historization (Krohn-Hansen 2001). Bare Life thus hangs firmly on the roots and conditions of governing in Agamben’s sense, on the sovereign right to distinguish between ‘bare life’ and other forms of life that are to be governed (Agamben 1998: 90). It describes

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<sup>26</sup> This argument, according to Sylvester, makes postcolonial states impossible to criticise for former colonizers especially.

<sup>27</sup> On Agamben’s work on Benjamin, see for instance Agamben/Raulff (2004), Durantaye (2005: 186) and Ek (2006: 366)

people that are banned from individually acting as political beings, but are still politicized<sup>28</sup>; it illustrates a form of being that in “formal ideology” (Hansen & Stepputat 2006) should not exist in a democracy, that is, people paradoxically entrenched in the constitution of the state, who exist without voice.

Voiceless people become under the rule of seemingly formal ideologies subject to “actual sovereignty”, or government by management, and that is the paradox of the factual matter; which makes the concept utterly useful. As will be demonstrated, my informants’ persistent perception of the poor as lacking intellectual capacity to participate in a functional democracy, lacking moral understanding, and depictions of poor as undernourished and filthy, all serve an elite depiction of the poor as less than human, that in play with elite power creates bare life.

### *The Problematic Voice*

Appadurai (2004) maintains that development should help “the poor” to develop and raise a “voice”, giving them “capacity to aspire” on their own terms. Escobar when speaking of development holds that the framework for an understanding of “development” is built on ‘intra-modern perspectives’, and hence is not applicable to the world at large (2004:210-11). Escobar’s critique has a close connection to Nonini’s (2003) criticism of neoliberalism. “Development” is a term that construes a hierarchy, where underdeveloped shall develop and become what the developers think of as ‘modern’. It is in this connection that Appadurai’s (2004) point is useful, for it illuminates the need for a development – an alleviation of poverty – on the terms and conditions wanted by those who are to “develop”. This argument is in accordance with Tim di Muzio’s critique of today’s development discourse. Di Muzio shows us that it is largely aimed at producing better conditions for trade liberalization and improvement of investment climate, thus implying that development now is pinned on neoliberal – “the developers” –view of progress (2008: 313-14).

Escobar (2004) further holds that “third worlds”<sup>29</sup>, although a stereotypical and almost meaningless term, still can be useful to describe “... [the] vast archipelagos of zones reduced to precarious living conditions, often (not always) marked by violence, and so forth”, i.e., slums. According to him, these are zones existing globally that should be understood in their

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<sup>28</sup> For this, Agamben applies the example of Jews in the times of World War II; they were, as a group, highly politicized, but as individuals deprived the right of acting as political beings.

<sup>29</sup> See also Escobar (1995) for an elaboration on the subjugation of people by the invocation of the term “third world(s)”.

own terms, constituting what he calls a “social fascism” directed towards the poor living there (Escobar 2004: 225-226). This depiction is remarkably close to Agamben’s statement that the camp is becoming the biopolitical paradigm of today (Ek 2006: 363).

When a nation-state is built on “modern” criteria and ruled by an elite, “development” through Appadurai’s idea of “voice” and “capacity to aspire” will be incompatible with the Paraguayan state of today unless the elite is called to dialogue. If not, “development” in Paraguay will very possibly stay at a standstill. Hence, without knowledge of what terms of development local elites can support, development is perceived as a threat towards the elites. This “threat” is built continuously in the social sciences; Escobar (2004), among others, can thus be criticised for giving way to a perspective on development where the elite has the role of the devils solicitor.



## *Chapter Two*

### *Segregation: Perceptions of Poverty, Use of Space*

When I told informants I was interested in their views on poverty, some just replied there was no poverty in Paraguay. Others asked what I meant by “poverty”, and said it was always a question of where one found the numbers on it. I agree and agreed to these difficulties, and said during my fieldwork that I was interested in my informants’ perceptions. Normally people received this as positive compared to statistics, since it meant I might understand the national “ordeal” in which they live and poverty exists<sup>30</sup>.

The segments of the elites I dealt with, seemed to move from zone to zone of exclusivity; when they were not in their own homes or visiting each other, they spent their time at the elite “clubs”, one of which facilitated everything from sports activities like tennis, football, gymnastics and swimming, to several restaurants and ballrooms. Other spaces they frequented, like nightclubs and shopping malls, were as exclusive as the clubs, as will be indicated not only in this chapter but also in the following. I choose to describe Asunción and give a few elite accounts of the Paraguayan poor, before I attempt an explanation of why they preferred the “safe havens” of shopping malls to the city.

#### *The City*

One can claim that historically, “the city has been imagined as a disciplinary space entrenched by ‘walls’, originating in an act of inclusion/exclusion. Entrenchment establishes a clean-cut distinction between insiders and outsiders, between the subjects and the outlaws.” (Diken & Laustsen 2002: 291). However, as Diken & Laustsen (2002) remarks, this is altered in large cities everywhere today. One may add to this that disorderly elements contrasting the ideal and imagined order have always been present in the cityscape (Weismantel 2001).

Asunción, called “the mother of cities” has a city centre with the structure of a classic Latin American colonial city; Straight, orderly lines constituted by urban streets, a few

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<sup>30</sup> For example Emo, a 45-year-old businessman, said he could not say who was poor and who was not in Paraguay. His explanation was that many people work informally: “like the people who work in others’ homes; if you ask what they earn, they’ll give you the sum in cash, but they don’t tell you they have roof over their heads, food, beverage, electricity, furniture and cable television!” I never heard of household employees who had cable TV. The conditions under which they live and work are described in chapter 3.

“plazas” that celebrate the conquest and the republic, and the obligatory catholic churches (Low 1996<sup>31</sup>, Weismantel 2001).

### *Sensing Asunción*

My informants stayed in their cars if outside their exclusive zones, and their judgements of the “disruptive and disturbing” elements of the city were almost exclusively based on vision.<sup>32</sup> Their judgements are similar to those Weismantel (2001) found in analysing poor, indigenous saleswomen in Cuzco. Drawing heavily on Douglas’ depiction of the disruptive force of anomalous elements that “violate the ideal order of society”, she concludes that these women are perceived as an “offence against order”, suggesting that gender, phenotype and “raggedness” makes them “out of place” in the colonially ordered cityscape (Weismantel 2001: 45-46). Comparatively, in the Asunción elite’s gaze, the “dirty poor”, disregarding gender and age, seemed to represent violations of the ideal order of the city.

Consider a sight that meets anyone going in to the city centre along the “Avenida España”, one of the main roads entering the city from where most of the elite residential areas and shopping zones are:

At the main crossing by the entrance to the city-centre, two people are present every morning. They are dressed in rags; dirty shorts, filthy t-shirts, a dirty blanket in the winter. It seems to be a mother and a child. The woman is quite big, her blond hair hangs down in lazes, her teeth are bad and her grey-green eyes look tired. The child, maybe her daughter, around five years old, stands or hangs around the woman’s upper body, limbs clamped around her. The woman has shoes, but the child is always barefoot. These are self-employed Paraguayans. A woman, a child, and working days made from begging at the traffic lights.

These two figures represent at least three problematic factors to the non-poor. First, they disrupt an orderly, clean and “smooth” sight of the city. Second, they represent something out of its place; the woman, supposedly, should tend to domestic affairs<sup>33</sup>, and the child should be tended to at home or in school, not “roaming” the streets. Third, they are begging, thus

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<sup>31</sup> Low (1996) takes this interpretation from Lefebvre, also used by Guano (2002: 181) to depict the city as “simultaneously a locus, a medium and tool of hegemony” and holds: “A fine blend of persuasion and coercion is always at work in the organization of a city’s architectural setting”. Low (1996) holds that traditions of ordering urban space to demonstrate military conquest and domination existed in Mesoamerica pre-colonial times.

<sup>32</sup> When I asked Maria if she ever goes to town to run errands she said no; “here I have everything, there is a gigantic Super 6 (supermarket), there is Shopping del Sol, Mariscal Lopez shopping, I have everything I need. The centre has moved.” This contention was common; even the post office, which one formerly needed to go to the city to visit, had opened a branch at the Shopping del Sol.

<sup>33</sup> “Ought to’s” and other normative terms applied are dealt with in chapter four, where moralities is discussed.



symbolically exploiting their out-of-place-ness to reach the not poor – maybe giving an indication that if they are to move, they must be “paid off”. These factors in sum imply a sight of these two, and similar figures in the city, as constituting “bare life” existing spatially in a *zone of indistinction* (Agamben 1998: 90); in the liminal non-space, or threshold, of a crossing.

Asunción, which once exhibited colonial triumph, symbolizing the possession, ordering and dominance of the land and its peoples<sup>34</sup> seems to have abandoned its original “order”. The unpredictable happenings of the city may contribute to an elite depiction of it as chaotic, similar to what Caldeira (2000) found in her informants’ interpretations of non-middle class spaces in Sao Paulo.

The economic division of Asunción’s population is in varying degrees visible in all parts of the capital:

At traffic lights with clean, neat, queuing SUVs, there are also people on foot, and men, horses or mules pulling carriages. People, most quite young, offer to wash windcreens, others sell fruits, toys and lottery tickets, and children down to 3-4 years beg. In summer, Paraguayan temperatures climb to above 40° Celsius and the heat is intense; the air stands almost completely still and air trembles up to two meters above ground, blurring ones vision. In winter temperatures can sink to 0° Celsius, when high humidity and winds makes the cold feel harsh.

Along the central streets of town, most pavements are jammed with stalls of wooden branches and plastic covers that sell everything from sunglasses to brooms. People of all ages have “their own” corners where they sell fruits from baskets. Beggars, street vendors and street dwellers give the capital a taint of the immense poverty of some Paraguayans. Sellers regularly climb onto passing buses with their baskets, greet the driver and swing themselves under the gate at the front, in order to go through the bus shouting out what they offer. On rainy days, they sell umbrellas, on hot days they sell soft drinks, and no matter the season some sell fruits and candy. These sellers jump of the bus after a few hundred meters, only to go back where they started and get on the next one, constantly in rapid movement. The city streets are full of potholes, and the crowded pavements are covered in layers of sand that blow up in whirlwinds, making the city a dusty place. Many of the houses down town, built in colonial style, must have been neat and beautiful once. Now, the paint is peeling off them, they are damaged by damp and their windows are shut with cardboard.

The city centre is hilly, but flattens out towards the upper riverbank where the landscape gets steeper. Here there is a partly wooded slope, inhabited more or less permanently by people living in shacks, in areas that have developed into the shantytowns, in plural called “los Bañados”. Los Bañados creates a buffer zone towards the river, stretching out along the whole curve of it. The area is frequently struck by earth slides during heavy rains and gets flooded when the river rises.

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<sup>34</sup>Again, I lean on Weismantel’s (2001) and Low’s (2003) descriptions of Latin American Cities. From them I contend that Asuncion’s city structure is similar to the ones described by them, and conclude that they are, with the same market and spatial changes, cases compatible with Asunción

When I asked my informants who lived in Los Bañados, the answers frequently identified its inhabitants as “los brutos” (the brutes)<sup>35</sup> or, called them dirty poor people, criminals and drug addicts. Notably, this identification of them includes both presumed actions; criminal, “raw” activities, and physical conditions; dirt and drug abuse. It is a fact that los Bañados frequently smelled bad, especially in the summer heat – my informants explanation of this was just the word “dirt”, but I think lack of water and proper sewage are key to the smell. In the next excerpt, I have just told Aurora, a woman in her mid-sixties who belongs to a family of much money with high political influence during the Stroessner era, of the blessed abundance of water at “my” house in Asuncion:

Aurora replied, “There is never too much water here either!” I objected I had heard that several of Asuncion’s barrios flood when the river rises. Aurora argued: “Yes, but why do people live there?!” I: “Because they’re poor?” Aurora: “They don’t have to be there! They could stick to the countryside; there they have land to live on!” Surely everyone does not have land, I protested. Her response was quick: “Yes, they all have land! They just don’t want to be there, what happens is, they have land, or they’re given land, then they cut the wood on it, sell the trunks, and go to Asunción. They have it good where they are, but no, they don’t want it! They want more! And they go looking for it in Asunción.”

Her description likens that of Ribeiro Thomaz’ elite informants in Haiti, who drew a line between “poverty” and “misery”, where “poverty” was a “dignified” condition, in which rural peasants might live, whilst “misery” concerned the condition of “the urban poor who lack work, decent shelter and adequate food”(Ribeiro Thomaz 2005: 141).

Since I spent some time every day on foot, I talked to and bought fruits and what not from people on the street very often, something that some informants met with great dismay:

I had bought some fruits from one of the street vendors, one of those who sell from a basket along the highway. He seemed so happy that I bought from him that it had made me cheerful, so I referred to it in conversation with Aurora, who responded: “Did you really buy fruit from there!?” She had a high pitch: “You must never ever do that! Those fruits are full of poison from the traffic, they suck up all the pollution, and it enters your body, you’ll never get rid of it!” I objected that the vendors ran out of fruits frequently, so it could not stay in traffic very long. Aurora said: “Yes it does!” as she said this, her brows raised: “It stays in traffic all day! But sure, it’s your choice...” she raised her hands, palms facing me, whilst shaking her head. I said: “Okay, so maybe I should not

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<sup>35</sup> I note that Teig translates “bruta” to “uopplyst og dum” in Norwegian: roughly unenlightened and stupid (1998:52). She elsewhere translates it to “enfoldig, uutdannet” too, that translates to simple-minded, uneducated (1998:61). This goes to show that the term is widely applied, and that the essence is somewhat similar to the use in Paraguay, although my informants said it translated to the English “brute” or “brutal”, something that relates it to violent behaviour. This may constitute a regional difference in use of the term.

have done that then, but that was not my point, the funny thing was, that as I walked just a few meters down the street, there was another fruit vendor, and he asked me ‘señora, do you want more fruits? More fruits!?’ I just started laughing, and said ‘no thank you, thank you, I have enough fruit now,’ and he laughed so wholeheartedly back, and then -” Aurora interrupted me: “Yes, that’s the way they are, if they see you buy from one, they all come running, everyone wants you to buy the same thing from them! It is just the same if you let them wash your window screen, someone comes along and dirties it on purpose, so you have to pay them to clean it again! They are all like that!”

My humorous story of interaction with charming fruit vendors in the streets was appalling to Aurora; it seems from this account she even thought I would embody some of the street dirt by eating the fruits. ‘Dirt’, according to Douglas, “is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classifications of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (*In Weismantel 2001: 46*). Aurora’s reaction to the street fruits, may be because she defines them as dirty; she thus order them inappropriate. However, she knew that whenever I bought her bananas after having driven around with Anita, the bananas were bought at traffic lights along the highway. It is interesting to note that she invokes a second notion too; that of the poor “exploiting” her – or my – goodwill; once you buy one thing, they want you to buy more, once you let them fulfil one task, they will make up new tasks.

I asked Nina, the wife of a known agricultural producer, Sonia, who has worked extensively with North-American diplomats, and Julia, who is married to a prominent politician and businessman, too, why they thought people would live in los Bañados and other poor parts of the city. They independently responded that “esa gente” (those people) live in los Bañados because they are lazy. Adding laziness to the evaluation of the inhabitants of los Bañados, the reason behind their poverty and place of habitat is understood as originating from lack of initiative and conspicuous wants.

These contentions echo findings among the upper class of Guatemala, although such stigmas there are connected to race; the indigenous population there writ large is said to be “lazy”, and to “have no hope for betterment” in any sense, because they are “proven to be so through history; it is a natural and irreversible trait in them”<sup>36</sup> (Casaús Arzú 2007: 204-5); something we will also see is in line with my informant’s contention regarding education

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<sup>36</sup> However Casaús Arzú finds an important and self-contradictory contention too, namely that the same upper class people who call the indigenous population naturally lazy, prefer to keep these same people as employees, because they are “better workers” (Casaús Arzú 2007: 204-7). This, the author states, is characteristic of this racism; it legitimates exploitation and the privileged position of the dominant classes, and she finds, as did Bourdieu (1984) and as did Orwell (1899/200f), that those who are the most persistent in their prejudice, are those closest to the condemned, those who most need to define themselves against identification with those judged; thereby confirming Agamben’s (2004) contention too, that dichotomies are tensions, and thus I contend that the tension is, logically, strongest expressed in its outer limits (see also Barth’s (1969) classic, “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries”).

among the Paraguayan poor, in chapter five. For now, suffice to say that the contention of some in the Guatemalan upper class also include judgements of the indigenous population as amoral, dirty and introvert in addition to lazy (Casaús Arzú 2007: 205). This is in striking accordance with the Paraguayan elite's judgement of "the poor", and my findings echoes the notion of bare life as "generally only noticed for their uselessness with respect to the dictates of labour" (ten Bos 2005:17)<sup>37</sup>.

### *Emic Perceptions of Paraguayan Poor*

Sonia and I had several conversations about the business her family runs. This led to her frequently giving examples involving their employees whenever I asked her about poverty, or, as here, when I asked the peculiar question "who are the Paraguayans?"

"Well, there are five million of them!" She looks at me with raised brows. I explain: "since you say 'the Paraguayans do this, or that?'" She starts to speak of how she finds the Paraguayan population: "if they go abroad, they work! They're known for being good workers, cause there, they have to, but here, no! They don't work! ONE man has to provide for a whole family. In the factory, I have men who have their wife, their mother, children, everyone, living on one salary, and therefore, they expect the company to pay them more. And I'm not going to pay for their women being lazy! The men say they have to take care of the children, but what do the women do all day, when the children are at school? Nothing! It's easier not to work, so they just don't, they don't want to."

On other occasions, she told me things that contradicts this, for instance when defining Paraguayan men as "only thinking of themselves", "this moment" and "the best of their sons to take care of them". She underlined though, "Of course, I'm not speaking of OUR social life, here, but in the country (side)!" This matches findings O'Connor did in reviewing the presuppositions in poverty research; that a proper cultivation of one's children, "found" in the middle-classes was seen as "lost" in the lower classes (2001: 112).

Sonia's understanding of "the idiosyncrasy of Paraguayans" was common. When I told a veterinary who deals with cattle on the ranches of some of my informants, that I was doing a study on Paraguay's divide between the rich and the poor, he said:

"You'll find so many strange things here that aren't found anywhere else on the planet!" I asked him, a bit uncertain, what he meant by that: "The workers for instance! They don't want to work. In Paraguay there is no real poverty. People don't want to work, they want money, but they don't want work. That's because

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<sup>37</sup> Notably, bare life by these traits breaks with Casaús Arzú's (2007) findings, but supports my mine.

Paraguayans don't know hunger. Many families just pick one family member, send her abroad to work, and then she has to send money home and the whole family lives off of that salary. They themselves never work! Here everyone has an aunt, a mother, a grandmother or a sister that they go to when they don't have money, and they get food there. That's why there are no poor people in Paraguay, only lazy people, and THAT is because they don't know hunger!"

Recall what I presented in the introduction regarding common statements about women's capabilities. The veterinary here claims that women are the breadwinners, whilst Sonia stated the women are lazy; both are contradicting the common contention that women are not "fit" for such responsibilities. Somehow, this tempts a depiction of "women" too as bare life; they are included in politics, by being excluded.

Several informants complained that the poor only wanted what could be bought in shops these days, and thus let mangos and avocados fall to the ground and rot away. The complaints were often followed by explanations of the poor "not knowing better" and assertions that "The poor just let things fall apart." These categorisations of the poor seem based on moral judgements, or stigmatization, of the poor by merit. Katz (1990) holds that such stigmas originate in a distinction between deserving and undeserving poor, where the deserving are those truly needy: children, sick, elderly or otherwise impotent people, while those able bodied and poor were undeserving. Seen to be a moral condition transmittable from parents to children, this forms part of a creation of "cultural patterns" of poverty (Katz 1990: 10). Orwell (2005) wrote that he was taught as a child "the lower classes smell", and contended: "no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a *physical* feeling" (2004: 299)<sup>38</sup>. Perceptions of the Paraguayan poor were often tied to similar notions; dirt, malnourishment and lack of hygiene formed the backdrop of the poor's acclaimed ignorance, just as Howes (2006) suggest is common place in the dominant's depiction of "inferior" others. These foci, that all underpin that a lack of order, predictability and merit form an important part of the elites perceptions of the poor, and may justify to them their distance to downtown – and thereby the poor.

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<sup>38</sup> Note that this is relevant to this day elsewhere too: Casauís Arzú (2007: 213) found that the Guatemalan upper class stated that the indigenous people "smell bad" and "are ugly".

## *Privatising Space*

Public space, as opposed to the privatised, arguably “contributes to egalitarianism and liberalism by fostering unplanned social interactions between individuals who would not otherwise associate with one another” (Vasselinov, Cazessus & Falk 2007: 111).

Setha Low looked at the use of and changes in public space, focusing on the then newly constructed “Plaza de la Cultura” in San Jose, Costa Rica. She describes it as modern, open space, and claims it to be a “site of modern consumption”, what Zukin termed a landscape of power (*in* Low 1996: 865-66). This renewal of space can function as a (re-) appropriation that keeps upper classes shopping and moving in the city; this I did not find in Asuncion. In Asuncion, appropriation and ordering of new space gives clean, shielded and secure centres that replace the old public and open. As the city is left “uncultivated”, its facilities are made available in suburb malls where one can avoid the random and cross-class meetings that take place in public urban space (Low 1996). One may say that talk of violence and crime contributes to an “urban fear discourse” that enhances the elites distance to the Asunción city centre, and that this again contributes to the construction of a landscape that “encodes class relations” (Low 2001: 45-46, Caldeira 2000).

Shopping centres, the elite’s clubs, gyms, homes and even countryside farms are privatised or private spaces where services, security and overall authority is granted only exclusive members<sup>39</sup>. This may also imply annexation of the law, as private security measures distinguish between the rights of those who are supposed to be guarded, and those who should be guarded against; my informants’ private guards carried guns, and were instructed to use them. The zones or spaces kept for the elites are thus different from those of other citizen in many aspects; Physical barriers, like fences, guarded gates, and occasionally electronics that surround them serves two purposes: denying access to non-members and marking materially the exclusivity of the space (Vasselinov et.al.2007: 111, Caldeira 2000: several). Spatial segregation is thus a manifestation of social and economic inequality (Low 2001).

## *Consumer Spaces*

My informants frequent three shopping centres specifically: the Shopping del Sol, the Villa Mora and the Shopping Mariscal Lopez. Prices there nearly compare to Norwegian ones in clothing, and the food-stalls serve at prices at least three times as high as food stalls outside

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<sup>39</sup> See for instance Low (several), Caldeira (2000) and Vasselinov, Cazessus & Falk (2007, especially p.111).

the malls. Voyce, taking his ethnography from India and Australia, argues that the building of shopping malls is a form of social dividing, a spatial purification, that “serves to render invisible the needs of the working class and the poor.” (2007: 2055). His argument seems applicable to Asunción’s spatial division. Rendering proximate, lesser privileged others invisible may also contribute to an “ordering of the world” both mentally and physically (Kleinman 1997), that eases the understanding of them as bare life (Agamben 1998).

Maria is very light-skinned blond woman is in her late fifties from a well-off and well-known Asunción family. She lives at the end of the shopping area furthest away from the city, and is one of the women who volunteered at the hospital. She explained to me while we were driving through the city in her new SUV that everything used to be gathered in the centre, and the properties, the colonial houses with large backyard gardens “used to be the thing to have”. Now, she said, “people cannot be bothered to take care of the buildings, so they fall apart; the city’s changed, and now we have two centres; the old, and the new, where all the shopping is, in Villa Mora.”

The Villa Mora area, where most of my informants live, is quite far from the city centre. Maria is one of the few who actually go through the city – something she says she only does because her parents, in their late 80’s have always lived there and now “refuse to move”. When I asked Maria whether the shopping zone was more expensive than the city, she first said no, but when I said I had not seen people of lesser resources there, she said

“Yes, because the people who go there are people of more resources. What happens is that there they have branded things, everything there is imported, the prices are in dollars, they’re not national. A bag can cost you 300 dollars, and here that is a lot of money.” I told her that was a lot of money to me too, upon which she protested: “No, you people have the Euro, which is a strong currency! A minimum salary in Asuncion is 300 dollars, 1300 Guaranies. One can’t buy a bag for 300 dollars then!” She contended that all the office employees at her husband’s office for instance, get the minimum salary: “But it’s not much... It’s another way of life. Here we have two or three Paraguay.” I asked what she meant, and she said, slightly agitated; “Look, it’s different; economically we have a lot of differences”

It has to be added here, that Maria pays her maid only 800 Guaranies a month, and my other informants pay between 500 and 900 Guaranies – thus, minimum salary is not really relevant. Her double-ness in accounting for prices at the mall versus the city may depict her vision of who constitutes the people – and what constitutes the prizes. The people she first speaks of

are those on her level economically – it is only when I clarify that I mean those who frequent the malls versus those who do not that she starts describing the different economic worlds<sup>40</sup>.

Arguably, malls “do not reflect the local history of their community but instead inculcate the tastes and identities of global consumer culture.” (Voyce 2007: 2057). This falls in line with my observations, and shows that public civic spaces are replaced by privately owned ones, in “fortress like structures” that depend on new forms of consumption (Voyce 2007: 2056-57). According to my informants, only people up to a certain economic stature interact in the city. This loss of public space as “open for communication and reflection” (Voyce 2007: 2056) can be interpreted as a loss of control of the population (Low 1996: 862), thus underlining the annexation from law depicted above. The guarded and clean spaces that the Asuncion malls offer clearly set them apart from the city centre –comfortable, practical; with all needs covered on limited space, and guarded, they are “safe havens” for shoppers of the upper economic strata, inaccessible for the poor and free of the disorderly elements of the city. This is also true of the other spaces of exclusivity frequented by my informants. However, the nightclubs, which too form zones of consumption, are chaotic, noisy and crowded – but it seems not to matter as long as the chaos is familiar:

I had gone to a nightclub in the shopping area with Ib. We had entered after a very brief stay in the club queue, and on VIP passes gone through a crowded dance space, passed a third row of armed bouncers, and climbed a staircase. We were now on a sort of a veranda, a huge space hanging from the ceiling. There was neon lighting, loud music, buckets of Heineken beer, air-conditioning and “ideal” bodies everywhere. I found I could not distinguish the crowd downstairs from this one, so I approached Ib.

I: “What do you think the crowd is here?” He asked what I meant. I decided to be bold, and asked him whether he thought it was upper- or middleclass people; “Well, you can notice in the way they dress. What they drink. Some people have a lot of money, but they’re like newly rich. They’re downstairs. Up here you have to be connected.” He went on, said that some people now had a lot of money, but no connections; “They’re the ones who drive around in the most expensive cars, thinking that’s cool, they don’t get it!” I asked him “But who’re the people downstairs? It’s crowded down there?” I was nodding over the fence, halfway screaming over the music. Ib shouted back at me: “they’re the poor and ugly people!” I looked at him for a moment, and asked if he really thought so: “No, not poor and ugly maybe...I’m kidding. But they’re not connected. If you think they’re many, you should see one of the clubs outside town; they can fit 7000 people in there. They don’t have a proper VIP area though.” I asked what he meant by that: “Well you just pay! They have three prices, and the most expensive one gets you to the VIP area, but that means that anyone who wants to spend can be a VIP! And it’s not even expensive!”

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<sup>40</sup> It may be added to this that the goods she could possibly look for in the city, like books or wine, cost the same in there as in the bookstores at the mall and wine stalls at the supermarkets.



First of all, the significant differentiator between Ib and his crowd and the ones downstairs, seem to be that they do not handle money the way Ib and his peers do; they are newly rich people, who do not conduct themselves “the right way”. This seems to comply with Simmel’s idea that “we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them” (*in* Appadurai 2001: 3), since what Ib wants here, is exclusivity of consumer spaces to a degree that he knows he has to have connections to get in. His distinction also falls in line with Bourdieu’s contention that the taste of “others” is always evaluated negatively (1984: 56). Ib’s lesser satisfaction with VIP areas that you can pay your way into, rests then on the notion of it being too accessible; as Simmel held, value is made through subjects judgement of objects, is not inherent in the object itself, and increases with the objects rarity, the scarcity of it, or, as I argue here, the exclusivity of it (Appadurai 2001:3-4).<sup>41</sup> This same differentiation is applied to clubs outside the city, that is, outside the shopping area – the club Ib speaks of is even further away from the city centre than the shopping area we were in here. His emphasis is on how you can pay your way “up” there; hence its exact location is less important. I suppose that our imported beer, the “ideal” bodies and the air-conditioning was not what made this space a VIP area Ib liked; it was that he knew we would not be there if he had not been “connected”.

The notion of connectedness as significant was clear elsewhere too. In the elite social-, sports- and recreational club situated near the shopping area, I was allowed in as a guest of a member, but I could not get in my own. To become a member one first had to apply on a form and stick your photo to it. The form would then be hung on display for all the clubs members. If no one protested to you becoming a member within two weeks, the club council would consider your application. If the council members agreed, you could then become a member by paying a large amount of money. However, I never found out the exact amount; all my informants had been born to membership, most of them descendents of the club founders. Neither the late authoritarian President Alfredo Stroessner nor the president during my fieldwork, Nicanor Duarte Frutos, had been of “good enough connection”, according to Maria, Nina and Anita, to be allowed membership. The Presidents had been offered membership because “all presidents are”, and all presidents, up until Duarte Frutos, had accepted. However, the latter had according to these ladies, first been offered unconditional membership, then turned it down “saying publicly and loudly how badly he thought of the club”, according to the above ladies. Then, as Duarte’s daughter was preparing for her

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<sup>41</sup> Reciprocity and notions of gift giving as depicted foremost by Marcel Mauss in “the Gift” might be valuable for the analysis of “being connected” and giving favours to stay connected. However, I will not deal further with this, as it does not concern to the same extent the relation between the poor and privileged.

birthday party – the fifteenth, a very big thing in Paraguayan upper class girls’ life – she had begged her father to give her party at the club. When Duarte then applied for membership he was finally rejected, because of his former public denunciation. This, my informants found hilarious.

### ***Consumption, Power and Conspicuousness***

It has been argued that when ‘needs’ go beyond what is necessary in terms of survival, they contribute to a consolidation of class domination, since consuming the unnecessary is beholden the privileged, “dominant class” and may enhance symbolic class boundaries (Friedman 2004: 3, Lamont 2001: 15343). However, the border between necessity and luxury is not fixed, but reliant on notions of *taste* and preferred lifestyles (Bourdieu 2007: 73). These arguments are often tied to a distinction between those who value the earthy and immediate and those who consume post “an intellectual, aesthetic screen, valuing the sophisticated and the reflective” (Carrier & Heyman 1997: 358, 370).

#### *Different People, Different Consumption*

My informants frequently express surprise, disgust, and disbelief when they saw their employees using cell phones or cameras or otherwise “crossed” a symbolic boundary between necessity and luxury. For instance Aurora was very suspicious of her driver when he bought a digital camera, and complained to me that he was probably stealing from her, and Anita blunted out when an elderly, poorly dressed woman approached our car with her hand stretched out towards us, begging for money as we stopped at a traffic light; “She should not beg. Look, she wears glasses, and she’s died her hair!”

Excess consumption, or consumption of luxuries, has also been called “conspicuous consumption”, a term first introduced by Veblen (1970 [1899]). The purpose of this kind of consumption “lies in its social or more precisely symbolic evaluation of the consumer” (Friedman 2004: 4), and is based on Veblen’s original notion; that of displaying wealth through extensive leisure activities and high expenditure on consumption and service (Trigg 2001: 101). I find it useful to investigate this with Veblen himself, who stated:

When the quasi-peaceable stage of industry is reached, with it’s fundamental institution of chattel slavery, the general principal, more or less rigorously applied, is

that the base, industrious class should consume only what may be necessary to their subsistence. In the nature of things, luxuries and the comforts of life belong to the leisure class.

-Veblen (1970: 61)

Applying Veblen's terminology, my informants clearly belong to the leisure class, and seem to apply Veblen's (1970) above "general principal" in every-day judgements of others. In line with Veblen, both Bourdieu (1984) and Cohen (1981) outline how elites of various sorts gain and transmit manners of distinction in contexts of family, private clubs, peer groups, private schools, etc (Gusterson 2001: 4418, Lamont 2001: 15344). Carrier & Heyman (1997) characterize Bourdieu's analysis of taste as "a gross contrast between those who are driven by necessity, particularly unskilled manual workers, and those who are relatively free of necessity, elites of various sorts." Here we might find another depiction of bare life; being driven by necessity arguably likens the notion of pure biological life.

What constitutes "unduly" consumption is perhaps clearer if we follow Appadurai (2001:38), who regards

... luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessities (a contrast filled with problems), but as goods whose principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are simply *incarnated signs*. The necessity to which *they* respond is fundamentally political. Better still, since most luxury goods are used (though in special ways and at special costs), it might make more sense to regard luxury as a special "register" of consumption (...) than to regard them as a special class of thing. The signs of this register, in relation to commodities, are some or all of the following attributes: (1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real "scarcity"; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cousin, silk in dress, jewels in adornment and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their "appropriate" consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality.

Both cell phones, cameras and died hair are acquisitions that fall into the above register. Other examples of the appliance of such a register was found at the hospital shop, a site I get back to in the following chapter. Here, we shall only note that the volunteers deliberately sell branded clothing and cosmetics at higher prices; the volunteers know prices in "real shops" and do not let things be evaluated by their use-value. As Maria explained to me, she always tell women who come to the shop that some colours and shapes are in fashion because:

"That way we sell more. And the bags! They are crazy about the bags!" She points to the shopping bags, mostly paper ones, with logos on them, and continues "Because then they can go around with real brands, like the people who go shopping!" she smiles and almost laughs.

When she says shopping here, she refers to the shopping centres. Marias explanation implies two things: that the customers at the shop all aspire to be “like the people who go shopping”, and also, that she distinguishes between types of shopping. The latter is important, for she, and this was confirmed by the other women, implies that the poor do not shop, although, as evident, they buy things at the hospital shop.

The shopping bags from the shopping centres have large logos, innovative design and are made of durable, shining paper. They represent elevated social status, access to expensive markets, and perhaps, symbolize “modernity”, if “modernity” is understood as neoliberal progress; their bags are *different* and send of other signals then sloppy, thin, almost see-through plastic bags that you get at the supermarkets, and even more so from the ones you get at the roadside stalls and in the local fruit-, vegetables and copycat-clothing markets. What is determined to be valuable is inherently political, in the widest possible understanding of that word (Appadurai 2001:3). If we understand my informants’ consumption as political, one may say that when they invest commodities with meaning through exchange, they exhibit their wealth, and thus power, through shopping<sup>42</sup>. In this sense the poor at the hospital shop comply with the elite’s power by consuming second-hand commodities that embody the elites power. However, this can imply that consumers somehow become the same, want the exact same images, in the neoliberal era, something that seems a bit dubious.

Veblen stated, “since the consumption of [luxurious] goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit” (1970: 64). This slightly deterministic approach has been criticized for assuming a “trickle down effect”, that implies that the ideas of consumption will be imitated by lower socio-economic strata (Trigg 2001: 99)<sup>43</sup>. In discussing more recent literature on consumption, Friedman (2004) interprets Bourdieu’s work on exchange, consumption and the meaning attributed to products, as representing an intellectual class’ struggle to maintain a distinction between high and mass culture. He states that this appears “as a cynical statement concerning the mass production of culture and a nostalgia for a more ordered world of meaningful exchange” (Friedman 2004: 9).

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<sup>42</sup> Definitions and discussions of what a commodity is or can be will be left out here – the important issue is that some things, some spaces, and some forms of embodied consumption are exclusive – and it is what makes these exclusive that matters to the analysis. The biography of things, as with the objects of the Kula ring (Malinowski 1922) is not dealt with. It is the social arenas and objects connected to it that matters – how social arenas are recalled through objects such as the paper bags; they are symbols of the shopping malls; symbols of the elite’s social economic strata.

<sup>43</sup> Notably, this “trickle-down” effect connects with ideas of hegemonic power that depict the spread of dominant classes’ ideas in the subjective process of consolidating class domination (Lamont 2001: 15243, Scheper-Hughes in D’Andrade 1995: 401). See also the following footnote.

Caldeira (2000), in criticizing Bourdieu's notion of the working class as confined to consuming necessities, says: "To describe the poor as being limited to the necessary is just another prejudice against them, one who is very common among those who think of themselves as better off" (Caldeira 2000: 68). Caldeira's analysis is in accordance with the link my informants make between the poverty of Los Baños and the classification of the behaviour of its inhabitants. This classification is expressed through a judgment of the poor's "conspicuous" or "unduly" consumption, their animalistic habits, i.e., dirty clothing and bad nutritional habits that contributes to their "persistently low brain capacity". Caldeira's (2000) critique echoes what Carrier & Heyman claim regarding the anthropological body of literature on consumption; that it "often portrays a social world that, while perhaps complex, is frequently uni-dimensional in that it assumes that all people in society perceive objects in the same ways and want the same things, or would do so if they had the chance" (1997: 359). They further hold that this view takes microcosmic (personal) values to be a manifestation of collective values, and that this gives the objects of consumption within a "distinct cultural setting" a uniform meaning (Carrier & Heyman 1997: 360).

Going back to Marias assumption regarding the shopping bags, this criticism seems beside the point; no matter "culturally" distinct or not, Marias perception is exactly as uniform as this literature suggests<sup>44</sup>. She supposes that the underprivileged shoppers at the hospital want what "the people who go shopping" want. It is important to note that the shoppers at the hospital might contest this assumption, and that it is contested in the social strata of my informants. For instance, Aurora claims that the poor do not wear shoes, even in winter, simply because they prefer not to. Consequentially, in her view the poor are not aspiring to be like her and her peers. Going back to Caldeira then, "to locate the poor close to necessity, to identify them with need, nature, and lack of reason or sophisticated culture can be a way of associating them with crime, which is often identified with the same traits" (Caldeira 2000: 68). Of overall importance to this discussion is the assumed creation and maintenance of symbolic boundaries, since "knowing the place of things and how they relate to each other" is depicted as part of ordering the world in a manner that frequently includes notions of moralities (Lamont 2001: 15245).

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<sup>44</sup> I find that Carrier & Heymans critique is useful for a critique of hegemonic theories, that depict how dominant classes exercise power partially through making their class-based interests and ideas seem salient for the population writ large; thereby constructing a "false consciousness" (Scheper-Hughes in D'Andrade 1995: 401). As far as the use of hegemonic theory goes, I do not find it useful for my analysis; if anything, what my informants seem to be upset by, it is that both the newly rich and the poor do not comply with their ideas concerning everything but perhaps consumption. Regarding consumption, the poor are both criticised if they consume conspicuously and if they do not; if they wear dirty clothes, they're beasts, but if they have digital cameras, they're thieves.

As many things formerly termed luxurious become “necessities”, or at least commonplace, new goods, practices and patterns of consumption may arise, and new ways of exhibiting wealth rise with it. I am not necessarily granting Bourdieu’s “cynical” view of “nostalgic” needs to order the world (Friedman 2004: 9) right, but it is an intriguing thought that provides a bridge from the focus on ordering the world spatially and morally towards plastic surgery as embodied and ordering consumption, or commodification of bodies (Sharp 2000: 293).

Several of my female informants spoke of others who they thought should have plastic surgery to get slimmer, lift their breasts, straighten their noses, and so on. I was for instance advised to get a breast enlargement, and that liposuction for my tummy and thighs would be a good idea. It might be that my informants experience their lifeworld as increasingly disordered; the authoritarian state is gone, urban areas are growing, their security is threatened and their consumerist marks of distinction (Bourdieu) or honorific evidence of wealth (Veblen) deteriorate through becoming accessible to more and more people, and that they therefore order new places – including the body. Embodied consumption, as consumption overall, arguably is an instrument for sending social messages. The body may be seen as a primary site of materializing class taste; through care for, use of and sign-dressing ones body, one reveals social positions (Bourdieu 2007: 75-6).

### *Cultivating Taste*

Learning to live life in accordance with consumerist ideals in a cultivated manner entangles a way of socializing, a way to be seen, and a way of seeing others (Veblen 1970: 64, Bourdieu 2007). As Appadurai contends, consumption is a way of both sending and receiving social messages (2001:31) – entrenched within the larger socio economic context, consumption signals level of cultivation in accordance with a scale of what is powerfully defined as cultivated. Veblen argued that this among the leisure class was done by emphasizing that one had *not* worked for ones wealth: the further removed from accumulative work one was, the better, thus implying that “old money” held higher status (Trigg 1999: 100). In line with this, we saw that Ib to an extent “mocked” people of newly accumulated wealth, and that the President’s attempt at gaining club access was frowned upon.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Perhaps because he was perceived as pretentious, after having scorned the club and then regretting it, his attempt at membership became an obvious marker of discrepancy between ambition and possibility (Bourdieu 2007: 72).

My informants' view, or pursue, of themselves through consumption, has a very high impact on their daily lives. Apart from hours spent on exercise, skincare and nutritional guidance and diets, most female informants of mine prefer to have their hair washed, brushed and styled at the hairdressers at least weekly. There they also get their 'depilacion' (removal of body-hair), pedicure and manicure done. These modifications of their bearing, posture and appearance, may be seen as reflecting their socio-economic positions and expressing their relationship to their social world (Bourdieu 2007: 75). In the next excerpt is an encounter I had with Julia, as she was in the hairdressers' chair. I had gone there to get a shampoo the hairdresser had told me I needed; I should not go around as I did, according to him.

I enter the saloon, and there's Julia. She's having her hair done by a girl. At her feet is another, tending to her toes, and there's a third, doing her nails. I ask how she is, she says she's perfect. She's just finished her Pilates "so now, I have half an hour to do my hair!" I ask if she's going to a party or some other happening since she's getting it done: "No, no, I just don't like doing my hair at home" she replies smilingly. Her head is being dragged back and forth by the straighteners the girl's using, and one of her feet is stretched out towards the one on the floor. She has one hand fixed to a little bowl with a lid that has wholes for all five fingers, getting ready for her nail-do. She asks if I'm going to get my hair done – I say I'm not, I'm just looking for a shampoo. At this point the head-hairdresser walks in and the subject changes to shampoos. After a while Julia asks me: "how do you get around here?" I say use the buses. She looks at me with a half-open mouth, lifting her eyebrows, then says: "Why don't you rent a car while you're here! It's so much easier!" I reply that I don't have a drivers licence "What, over there you mean?" she says, I nod "but you do know how to drive, because it shouldn't be a problem..." she smiles at me. I say that I can drive, if it's an absolute emergency, but that she probably wouldn't want me to... She laughs.

The whole conversation with Julia was conducted in English. Neither the head-hairdresser nor his assistants spoke English, thus none of them were included in the parts of conversation that did not concern shampoos. The fact that people tending to her looks surrounded Julia, did not seem to disturb our conversation, she did not comment their presence at all. It is intriguing that I could perfectly well drive without a licence, but should be careful how my hair looked. These two advises towards my behaviour are, of course, reflections on different levels. One concerns an issue of appearances, something not to be careless of, the other issue concerns mobility, privacy, practicality, and the law, the latter clearly the least important.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Caldeira (2000) found similar attitudes towards driving during her fieldwork in Sao Paulo. There, teenage kids among the upper middle class were permitted to drive without licenses and proper instructions, because their parents considered it safer than any other alternative, like taxis or buses. This implies that both in Asunción and Sao Paulo placing oneself above the law is justified. Moreover, nearly all my informants drank and drove, disregarding the law in yet another aspect.

## *Threats and Security*

Forms of life and forms of security are interrelated; security creates society as much as society creates security.

-Diken & Laustsen (2002: 302)

Security threats and measures do limit the choices of my informants. Members of their friends' families have been kidnapped, several have been held at gunpoint and had their properties robbed.<sup>47</sup> Security was therefore given as a reason for enclosure of the spaces my informants frequented:

Nina has been robbed with guns twice. Once with her daughter while they were renting a video at a drive-by video shop near their house, and once while she had gone out of the car down-town to ring a doorbell, while her four and six years old nieces waited in the car a meter from her. Additionally, a gang of armed young men robbed her house once. The maid and the gardener had been tied up, before the men busted into her son's bedroom. He was the only family member at home, the others were at one of their *estancias* (farms), hours away from the city. The son had been tied up too, and forced to reveal the placement and code of the safe. According to Nina, nothing much had been stolen, for she had moved most of her jewellery to the bank a few days earlier.

Nina told me of these incidents because we talked of the poor. She was certain that "the poor" had committed these crimes, and when I asked which poor people she meant, she contended it was "the brutes from Los Bañados". The only indication she had of this was her distant perception of the burglars, which apparently matched her (distant) perception of the poor. It shows that a moral stigma rests on the poor's physical appearance, since Nina's assertion is made from sensory conditions like smells and sights. She mixes moral and aesthetic sensibilities (Kleinman 1997: 318, Bourdieu 2007: 75-6), and finds her burglars. For other informants, this mixing of sensibilities did not only pertain to dwellers of los Bañados, but was applied to countryside dwellers too.

Recall Orwell's (2005) childhood lesson that "the lower classes smell". Note also that Casaús Arzú's (2007: 205) Guatemalan upper-class informants contended, "the indigenous is dirty" (among other non-flattering ascriptions). In a survey of Anthropology of the senses, Howes (2006) points out the commonality with which sensory judgements form part of justifications of exclusion, particularly invoking dichotomies that associated "Europeans" with "the mind and reason" and "non-Europeans" with "the body and senses", emphasising

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<sup>47</sup> Space unfortunately does not allow a further elaboration on the politicizing of security, but during the election campaigns, rumours had it that elements of the opposition – more specifically, Fernando Lugo - had been involved in kidnappings, something that shows how threats are politicized and regarded as present in all levels of society



the tradition of mapping and measuring in the overall (European colonial) strive for a cartographic ordering of the world and of bodies. From this we can discern a line of reasoning regarding the body of "the other" as material mass, and not individual life; a reasoning that fits well the idea of creating bare life.

One of my informants had had fired some employees for allegedly stealing from her farm. They were suing her for firing them unjustly, so she had to go with a lawyer to attend court in the district where her farm is. The fifth time I asked her to come along with her, she responded:

"I thought about it! It might be interesting for you, but what is this, do you WANT to get shot!?" I laughed a little and said no, I did not particularly want that, but that it I wanted to be present during the trial, to observe. I added "It can't really be that dangerous for me? If I go with your guard and just play "a stupid foreigner"?" She bit me off "The guard can't do anything, he can't protect you! If they shoot you, they shoot you! Or worse, if the guard leaves you out of sight for a minute, they can kidnap you, maltreat you, and THEN kill you! Is that what you want?" I was clearly losing the argument, but asked none the less: "Who do you think are dangerous there?" She said: "Many that live in the area. A few years ago, I had to use proper bodyguards<sup>48</sup> when I fired some people [for a similar incident as this]. Some of them disappeared and were never punished, and they wanted to kill me. They're still around, and to them your life is worth nothing!" I wanted to know why they would see me as a good target. She said, "When they see me, they say "ah, la Gringa!" If you go out there, they know you have something to do with me, you will be too visible."

### *Emic Perceptions of Threats*

Even those of my informants who have been held at gunpoint on several occasions often avoid using the personified security measures, namely bodyguards. This, they explained to me, was because the guards deprived them of privacy and rapid mobility. They prefer moving freely as much as they can, but claim that on some occasions, guards, drivers and specially assigned police is absolutely necessary.

Anita, as a powerful man's wife and very rich woman is under constant threat. She prefers going around without guards, and does so as often as she can, using roads where ambushes are not likely to happen. Slightly paradoxically, she here chooses the road slung along los Bañados, a road where no security officers, neither private nor public, are present:

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<sup>48</sup> Admittedly, I never understood what she meant by "proper bodyguards", except she had then used several, and now only went there with one combined driver/security guard.

It is mid-February and steaming hot as Anita and I drive towards the park in her spotless Mercedes. Anita has chosen a road along “los Bañados” that she says is “completely her own”, aligned by shacks made of cardboard and metal pieces that serve as houses. Some of the shacks look more like birdcages than people’s homes, as at least one of the walls is made of iron barrels. The road is bumpy and dusty, and very few other cars are visible in the area. As the car goes by these homes, the children in the street turn their heads and shout towards the fancy looking car. Anita seems not to notice them; she just speaks of the lovely cool shades of the trees in the park we are going to.

The sense of privacy that Anita gave as we drove can imply that she did not see these areas as owned by anyone. I suggest she thinks of this as a safe option for two reasons; because she is unlikely to be there, and because the audience I see her having along the road, are actually not there in her vision, something her oblivion to the children’s gazes and shouting underscores<sup>49</sup>. This sort of oblivion was shook by me occasionally, since I commented places, sights and persons to my informants on several occasions while driving with them. For instance, I was taking pictures from the car while out with Aurora once, when she, seeming somewhat annoyed with me, asked why I wanted to take photos of these ugly things, and rhetorically asked what people in Norway would think of Paraguay if they saw my photos. This matches the perception of Paraguay as chaotic, and underscores that what is perceived as an aesthetic landscape is socially constructed (Green 1995: 33)<sup>50</sup>.



A scene from Asunción’ street life

<sup>49</sup> I treat the proximate poors’ visibility in chapter three, five and six, and will therefore not elaborate on it further here.

<sup>50</sup> Green (1995) argues that both market interests and projects of nation building influence this social construction, thus ensuring an imaginary of the landscape that hinges on “‘high’ or elite Western culture”.

### *Security Measures*

Even though threats are real and the city is dotted with exclusive spaces for elites, once inside these spaces security is only occasionally visible. For instance, this struck me when flying privately out from Asunción's International Airport, which shares its airstrip with the private one. My eagerness to identify myself was claimed "not necessary at all!" and the informant I flew out with simply shouted five of the eight digits on my passport from the back of our plane. I had been advised by another informant to bring my passport on this trip, because "we might suddenly feel like flying abroad", something clearly not necessary on the Paraguayan side at least. Security measures are thus often only present in name and not in action. Still, many informants were completely dependent of guards. Normally the guards do not participate in conversations, nor are their presence commented or noticed unless they are assigned a concrete task; they may thus be described as "bare life", conducting only physical tasks that do not reveal their individuality. In the next excerpt, conversation and actions during a ride from the big, enclosed and guarded industrial complex, owned by Marita's family is detailed. Marita is in her forties, has five children, a career in law and a politician husband. She is member of a family who was closely associated with Stroessner until his death in exile in 2006. If I mentioned that I had contact with them to other informants, responses ranged from allegations of corruption, murders and drug trafficking to deep respect for their political influence.

The moment Marita and I left the office building, her driver/security guard ran out of a hut on the other side of the spacious yard, and jumped into the car. He pulled up in front of us in seconds, got out, gave the driver's seat to Marita and opened the passenger side door for me, saying "adelante" in a soft voice. He then placed himself in the backseat, and stayed silent. I asked Marita if she always had him with her. "Yes. I don't want to, but I have to." I said her mother had informed me that the family receives threats "Yes, yes we have. But she doesn't want to have a guard! I don't either, but this trip (back and forth to work) is the most dangerous, because I go every day. It's a routine; I go the same way, every time. But I think my brother is the most..." I say: "vulnerable?" "Yes, vulnerable. So we have to keep changing his routines. When you get to know things like this, you have to do something. You have to do something (shrugs her shoulders), you can't just not!" I asked her if her children had guards. As we spoke of this, she pulled into a gas station, and the guard got out of the car. He leant in the back window, asked "cuanto", she answered "por cien" (for a hundred), gave him the money, pressed the connection to the gas-lid, all while still speaking to me: "The children don't want to go with anyone, X (her eldest son) always says 'no, no, no, I don't want to go with anyone!' but many times he has to. Once, he wanted to go, and there was no guard at the house he could take, and he didn't want to take ours (her and her husbands), so I said, take that one, the police that was at our street, a very young one. My son said 'that one won't defend me, I'll defend him!' but he took him, and went to the disco. There, my son left his key in the engine, so the police officer could listen to the radio. One and a half hour later, he got a phone call, saying: 'your bodyguard

has crashed into three cars!” she had a high pitch at this point, but then started laughing, and went on: “the guard had taken the car, because he wanted to drive, but then he didn’t know how to! So he crashed into three cars! Three cars!!!” I just made some noises of nervous laughter. Marita continued: “it’s very hard, complicated; you don’t know who to trust, and a police officer that can’t even drive...!” I asked how they are able to trust people that they do not know with their routines and getting them around, and commented that it might entangle risk. “Yes... it is hard, it is hard,” she said, but she did not pursue the topic.

Marita refers to the guard, bodyguard, and police. I knew from Anita, Marita’s older cousin, and saw myself, that there were always one or more police officers stationed outside their houses. These belong to the national police, and are not in the same uniforms as those who patrol the city streets. Anita’s family used to have a former chief of police outside their house: “No-one would even walk on our sidewalk then! It lasted for years after he retired. No one would go near our house. I don’t know what he did or said, but everyone kept far away from our house, even years after” Anita once told me. Now, this had changed. The police officers were so frequently changed, that I doubt whether they ever got familiar enough to recognise anyone, as Anita said, “they are only there for appearances.” Occasionally, all the different security personnel became something of a joke. Once when Anita and I drove by Julia’s house we saw her huge security guard, armed and all, watering the lawn, Anita commented laughingly: “He’ll pretty soon be putting the kids to bed too!”<sup>51</sup>



One of the private apartment buildings set about a kilometre outside downtown in the direction of the Shopping malls

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<sup>51</sup> Security guards frequently just “hung around”, sitting in groups on plastic chairs outside their “subject’s” house

### *Concluding Remarks*

... the home is the fortress and symbol of the bourgeois family, the material proof of its ideals and moral values. Inside it, private lives unfold, and outside there is the public world, businesses and threatening elements. The café, the bar, the house of prostitutes are the negations of domestic virtues, thrift and hard work these are the places in which the deep contradictions of society reveal themselves.

- Franco (1999: 233)

The symbols, privacy and values Franco speaks of can be thought of as expanded to the privatized zones my informants frequent. Their comfortable fortresses somehow exist in several locations, kept in exclusivity. The poor are not “formally” allowed in the clubs, malls or the nightclubs, for a simulation of the order, peace and cleanliness of homely leisure zones is expanded into these. But as we shall see, they are still there performing the tasks the elites themselves do not deal with. Just as bare life is included in the nationstate, so it is included in these exclusive zones – but in both instances, without individual recognition, or *political* life

This including exclusion, facilitate the way my informants met with their employees; their most proximate poor. I will therefore illuminate the homes of my informants and their relations with employees in the following chapter, and give examples and interpretations of the interaction some informants had with slightly more distant poor, at the Hospital where they volunteered.



**Chapter Three**  
**Taking Segregation Home and Out:**  
**Elite-Employee Relations and Volunteer Work**

As shown, the poor are depicted by my informants as out-of-place and dirty, disruptive elements. This goes for (some) employees too. The segregation of space found in the city and enforced through security measures is brought home, as many employees live on their properties and informants depend on them for their daily standards of life. The maids buy foodstuffs and make the meals on the instruction of the employers; they clean the house and clothing, iron, tend the gardens and feed the dogs. They eat in the kitchen and sleep in rooms built in the backyard of spacious, meticulous homes, but cross in and out of even the most private areas of the houses, like the bedrooms and bathrooms. This paradoxical arrangement might serve to illuminate why contrasting ways of living, straight out poverty, in my informants proximity is normalised.

***Taking Segregation Home***

In the “private”, in the “domestic” sphere (...) in which the individual lives as a refugee zone, as an autonomous field of needs and satisfactions, below or beyond social constrains, the individual nevertheless always continues to evince or claim legitimacy and to assure it by signs.

-Baudrillard (1981: 40)

The homes, holiday houses and even farms of my informants often struck me as mini-exhibitions of the segregation of the rich from the poor. Since all my informants had at least one live-in maid, they next to never did anything in the kitchen themselves. Living rooms and hallways were kept neat and often displayed arts. The gardens, swimming pools and tennis courts surrounding their homes were cleansed regularly, and for the parties they threw, wines and other beverages were normally served in crystal glasses. Informants surrounded themselves mostly with the latest fashion in furniture, the best of foods available, and electronic equipment, like air-conditioners, computers, mobile phones and TV's.

In stark contrast to this, the kitchens of the homes were worn down, often impractical, and seldom in a shape that kept them free of waste, ants, flies, and other insects and microbes that thrive in the high temperatures of summer. The maids', guards' and other quarters of the

house inhabited or used by employees were equally deteriorated. Following Baudrillard (1981), the reason why the contrast between the homes' displays of luxury, along side the raggedness of their kitchens was so large, can be that the raggedness functions as a symbol of wealth; it displays that they do not need to engage themselves with the "work zones" of their houses, thus evincing their lean on solely leisure activities when at home.

I did not ever hear anyone mention the obvious difference between work and leisure zones of the houses, even while standing in kitchens talking to house owners. It seemed entirely "natively logical" that areas not normally on display for visitors or in frequent use by house-owners were ragged. Just like the streets, the buses, the pavements, the street children, the maid's clothing, the larger parts of down town and hundreds of old houses - nearly palaces – were ragged<sup>52</sup>. Continuing with Baudrillard then, "in the least of behaviours, through the least of objects, he or she translates the immanence of a jurisdiction which in appearance is rejected" (1981:40). Now, Baudrillard puts the weight of his analysis on the middleclass, who seem to strive for all that symbolize their "progress on the social scale" in a "desperate" manner (ibid.). This might explain why the elites live in houses that have dirt too; segregation at home also shows that their house is big enough for it and implies segregation from lower middle classes too; it manifests their place in the socio economic totality of their context.

### *Emic Descriptions of and Expectations towards Employees*

Employees were always present during lunches, parties and came on holidays. Intriguingly, when I witnessed both discussions of problems concerning employees' performance of tasks, and confidential political conversations, they were "invisible" to the extent that my informants never told them not to tell anyone of state secrets. Employees were as much present as I was, and I was told not to tell. Somehow, employees appear to be unthreatening to an extent of not being recognised as human, or at least as political beings. Again, *homo sacer* seems an applicable term. This reflects Inger Lise Teig's observation from the Dominican Republic that household employees could be treated as non-persons, people "without rights who were ignored and treated without respect" (1998:61<sup>53</sup>)<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> I only humorously point out: if the exposure of wealth were the subject of this thesis, I might have analysed the deterioration and destruction of space, objects, wealth by the elites as something similar to the Potlach, where this evidences wealth...

<sup>53</sup> My translation from Norwegian

<sup>54</sup> It seems domestic servants are associated with prostitution and general destitution transnationally; See for instance Weismantel (2001: 62) and Srinivas (1995: 270).



In line with my informants' preferred avoidance of using guards, Srinivas finds that many employers in India now find it convenient to avoid live-in maids. Instead, they prefer to employ domestic servants on an hour-basis to avoid the inroad it creates to their privacy (1995: 273). This contrasts with my findings regarding maids, as several informants were upset about the increased difficulty they experienced in finding live-in maids<sup>55</sup>. They said that live-in maids were more convenient to have, as it gives access to service twenty-four-seven, but that they thought maids had become more demanding of both leisure time and salaries.

Aurora lives in a large house on her own. She has two maids that share a small room in the backyard. The two women were 24 and 28 years old. The room they shared was not insulated, and in winter it got as cold as the outdoors. Aurora had given them a stove, but the girls claimed almost never to use it. Aurora said that she "does not even know if they wear panties", and thought they slept and worked in the same clothing – something she said was because they did not know how to keep themselves clean and "lacked culture". None of Aurora's maids had children; neither did they have more than six years of schooling. They had both come to Asuncion from the countryside looking for work. Aurora seemed to worry about the behaviour of her maids. She often told me not to talk to them, help them with clearing the table or get things myself from the kitchen, for she thought it would give them bad habits and build expectations towards following guests. She did not want them to get accustomed to this nicety, so it took a while before I managed to talk to them on my own. Our brief conversations would normally take place in the mornings then, when no one else was in the house.

Srinivas, drawing on historical and cross-regional sources mostly, holds that the identity difference between maids and mistress was shaped by the mistresses as an opposition to the maids' (Srinivas 1995:275). Since live-in maids are dependent on non-objective judgement of their work, in combination with the employer's mood and sometimes changing ideas, their working conditions are unpredictable. This reflects Aurora's worries; if her maids behaved badly, it would reflect on her.

The guards, drivers, gardeners, maids, nannies and nurses that surrounded my informants were not all visibly hard working, although most had to be accessible 24-7. My impression was that the maids and nannies especially had their hands full. The norm among my informants was to give them only a day or two off every second week.

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<sup>55</sup> Finding maids was often done through agencies, but it seemed it was preferred to find employees through acquaintances. As I show in the following excerpts, Julio and his wife found theirs through a friend, and Maria's new maid was the sister of her parent's maid. Some brought young girls, around the age of twelve, who were children of their farm employees to the city to work for them. This was perceived as a good option for these girls, as they could (possibly) go to school in Asunción on the side of their household work –. When Julia did this, she encountered a few problems: one of the girls according to Julia just cried and cried for her mother – and both the girl and the mother were blamed for not taking advantage of the opportunity at offer when the girl finally was sent back to the farm. On another occasion, one of these girls got pregnant, twice. Julia's family paid for her abortions, and complained that it was lack of education that got her pregnant. This goes to show that the complaints of people coming to the city "chasing dreams", were also expected to do so, for rural life was not seen as something prosperous. Again, we see that both actions are condemned in one sense or another; the poor cannot get it right.

Maria was without a maid for at least a month during my fieldwork, and told me her latest maid had been a liar and could not be trusted; the relation left her with “no *confianza*”. When Maria explained this to me, she added that she never understood the lies, and at the end she did not know whether her maid was “crazy or what!” She elaborated on how very hard looking for a maid was because she had three men at home (husband and two sons) so “I’ve got to do three beds, three breakfasts, three lunches! And the clothing! And the amounts of ironing! I can’t do all that; I would have to stay at home all day! My life is such a drama at the moment, such a drama!” I asked her if the men could take on some of this responsibility, but she negated “no!..no...” She did not want to hire just anyone to be a live-in maid, especially after her experience with her last maid. She expected her maid to have breakfast for her sons and husband ready by 07, tend to all meals – including hot lunch and cleaning the house and clothing, iron, make dinner and serve guests if she had any until everyone had gone, before she tidied up the house and went to bed. Maria said she often had guests until 02 in the morning, and that the maid then would have to clean up, get some sleep and be at it again for breakfast serving a few hours later.<sup>56</sup>

When we talked of this her sister, Teresa, was present too, so when Maria told me of one of her parents employees’ who had been with them for 55 years, I could watch the reactions of the two of them.

Maria said this employee had been there since she was four years old, and I looked from her to Teresa and back while asking if that made this employee like an aunt or something to them. Teresa just kept writing in her book, but Maria said the employee was “almost like a part of the family, it is not like a ‘patron-worker’ relation...sometimes when I’m there she’ll even sit down and have tea with me in the kitchen...!” Teresa still did not say anything, only glimpsed up at Maria as she said she used to talk a lot with this maid and share her problems with her, but kept doing the accounting. Maria repeated that since the maids are always there, these relationships are “special, not like regular workers.”

Teresa not commenting on this might insinuate that she disagreed, but I do not find it pertinent to speculate in her silence. Safe to say though, Maria found it very special that she could have tea with the maid.

Many informants complained that they had to give employees instructions in detail – Sonia gave as an example that her maid had to be repeatedly told to buy for instance *red* stockings - and added that she could not say “not blue”, because then the maid surely would bring back blue socks. Her explanation for this ordeal was that her maid and all other maids as far as she knew, were “*sin pienso*”, which literally translates to “without thought”. The contention that the employees, “lack culture”, easily obtained bad habits and had low

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<sup>56</sup> Notably, Maria had two additional employees: a lady that cleaned the house thrice a week and a gardener who came weekly.

intelligence was common. Teresa too confirmed this, and complained to me on how she still had to tell her gardener through fifteen years to water and cut the plants: “it is like he thinks the plants will do it for themselves!” she added. When reflecting on these statements, I think it helpful to bear in mind that these employees are continuously asked to not do anything without being told to – it might be then, that Teresa’s gardener will not dare to cut the plants if he is not told to.

I weekly attended Catholic biblical meetings with normally about twenty people, held in the home of one of the volunteers from the hospital. Except for the catholic father who led them, only one man, Julio, attended these. Once when he did a summary of a passage<sup>57</sup> and was applauded, he said his summary was not from the top of his head, for he had read it to his maid the same morning. Several of the ladies responded: “That’s amazing, you read to your maid!” Julio answered that was how he had known exactly what phrases of the passage were “hard to understand”<sup>58</sup>. The explanation of why reading to ones maid was amazing was elaborated on that afternoon, as I got a ride with Julio and his wife from the gathering:

In the car, Julio started speaking of the maid he had read to and how lucky they had been with her. He said he thought it very rare that she was from the countryside, “but still has a capability of understanding!” I asked how they had found her and how long she had been with them. “Only a month” his wife replied, speaking for the first time since we got into the car. A friend of a friend fired this maid, because: “she didn’t want her to be alone in the house with the husband every day”, according to Julio’s wife, who had then taken the maid. Julio interrupted, saying “And, she goes to university three evenings a week! It is very rare; she has a sense of learning...” to which his wife agreed, and explained that this was very rare since the maid was from “far, far out on the countryside and people there think differently”.

Both employees of informants and informants confirmed that many go from the countryside to the city to find work and opportunities. Unequal terms for employer and employee are due not only to lack of associations, but also to low levels of schooling and multiple languages in the countryside. According to a study on bilingualism in Paraguay in 2003, Guaraní is nearly as much used in Paraguay as Spanish, and 87 % of the population counted themselves as bilingual in 2002 (Kvaal 2004:26). However, the administrative language in Paraguay is Spanish, and less than 2 % of the population are “ethnic Guaraní” (Kvaal 2004:25). I think there has to be an economic divide between those who do speak Guaraní and those who do

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<sup>57</sup> Juan 6, 51-58, about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Fascinatingly, his perception of the maid – portrayed as “sin pienso”- as suitable for a try-out reading of the bible might imply that he does not really regard the attending women as much of an opposition to the maid intellectually, but I am not pursuing this argument.

not, as only a few male farm-owners among my informants spoke it, and they only did so when dealing with farm-employees. Since the mistress normally instructs household employees, Guaraní is not used in the elite homes. Language diversity thereby constitutes a common problematic, and enhances a relationship of exploitation and dependence between employer and employee (Srinivas 1995: 272).<sup>59</sup>

Whether urban domestic employment provides better opportunities through personal freedom, education and monetary means, compared to rural work is highly contested. Howell (2006), taking her ethnography from Oaxaca, Mexico, holds that even if the domestic employees themselves do not gain any of this, enhanced educational possibilities is normally obtained for their children, and many support their rural family through urban work. The latter pertains to Aurora's oldest maid at least; she told me that she saved as much as she could from her salary, and put it towards a rural piece of land near her family, where she hoped to be able to build a house one day. Her hopes may be regarded as a wish to escape domestic employment, that arguably is a form of legalized enslavement that dehumanizes and objectifies to the point of "social death" (Sharp 2000: 293); she is not a person among persons while serving – and she serves nearly 24-7.

### *Nannies and Drivers*

Nannies were brought on family holidays, to church and to fashionable lunches; wherever the kids went, an employee normally followed them. Those informants who had their kids at schools a bit away from their home drove themselves to pick them up – they would not trust the nannies to drive. Recall also that when I went with Julia from her office the security guard sat in the back. Nevertheless, when Aurora goes to meetings or has to leave the city, her combined driver and security guard is behind the wheel. The same goes for Anita, who normally goes around on her own, but if she leaves the house in the evening, she uses a driving guard. I never observed drivers included in conversation, but Aurora told me that when she went far with only her driver, he would drive and she would sit in front with him, both singing along to the Christian pop music Aurora likes. I never saw this, but if true, then when the two of them are alone, the driver/guard might be "given" individual recognition.

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<sup>59</sup> Srinivas' findings may have their basis in what Tellis-Nayak found in India too; that employers' dominance over employees is tied to a responsibility for the servant as for a ward (1983: 68). As far as I saw, heard and observed, my informants only problem with their employees were connected to the latter's "dumbness", lies or theft. The latter is treated in connection to morals in the chapter five.

Many Latin America researchers emphasise the virginal ideals that makes the process of becoming a mother a difficult one: one should, ideally, be both virgin and mother. Melhuus (1997) holds that this dilemma is overcome by stressing “el sufrimiento”, the suffering, of being a mother and of being subjected by men<sup>60</sup>. Interestingly, I never heard my informants speak of this suffering, neither did they tend to their children alone, but they did stress how difficult it could be to deal with household employees, who stole, lied or were just “sin pienso”, and as Maria held (above), she did not expect her male cohabitants to take any domestic responsibility. Most informants had a nurse for each baby until it was a year or so, and all had nannies that took care of their flock of children. Thus, informants did not relate to the virginal, suffering ideal on this level. It might be that this ideal is not upheld in Paraguay to the same extent as elsewhere in Latin America. However, we must, in noting the emphasis on women’s supposedly “natural disposition” for dealing with family life and neighbourhood ties (Molyneux 2001: 178) that it was mostly my female informants who participated in the catholic biblical meetings and only women who volunteered at the hospital.

### *Talk of Employees*

Several stories of nurses maltreating babies went around. The most common one was that a nurse had taken a few months old baby in a bundle to beg at the highway traffic lights. According to tales told individually by several informants, this had happened to “friends of mine” or “one of my daughters friends”, something that made the story rather dubious; either it really happened a lot, or, it is only what Caldeira (2000) terms “talk of crime”; stories that underline crime and danger but is not necessarily true. Either way, it is quite paradoxical that these acclaimed unclean and uncultured employees are left to watch the children all day, it might even be considered a field of conflicting moralities since women in one sense should not leave their babies with others, but in another sense are expected to spend their days taking care of their looks, as will be depicted in the following chapters.

At one of the biblical gatherings I overheard Teresa and some of the other women discussing how their parents were “too nice to their employees”;

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<sup>60</sup> Although this falls outside the primary scope of this thesis, it must be noted that being subject to men was something my informants did talk about. Jealous, cheating and aggressive husbands were not unheard of, and especially Julia and Anita had husbands who frequently denied them to leave the house with friends and called several times a day to check their whereabouts. Julia was even GPS tracked by her husband – if she was ever anywhere he did not know she was going, he called to question her. Teig in the Dominican Republic found this sort of limitation, too (1998: 85-87).

Teresa said she had asked her parents chauffeur to change a light bulb, and her parents had protested. While holding her chin in, laughing, hands along shoulders, leaning backwards, she imitated her mother saying “nooo, Teresa, you can not ask him to do that! He has high blood pressure!” she laughed even harder, and the other women laughed and nodded, as she added, “no, the chauffer is sacred, he is sacred!” One of the women added, “Such are my parents to, it’s ridiculous! Like a chauffeur can only drive...”

This may seem only a complaint that the women’s parents are too protective of their staff, but reflecting on the use of security guards, and how often they were just “around”, it might be that the women here are indirectly telling each other the socioeconomic stand of their parents; they are rich enough to keep staff that only serve one purpose<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore, these complaints portray the needs of employees as unimportant, giving way to a perception of them as “lesser” humans, or, a more extreme depiction, that they are indeed “homo sacer”.

### ***Overcoming Difference with Voluntary Work? Cases from the Hospital***

A second arena, on which some female informants met with their surrounding poverty, was the hospital where some of them volunteered to “help the needy”. Molyneux (2002) has shown that the reliance on community-based participation for poverty alleviation in Latin America is large. As Hyatt (2001) has shown, the reliance on voluntary work in neoliberal governance moves the responsibility of the poor’s “safety net” from the state to individual hands, in line with the World Bank’s 1997 Report (Hyatt 2001: 205-6, Molyneux 2001: 171, 175). This fits well into it’s strategy of leaving the market to deal with it’s own forces; it presumes a building of social capital that excludes state expenditure and making volunteerism an *obligation* of citizenship (Hyatt 2001: 228).

Those defined as needing by my informants were disabled children, ill people and occasionally children at rural schools. Some of these were helped at the “Hospital de las Clinicas”, a supposedly free of charge hospital used by poor Paraguayans from all over the country. Statistics say in total 78,3 % of Paraguayans are without medical insurance, that is, including the public insurance, out of which 91 % living in rural areas and 68,1 % in urban areas (EPH 2005: 31)<sup>62</sup>.

“Las Clinicas” is situated at the opposite end of the city from where my informants live. From a little shop set inside the hospital area they sell second-hand clothing, gadgets and medicines cheap, mostly to poor people in the area. The work at the shop starts around eight

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<sup>61</sup> The role of the servant may in part be one of fulfilling a display of wealth (Srinivas 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Numbers from Encuesta Permanente de Hogares 2005 / Total País

thirty in the morning. I normally got a ride there with Teresa, her SUV would be stuffed with goods to sell. At the parking lot outside the hospital two male and two female helpers would meet us. Using an old stretcher on wheels and bare muscles, they would gather all the goods and transport it through the hospital area. My informants would never carry anything heavy, and never more than two bags.

The hospitalized bring their medical prescriptions and whatever money they have to the shop. The volunteers (never the helpers) calculate the prize and then hand the prescription and sufficient money to pay for it to one of the male helpers. He brings it to one of the three pharmacies near the hospital and get the medicine. The hospitalized get their prescribed drug at the shop afterwards. According to my informants, people also have to buy equipment for surgery themselves, although Nicholas, a doctor there, claimed most of the surgery equipment was supplied free of charge. The first time I went there, Theresa and Eva explained to me in the car that I was now going to see “la otra cara de Asunción” (literally, Asunción’s other face), clearly expecting I had never seen it before.

The hospital did not have heating, so in winter both the shop and the treatment wards were as cold as the outdoors. Some wards are set in the basement, some lead straight off from outdoors; the buildings are many, and halfway covering aluminium roofs hang between them, providing some shelter from the heavy rains and burning sun. Inside the wards stretchers and beds without bedding host patients; some wrapped in woollen blankets and cloth, some in their clothes, or, frequently, rags.<sup>63</sup> During one of the days in the shop with Teresa, the main administrator of the voluntary work and married to a highly regarded businessman, Maria, already introduced, Eva, who lived off of her deceased husband’s fortune, Elisa, who’s husband was a real-estate broker and owner, and Bella, a very religious and slightly secretive woman (I never knew where she got her fortune from), I took a walk around the hospital. When I got back, Maria asked me how I found the hospital:

I told Maria I could not see how they managed to keep the hospital clean enough to treat patients. She said: “There are a lot of hospital infections here, a lot”, but Teresa looked up and said it was “clean enough”. Bella protested: “They come in, and are hospitalized in the clothes they wear in the street, the hospital doesn’t provide clothing. It’s a disaster here, this is like Africa!” She repeated to the others “I tell her, it’s like Africa here!”

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<sup>63</sup> I realize that this description can seem a “romanticized” picture of the deprived conditions at the hospital. The problematic of doing so is thoroughly discussed by Kelleher (1997), who contend that descriptions of despair tend to become spectacles of such, imitating cinematic images that simultaneously communicate and obscure reality (1997: 57). This ties nicely to Kleinman’s (1997) descriptions of spectacles that immerse the viewer in “cacophony of instantaneous images” that “creates an amoral virtual reality” (Kleinman 1997: 319), discussed further in chapter five.

This was the first time I ever heard Paraguay compared to Africa. Obviously, the association to Africa as a unified continent of extreme poverty and despair is at best imprecise, but significant in this comparison, is how Bella seemed to ascribe this condition to a part of her own country, in a manner that clearly set it apart from her own lifeworld; the poor constitute an “underdeveloped nation” within the nation, as Harrington’s novel said of the poor in the USA (*in* O’Connor 2001: 121). Pointing to something as far away, somewhere none of the people present had been, illuminate the degree to which they distanced themselves from the local poverty; images of suffering are independent of locality, mashed up until none of the suffering are more than objects of pity and exploitation (Sharp 2000: 293, Kleinman 1997: 319). Interestingly, Maria told me that she had only started working at the hospital a couple of years ago, as she had not wanted to expose herself to the suffering among the poor before that.

People normally gathered outside the shop early, sometimes the entrance of the shop got completely blocked before we got there, so “the helpers” would shout out and shuffle people away for us to get through, like one of my first times there:

People were waiting outside as all the clothing was poured out on the floor and then roughly sorted between men’s, women’s and children’s clothing. While the helpers did the sorting, Bella looked at me, nodding towards the people outside, and said, “Look! There’s a line forming, sometimes it fills the whole square outside!” I asked if it was always like that “No. They know that on Tuesdays we bring the prettiest things, because Teresa knows so many people, and has so many contacts...” Then the women started mumbling among themselves as they all looked outside. I heard one of them say; “There she is!” I asked: “there is who?” “That one” Bella pointed discreetly. I could not see whom she pointed to, there were too many people staring at us, waiting impatiently to get inside. Bella said the person had nine children and “is not right in the head, she is...special”. She added “I’ll show you later!” upon my obvious confusion as to whom she was speaking of.

Shortly after, when we had piled some of the clothing onto the table by the entrance, hung some suits in cleansers’ bags on the wall and short side of the shelf, and placed as many cupboards, gadgets and shoes neatly on the front desk as possible, a woman entered the store. She was holding out the skirt of her torn and dirty used-to-be purple-flowered dress in front of her, begging for a new piece of clothing. The women asked each other, two of them looked through some piles, but they found nothing to give her. The piles they looked through were the ones with the lesser-looking clothes; only then did I realize there was a pile for that. I asked if the woman had no money, and the volunteers confirmed. I did not see where she went.

Later that day, Bella took me for a tour of the hospital. We crossed the square in front of the store, and there the woman who had begged for a free dress stood, blocking the path. She was with a boy in a wheelchair who looked gravely handicapped. Bella greeted the woman and the boy by name, and they moved to the side. As we walked away, Bella told me this was the woman spoken of formerly, the special one with nine children. Bella stated that the child in the wheelchair “was normal until he had meningitis, then he became like this. That



woman is not right, so men take advantage of her...that's why she has nine children. But now, luckily, she has been sterilized!"

Here, one might say that the children of this woman are understood as deserving poor. By sterilizing her it is ensured that she does not provide the world another undernourished and neglected child. However, it seemed her suffering from men taking advantage of her is a non-problem. Kleinman holds that suffering is a social construct, something that in turn creates "certain categories of sufferers (categories that institutions have constructed as authorized objects for giving help), while denying others" (Kleinman 1997: 321). An institutionalisation of these categories seem in line with Katz' (1990) argument that a distinction is made between the deserving and undeserving poor. Both labels, "suffering" and "poor", bear with them that some are deemed illegitimate objects of welfare; therefore, policies and programmes by which social institutions are run can intensify some kinds of social suffering, and obstruct their alleviation (Kleinman 1997: 321). Arguably, the "special lady's" suffering can be seen as suffering hindered from alleviation; as long as she is sterilized, Bella interprets it as a problem solved – maybe because it is then changed to a constant and non-changing problem; it is ordered<sup>64</sup>. It must be noted too, that leaving the responsibility for social integration and equality with volunteer efforts, is not sufficient to excuse lacking socio-political efforts, and may contribute to keeping women out of political positions as well as limiting state responsibility in social welfare (Molyneux 2001: 185-6).

Differentiating between patients/customers was commonplace – some were said to be "mad", and were never given cheap prices on clothing or medicines from the shop. Others were always given something:

It was yet another day at the hospital. A doctor came in with a prescription and walked up to the desk. Teresa, Bella and I were all behind it. The doctor asks that we pay the whole cost of the medicine, and then for something else that I can't quite catch. He says, "He's an indigenous". The ladies both repeat, "okay, okay", and Teresa writes "indigenous person" on the prescription. Bella starts rumbling about for something in the shelf behind us, and comes back with a fork and a knife. I ask why he needs it. They inform me that the hospital does provide food, but no cutlery (just like they provide no blankets or clothing). "Yes", nods Teresa, "but he also needs a spoon!" Bella gets some teaspoons of plastic. Teresa objects: "How is he going to eat his soup with that!?" Bella winks at me, saying: "that's why I'm giving him two!" "No, he's got to have a real spoon! We have to buy one for him then." Teresa says firmly. Bella says she doesn't know where they sell that; suddenly serious

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<sup>64</sup> It might be that Bella had other thoughts on this matter. She never spoke of the suffering of the "special lady", though, and as we shall see, women are expected to keep men interested in them, something that might imply that this lady to an extent is seen as responsible for men taking advantage of her too. On the other hand, Bella, might feel more empathetic to this lady than I realize. However, I find it untimely to speculate in this.

“They sell that everywhere, at the super!” Teresa exclaims. It’s decided that I should go with Bella to buy a spoon. We walk out of the hospital, and find spoons sold on the street corner near by. Bella buys two. As we walk away she looks at them and says “one would hope that they’d sell them clean, but I don’t think so!” she shows me a spot on one of them. When we return, she gives the spoons to Teresa, saying, “I got two!” Teresa looks at her, and says “you always have to exaggerate!” then looks at me and says, “Bella always exaggerates!”

As one of the male helpers has gathered the medicines, Bella wants to bring them and the cutlery to the “indigenous”. She asks me to go with her. As we walk I ask her what they mean when they say “indigenous person”. She says “a different person, a different race than us...” she seems uncertain either of my question, or of how to formulate an answer (maybe both), so I say “what does it matter that he is an indigenous, why do you write it on his prescription?” Bella seems almost relieved, and says, “because, the indigenous peoples, they are the most poor, and often they come alone” I ask if that makes them in need of more help “yes, yes” she nods towards me. To find the patient we have to go down a staircase. As we reach the passage under the building, Bella turns to me, closing her mouth, while waving her open hand in front of her face, raising her brows a bit, as to signal it smells bad here. And it does, it smells like sewer. Straight ahead and to our right are signs for toilets. Their doors are open. On our right is a doctors’ examination room. In the doorway stands a man in a doctors coat yelling out names. The hallway is very narrow and badly lit. People are sitting on a few chairs and leaning on the walls, maybe waiting for the doctor or to use the toilets. I would not have been here for any length of time voluntarily, but at the same time; it is slightly warmer down here than outside, probably because the air here doesn’t move. The hallway creeps to the left, we turn the corner. Ahead is a double door with windows on both doors. Some curtains are draped on the inside of them. We go through.

There are about 25 beds in the room, some are shielded by draped metal-racks, some look at least 30 years old, and many are narrow stretchers meant for transport. Our man is behind shields. “Look, there he is, sleeping”, says Bella and stops at the far end of his bed where the shields are torn. He looks tiny, even on the narrow bed. His dark skin is pale. Behind this wards’ administrative desk straight ahead, stands the doctor who asked for the medicines and cutlery. He looks no more than 25 years of age.<sup>65</sup> Two nurses stand by his side. We approach, and Bella says that she’s found cutlery and the medicines for the indigenous, but that since he’s sleeping she wants to leave it with the doctor. The doctor nods, and peeks at us over his thick glasses. He says thank you. As we leave, Bella again stops in front of the indigenous’ bed, and says: “Look. He has completely different features than us. He is of another kind [otro tipo<sup>66</sup>]” We leave the same way as we came, Bella now comments verbally on the smell. The doctor by the toilets is still in his doorway, but I think I catch a glimpse of a patient on a stretcher behind him now. We walk up the stairs, and I say I agree the smell was bad. Bella says she thinks it’s “terrible”.

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<sup>65</sup> Las Clinicas functions as a site of practice for medical students, most of whom move on to private practices when they finish their studies, according to my informants. This explains the young age of most medical personnel in the hospital.

<sup>66</sup> As already mentioned, the indigenous percentage of the Paraguayan population is very low, something that might explain the rarity with which Bella treats this case.



One of the downstairs wards at las Clinicas

### *Trust and Respect*

The hospital shop, mostly poor people and the four employees of little education and means are present, in addition to the volunteers and surrounding medical personnel. It is a place in which respect, trust<sup>67</sup> and tolerance is contested; Customers were frequently suspected of stealing goods or pretending to have more money towards the cost of medicines than they gave when handing in prescriptions. On one occasion, when one of the female helpers asked a customer whether she had paid for goods she was about to bring out of the shop, her question was responded to in a very offended manner; the customer shouted that she had been coming to the shop for 39 years, and would not be talked to “like that”. She then ran out of the shop. After this Teresa stated: “a lot of people steal from us here, a lot, but they are also our customers! If we’re not nice, they don’t come back, so you can’t talk to people like that!” The help who had posed the question received harsh words and correction throughout the day for having behaved “aggressively” and risked the good will of customers.

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<sup>67</sup> I am aware that there are extensive debates concerning trust in anthropology, philosophy and sociology, but these too fall outside the primary scope of this thesis; I only mention “trust” to illuminate some of the ground on which the “social hierarchies” that I empirically demonstrate rest.

On another occasion, when the shop was extremely crowded, a pair of silvered chandeliers was for sale. Upon question from a customer if she could buy only one, the women had decided they would only sell them as a pair. About fifteen minutes later, another lady was trying to buy one, so Maria started looking for the other. The first buyer said she did not know where it had gone to, so Maria shouted out that the doors would be locked and no one could leave before the chandelier was found. The crowd got shifty, and suddenly the first buyer encountered the other chandelier; “like this it was!” she said, showing everyone where she found it, jammed strangely between a chair and a shelf. Maria got the door unlocked and the second buyer bought the pair of chandeliers, meanwhile the shop emptied quickly. Not many people came in for the rest of that day, while normally days that started out busy like this one, stayed busy. Both these episodes imply ranking, as the first one the employee is ranked below the customer, but in the second, all customers are ranked below the volunteers, with Maria taking the lead.

The manner in which people were treated and spoken of in the shop, serves an understanding of how my informants, even when they enter the spaces of the poor, rank themselves above them:

A doctor comes by. He throws his arms out, shouting “hallo girls!” as he enters. The shop is full, but he’s a tall man who almost appears to step over everyone else. Maria introduces him as the chief of one of the wards. The doctor starts speaking loudly about a hospitalized boy, explaining about him to Maria and me, but in the tiny shop and outside there are at least 20 people who hear him. He tells us the boy had been drinking for three days straight, and then his liver collapsed. Maria refers to something I had said earlier, about liver collapse often being a disease for alcoholics. The doctor replied “no, no, he had also been drinking before, but now he drank for three days straight, and it failed. It happens to many youngsters here!”

The doctor’s indiscreetness in the shop depicts something that occurred frequently: the patients, the helpers and other poor people who came to the shop were all ranked below my informants; discreetness and respect for these people’s privacy was not common. This particular doctor was a man in high regard among the ladies; they spoke in praise of how he usually worked 14-hour shifts interchanging between his private practice and the hospital. He himself told me in private that he thought his work at las Clinicas important, but he underlined that it was self-satisfactory because his peers praised him for it.

Alcohol abuse is common among poor Paraguayan youngsters, and many drink spirits that are not meant for drinking. The illness resulting from this makes the poor embody incidents that would not strike the elites; the poor even have diseases the elites would not get,

something commonly interpreted as a result of their “ignorance” – again, their physical being is important. This was also exemplified by who were struck by the dengue fever<sup>68</sup> a few years ago, and in 2008 were struck by the yellow fever, a disease the elites were vaccinated against, and both diseases they could get treatment for swiftly. Recall Agamben’s outline of an *anomic*, or lawless, space (Agamben 2004: 1): He argues further, drawing on Foucault’s elaboration on how security became a paradigm of government (Foucault 1991), where actually allowing catastrophes and famines to happen allows the governing to administer under suspension of the law, since normal measures can be argued not to suffice under such exceptional conditions; thus security, and/or discipline, become oppositions to law (Agamben 2004: 2)<sup>69</sup>. Agamben concludes that there is a fundamental difference between governance through law, and governance through management (*ibid.*). It will become clear throughout this thesis that arguably, Paraguayan elites govern through management: for now, linger with the idea of chaos as something that needs strict administration.

Talk of both diseases invoked discussions where the blame for illness was placed upon the poor themselves and often invoked the theme of dirt and uncleanness. For instance, Nina explained to me that what she could not understand about the poor was “why they have to be so dirty?! They could just buy a piece of clothing, nothing expensive, but a piece of clothing cost nothing here!” She added that there is plenty of water in Paraguay, so she could not understand why people did not wash themselves and their clothing, and concluded it was because the people “son brutos”, which literally translates to “are stupid” or “are brutes”, alternatively, “are beasts”. Again, the notion of beastliness was invoked. It is evident that physical appearance is very important in identifying the poor, and that this identification is blurred with other descriptions of them; sensory conditions are mixed with moral ones, implying notions of bare life (Kleinman 1997; Agamben 1998).

### *Concluding Remarks*

Reflecting on the above descriptions, structural violence too seems relevant. The distant perception of poverty, the disrespect for the private matters of the poor, and the lack of

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<sup>68</sup> The typical advice for avoiding Dengue fever, for which there is no vaccine, is to use repellent containing DEET, dress in long sleeved clothing, screen windows and doors, and clear away standing water and garbage. All these advices are harder to follow the less resources you have. Additionally, as with all disease the fever hits harder the worse your physical condition is. Bed rest is important for healing from it (NIAID), something that may lead to unemployment for many among the poor.

<sup>69</sup> I realize that I imply that the elite may go as far as intentionally spreading diseases to enable exercise of exceptional policies. I do not mean that; but it is indeed convenient to have the poor existing in such a ‘disorderly’ condition that keeping them in check justifies any kind of measure.

understanding regarding what makes the poor prioritize subsistence, through for example begging, over cleanliness or contemplate the possibility that everybody does not have access to clean water, soap, or a few Guaranies extra to purchase new clothing, etc., can be understood as consequences of structural violence, blurred over time in the messiness of everyday life. In sum, this goes to show that embodiment of inequity occurs at several levels simultaneously. Not only through direct subjugation of bodies en masse, in the discourse of some bodies being disposable and through the sovereign claims to exception (from law; Agamben 2004; Sylvester 2006; Norris 2000), but also indirectly through an allowing of the spread of diseases in large fractions of the population, as if it was a natural fact and necessary evil.

Visible markers of difference can function as elite statements of the elite's roles as both political and economic superiors, as do their relations to their employees. An additional visible marker of difference is found in consumption, and especially embodied consumption that alters physical appearances; this is therefore discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Embodied Consumption: Handling Wealth, Values and Ideals

I have so far argued that the elite's abandonment of the cityscape, the closing off of consumer spaces and the lack of *social* encounters with people of other economic classes makes the city and my informants' homes spatial manifestations of social inequality; In the centre, expensive cars drive by, but no owners of these set their feet on the pavement. Instead, these feet go shopping at malls outside the city centre, run on treadmills or walk in secure parks; in the homes. Ethnography provided so far supports Nonini's (2003) statement; a neoliberal market economy places the guilt and praise of success on individual shoulders, and those excluded from the market space are themselves blamed for their exclusion; They are lesser citizens in a new mode of governance where consumption forms the basis of citizenship (Voyce 2007: 2059). However, government by management (Agamben 2004) be it by means of consumption as basis for citizenship or otherwise, is not inherently new; a critical view on Voyce' (2007) argument is indirectly found with, among others, Sylvester (2006), who argues that in postcolonial states, what has changed is the formal policies of governing, whilst it's rationale is older. In this sense, one may argue that neoliberal policies function as a guise for the same mode of exploitation that existed during colonial times; the horse is the same, it's name new, and for instance as Sharp (2000) argued, one has seen a legalisation of slavery in domestic work. The outward positive discourse in both colonial ordering (Howesbook 2006) and development policies that aim at "modernisation" (Escobar 2004; Nonini 2003), thus exist under the guise of enhancing "freedom" for those subjected, whilst the question of what freedom this really is, remains blur.

#### *Connecting Space, Consumption and Bodies*

Talking with Ib over lunch one day, I comment that there are a lot of pretty girls in Paraguay. Ib swiftly replied that there were more in Argentina, and added "but maybe it's just because there you see them, here you don't". I asked what he meant by that, and he continued: "In Argentina, the pretty girls have to work, you see them in the city, they walk, take the bus even. Here, the pretty girls all drive, or have drivers and guards, so you can't see them. They're never on the street. In Argentina, it's not divided like here. Maybe that's why."

This excerpt goes to show the immediate connection between spatial segregation, consumption and bodies: What is striking in Ib's comment, is not only that he describes the

use of infrastructure in Paraguay as different from that in Argentina, but also that when I said “pretty girls in Paraguay”, it seemed so unlikely to him that I could mean anyone but the middle and upper-class ones, that he did not even think it a possibility. His notion of aesthetic exclusion was commonplace; one can say that beauty by Ib’s categories demands such expenditure that it is only attainable for those of high economic strata.

If we follow the logic that bodies have an optimum position in segregation and that segregation is intertwined with consumption, it seems fruitful to pursue the notion of segregation towards embodied consumption. This allows an understanding of bodies as “renewed”, shaped and desired through commodification, and underlines the interpretation of bodies as demarcating economic and social domination (Bourdieu 2007; Sharp 2000: 292). The physical stigmas on the poor as dirty, lazy and/or criminal, in play with elite bodies being modified through exercise, high maintenance and cosmetic surgery, ensures clear physical differences between the privileged and the poor.<sup>70</sup> Observable bodily modifications among the elites and verbal statements like Anita’s: “being beautiful is part of being a woman, it’s a woman’s obligation to take care of herself!” invoke two means of physical demarcation; availability of consumption, i.e. economic freedom and time for such consumption and also, an obligation “the dirty poor” do not fulfil. I will therefore contrast the physical stigmas on the poor to the elite’s views of their own bodies.

### ***Bodies of Praise***

A phenomenon occurring in both “la Nacion” and “ABC Color”, the two largest newspapers of Paraguay, is the “paginas sociales” (“social pages”). The pages are placed in the centre of the papers and consist mostly of pictures and short notes on parties, dinners and a few “who’s out partying?” reports. They show two symptomatic factors in “the life of the privileged” in Paraguay. Firstly, the people in the pictures are always well groomed and in exclusive, normally expensive, settings. Secondly, the phenomenon illuminates the vast attention given to peoples’ appearances and whereabouts. The focus on ‘the privileged peoples’ way of life is far greater than that given to ‘the commoners’ life. The people who figure in these “social pages” are not necessarily famous for anything they do: most are simply photographed because they are beautiful and rich enough to be at the scene of something social.

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<sup>70</sup> To my knowledge, the technological modification of bodies does not occur among the poor in Paraguay, although it has evidently become a trend among the poor in the neighbouring country Brazil (Edmonds 2007).



Interestingly though, these scenes are, as Ib contended regarding the nightclub VIP zones, not just about money:

Over lunch with one of the families, a restaurant where you can only reserve a table if you have a well-known last-name came up. Anita laughed a bit at this, and said “I wonder how they promote that place!” Then she added that everywhere else they let in everyone who makes a reservation, something that brings them a variable clientele. I asked her if these restaurants were not so expensive that the clientele was automatically “screened”, by prices. “Yes” Anita answered, “But there are uneducated people with money too, so I suppose that is what they want to avoid...”<sup>71</sup>

### *Modifying Bodies*

The sociologist Brooks argues that cosmetic surgery in North America is portrayed as accessible and unthreatening, and embodies scientific progress and innovation, and praise women who embrace new technologies without fear or hesitation (2004: 215-216, 218). It is thus possible to argue that the frequent surgical interventions in the bodies of my informants transform their bodies into more modern, ordered and cultivated bodies than the bodies of the poor. Arguably, beauty becomes more stringently understood with the increased use of cosmetic surgery. Brooks holds that it also creates more “liberal understandings of ugliness” and “produces a fundamental story of sameness versus difference, a story of encroaching aesthetic conformity” (Brooks 2004: 225).

The first time I pursued the subject of cosmetic surgery, I was with Anita:

We sat in the living room, having a glass of juice and sporadically glimpsing over to the TV. Anita’s daughters in law and daughters all have silicon breast implants, and Anita herself has had several cosmetic surgeries done. I started saying I had noticed a lot of people among the upper class have had surgery done. Anita looked at me strangely, and said with a pitched, irritated voice “the lower class??” It appears I used the word “bajo” instead of “alto”. We concluded I meant alto, and she replied the question with a “yes”. I tried to ask why she thought it was so, but Anita simply went “well, you’ll see! When you turn 50 there are a lot of things that need to be corrected! I have only done it twice.” I asked how, and she showed me how she has been given a facelift “you should see the picture! They take a photo before, to see what they need to do. I was horrible! This was hanging!” She points to the skin under her chin, and continues: “This was like this” Dragging down the skin under her eyes and eyelids to show me: “But I have only done it twice!” Her daughter in law never interrupted us, and Anita quickly left the subject for the film showing on TV.

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<sup>71</sup> Admittedly, I went with young informants to this restaurant several times; they were not the ones avoided.

Through the conversation, it became clear that Anita regarded surgery as a necessity. Later she told me that she had first been frightened to have it done, because she did not like the thought of being unconscious. Her motivation for perusing the operations in the end was that she “refused to be seen as a coward”, a reasoning that is strikingly in accordance with Brooks’ (2004) finding. Paradoxically, Anita was of the few who nearly never used her continuously available security guards, for, she said “My body is so old and I use so many medicines that if they kidnap me, I am going to be dead within forty-eight hours anyway. And no one is going to pay ransom for my dead body!” She hence seemed to believe that since there was nothing to get out of her or her family for her body, there was no real risk of kidnapping.

This rationale, I think, made her feel carelessly safe, something she clearly embraced as she often rolled down her window at traffic lights to give money to kids or by fruits from street vendors. She even took me for a ride through the outskirts of los Bañados once, simply because I asked if she knew what it looked like. She had never been there before, and after we had driven for about ten minutes, the road suddenly ended. We spent quite some time turning the car around again in the dim afternoon light, and more and more inhabitants of the area showed up to have a look at the luxurious sports car with shaded glasses and all, bumping around on their muddy tracks. I think I was more startled by all the attention than Anita.

Images of “the ideal body” are made continuously, through a “flow” of ideals forwarded by markets, media and health industry, but also by health morals and perhaps influential peers. I suggest that in Paraguay, the elites differentiate themselves from the population at large by embodying their consumer patterns; nearly all my informants took consumerism to a new level through cosmetic surgery.

The key issue here is that my informants strive for an “ideal body”; slim, big-breasted and fit, under conditions the poor cannot access; they consume what the poor cannot consume. This striving for distinction from proximate and outnumbering others, ends up creating new physical features by which the consumers can be recognised. In the Paraguayan context of (fairly) homogenous phenotypes this consumption modifies bodies to such an extent that I suggest the result simulates racial differences, thus perhaps invoking the other than phenotypical signs of “mestizaje”; those of being “cultivated” (de la Cadena 2000).

Brooks argues that cosmetic surgery makes the non-surgical face and body stand out or even become “abnormal” (2004: 225). Edmonds (2007) shows that in Brazil cosmetic surgery, or “plástica”, has become available to the poor through public hospitals, under the

claim that “the poor have the right to be beautiful”<sup>72</sup>. Edmonds claims that in Brazil’s neoliberal economy, where economic inequity thrives, beauty practices offers one way in which new markets of work and “fantasies” of social mobility and modernity meets (2007: 366). In his opinion, bodily ideals have become part of a national body ideal where “a range of problems with diverse social origins manifest themselves as aesthetic defects, which are diagnosed and treated by the beauty industry” (2007: 365). This constitutes a similarity with Brooks’ findings, but seems starkly different from my observations in Paraguay: As opposed to both Brooks’ and Edmonds’ findings, for now at least, cosmetic surgery is an elite perk in Paraguay. Thus the non-surgically modified face and body can only be perceived as abnormal in elite circles. However, in these circles it does seem abnormal, as exemplified by Angelica, a woman in her early thirties, who stated to me “these breasts are my own, and I’m so proud of them; everyone thinks I have implants!”

Edmonds finally argues that cosmetic surgery in Brazil finds its legitimacy mostly through one key point: the increase of patients’ self-esteem (2007: 366). Self esteem constitute a factor which legitimizes cosmetic surgery among my informants as well:

I asked Ib what he thought of plastic surgery: “A lot of people do it”, he replied. I said I had noticed, and that it did not really appeal to me. “Why?” asked Ib. I said I found people look very similar after surgery, and that it was not “my kind of beauty”. “Oh,” Ib said; “a lot of people do it here. It’s become a regular present, girls get it from their parents, when they’re 15 or 16; I’m like, come on, let your body mature a bit, and then go ahead!” I asked if he meant it was too early for the girls, or if he did not like it at all: “No, no, I like it, but not too early. If it helps people’s self-esteem, it’s good. After all, I’m not the one to talk; my girlfriend’s had a nose job and a boob-job. And I can’t blame her, she had THE UGLIEST nose!” I: “Yeah?” He confirmed; “Seriously, it was so ugly!” I asked him why men do not do it then. “I suppose, here in our culture, we’re so macho, that if you did, you’d be seen as really gay! Maybe some do it, but they wouldn’t tell you, they’d be so ashamed!”

Ib here shows a quite stringent understanding of beauty and ugliness, and seems to imply that self-esteem for girls necessarily depends on physical features. At the same time, he could be implying that even if the same goes for men, they will- or should- hide it, as it would not be in accordance with the “macho” ideal of manhood, where the man is everything opposite of the woman; he should not conform to or care about physical ideals in a womanly manner.

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<sup>72</sup> Edmond further holds that this bodily ideal is a result of Brazil’s national beauty myth, where racial mixing supposedly gives favourable results in female bodies “blessed with small waists” (2007: 372). Sometimes, however, these bodies need corrective surgery, as with the operations known as “correction of the Negroid nose” and the use of silicon to enlarge female buttocks (Edmonds 2007: 365, 371).

### *Consumption and the Female Body*

Where the examples set by the leisure class retains its imperative force in the regulation of the conventionalities. [...] the tradition that the woman is a chattel – has retained its hold in greatest vigour. [...] this tradition says that the woman, being a chattel, should consume only what is necessary to her sustenance – except so far as her further consumption contributes to the comfort or the good repute of her master.

-Veblen ([1925]1970: 62-63)

Veblen's Theory of the Leisure class seems applicable to an analysis of my empirical material although in one important aspect it is contradictory; his statements on conspicuous consumptions are first and foremost applied to the role of the gentleman, and the gentleman's consumption is presented as superior to that of the (gentle-) woman. I hold that conspicuous consumption is at least as prevalent among my female informants as my male informants; Consumption is much more boldly exhibited through clothing and plastic surgery with the former than with the latter. Perceptions of the female body as primarily a subject of male desire, reflects Weismantel's (2001) statement, that females exist at least in public space, to entertain male gazes<sup>73</sup>. I was warned by both Aurora and Bella independently not to speak to men alone, as it would get their wife or girlfriend jealous, and the men would think I was "promiscuous".

When Bella warned me not to interview Nicholas, a doctor we both knew, on my own, she said he was "a known womaniser" ("un seductor de mujeres"), and might want something else from me than an interview. According to Bella, Nicholas had a beautiful wife, so she did not know why he committed adultery, but thought it was because of "a male need to fulfil sexual desires". She thought this was especially a problem when the men had secretaries, because "the secretary was always there, with nice make-up, well perfumed, and without problems." Therefore, the responsibility of a woman to keep herself well and change the patterns of life so that the man did not get bored was very great, she thought. When I told her I was used to speaking to men without it implying anything but speaking, she replied "Yes, yes, Line, but here it is not like that..."

The general view of my informants seemed to be like Bella's: Women are responsible for keeping their men excited and interested in them. I find Veblen's words on how women "should" consume only more than needed if it pleases their master strikingly in accordance with this view. For instance, Anita stated that her husband had initiated her first surgery

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<sup>73</sup> Note the opposition to the gaze on the poor; they are there as disruptive, whilst women are there as an aesthetic contribution. Both instances however, invoke a notion of seeing humans as objects, echoing Sharp's (2000) notion of the commodification of bodies.

because he “saw she needed it”. Seemingly vain, it can also demonstrate an embodiment of resources; they can afford to get it done, and it distinguishes them from those who cannot. Intriguingly, since Anita has never worked, it is most likely her husband’s wealth that is exhibited through her body – she is then, a chattel, in Veblen’s (1970) terminology<sup>74</sup>.

### *(Persistent) Classifications of Bodies*

Perspectives on the body in anthropology have focused especially the problematic of the dichotomy of the body to all things mindful, the so-called Cartesian dichotomy (Sharp 2002: 289-90; Lock 1993: 134). As Lock describes, this dichotomy has been theoretically thoroughly questioned, forcing foci that emphasize bodily matters as cultural constructs in addition to being ‘natural’ or ‘objective’, something that allows reflexions on several other dichotomies like nature/culture and self/other too (Lock 1993: 134).

Now, these reflexions happen within the realm of science, within philosophy and anthropology. It may still be fruitful to question whether these reflexions happen outside the sciences too; if they really did, would biopolitics be possible? If dichotomies have been immersed in every day experiences, actions and ideologies, a purely theoretical analysis that takes reflexions around these dichotomies for granted, may stray from empirical facts. This implies that seeing the local elites view of poor Paraguayans through Lock’s (1993) theoretically developed glasses might blur the picture; Dichotomies persist among my informants, and facilitates the ease with which they speak of self and other as separate, distinguished by perceived opposites like culture versus nature and mind versus body; they to a large extent see their proximate poor as belonging to the latter, and that being a natural fact. Following this line of thought, there is a reproduction of the image of the other as belonging to a category that holds nature and body and *not* culture<sup>75</sup>. The poor seem perceived as one big body, one group, whether alone or assembled, women or men, children or elders; my informants themselves claim to hold culture, as opposed to “their others”, who are claimed not to.

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<sup>74</sup> Note also that Anita’s husband was “extremely dominant” – something she said, and I observed to be a just description. However, in avoiding conflicts with him, she said to me that one of the fundamental lessons in her life was that she, to live as freely as possible, had to “pick her battles”. Thus, she obeyed by her husband’s restrictions in some fields, for instance always having lunch at home with him and not going out at night without being accompanied by someone in her husband’s trust, like their sons or other preferably male relative, but had her freedom to fly out of the country in his aeroplane to go shopping with his money or vacationing occasionally. Their relation may be seen as Foucault’s (1991) “perpetual battle” and Anita’s handling of it as a “doxic” one, as especially understood by Auyero (1999) regarding the clients’ “defence” of the patron-client relation.

<sup>75</sup> As noted previously, this distinction is historically common in attempts at “ordering” modernising” and “developing” the world by colonial ideas of measurement (see for instance Howes 2006).

What I find critical in Lock's (1993) assumption that the time of dichotomies is over, is not that anthropology has moved on, rather that such a theoretical assumption may undermine the fact that people still classify the world in dichotomies, maybe especially so at a distance. Assuming that distance is what makes brut classifications possible, the maintenance of dichotomies is relevant to the investigation of persistent poverty.

Classifications of bodily fluids can give a useful take on the body-mind dichotomy. As shown in the following excerpt, these classifications are strong, but used both in the support of and opposition to differentiation. The following conversation occurred an early, rainy and cold morning in the car, heading for the hospital with Maria and Teresa. It started when Teresa asked me with whom I had gone to the cinema the night before, and I told her it was someone who was in Paraguay visiting an adopted Paraguayan who had come back to find his parents:

"Look", Teresa said "I have a friend who really wanted children, and they didn't get any, so they said, why don't we take one of these poor creatures? [Meaning a poor Paraguayan child]"<sup>76</sup> She says that these were very rich people that have more than enough money, and continues: "So, they did. A year later the woman got pregnant, and had a girl, so the two girls grew up with the exact same possibilities, good education, they went all over that world, everything... And now, their girl, she's a lawyer, specialized in what do I know...But the Paraguayan, she wanted to have a kiosk!" Maria breaks into the conversation, saying: "Yes, blood is not water!" "No" Teresa agrees, "Such are the Paraguayans! She could have done anything, and wanted a kiosk! Blood is always more than water."

"Another friend of mine, she adopted a baby too." Teresa continues, "Then, when the girl was sixteen-seventeen years old, she said she wanted to see her family! The mother tried to talk to her, but okay, she wanted to see her biological mother. They found her, and the girl went to visit. It did a lot of harm, it generated a big crisis!" Maria and Teresa start talking back and forth as to what reason this might have, and Teresa finally says that when the girl saw her mothers house, "with no roof, earth-floor, no proper walls" she must have felt all the opportunities she had had "were unfair or something". She keeps saying that it was a big crisis, a long crisis. As though she wants to give me an opposition to it, Teresa says "But, I have another friend too, and she adopted three boys. The one in the middle said to her that he never wanted to meet his family, "because she was his mother!" this Maria agrees to, and turns to me saying "porque el trato continuo engera cariño!" [literally: because continuous treatment engenders care]. I ask her what she means by saying that, and she says "it's like with a secretary: that's why you don't want your husband to stay too much with his secretary, you have to be careful!" I ask what she means, and she says: "Because, they spend a lot of time together, maybe they share problems, share stress, every day, and they develop cariño. It's a reason to be careful!"

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<sup>76</sup> Note that adopting a poor child was not seen as problematic in itself, as Casaús Arzú found it to be among the Guatemalan upper class (2007: 209-211). There, it seems, the problem in doing so rested with the indigenous being seen as an inferior "race". Still, when Teresa connects the child's ambitions as a grown-up to her "poor" blood, it seems the judgement is the same; one cannot, apparently, change "the ways of the poor", just as Casaús Arzú contended the lack of hope for changing the "indio", as I described in chapter two (2007: 205-207).

Here, the ordinariness with which classifications are used is important. Teresa and Maria agree that biological inheritance is inevitable in the first of their three stories, an aspect which they connect, not only to bodily fluids, but also to nationality. The matter of nationality as bearing certain traits, mostly the same traits as the poor and beastly, is paradoxical, for Maria and Teresa are Paraguayans too. In the second story, adherence to inheritance is spoken of differently: what first seems to be a story of a young girl ‘searching for roots’, turns out to be a tragedy once they are ‘found’. From this story it seems Teresa and Maria recognise that the environment also influences the development of a child.

In the third story, the environment shifts from being secondary to being primary, and Maria’s statement: “blood is not water” suddenly seems beside the point, as continuous care is ‘everything’. The fact that Maria explains this through the analogy of the relation female secretary – male boss may seem odd, but if seen as an analogy depicting a person’s dedication to others as created through long span interaction, it seems less strange and reflects Bella’s warning given above.

Dichotomies should, according to Agamben, be understood as tensions; as di-polarities instead of di-chotomies (Agamben 2004: 3). What this means is that the private/public, the house/city, exception/rule are all existing in tension, and are distinguished interdependently. Think of this as a reason why my informants’ houses incorporate zones of messiness and dirt. Additionally, having servants living in their houses while not recognising them as equal beings, takes the polarity, or tension, home, thus “naturalising” the order inherent in their world even in the most intimate of spaces.

### ***Docile Bodies?***

As outlined in the introduction, structural violence provides one insight to understand inequity. Whether including state policies or not, structural violence transforms individual bodies into *bodies en mass* and deprive them of individuality. It is tempting to assert that in Paraguay the poor are made to look docile through oblivion. The poor are hardly there to the people of power, making their existence resemble bare life, a result of prevailing structural violence. The poor are noticed for their uselessness, they are disposable, while simultaneously incorporated and necessary in the elite lifeworld, just as Agamben argues bare life exists inherently in the life of the state (Agamben 1998; ten Bos 2005:17).

“A body is docile”, Foucault writes, “that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.” (1991b: 180). The word docile translates to passive, compliant or tame; tame being a word my informants frequently used in describing the condition in which the Spaniards found the Guaraní Indians upon arrival in the region. This, according to my informants, assured the ease with which the Spaniards came to rule the territory. Strikingly, they also called the Guaranies “wild” – but as I came to understand it, it then meant “uncultured”, not “brutal”, a term now applied to the poor. This understanding is tied to colonial times, but it might be useful to think of the Paraguayan poor today as subjected by the same means.

As we have seen, elite bodies in the notion of commodification are docile, but I sustain that they individually choose to be. On the other hand, the bodies of the Paraguayan poor may be seen as docile even if not transformed or improved, for they are subjected, and occasionally used. If we follow Sharp’s argument, domestic employees are subject to legalized slavery (2000:293). Slavery, in the ‘traditional sense’ is moreover often connected to colonization, and both the subjectification inherent in colonization and that in domestic employment “potentially dehumanize individuals and categories of persons in the name of profit” (Sharp 2000: 293). Sylvester maintains that European capitalist development: “...featured body regimes to regulate citizenship, marriage, education, health, sport and labour, often on the basis of ‘rules’ about what was appropriate for one’s race, class and/or gender.” And she continues, citing Foucault: “For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence.” (Sylvester 2006: 67). As we have seen with Agamben (1998), the creation of biopolitics may be traced further back, thus Sylvester (2006) somehow reads Agamben slightly superfluously.<sup>77</sup>

### *Tension: The Physicality of Right to and Deprivation of Power*

I think it safe to claim that a degree of worship of “beautiful”, wealthy, powerful people is a transnational and historically well-known phenomenon (Hart 2002). The Paraguayan elite, may, in other words, constitute and confirm their position through displays of wealth and

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<sup>77</sup> The claim that body politics and European capitalist development was interdependent seems reasonable, but that this body politic is a new or inherently European capitalist phenomenon does not (Agamben 1998). Keeping its subjects docile, regimes have always occasionally been “body regimes” in the above sense. On the grounds of this, it is fruitful to argue that people in power have always, in different forms and through different claims to sovereignty, deprived others of individual political being. I do not undermine the importance of the systematization of use of others that developed grand scale during colonial times. Nevertheless, to claim that the idea of actual sovereignty by biopolitical means is new implies that empires other places have not existed as equal to the European ones Agamben (1998) describes, a critique long ago noted by Wolf (1982).



beauty. These displays offer a “soft” approach to their “right” to power. Being physically “superior” confirms that they are “born to power”. Recall Orwell’s (2005) argument of being distinguished by other means than money, namely that of genteel behaviour, and add to that that physical appearances are depicted as important for both the elite and the poor, reinforcing bodily demarcations of difference (Bourdieu 2007).

Not only ideals of fitness, modernity and progress regulate consumer bodies. The shape and state of bodies is something that the state ideology too is involved in<sup>78</sup>; in the nationally owned “Parque de Salud” the paths are aligned with signs that say: “Not just other people’s children become alcoholics! Talk to your child”, “In this slope people with cardio conditions must walk slowly!” “Smoking endangers your health!”, “Eat food with less grease!”, “Peel the chicken before you grill or cook it” and “All success starts with self-confidence”.

The instructions on how to regulate and maintain your mind, body and health as well as the advice on how to raise your children, illustrates an attempted cultivation of the audience<sup>79</sup>. However, this cultivation only reaches the segments of the population that have leisure time and id cards, excluding most domestic employees, slum-dwellers and rural Paraguayans. Interestingly, as I will get back to in the next chapter, the poor are frequently claimed to be undernourished and therefore stupid; Aurora explained to me once that when her grandparents got to Latin America, they were poor, but they knew what to eat and how to take care of themselves, her grandparents were therefore never malnourished. This sort of reasoning hangs well on the frequent complaint of “the poor’s lack of knowledge” and also fits an argument that holds health and nutrition individual responsibilities that the poor should know how to take on<sup>80</sup>.

Adopting the understanding of bodies, as argued by Foucault (1991b) (where the body as invested by power relations, form part of a political economy) it is interesting to note that body politics expressed in the abovementioned information campaign does not reach the population at large. The political economy of bodies rests its legitimacy on a certain type of scientific and moral reasoning, something that is essential to the Foucauldian notion of

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<sup>78</sup> As Abram (*in* Krohn-Hansen 2001: 80) notes, one cannot separate “the state” from “the social”; as I show in the conclusive chapter, the elite *act as* performers of state policies, thereby being the social actors of the state. One may thus see this “state ideology” as developed by the elite and performed in the public, but exclusive space (it is fenced and guarded, and a place one can only frequent if one has leisure time and an identity card), of the “Parque de Salud”.

<sup>79</sup> Recall the notion of government by management (Agamben 2004, 1998). This in play with a notion of cultivation, which reminds us of both Veblen’s (1970) and Bourdieu’s (2007) stress on demarcation by taste, makes these signs powerful.

<sup>80</sup> As elaborated in chapter one, many of the Paraguayan poor are landless: the country has one of the most unequal distributions of land in Latin America, therefore they do not have access to fertile land – something Auroras grandparents and peers did. Additionally, this statement indicates a moral judgement of the poor, something further discussed in chapter five.

'biopower', a notion that in its ultimate logic can be used to sanitize a population of "polluting" elements (Foucault 1991b: 170-172, Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2005: 9). As we have seen, the poor are seen as polluting elements. Arguably, through a notion of "biopower" they are rendered in a state of bare life.

### *Sacrificed versus Disposable Bodies: a Historical/Monumental account*

To draw a line between protest and obedience is highly circumstantial. It depends on what is defined as resistance and when resistance crosses over to protest and potential danger for the governing. Resisting bodies may be disposable, as for instance the bodies of criminals. A docile sacrificeable body is invested with a meaning that exhausts its individual being in a positive sense, as for example a soldier's body sacrificed in war.

The bodies lost in the two Paraguayan wars, are portrayed as sacrificed in Paraguay. These bodies have been given their own monument, the "Panteon de los Heroes" (literally, the pantheon, or memorial temple, of heroes), at the central square of downtown Asunción. The monument forms a rectangle with a church-like spire on top. Inside there is an open crypt containing coffins of anonymous soldiers who died in the wars. The coffins are covered by Paraguayan flags, on top of which are signs saying "Soldado Paraguayo" (Paraguayan Soldier), and aligning these are other coffins and memorial scripts of known military generals. Notably, the Generals are recognised individually, whilst the soldiers are only "soldiers".

The room has a big altar, facing the door on the opposite side of the room. On the altar is the crucifixion of Christ, below a larger figure of Mary with a band of the Paraguayan flag crossing her chest and two angels flanking her. You can walk around the crypt and written on brass plates hanging on all surrounding walls, are texts describing the heroic acts of dead Paraguayans. Outside the wide double doors of the "Panteon" two men from the National Guard stand guard. The dead heroes inside the "Panteon", individuals who fought in wars for the Paraguayan nation, have been sacrificed and hence become sacred bodies. This distinguishes them sharply from bodies lost and not found during the wars, bodies lost at other times through disease or hunger, and bodies intentionally disposed of, as during Stroessner's regime.

The placement and regard of dead bodies are arguably important for a national understanding of common descent and localise particular ideas about social relations, rights and unity (Krohn-Hansen 2001: 83), thereby also forming ideas of exclusion. The "Panteon de los Heroes" is a monument celebrating not only sacrificed bodies, but also the nation they

sacrificed themselves for, and those who were – and are – the nations primary defenders; military elites. This sort of national celebration: the monuments of the past, confirm and establish elites' authority, and may, in effect, imply “a mass popularisation of elite tactics” (Herzfeld *in* Shore 2002: 13). The national monuments' affiliation with religion, coupled with ideas of what bodies are “worthy of worship” and placed centrally in the city<sup>81</sup>, is a powerful enforcer of Paraguayan (military and religious) history. It does not recollect the bodies lost outside this heroic history: the Stroessner regime saw resistant bodies as potential threats against his regime,<sup>82</sup> and sacrificed these for the good of the nation too. However, these bodies did not fight for the “right” cause, they were not heroes; they were thus not sacrificed, but could be killed with impunity, as bare life.

The threshold between docile and resistant moves parallel to the administration of power, indicating that more bodies are perceived as politically docile in today's Paraguay than Stroessner's. This secures life from political persecution, but cannot secure life from oblivion and neglect; it cannot protect life from becoming ‘bare life’. Foucault's focus on how different institutionalized forms of punishment are informed by power-knowledge, may illuminate which bodies are subject to structural violence, or creation of bare life, too; Agamben speaks of this developing first in concentration camps, where those inside great fault was being invested with the truth that they were the same, belonging to one group, deprived of legal or political existence (Agamben 2004: 2). This is furthered to the exercise of punishment in normalised and more or less permanent states of exception where I argue that structural violence is accepted as normal, and therefore the existence of bare life is naturalized.

Arguably, Paraguayan elites order space and manage themselves in tension with communities and collectives of poor people rather than with individual subjects. The “worship” of the powerful and beautiful in contrast to the physically bound stigma on the poor, construct some bodies as less valuable than other bodies; as Ek (2006: 364) notes in interpreting Agamben (1998), one of the fundamental activities of power, is to produce bare life. The legitimation of this production is found in emic versions of history that underline the disposability of some bodies, having normalized over a long span of time the loss of citizens. Moreover, Aurora, when she explained the destitution of the population said, “most Paraguayans have blood of indians, prostitutes and bandits”; thus connecting physical

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<sup>81</sup> Recall also that Guano (2002: 181) depicts the city as “simultaneously a locus, a medium and tool of hegemony” and holds: “A fine blend of persuasion and coercion is always at work in the organization of a city's architectural setting”.

<sup>82</sup> See for instance Hicks (1967), Nickson & Lambert (2002) for literary confirmation. High surveillance and curfews during Stroessner were frequently recollected by all of my informants old enough to remember it.

inheritance and current misfortune, as did Maria and Teresa when telling me the story of the adopted girl. Thus, they actively participate – perhaps in partial oblivion - in the reproduction of collectives of disposable bodies, into which the poor are fitted.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Could it be that the accessibility of used bags with logos, cheap (-ish) digital cameras and fake branded clothing from local markets has simply moved Asuncion's elites need to distinguish themselves from "mass culture" to a new level? As shown in chapter two, (conspicuous) consumption is of high importance, and as Veblen (1970) held, goods lose their status when they lose their "distinctiveness". This is echoed by Appadurai, who holds that rapid changes in consumption can appear threatening to those in power if consumption is not inspired and regulated by them (2001:28). When objects are put to use or displayed in contexts where they are thought not to belong, they may indeed appear "morally shocking" (Appadurai 2001: 28). This explains why my informants assert that mobile phones and digital cameras held by "rancheros", drivers and maids, must be derived through theft.

The construction of a new consumerist city along side the old, is parallel to the production of new consumerist body ideals and both instances assure that the privileged has bodies and spaces of consumption inaccessible to the poor. Ordering and cultivating both space and bodies, signals difference that in its ultimate stand becomes political, as Appadurai (2001) holds; the elites define what is indeed cultivation and through that they uphold positions in society. However, I maintain that this notion of politics is politics in its broadest possible sense, and a politics often enforced unconsciously.

The following is a lengthy bit of an open, recorded interview I did with Maria, after having known her for more than three months. Her association/reasoning formed the conversation to include both subjects already dealt with and what is dealt with in the following chapters. I therefore conclude this chapter with it:

Line: "Do you think there is more delinquency now, more crime, than before?"

Maria "Yes, there is more, because there are more people... I don't know..."

Line: "But why is that?"

Maria: "I don't know, but Line, I think that it's so in all of Latin America; you go to Argentina, and you hear the same problems, you go to Brazil you hear the same problems, I don't know what it is, if it's the values, the consumer society, that we are not prepared for that society of consumption..."

Line: "What-?"

Maria: "The consumer society? Consumption, eeh.."

Line: "Yes, but why does that influence crime?"

Maria: "Because the people want what they can't have."

Line: "So they rob?"

Maria: "Those same? Of course, because they do anything to have for instance a cell-phone. If you don't have a cell-phone, you're no-one, if you don't have a Nike sneaker, you're no-one, and the kids want." She goes silent for a second, then continues: "Why the prostitution? How many women sell themselves, how many girls model, to be able to have things? So, what is it that we don't have; values. I think that's what it is!"

Line: "But do you think that the values now are more...?"

Maria: "Values are worn down (se perdió muchísimo los valores), we have a lot of negative values (antivalores). The 'to be' is not as important as the 'to have'. There is more importance given to having than to being."

Line: "And before it wasn't like this?"

Maria: "No. Before, people were careful with their names. Until now, at a certain level of people, at a certain level...you knew what people thought of you; 'oh, you're father is a narcotics dealer', you understand? 'he's a bandit'; but for some people it doesn't matter [now], because they have a level [of income] that gives a very easy life. You see that a lot in our society!"

Line: "I don't often ask how people earn their money..."

Maria: "Hmm...there are many resources, and we have people who use all of them...but I think that's all over Latin America! It's just here, since we're a small society, you see it better, because you know who is who. I'm going to tell you, Line, before, when I was 17, 18 years old, I went down the Calle Palma [former main shopping ore of down-town Asunción] in the centre, what used to be the centre, and you saluted, you knew the people, you went out, and every time you met friends, in the street. And now, I go to Calle Palma, and I don't know anyone! No-one I know."

Line: "When did it change?"

Maria: "I don't know. Little by little, I have lived here, in this zone for 26 years, since more or less then it's changed...around 30 years ago, around then. But it went increasingly, increasingly because the economic situation changed. It changed a lot, because a lot of money entered."

Line: "So it influenced the infrastructure too?"

Maria: "Yes. And then the values changed a lot too. It became money, money, money."

She went silent for a while. I hear myself going "hm" on the tape, before Maria continues:

"Because you can say, there are two totally different epochs. Before I tell you, the people...Look, I remember, when I was in college, an aeroplane crashed, with...with...with contrabandists, I don't remember exactly, but it was the husband of one of my classmates' sister. He died in the crash, and when he was found they saw he was smuggling. In those times being a contrabandist was being a 'sinvergüenza' (shameless person), a contrabandist is a person who smuggles and don't pay taxes, right, but afterwards, it developed into a thing like this, a ...!"

Line: "Normalized-?"

Maria: "It's not normal, it is a crime, right, but before, it was all secret, understand, because it was seen as bad, but now...because of this I say values have changed a lot. Unfortunately, for the children, it's a bad example, to see those extravagant people, who have money, but in what manner did they get them!?"

Line: "Hum..."

Maria: "You see, it's not easy to educate in values now. The children see different things that the others have, you give them one, and they want another."

## Chapter five:

### *The Poor's Dirt and Ignorance: Lack of knowledge and morals*

As illustrated, both space and spatialized practises incorporate notions of poverty and prosperity. This chapter pursues the logics behind the reproduction of difference, which forms the backdrop of spatial, social and bodily segregation. As Kleinman states, people incorporate social memory and embody society's norms to the extent that it forms "normality", creating a bridge between transpersonal and bodily processes (Kleinman 1997: 324)<sup>83</sup>.

The ethnographic focus of this chapter is on differentiation based on notions of education, class and morality, that is, segregation based on (learnt and) subjective norms (D'Andrade 1995: 399). In understanding distancing social phenomena and the justifications employed to defend these, access and exclusion, which is not solely based on economic superiority, is investigated. Social capital, gained through acquaintances and education will show one practical field of inclusion and exclusion.

Bourdieu defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition"<sup>84</sup> (in Portes 1998: 4). Portes (1998) holds that social networks are constructed and upheld with investments that institutionalise group relations, making them reliable sources of other benefits. This notion of social networks provides a useful backdrop for understanding the following ethnography.

#### *A Case of Verifying the Population's Ignorance*

I had not been in Paraguay very long before I came aware of the Medias depiction of "people's ignorance". With the upcoming elections and several outbreaks of yellow fever, the ground lay clear for harsh words and what I first perceived as somewhat extreme views, but that turned out to be quite common. One of my first encounters with this was when Aurora decided to explain me "a thing or two" about the Paraguayan population. She had found a

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<sup>83</sup> Note that Kleinman is both anthropologist and psychiatrist.

<sup>84</sup> The term "recognition" is an interesting one: as Anderson points out; recognition is pointless to the construction of individual self- confidence, respect and esteem, unless it comes from someone whom one views as deserving recognition (1995: xviii). This implies that my informants, although always treated with great care by employees, might not experience this care, or "respect", as recognition. Likewise, the employees, although they are given grad responsibility, might not experience recognition, since they in other aspects are not recognised.

comment on the spread of the yellow fever in the newspaper<sup>85</sup>, written by a well-known Paraguayan columnist, businessman and politician. She read it out loud in Spanish while translating directly into English. The column describes this man's views on two alternatives in fighting the fever: to remove all monkeys and mosquitoes that transmit it, or vaccinate the whole population:

The column states that the yellow fever is best countered by vaccination, for the Paraguayan "uncultured, not educated, in general dirty" population, live surrounded by "infectious monkeys on huge overgrown properties in the cities, owned by rich people with no intention of cleaning them up, and a city-council with traditionally slow reactions" could not otherwise be guarded from the fever's further spread. Since Paraguayan people were "dirty and experts in dirtying" and "have been so for centuries", they had poisoned all clean water sources with garbage, and made the removal of all the monkeys and mosquitoes impossible. The columnist held these were "indisputable facts that will not disappear over night with little messages through the radio, television spots or politically tainted speeches." Quoting a known Asunción' university professor's reaction to the previous year's outbreak of Dengue Fever, he writes: "No se preocupen, in este país no progresa ni la peste" (literally: "Don't worry, in this country not even the pest will progress").

In the continuation, he claims the Colorados spent all the money reserved for vaccination on their election campaign, and that this was why medical experts advised to only vaccinate in high-risk zones. Adding "I am probably ignorant on the topic of medicine, but I know our peoples reality", he says the dengue's spread had stopped only because of the cold winter. He then poses a rhetorical question: "will such a cold save them again?", and finishes by saying that those who cannot afford mosquito nets, repellent and air-condition will take their kid to the doctor and have it vaccinated, but if they then ask why their (dead) relative was considered outside the high-risk zone and not vaccinated, the doctor will simply reply with a shrug: "fue la voluntad de Dios" (it was God's will).

Aurora thinks his claims are sharp, but agrees that the Paraguayan people are "very dirty and only wash where they are seated, just chuff garbage slightly away and there they sit, in their laziness!" When she went to school, Aurora says, they had a subject called "civic education" where they learnt about the Paraguayan constitution and their rights and obligations: "now people only know their rights, and not their obligations! People now are without culture, without knowledge and education; they are ignorant!" Two of Aurora's cows had died because they ate garbage thrown into their pastures, she says, before continuing: "People walk for kilometres to throw garbage into the rivers, but that doesn't make it disappear, and people don't understand it! When it rains, they throw garbage into the streets for the rain to take it away, and it does, but it piles up elsewhere. People only remove it from their houses, or put it in their patio, and there it stays, stinking. People are lazy!"

From this excerpt we see how sensory-based judgements, as already depicted, are included in moral ones. Note also that the pessimism with regard to "Paraguay's progress"; i.e.

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<sup>85</sup> The privately owned, nationwide paper La Nacion (10.02.2008, page 21). I have the original paper version.



development in a “modernising” (Appadurai 2001) or “cultivating” sense (Veblen 1970; Bourdieu 2007).

### *Nutrition and Ignorance*

While at one of Anita’s farms, driving around with a few of the rancheros in the pickup of the capataz, some wild birds flew up next to the car. Anita shouted out for me to look, and said the rancheros catch that kind of bird to grill for late breakfasts in the field. I comment that Paraguay is rich in resources, which Anita answered “Yes! And fortunately, our workers aren’t as ignorant as many. They know how to use the resources, they are capable people.” Anita later told me that she thinks it horrible that kids don’t drink milk anymore and “go to the shop and get coke instead! And they say that mangos are for pigs! They don’t know how to eat properly anymore; they just want to buy things. There is such ignorance here. It’s lack of education, lack of culture!”

This circular argument that the poor are ignorant, therefore eat badly, and are ignorant because they eat badly, caused many discussions. The notion of ignorance is clearly bound to the physical being; through lacking capability of consuming the right foods, yet another field of embodiment is found. I was also often assured that Paraguay indeed has great resources, above all in water sources and fertile ground. My informants said that if you just threw a seed on the ground a tree would be there the next day, and that Paraguayans never bothered to eat the pulp of oranges, but simply sucked the juice out and threw the fruit away, as fruits were always in abundance. Sonia summed this up: “Paraguay actually has everything you need to be lazy! For instance, abroad many say Paraguayan workers work so hard, but that’s only because they have to when they’re out of the country. Here, they just want to be paid, they don’t want to work! They’re functional an-alphabets. People here don’t want to learn, that’s Paraguay’s problem.”

Invoking not only the resources of the nation, but also the resources of Paraguay’s people, and by that the country’s underdevelopment was common. In chapter six I get back to how speaking of “the Paraguayans” among my informants, normally meant speaking of the poor and “ignorant” majority – even though most my informants when questioned called themselves Paraguayan, as already illustrated.

### *Education*

Rumours among my informants had it that Stroessner only imported salt without iodine to “keep the population from becoming too intelligent”, something that indirectly pinned the

blame for the people's ignorance on state authorities<sup>86</sup>. However, changing nutritional and educational policies<sup>87</sup> have not inflicted the elite in the same manner as it has their economic and social subordinates.

Guano stresses that in Argentina "Education is seen as the historical factor that propelled the upward mobility of the European immigrants and their offspring" (2003:157). This seemed to be the view of my informants too, as their answers to "what to do with poverty" mostly emphasised education. However, when speaking of the capacity to learn and access to education, my informants were partial to malnutrition hindering intelligence, and some even stated that generations of malnourished poor had made a lacking capacity to learn inheritable among them. The overall assumption was that even if the poor receive education, they still would not gain the level of intelligence the elite claim to have, echoing the Guatemalan upper class' contention regarding the lacking capabilities of the "Indio" (Casaús Arzú 2007).

### *Schools*

Pedro is a man associated at a high level with one of the private schools in Asuncion and frequently involved in meetings with parents, teachers and administrators there. He has lived in Paraguay for about 40 years, and although not very prosperous, he attends social gatherings and socializes with my informants. I asked him in an interview if he thought the parents at this school would object if they'd taken in poorer children there:

"Yes, yes they would. They probably would. But what would they argue...?" He asks this to himself, chewing on the question while crossing legs and arms and staring at the wall ahead for a moment, before he continues: "If it was more than a certain percentage, they would probably say that it lowered the level of education for their children, and since they pay a lot to have their children here, if the children are in the same mix as elsewhere, they might as well keep them elsewhere. I don't want to say that they'd talk of lower intelligence among the poorer, but...in not so many words, yes they would object."

According to Pedro it seems that both selection and exclusion reproduce social boundaries and inequality.

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<sup>86</sup> This sort of rumour parallels what middleclass Argentineans said: "Péron was an enemy of education because he needed to keep the mass ignorant in order to better manipulate them" (Guano 2003:158).

<sup>87</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron proposed in 1972 that institutional biases against working class children was accountable for the lower academic performances of these. These children were not aware of this selection by the system, because they were "under the spell of the culture of the dominant class" (Lamont & Molnár 2002: 172).

Pedro classifies his own kids as suitable for such schools by other criteria than money even though they are “sort of there on grants”: “My son can compete socially” he said. I asked him to explain “Because of his European background, he, you know, he actually IS what many people here would aspire to be. Just by the virtue of him being European, I mean, his parents being European, he has the cultural background, the way of upbringing that makes him more than socially compatible [to the children of extremely rich families]”

The quality of Paraguayan public schools were so much doubted by my informants, that they would never even consider using them for any other purpose than schooling young employees or kids of employees. When I asked in-depth about why they had chosen private schools, the schools being bi-lingual (English and Spanish as teaching languages), that the kids of friends went there, and that these schools were safe, was given as reasons. Maria, who had sent both her children to a bilingual school in a rather posh area, explained this further to me:

Her husband having gone there and the school teaching several classes in English were primary reasons for their choice. She said this school was for people of means: “Not like the public schools, which have the real nation! It is a bubble. All the private schools are a bit like bubbles, but okay, it’s the society in which they socialize [en que ellos se manejan].” Maria explained she would not think it a good idea for a child of less resources: “You have to take care that your kids enter into the same level as where you are. I for instance am not partial to putting my children in a school where they don’t have the same...what the others there have, because the only thing that would happen then is that they wish for things you can’t give them, and you can make them resentful, right? If your whole group of friends are people who have a very high economic level, and you don’t, you will want, at the age of 10 years, when you can’t understand... At my age it doesn’t matter, I can manage with the... I don’t know, the Maharaja of India, because his richness wouldn’t effect me, I am already shaped (as a person) [ya estoy formada], but a kid who is in formation, you have to put him on his level, in his reality, you shouldn’t give him things that aren’t of his reality. That’s what I think. I could be wrong, but at least I think so. See, a kid put in a school that for the parents is a sacrifice [economically], that ambience is not in accordance with his reality.”

It seems Maria thinks segregation in school necessary because of economic differences, to avoid enhancing the kids’ experience of differences. She might think these divides natural, and something one should not engage in changing, or she is “lured” by the reproduction of her own privileges. Although it is seemingly quite sympathetic not to want to expose kids to every-day explicit points of inequity, it is also a sign of resignation; she has no solution to the problem, and thus applies an ethical solution to a wider moral problem (Zigon 2007), a theme I further discuss below.

### *Institutionalised Belonging and Exclusion*

Carla, who had to quite an extent lost her family's many generations old fortune, could still define herself and her children as members of the Paraguayan elite. Among one of the significant factors in this regard were that the family is still lifetime members of the elite club in Asuncion, thus able to invest in their social network there (Portes 1998). The whole family frequently use its facilities and are spoken of by other informants as being victims of a "personal tragedy" in loosing most of their fortune.

When Carla's youngest daughter as a child befriended their maid's daughter, she brought her to the club on several occasions. According to Carla, the maid's daughter could never be considered for membership though, in spite of her accomplishing a University degree and working at a bank office at the time of my fieldwork. When I asked whether Carla thought that the girl would gain membership if she had married a member of the club, the answer was bluntly that no member of the club would ever consider marrying her:

"Frankly I think it's other factors that make people capable of falling in love. Sometimes, the ideal seems to be to unite us all, but socially we, the people, function in groups, and we never completely disband that. I'm not saying that it is good, but it is. It is the real situation."

Although the maid's daughter had affiliated herself with what Portes calls individuals of refinement, she was not able to obtain the "embodied cultural capital" necessary (1998: 4). Some social borders thus seem impossible to trespass; as Srinivas contends, no none-western studies of domestic servants support that upward social mobility occurs as a result of domestic employment, quite in line with Carla's statement (1995: 273). Similar to the economist Loury's statement, "The social context within which individual maturation occurs strongly conditions what otherwise equally competent individuals can achieve" (*in* Portes 1998: 4).

As Bourdieu withstands; "Dominant groups generally succeed in legitimizing their own culture and ways as superior to those of lower classes, through oppositions such as distinguished/vulgar, aesthetic/practical, and pure /impure" (1984: 245). This distinction by oppositions is quite in line with both Veblen's (1970) contentions and Douglas' (1966), illustrated in the previous chapters. Such a distinction can aid dominant groups to legitimize specific meanings that conceal power relations, much as the Foucauldian bridge of power-knowledge (1991), and arguably functions in interdependent tension (Agamben 2004). When people define themselves as belonging to a group, they also define who does not belong to it.

Of importance here is the question of how these definitions by distinction are judged morally defensible.

This holds at least two important factors in an analysis of the rich' conceptualisation of the poor. First, specific meanings or "truths"<sup>88</sup> are taught through private schools and other social arenas that are inaccessible to the poor. Second, the rich themselves are not necessarily aware of their individual partaking in this, so the power relations that rest on these oppositions may be considered natural by them, like Kleinman (1997) implied. This normalisation of norms arguably happens in discreet practices<sup>89</sup> that must be investigated in multiple locations to reveal the sum that contributes to persistent inequity. An example of inclusion/exclusion among peers may be given by a discussion that happened during lunch with one of the larger families. It concerned how, when and why people were allowed access into their social network:

The conversation around the table turned to Julia's daughters 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, an event which had made the family rebuild the little football field they own, and construct verandas, fountains and drape all the surrounding walls with cloth painted with landscapes to create "the right ambience". As far as I was told, the party's cost was about 80.000 U.S. Dollars. At the party a family coming from the border region was invited, something that came up in conversation several times. Since they were only one among many families attending, I found it pertinent to ask what was so particular about them: Julia explained that the border city towards Brazil was "very strange; it is rural, but it has this great shopping centre, like anywhere in the world!" She then said this family had "entered very quickly into the society here, in only two years! That is very rare, because people from outside Asunción normally don't come into society like that. But now I was told (points across the table to her sister and husband) that they have put a lot of money towards it. The family is one of the owners of that great shopping centre. They have paid to be members of the Club, and put their children to good private schools, so that is why." After Julia's explanation to me, the discussion of this family continues around the table, but now turns to the looks of their youngest daughter, who it is said looks like a model, fair and very tall. They keep discussing their looks for quite a while. I can't follow it all, but the words "rubia" (blond) and "bien flaca" (nicely thin, slim) are repetitive.

### ***Moralities***

One can hold that morality in the western scientific (or academic) view has been set in a biological/physical frame, meaning that morals have been seen as firmly placed within a biological understanding of humans (Howell 1997:1). According to Zigon (2007), another take on this is that anthropology, since it finds many of its "roots" with Durkheim (1858-

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<sup>88</sup> Foucault's (1991) "knowledge".

<sup>89</sup> The notion of "habitus" (Bourdieu, several) might have been fruitful in analysing this, but I cannot elaborate on this.

1917), shares his notion of morality too. Durkheim, apparently, found morality to be so fundamental to society, that one could not study any aspect of it without implicitly studying morality; one could not separate a moral realm to study from its base in society (Zigon 1997: 132).

Howell points out that ‘morals’ can mean something as wide as culture and simply be substitute term for culture (1997:3). Here, it is meant to frame only the “ought to” judgements, that is, the normative judgements, passed by my informants on their proximate poor, including employees. As Howell rightly underlines, the relationship between moral values and practices is dynamic: “Values are continuously changing and adapting through actual choices and practices, while, at the same time, they continue to inform and shape choices and practices.” (Howell 1997:4). I frequently asked informants why people were poor. This often invoked blame-pinning answers based on what the poor did “wrong”, arguably underlining that “orthodoxies” first become visible when broken. If the poor do something “wrong”, by what standards do they do so – and what would be “right”?

Answers such as these, fosters questions of values and of morals, and, it forces the questions of weather my informants themselves were in line with their own terms of values and morals. These questions connect intimately to questions of who – or what – powerfully defines and legitimates moral understandings. Howell holds that “Today, most would agree that a scholarly pursuit of the moral system of any one social group must in some way take account of indigenous perceptions about the human being; about personhood, agency and sociality” (1997: 7). In this, we see that if my informants, as argued, create bare life, they do so in a larger system or context that provides their creation of it as “natural” (Kleinman 1997). Most of my informants were self-proclaimed religious, something that they perceived as an adaptation of a certain set of “values”. Their perception contradicts that morals are physically given as they seem to believe regarding the poor’s “malicious” behaviour, since in principal this grants anyone the same possibility of adaptation (or, one might say, salvation). Nevertheless, as demonstrated, primordial explanations of poverty and lack of morals prevailed.

Howell contends that a Euro-American position might “take for granted that the moral person acts knowingly, and that this necessitates a conscious positioning *vis-à-vis* possible different courses of action.” (Howell 1997: 15). Zigon slightly disagrees with this approach, and claims that persons consider themselves and others inherently moral at all times, meaning that they can not shift out of a moral condition, as it is most of the time an unconscious one (Zigon

2007: 133)<sup>90</sup>. However, Zigon makes a distinction between *morality* as an unreflective mode, and *ethics* as a conscious mode of tactic performance/action, and claims that the anthropologist therefore should keep her focus on the moment in which morality becomes tactic performance (2007: 137).

Teresa echoed this distinction when I asked her what she really thought of the division of society and societal resources. She answered that she did want the children of her employees, and really all children, to get the same schooling as hers had, and that she did want better conditions for them, but that she found that giving them the opportunity now would mean forsaking her and her kids' opportunities; Teresa gave a moral reasoning, but a tactical solution. Zigon says that ethics are normally applied when the dilemma confronting one is of such a character that one no longer "dwells in the unreflective comfort of the familiar", and therefore a person applies ethics to normalize his/her situation (Zigon 2007:138)<sup>91</sup>. According to him, ethics is applied to return to "everydayness" post "moral breakdown" (Zigon 2007:140), which seems to be what Teresa does; in her "normality", she can balance morals and action, but upon questions that "undress" her actions, she applies ethics, perhaps to "rebalance". Note also that this might be useful for understanding Maria's solution to inequity in schooling, as her ethical solution was to keep the kids ignorant to the problem (as long as possible), until they became "shaped" enough to realize (and perhaps appreciate) their own position in society.

Acting knowingly must be based on the assumption that a person indeed has full information. I suggest that the conflation of acts of "the poor" depicted in the media, talk of the poor among my informants, and spatial segregation, hinders full information. As my informants go about their daily lives, they interact with the poor to such little extent, that they are not familiar with most aspects of poverty, neither are they exposed to positive evaluations of the poor; they talk of, read papers that say and watch TV that portray, the poor as malicious thieves, gun shooters and land-invaders, dirty holders of dangerous diseases, or at best, just complainants with no education. As D'Andrade holds, only reporting what reflects badly on a subject is a well-known manner through which to produce biased representations (1995: 399).

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<sup>90</sup> Zigon here points back to Heidegger's notion of "breakdown", the moment in which a person realizes his/her condition or state, where a stepped-away mode of being in the world makes available consciousness, awareness, etc. He argues that this is what happens when a person finds him/herself in a moral dilemma (2007:136).

<sup>91</sup> Zigon leads this further to Foucault, who allegedly claims that freedom of thought in a moment of problematization, that is, Heidegger's breakdown, is limited; thus his/her options in using ethics are construed – and what construes them is socio-historic-culturally constituted. He further problematizes motivation, something that might be relevant to my field of study, but that I shall not discuss for lack of space (Zigon 2007:138-9).

I do not claim that the elites behave in entire oblivion of whatever reality surrounds them, and therefore do not act “immorally”, but judging my informants acts by external “indigenous perceptions” (Howell 1997: 7) of moral standards is naive, at best. My informants’ context constantly provides them with experiences *of* the poor but seldom *with* the poor. They find their worldviews confirmed through media reports and in assimilation of these attitudes among peers’ and family, in sum providing them with little ground to choose (morally) different. The above recount of newspaper statements for instance, portrays the Paraguayan population in general in an extremely unflattering manner, that most Paraguayans would probably say did not pertain to themselves – and of course, the elites neither identify with it – but they seem to believe it pertains to their proximate ‘others’<sup>92</sup>. Recall again the argument of governance through management (Foucault 1991a, Agamben 2004); the worldviews depicted do, no matter how you twist and turn them, support the elite’s management of the country; since all else is chaos, “everyone” is better off with their management.

### *Doubting the State and Disregarding Law*

As illuminated, neither schooling, nor health depends on state institutions for my informants. Disturbance, annoyance and potential hindrances are relevant words to describe their views of actions of the state and its institutions. Among the state institutions, the legal system seemed to be what mattered most to them, both in breaking with it themselves and in pointing out others break with it. The law was not necessarily talked of as something by which to abide, but frequently as a sizeable institution that complicate their lives, especially in connection to their businesses:

Aurora tells me she is smuggling goods for her family’s production into the country. I ask her why, and she explains that since Argentina has launched a new taxation, and put a 40% tax on exports, the prizes have raised so much that she will not accept it. I ask her what happens if she gets caught, if she will get arrested or something. She negates, and says she will bribe. She says that the people who smuggle live well from the bribes they receive, including the police. I say that this sounds very inefficient, upon which she comments that I am too discrete in my replies. I say that not abiding by legal regulations makes the legal system dysfunctional. Aurora

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<sup>92</sup> The struggle with applying pertinent identifiers is echoed by the shifting appliance of the term “macho”, describing anything from “having kids all over” to absolute abstinence from domestic tasks, among Mexican men, found by Gutmann (1996, see for instance Pp. 221 and 232). This comparison goes to show that appliance of generalising categories to others is commonplace and easy, whilst regarding self it is nuanced, complex and non-stereotypical.



says: "of course, the law doesn't function! People don't mind the law, it's not there to force people, it's there to be followed, and people don't get that!"

Notably, Aurora admits to smuggling and bribing and in the next breath expresses frustration that the law does not "function". She then seemed to feel this was because people did not understand how a law was supposed to function.

### *Rights & Actions of Supremacy*

With the exception of state built roads, state expenditure as long as it left them alone with their spending, did not matter to my informants. The law was varying with age regarded as a flexible institution; most informants above the age of 35 told stories of bribing and never minded drunken driving, whilst the younger informants were more vary of notions of "rights"<sup>93</sup>:

Ignacio claims the poor had no rights in this country. He said: "When they try to steal a cow, they get shot in the head, they don't have rights!" He insists that that is not an act of self-defence, whilst Aurora and Anita claim it is. Ignacio gets agitated, he says "when the cow they're trying to steal is twenty meters from you, it is NOT self-defence to shoot the thief! They steal because they need to!" Aurora firmly says: "No! They steal because they don't want to work!"

Morals, seen as multivocal, context-dependent and open to interpretation when applied to oneself, thus seem firm, stated and fixed when applied to others. That is, when Aurora smuggles goods into the country, she does so because she, under new high export taxes, is of the opinion that she has to. Morals *as in the law* are then permeable to her. And then, as Aurora finds one of her employees has stolen food for his animals from her farm, because he, under rising food prizes and constant low salary, was of the opinion that he had to, it is in Aurora's view not permeable, but wrong both *morally* and *legally*.

Simply demonstrating that right and wrong, whether annexed from the law or not, is contextual, is not sufficient to show how it is applied as a stigma on the poor. To do this, all the pieces in the puzzle that makes up the total picture of the poor that gives the backdrop for

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<sup>93</sup> Upper middle class and elites in São Paulo placed themselves above the law, both because they could buy themselves free from it and because they saw themselves as almost primordially more moral beings than the poor. Therefore, they did not need to adhere to the law as the poor as a group. Some claimed the poor should not have "human rights", because they were not seen as "human" (Caldeira 2000: 344). Guano's informants in the Buenos Aires middle class expressed similar attitudes, as they described local poor as "barbarian" (Guano 2004).

judgement of them, needs depicting: ‘The poor’ are prejudged to be criminal, as shown in the previous chapter, “immoral” by environmental influence, “stupid” as a “consequence of malnutrition”, and “lazy by inheritance”. Thus, when the employee steals, Aurora thought, “he might not even understand that it is wrong”.

The wrongdoer in the above case had been paperless, which made his stealing utterly provocative to Aurora: “He came without identity! I helped him with the papers: I gave him an identity I made him a person! And then he steals from me!” The offense Aurora experiences here seems based on some sense of ownership of the worker, as she “made him a person”, and seems to feel he owes her something – something he did not comply with. This connects nicely with depictions of bare life. Aurora clearly does not think a person without politically, or formalised, recognised existence a person. If we recall the outline of bare life in the introduction, the capability to suspend law holds more importance than that of creating law (Ek 2006: 365). In an *anomic*, or lawless, space, the excluded stands in relation to the sovereign, abandoned by law post its creation, but still included (Agamben 2004: 1; Ek 2006: 365). What Aurora claims here, seems to be that she holds the power to transform the *braziguayo*<sup>94</sup> from bodily mass – bare life - into a person; she thinks herself ‘the long arm’ of the sovereign, and decides on inclusion/exclusion. Indirectly, she appears offended to the point of wanting the right, having “made him a person”, to *unmake* him as a person as well.

### *Lack of Capacity and “Morals” as a Democratic Problem*

Invocations of peoples stupidity was closely related to doubts of democracy, similar to statements found among Brazilian elites, who agreed that lack of education and health problems were the major obstacles to democracy (Reis 2005: 34-5). Angela, a woman in her early thirties, simply stated that Paraguayans, in general, were stupid: “Because Paraguayans see how this government is acting and they still vote for it – maybe because they get 10 or 20 guararníes! Money that only last one day, but the politics is for the whole future!”

Melhuus (1997) states that interconnectedness between different fields of morality may be investigated so that values and meanings underlying them may be traced. This may enable an insight in what binds the different domains of morality in a society together, and how these values and meanings facilitate differing moral codes (Melhuus 1997: 180). Since there is no

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<sup>94</sup> The so-called Braziguayas/os, or Brazilian Paraguayans, are born on either side of the border but work and reside on Paraguayan land. These are frequently employed in large-scale agriculture, and are presumed to be stateless.

one standard of morals in multiple life worlds, but rather similar notions of morality and differing and shifting forms of applied ethics (Zigon 2007), one needs to delineate a particular field of study to find its meaning and values (Melhuus 1997: 180). Studying moral judgements passed on those outside my field of study would be meaningless if it was for the sake of morality in itself (Howell 1997: 7). Therefore I do not engage with ‘morality’ as such, but follow my empirical field of study, and depict the judgements, more or less explicitly moral, passed in it on perceived subordinates.

Melhuus depicts a moral code of honour and shame, in catholic rural Mexico, connected to sexuality through notions of masculinity and female virtue (1997:181). She uses gender to elicit and access what she calls the moral universe (Melhuus 1997: 181). She states: “A moral code where notions of honour and shame appear to be central values is a particularistic one which implies that rules of conduct apply unequally to men and women: what is appropriate for men is not appropriate for women and vice versa (1997:182)<sup>95</sup>.

The elite interpretation that poor people generally lack appreciation of their place and situation may partially be illuminated through gendered notions of morality. When I told Aurora that people I talked to described Paraguayans as “haraganes y ignorantes” (lazy and ignorant), she responded by using gender-dependent notions of proper conduct:

“Well, I’m not surprised, really, they aren’t good at working, and they don’t really want to either!” she laughed, while speaking slowly, dragging her words a bit, and lifting her brows at me. “Just to make a point of it: now, my people at the farm have left me! Apparently, the girl did not like it, claimed to get bored, and you know she was barely fifteen, with two kids! She made it difficult for him to work! So he left, took her home and left her with the kids.” I asked if this was a rumour. -“No, no, this is not a rumour, it’s true, he took her home and dumped her with the two kids.” I slipped out: “that bloody bastard!” Aurora answered: “Well, she did make it difficult for him!” I objected that she was only fifteen, and had been left at her hometown with two kids and a broken marriage -“Yes, well...” Aurora said.

Apparently, the Braziguayo was wrong in leaving Auroras farm, but right in leaving his wife, as the wife was to blame for his leaving. Aurora said she could not understand how the girl could claim to get bored, when she had two kids to tend to. This ties gender to notions of work, as the braziguaya should have been happily confined to the “retiro” seven kilometres away from the other farmhouses. Her proper role was to be a mother, non-demanding of other entertainment. This is compatible with Melhuus’ observation from Mexico, that women – and

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<sup>95</sup> Recall too, Ib’s statement, that men would be to ashamed to have plastic surgery because of their machismo, whereas women should have it to fix imperfections and thereby self-esteem issues. Note that this reflects Gutmann’s (1996) depiction of shifting ascriptions, depending on whom they concern.

especially wife's – should not work outside the house, but tend to their family not to jeopardize their chastity (Melhuus 1997: 183-4). Furthermore, Weismantel's (2001) argument, that women outside the home overall are “out of place”, is resonates in this. Accordingly, the Braziguaya fails to appreciate her husband's guarding of her virtue as attached to her spatial presence.

When Maria's new maid quit, Maria thought it was because the girl found the work too much. This girl's sister worked for Maria's parents, a “less demanding job” Maria explained, and said to me that she was certain that the this whole family preferred to live off of one salary, instead of working themselves. Maria's explanation touches two perceptions of the poor: that they are unwilling to really work, and that they are happily confined to having one salary provide a whole family; they do not really want better conditions. Looking back to the previous chapter again, this coincides with Auroras understanding that the poor do not want to wear shoes. Interestingly, the perception of the Paraguayan poor as a (non-) person, with little interest in rising socio-economically echoes Oscar Lewis' description of persons immersed in “culture of poverty”: “he is not attracted to a middle-class style of life, with its accompanying concern for status, prestige, and individualistic methods of betterment” (*in* Katz 1990: 21).

### *Religiosity*

Most of my Most of my informants are religious, belonging either to Evangelical, Catholic or Anglican Churches. The Catholics and Evangelicals, with whom I spent most time, regard frequent praying as very important. Anita, for instance, had a “private session” with a female evangelical pastor at her house weekly – when I asked why she did this, she said that if she had not “she would not have done anything all week” except tending to herself and her own entertainment and bodily maintenance. She additionally went to church on Sundays, as did my other informants.

Kleinman (1997) holds that the convergence of medical anthropology and study of religion happens in the analysis of suffering, because “the choke, anguish and often desperate hurt of suffering spark fundamental questions about human conditions that are as central to medicine and anthropology as to religion” (Kleinman 1997: 316). Suffering is in Kleinman's view something that happens both at an individual level and that may transcend to a cultural, transpersonal level, where it becomes embodied as collective memory. Suffering as social

phenomenon connects the political to the emotional and the physiological to the religious when people attempt to order the world (1997: 317).

My informants' attempts at "ordering the world" to make sense of poverty, brought about shifting political, religious and material answers. The state, depicted in such incidents as 'an actor'<sup>96</sup> is 'blamed' for doing insufficiently and the (suddenly) individual poor for not conforming to politico-economic ideals of success; The division of poor and rich is depicted by my informants as God's will, or placed on the poor themselves, through blaming them for personal undernourishment, dirt and promiscuity. Thus, reasons for poverty is ordered (into) the poor's physical being. All these attempts at ordering the world underpin the moral problem of poverty, and it could be argued that morally, it is easier to handle misery if it occurs with someone you "should not" like, someone with whom you have nothing in common. In that sense, stigmatizing the poor makes their suffering less socially painful: it keeps them outside the collective memory (Kleinman 1997). By not recognising the poor as fellow human beings; by depicting the poor as bare life, one can quite effectively avoid otherwise pertinent moral dilemmas and/or breakdowns (Zigon 2007).

This line of thought was picked up at one of the Catholic biblical meetings, as Julio read out the days passage, about "how good trees give good fruits, but bad trees give bad fruits". Julio said when finishing that this was easy to understand, but asked rhetorically: "what is the real meaning here?" before he contended: "The real meaning is that what one learns, one needs to incorporate in ones body! That is what it means." Thereby, he invoked those who according to popular statements do not incorporate (a Christian) knowledge in their lives; the poor.

After Julio's contention, everyone at the gathering started talking simultaneously, in a discussion of how to integrate faith in life:

Teresa said she thought that loving God is to love your next one, and concluded that it is better to spend your time giving love to your next than praying. Julio disagreed with this "since not going to church leaves you empty" [vacío], which triggered several comments all more or less agreeing with either Teresa or Julio, until the woman next to me interfered, almost shouting: "No, the two can't be compared, going to mass and being loving are two different things!" Teresa replied: "No, because how to live your life is the question! I remember that [a catholic father visiting from Spain], said that when you get married, as a woman, your responsibility is your house, your family!" Because of this Teresa thought that a woman who for instance spent her Sundays helping

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<sup>96</sup> Here we see that on an empirical level, my informants do exactly what Abram (*in* Krohn-Hansen 2001: 80-1) warns us against; they personify and thus mystify the state, by giving it agency in itself. By this, they conceal the power of the state which rests partly with those who perform on behalf/under the guise of the state – which to a large extent is my informants themselves, by their socio-economic and political positions, and by their everyday-practices performed in interpersonal encounters (Foucault 1991).

poor people or going to church, was actually not doing a good thing; she should rather spend her Sundays preparing lunch for her family; “sacrificing ones time for others is not good if it’s not good for the family! It is not that one has to have children, but one has to stick to the vows of marriage. The family is the most important thing. I think everyone should care the most for their closest ones” she concluded, and referred again to the father whose words she leant on.

Teresa’s clear leaning on a woman’s place in the house and with her family seems to knock out the importance of other acts in the name of religiosity, reflecting Melhuus (1997) findings. The discussion at the gathering continued after more prayers and recitations, with Teresa and Carla discussing “how one can help others” and “be a good Christian”:

Teresa held that as long as you tried to help and had good intentions, you were a good Christian. Carla replied boldly “but you have a narrow view! You do not know if what you think is helping and is good, is really what the person need! It is difficult to know the limit of your sight; because all people have sides you don’t see.” While saying “sides you don’t see”, she gestured behind her, to each side, and in front, as to demonstrate that there is more to people than appearances.

Carla’s contention here, that one does not know the preferences of others, and might therefore not ‘help tem’ in the right way, shows that she quite sensibly does not assume that all persons would gain from the same kind of ‘help’. On the other hand, this sort of reasoning may excuse lack of any kind of interference on the part of the elites; they should not interfere. Again, recall that Aurora felt the poor did not want to, or like to, wear shoes – if she is right, then obviously imposing the use of shoes, would be “narrow minded”.

### *Concluding remarks*

Kleinman states: “Primo Levi is not alone in finding the most chilling and ironically inhuman implication of personal experience with the most extreme kinds of social suffering to be that human beings can come to terms with and indeed justify anything” (1997: 318)<sup>97</sup>. In an environment of such large economic inequities as in Paraguay, the need to “make sense of” suffering by ordering the world, might be more pressing than in contexts where poverty is less visible. This might shed light on why my informants’ answers frequently seem either ruthlessly Darwinist, deterministically religious or fatalistically market liberal.

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<sup>97</sup> Primo Levi (1919-1987) was a Jewish Italian chemist and Holocaust survivor who became a world famous writer.

Reflecting back on Bella's statement that las Clinicas was "like Africa", it might be that we – that is, the media-consuming humanity at large – are so frequently challenged by images of social suffering that we normalize it<sup>98</sup>. If so, whether it happens near or far, then, as long as it does not happen to our peers and us directly, we order it in to the great "cacophony of instantaneous images" that "creates an amoral virtual reality" (Kleinman 1997: 319), that when pertinent is fended off by applied ethics (Zigon 2007). It might be though, that Kleinman is right when he criticizes this view of ordering the world for overemphasizing human need for meaning. He contends that an overemphasis on the concern with meaning "understood as a cognitive response to the challenge of coherence" may undermine the importance of inhabiting, acting in and contesting the world, giving an inadequate account of medical, political, moral or religious experience<sup>99</sup>.

Between the text of this chapter and the next one there lies a paradox. When distrust in individuals *and* use of bodies is justified by my informants, with the effect that people are deprived of individuality, how can the same informants claim to believe in economic liberalism and a free market that arguably pins blame and praise on individuals (Nonini 2003)? Might it be so that the same overall – or underlying – shifting moralities are found in male dominance, elite dominance over the poor and international dominance? In the next and concluding chapter, perceptions of international dominance and the justification of elite dominance in Paraguayan politics is in case. The campaigns for the 2008 presidential election, trust in people and in politicians and beliefs about Paraguay and Paraguayans among my informants is therefore in focus.

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<sup>98</sup> Similar to what I argued in the introduction, that the loss of Paraguayan bodies became normalized under Stroessner.

<sup>99</sup> Kleinman questions the fundamental separation of body and mind, and holds that for instance in England in seventeenth and eighteenth century, body and mind was seen as thoroughly intertwined. Then, the notion of a depression for instance was a physical one as much as something concerning the state of mind, and the person it concerned was seen as "pressed down" both materially and emotionally (Kleinman 1997: 325). His major point is to address "a form of being-in-the-world that insists that experience is both within and without the boundary of the body-self, crossing back and forth as if that boundary were permeable." (Kleinman 1997: 326).





## *Chapter six*

### *Glimpses from the Ambience of the Election*

I was watching a television debate with Aurora in the run up to the elections, when she suddenly turned to me saying: “Why should a stupid have the same right to vote as me?!” pointing a finger to her head: “Why should a stupid, one who can not think, decide? It makes you think!” I asked whether she didn’t want everyone to have the right to vote: “No...no, it is their right, it is their right, but it makes me think”, she replied.

One of the implications of naming the poor “brutes” and similar adjectives is that it “eases” the choice of not regarding them as deserving subjects of “welfare”, rights and voice. With this claim as a backdrop, this chapter illuminates the views of the poor’s participation in the national “community”. I emphasize episodes and talk that came up in connection with the elections, since it invoked scepticism towards “the Paraguayans” capacity to participate in a democracy, and also, a mistrust in democracy for Paraguay overall. This chapter catalyzes the sum of theories and elite practices outlined so far.

#### *The Presidential Elections*

As shown in the introduction, Paraguay has only been regarded as a democracy since 1993, when the first free elections were held.<sup>100</sup> Until a month after I left the Colorados stayed in government, when Fernando Lugo Méndez, a former Catholic Bishop from the San Pedro department, heading a coalition of seven minority parties took office. Few of my informants recall life under rule of any other party than the Colorados, and their expectations towards other rule were uncertain. The media gave much attention to the elections and wherever I went, even throughout the countryside, propaganda for the different parties and candidates was highly visible. Banners and flyers were everywhere; houses, fences and electric poles were painted with slogans of promotion for the different parties. The Colorado Party was decisively the most visible, but all four Presidential alternatives were present.

The presidential elections were held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April. Competing against Lugo were Blanca Ovelar for the Colorados, a former teacher who had worked in the ministry and held by my informants to be Nicanor, the sitting president’s, “marionette doll”, Pedro Fadul, an

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<sup>100</sup> In May 1993 Juan Carlos Wasmosy won Paraguay’s first “fully democratic elections” (FCO, 08.05.09)

intellectual and businessman and Lino Oviedo, an ex-convict and former military general during the Paraguayan dictatorship.

### *Perceptions of Democracy*

Many said they did not believe the Paraguayan people were ready for democracy, they claimed the people were not able to make decisions, because ‘these others’ fell for all sorts of temptations too easily. The Colorado Party was said to give away both money and medicines from the health department to tempt people to vote for them. Similarly, Lino Oviedo was accused of using corruption money from his time in the military to buy caramels (!) that he gave out at election meetings. Perks like caramels and medicines were by my informants perceived as enough for the poor to sell their votes<sup>101</sup>.

I want to underline that trust in peoples’ ability for competent participation in the Paraguayan democracy was scarce among my informants, and frequently implied that democracy was impossible in Paraguay. They did not trust election candidates, they did not trust the people, and they did not trust state officials<sup>102</sup>. The discourse of “the states” mischief<sup>103</sup> was on an almost daily basis confirmed by the newspapers, where talk of people being paid off under the table, being paid for state jobs they did not do, and state-leaders enhancing greatly their overall expenditure when entering state-paid jobs, also illuminates why paying taxes was often talked of as irrational. The opposition in the elections frequently used such more or less trustworthy rumours of state corruption during their campaigns.

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<sup>101</sup> Recall the depictions of the poor as driven by necessity, as bare life.

<sup>102</sup> There was a high awareness of corruption. Like Ib said to me “This society doesn’t work!” When I asked what he meant by that, he said: “You don’t get anywhere without favours. If you need to get somewhere, you have to go via friends and favours. If you don’t, nothing happens. ... Here, the mayor is corrupt, the police is corrupt, everyone’s corrupted. By the time people get into the political system here, they owe so many favours, that they’re already corrupted. They give friends positions in government and employment in the state, and then they have to pay them, and then they give positions to more people... everything is corrupted!”

<sup>103</sup> Note yet again the personification of the state; my informants shifted freely between “the state” and “state officials”, as if the former was an actor in and by itself, only occasionally dependent on those performing under the guise of it.



ABC Color, one of the national papers', depiction of the Presidential Candidates: Lino Oviedo, holding a horseshoe for good luck, Blanca Ovelar crossing her fingers, implying she's a liar, Fernando Lugo with his beams and cross, and Pedro Fadul, who had so little support that he could not win, holds a four-leaf clover, possibly for liberalism and hopes for a miracle.

### *Depictions of the Presidential Candidates*

It struck me that most people emphasised that things they told me regarding politics were “only personal opinions”. I think the allegations of corruption combined with the history of punishment for “wrong opinion” serves as a backdrop for this. Still, when safely set in family surroundings, where employees (as illustrated they pose no threat in their state of being non-persons) were around too, some were very opinionated. In the next excerpt, Emo is having a fight with his aunt over lunch, as his aunt said she would vote for Lugo:

“Why on earth would you vote for Lugo!? Chavez for sure pays him! He has ideas like Morales and Chavez, like Robin Hood, he wants to take from the rich and give to the poor!” almost yells Emo. “No, you speak of nothing, nothing! I’m certain Lugo won’t lie, won’t steal, he doesn’t want power for those reasons, maybe it’s better that he thinks like that” his aunt replies. Emo shouts back: “But who are the rich people, aunt, who are they!?”

Here, Emo points to a theme that occupied most of my informants, namely what would happen with *their riches* if Lugo took office.<sup>104</sup> Lugo's "charisma and patience" was often given as the reason for his allegedly large support in the countryside. Whether he really had this support, I am uncertain of; Angela, who had volunteered as an election observer (for Fadul) on both the last election and this one, told me she had seen the "iron grip" the Colorados had on the countryside through force and threats, and she was not alone in thinking the Colorado party's members observing the elections would threaten or bribe people to vote for them.

Emo, who owns several businesses in Asuncion, told me during a family lunch that he was certain that if he changed his registered address to vote nearer where he now lives, he would not get to vote. He expected he would then be met at the place of voting, with officials having registered him to vote "in Ciudad del Este, for instance". He meant that the Colorados did this if they thought you would not vote for them. When I asked if he really thought miss-registrations were done on purpose, the whole lunch table roared with laughter, and Emo said: "Of course they do! They have complete control of the system, so they use it as they like!"

Regarding the discourse the Colorados apply to emphasize their position in Paraguay, Ted, who is owner and writer in the media said too that since the Colorados had "built the system, and knew how to use, it they would probably win". He perceived the Colorados campaign as trying to give the impression of "being" the country: "When they say 'todos somos colorados' they really say, we're all part of this, here you don't choose a president, you choose a party, and the party IS Paraguay."

Recall the notion of clientilism, how cross-class alliances are firmly held by "caudillos" who manipulate and/or directly force obedience by means of own positions (Auyero 1999; Sondrol 1997). This also echoes the concept of hegemony<sup>105</sup>, by illuminating the idea of elite ideas spreading among the population under the guise of being for their own good<sup>106</sup>. Whether this depiction is correct I cannot say, as I did not do fieldwork among "subordinate classes", but the belief in such a spread was certainly firm. Plausibly, one can see the idea of clientilism spreading among people in the same manner as the idea of Latin men being "macho" (Gutmann 1996); as Paredes holds, "we must remember that names lend reality to things" (*in* Gutmann 1996: 226).

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<sup>104</sup> Ted's view underlines this: He said that since Lugo was the main opposition to the Colorados he had voters "on all sides" and therefore did not say what he really was going to do. Ted thought that Hugo Chavez and possibly Evo Morales sponsored Lugo, and that Lugo would become "just like Chavez", something not perceived as positive; it meant deteriorating business, expropriation and frightening away foreign investors.

<sup>105</sup> Depicted in previous footnotes.

<sup>106</sup> See for instance Lamont (2001: 15243) and Scheper-Hughes (*in* D'Andrade 1995: 401).



Lino Oviedo's campaign depiction of Paraguay under Lugo, comparing him to Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela on the one hand, whilst portraying himself as in line with Lula da Silva in Brazil and Christina Kirchner in Argentina.

### *Landless Peasants and Land Invasions*

Lino Oviedo, the military man, was not only famed for his authoritarianism and “craziness” (something mentioned by several; those who did not like Oviedo, termed him insane in addition to authoritarian). Rumours also said Oviedo probably had “a deal with the Colorados” since “Nicanor let him out of prison”<sup>107</sup>. According to Ted and one of his colleagues, Oviedo was the only one who spoke out in support of private property and criminalization of land invasions.

Land invasions, which arguably are part of a fight for redistribution, is frequently done by the organisation “Campesinos sin Tierra”, who frequently also initiate rallies in Asunción. Some informants claimed that they and other organisations promoting social mobility were overruled and used by people with political interests, much as the allegations Auyero found in Buenos Aires, that “rally attendance is seen as a demonstration of the "naïveté" of some

<sup>107</sup> Lino Oviedo had been imprisoned for suspicion of having attempted a coup d'état in 1998, when he was still acting as a general in the military.

inhabitants or of their lack of psycho-social development” because rallies are portrayed as only contributing to consolidate existing power relations and function for the personal gain of those inaugurating them (Auyero 1999: 306, 308-311)<sup>108</sup>. My informants spoke of the organisations such as “Campesinos sin Tierra” and “Los sin Techo” with contempt:

We were cruising around in a pickup at one of the huge estates of my informants. As we got to a main road that cross their land, they all commented on how bad the road was and I was explained that the government does a horrible job with the roads of the country. Along the road there were shacks surrounded by people. I asked who they were, if they worked on the land. “No, these are natives!” said Anita. Her daughter in law then explained to me: “these Indians want our land. The government should give them land” “– And in fact, they have, somewhere else, given them a lot, 5000 hectares”, added Anita’s son “–but no”, continued his wife, “they want this one! Because it has animals, water, everything, they want this land, so they won’t leave!” I asked whether they did any harm by staying there. This was negated. Anita’s son said that in his view (he underscored that this was HIS point of view only), NGOs who were working with helping “the Indians” were doing things wrong. Wrong because he thought they only fed money to lawyers. “The lawyers here need problems, so that they can have work, so they tell horrible stories of the conditions of the Indians, the NGOs give more money, and the lawyers get paid!”

A few weeks after the elections I had a conversation with a group of wealthy men belonging to the Colorado Party. Since facing the elections there was so much talk of Lugo not “respecting private property” if he got to power, I asked how the men saw the situation now. They in full agreement told me “the problem here isn’t the land, it’s the people!” I asked why; “there is plenty of land in Paraguay, and it’s rich. The problem is that the people don’t want to work!” This was clearly not an answer to my question. However, the response is indicative of how some privileged Paraguayans think of ‘other’ Paraguayans trying to get a part of their riches. Similarly, Sonia told me later on, while talking of “Campesinos sin Tierra”: “Really, I don’t see what right they have to ask for land! Nobody gave me any land!”

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<sup>108</sup> As noted in the introduction, there was little indication of whether the ones benefitting from such inauguration were among my informants; Teresa, Maria and Sonia all spoke of the rallies being paid by “someone” to cause trouble and upset, but on question, they were never clear in whether those allegedly paying were politicians of the opposition, of the Colorado, or NGOs. However, one of my male informants did have a very large rally performed in his support a few years ago – but in describing that incident further, I would reveal identities, and that I will not do.

## ***Handling Democracy: Conflicting Moralities***

Within a totally corrupted atmosphere, individual success has no meaning.  
-Franco (1999 [1971]: 238)

Quite a few of my informants claimed that life got more complicated after the end of the Stroessner regime. Although many claimed they had not earned money from his government, several had been granted contracts for construction- and administrative work on the Itaipú dam<sup>109</sup> from the 1970's onwards. The small size of the upper social class in Asuncion made personal contact with Stroessner and his offspring normal within these circles, according to my informants. Some remembered the authoritarian rule positively. In comparison with the current situation of formal democracy, which many perceive as chaotic and unsafe, a rule that issued curfews and made decisions for those seen incapable of it was preferred. Elisa's response when I asked what she thought of the elections reflects this:

"I don't know why they want to rule this country, who on earth wants to rule this country? It's a disaster! It'll take at least 50 years to get anywhere with it...no, I don't see why anyone would want to try to rule here" I asked if she thought it was better before: "During Stroessner? Yes, it was poor, it was not developed, but at least it was clean and orderly!"

Views like this were common. I had several informants who claimed never to have heard of the "Archives of Terror"<sup>110</sup> and claimed Stroessner's regime had never treated anyone brutally.

Elisa, as many of my informants, indirectly held that a formal state of exception was preferable in the face of the current formal democracy. By "formal state of exception" I point to the authoritarian, "normalized", out-in-the-open form of rule that did not – and this is important – pretend to treat all equally. It might be, that the ideas of rights and obligations as shared by all equally seemed uncanny for yet another reason than those depicted so far: namely that the institutionalization of democracy makes the lack of equal rights, obligations and opportunities so obvious. This, I think, bothered my informants. Society had become increasingly inconsistent: they themselves held conflicting roles in it<sup>111</sup>. As elects of government and deputy positions, their "ought to" behaviour was of a different character than

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<sup>109</sup> Hydroelectric plant Paraguay holds part ownership in with Brazil. The dam is a huge source of conflict between the countries, since the contract for sharing economic profits from the dam was drawn up during Stroessner's time. Yet another instance in which Paraguay can be said to be under the scrutiny of neighbouring countries, as I show complaints of in the following.

<sup>110</sup> The Archives of Terror is a collection of documents, letters and (some) photography that document human rights abuses and torture committed under Stroessner's rule (see for instance Boccia Paz et.al 2007).

<sup>111</sup> Recall Zigon's (2007) argument, and reflect on this as increasing the frequency of moral breakdowns, thus forcing that of applied ethics.

before. For those in politics, the patterns of obligations, expectations, and appearance they should stick to there differ vastly from that expected from them in their businesses.

As depicted, smuggling, bribing, cheating, making use of favours and leaning on contacts was absolutely necessary in business – and so too had it been in politics. It argue that the Paraguay has formerly been run as a business, which meant that as long as you had contacts, politics and private business was all part of the same game (see for instance Nickson & Lambert 2002; Hicks 1967). The situation now, although still “businesslike”, seems changed and changing. I suggest that my informants are now “going underground”, taking on formal positions to stay in control, but exhibiting to a lesser extent than before the real power they have by means of among other things their private businesses. Their situation is therefore one of conflicting roles: they support democracy and all of the states institutions outwardly, willy-nilly get themselves elected, AND break the laws they ratify, for fear of loosing out in business and perhaps more “hardcore” arenas of power<sup>112</sup>.

Especially Julia’s husband was worried about this. He had spent years in politics, under pressure from especially his father<sup>113</sup>, and said to me that he absolutely hated it. He saw it as filled with people striving for personal gain and tainted by hypocrisy. However, during all his time in politics, he had run companies with departments all over Paraguay, and was subject to allegations of smuggling, thus he too was an acclaimed hypocrite. Julia, his wife, advocated authoritarianism:

Julia explained to Anita, who still supported the Colorado Party, and me that she felt Lino Oviedo was the right man for President since “he is so orderly”. “He’s a military man, of course he’s orderly” replied Anita. “Well, I saw him, he came and he had everyone walk in line! Everyone knew where to be around him! So much space here, there, there, and behind!” Julia showed us with her arms, drawing one hand towards her, pushing one forward, smiling as she continued: “I think in this country, we don’t have the culture for democracy. Liberty doesn’t work in Paraguay, I think people know too little to take position, it just doesn’t work, so I like Oviedo. He has such command!” Anita comments: “Yes... Line, do you remember I told you Paraguayans are used to a firm hand? They need a firm hand, they can not deal with choosing themselves.” Julia leaves the room, I say “so

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<sup>112</sup> As noted, allegations of drug trafficking, smuggling, use of force, threats and weapons were thrown against some of my informants. I do not regard these allegations positively, and I believe those under allegation were very often depicted, “at home” too, not just by social scientists (...), as “devils”. Even through I provide ethnography that may support such ascriptions, I do not agree with these. My informants are people, and to me they were loving, caring fellow humans who supported me in many difficulties during my time in Paraguay. For this I owe them my eternal gratitude. I could not have written this thesis if they had not accepted, seen and helped me. But I could not forgive myself if did not speak my mind about my ethnography. So, yes, I find myself as I find my informants; trapped in a moral breakdown, forcing me to apply ethics, and hold that different lifeworlds and shifting contexts indeed bring about moral dilemmas and conflicting loyalties. It is not a pleasurable experience.

<sup>113</sup> I quote one of Gutmann’s informants (1996: 221): “haven’t you also lost something for following your father?”, simply to reflect the pressure I saw Julia’s husband was under; he did indeed, as did his brothers, strive hard to reach the ideals set by their father, a quite prominent politician and businessman who never gave up on shouting at all his children and correcting them, even in public.



she really likes Oviedo?" Anita says, "Yes, apparently she does! Her husband likes Lugo, she likes Oviedo, and I like Blanca, because she is a woman, and a woman should rule this country." She laughed.

Accordingly, neither the idea of democracy, nor that of authoritarianism was shared by all. Ted's thought on Lino Oviedo was that he was "a product of the army, and authoritarian" and stated to me: "My father and bothers like him, they like such firm hands, but I don't want to live in an authoritarian country, so I don't like him!"

### *Citizenship, Social Fascism and Zones of Indistinction*

Commonly, people are excluded from citizenship on the grounds of lacking what gives them nativity, traditionally relation by blood and/or birth on national soil (Nicolopoulou 2000:131). Since territorially internal poor most often fulfil both criteria, they cannot be disqualified from citizenship on these grounds, but the elite's doubt of the poor's ability to participate in democratic rule can make democracy seem a bad idea to them. This might also be tied to the political clientilism; As depicted, my informants believe that people would vote in accordance with their "patron's" demand rather than for their own good<sup>114</sup>(Sondrol 1997; Auyero 1999).. Another possible angle on this is Sylvester's (2006), which entail postcolonial states' acclaimed naturalised and in-criticisable constant state of exception, under which subjects become bare life.

In Escobar's (2004) work on globality and anti-globalisation movements, he argues for the use of the term "third-world", not as a geographical term that mash all developing countries together, but as a term which describes impoverished zones globally. He goes on to state that the poor in these zones could be thought of through the concept of social fascism (Escobar 2004: 225-226). This statement finds support in the argument by Di Muzio (2008), who makes the connection from global impoverished zones, that is, global slums, to Agamben's understanding of the camp. Going back to Agamben, I quote:

Fascism and Nazism are, above all, redefinitions of the relations between man and citizen, and become fully intelligible only when situated – no matter how paradoxical

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<sup>114</sup> Aurora was certain her maids would vote Colorado because they were, in her words "stupid", and when I pressed her for a more nuanced answer, she did say they were probably pressured in the countryside (where they had to go to vote) to do so. When I asked the maids in private whether they did vote Colorado, they would not answer until *after* the election (perhaps implying fright of what i would do with the information they gave me?), but when they did, both said they had voted for Lugo. Note that Aurora said she had no idea "what countryside" her maids were from, nor did she know where they went during their every-second week 30 hours "of duty". She neither knew their birthdays, or how old they were.

it may seem – in the biopolitical context inaugurated by national sovereignty and declarations of rights.

- Agamben (1998: 130)

Linking Escobar's and Di Muzio's thoughts to this, one can argue that bare life exists in impoverished zones by virtue of those of its inhabitants deprived of rights. In their argument these rights would be given them if democracy was enforced as it is formally described, (Escobar 2004, Di Muzio 2008). What Agamben (1998) has shown us though, is that democracy holds little guarantee of what Hegel termed "negative freedom" (Honneth 2005: 11), for it incorporates bare life.

Still, if we accept Escobar's terming of the treatment of global poor as social fascism *and* even if we grant Agamben's proposal of a distinction between bare life and citizen correct, the proper enforcement of democracy would change the conditions under which the elites *experience* themselves as superior to the poor. Truly accepting democracy would make their superiority fascist. Doubting democracy grants them the right and *moral* obligation, to rule the country – since they see their proximate poor as being neither knowledgeable nor responsible enough to participate in its rule. Thus my informants variably seem to believe they need to take on "the white man's burden" (Kipling 1899: see appendix) to resolve the ordeal, disregarding (when not blame-pinning individuals entrenched in a "culture of poverty") poverty in what they perceive as well-functioning democracies, like the USA.

The above chain of thoughts can make the assuming of Paraguayan elites to be fascist an easy one. This is not a satisfactory portrait. There is a difference between massive acting out of fascism, putting ideals into practice as in Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain and Hitler's Germany, and expressing thoughts that can be interpreted as fascist.<sup>115</sup>

### *Sovereign Power and States of Exception*

Two forms of sovereignty are relevant to the topic of this thesis; formal ideologies of sovereignty, the theoretical frame (disregarding the incorporation of bare life), and actual sovereignty, the right to (take) life (Hansen & Stepputat 2006: 295 -296). Foucault wrote concerning the sovereigns exercise of power in the classical age: "The right which was

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<sup>115</sup> Paraguay has been known to harbour Nazis post World War II, but the country has also received other migrants, who at the present are much more dominant publically. Those of my informants who disliked the presidential candidate Oviedo, frequently explained that his authoritarianism was something he had learnt while training for the military in Germany. Although this had happened after the division of Germany, the informants who held this stated that Oviedo had adopted his "fascist ideas" there. My informants thus claim to know well what ideas of fascism imply, and are in strong opposition to these – verbally.

formulated as the “power of life and death” was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live.” (Foucault 2005: 79). Foucault argues that this changed with the times of enlightenment, laying the basis for biopower, so that “The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.” (Foucault 2005: 81).

Power with Foucault is exercised through all strategic positions and manoeuvres, manifested and maintained through encounters; power is processual and reproduced by both the dominated<sup>116</sup> and the dominating (Foucault 1991b: 174). As this notion of power is diffuse and remains in the details, power is not a privilege held by anyone, and should be understood as a “perpetual battle, rather than a contract” (ibid.). Hansen & Stepputat argue for an ethnographic approach to sovereignty in practice, where the body becomes the site and object of power (2006: 297), and I add, that the focus on bare life may enable just that. It is useful to connect this approach to the topic of this thesis, since the body, as shown, is used in “signing” wealth and power, in addition to its importance in depictions of the poor.

When the colonized territory becomes a sovereign state, it acquires the entitlement to create a range of people that can be killed with impunity for “exceptional” reasons (Sylvester 2006). In other words, when a state has absolute sovereignty, it can “widen” the categories of what (groups of) people it can rid itself of. Sylvester argues that with the use of a discourse of being “sinned against and unsinning” postcolonial states “demonize” imperial apparatuses of control, and without implicating their own demon-like actions, postcolonial states can normalise exceptional policies under the guise of being “victims”. In states where former colonizers are blamed for the creation of today’s underdevelopment, the former colonizers encounter a problem with intervening in such exceptional policies (Sylvester 2006: 69). If this happens, the international community therefore endeavours to look the other way, and, by implication, confirm the discourse of “sinned against” and “sinners” (Sylvester 2006: 66).<sup>117</sup>

Claiming to be forgotten by Europe, and in a squeeze between Argentina and Brazil, the fraction of the Paraguayan elites that I spent my time with, declared that they only act as they have to. They emphasized that the conditions under which they work towards enhancing production and legal exports and imports from their neighbouring countries are harsh, and that

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<sup>116</sup> Notably, I had no access to the dominated’s reproduction of power, as mentioned when disregarding the notion of hegemony for my analysis. Thus I can only sustain that power relations are visible in the bodies of both the poor and the rich, and thereby is at least in play between these, as understood through Agamben’s (2004) notion of tension.

<sup>117</sup> This argument in my view seems implicitly based on a dialectic understanding of history; once in the “habit” of it, the same conditions of rule is applied (almost) no matter the circumstances and its formal ideology. This may therefore be a slightly too fatalistic sense of government as completely destined by history in a dialectically predictable way, but the thought is so intriguing, and so apt to illustrate the persistence of colonial policies *both* under the guise of neoliberal policies *and* in a continuum of dominator/dominated as a “naturalized tradition”, that I apply it none the less.

for instance the Mercosur trade agreement was constantly “overruled” by Paraguay’s larger neighbours, so that the conditions for Paraguayans engaging in trade were constantly limited. It was also said that Europe had failed to fulfil its responsibilities towards Latin American descendants in not importing Latin American, specifically Paraguayan, produce. This depiction supports Sylvester’s (2006) argument, since Paraguay in this view both has been and is “sinned against”. Recall the emic versions of history referred to in the introduction, where the Spaniards were depicted as robbing the continent and “leaving behind” habits of promiscuity. In largely blaming external, historical factors for their national ordeal, when not the “ignorance and laziness” of “Paraguayans” in general, they justified their own acts. Below this is exemplified by Sonia, as she explained to me over a glass of wine at her house, why and how she meant that South America, with a few exceptions, had “done worse” than North America:

“The difference between the two Americas, north and south, is that people who went to North America went to make a better future, they brought tables and chairs, they made new homes, they wanted to create something. Those who came here only wanted to rob. The Spaniards and the others just came here to get gold, they didn’t build homes! Many were married at home, but since they were away from home for long they brought prostitutes. And that was the start of the population here! Children of prostitutes. And then these men were given Indian women as gifts, and had children with them too, children who grew up fatherless. That is what this continent is built on, that’s the difference between North and South America, and Paraguay is a result of it.”

I asked in what sense she meant the United States “was doing better”. She said people had money there. I said: “there are many poor people in the US-” Sonia replied, “I know! I’ve seen them, and I know why they are poor!” “oh” I muttered, and Sonia continued: “Yes, they are poor because they don’t want to work! How else can someone from Latin America go there, and be able to work and send money home?!”

During this explanation, Sonia simply gave her version of “the true history of South America” and placed Paraguay in it. Tying history together with her interpretation of poverty in Paraguay and elsewhere, she underscores that people are poor because they are lazy. This ties nicely with what Katz (1990: 14) holds; that “especially in America, where opportunity awaited anyone with energy and talent, poverty signalled a personal failure”, in line with O’Connor, who portrays Americans as understanding their society as one in which anyone with a determination to get ahead, could do so (2001: 101).

### *Bare Life and Voices*

The last decade, several people have pushed Agamben's conceptualisation of 'bare life' further, from its origin in Roman Law and regional focus on Europe and later the USA (Agamben 1998, 2004), extending it to other regions. It seems fruitful to make use of the extension that focuses on postcolonial and developmental states, as suggested by Sylvester (2006), among others. Although Sylvester (2006) keeps her focus on African states<sup>118</sup>, I believe the notion of the state of exception and the bare life it produces for segments of the population is applicable to Paraguay. With Sylvester: "Having cut their teeth on colonial biopolitics, the development project<sup>119</sup>, and, one might add, violent decolonization in many locations, postcolonial elites are familiar with the sovereign exception and subsume it into statecraft." (Sylvester 2006: 67).

If the sovereign in Paraguay, is only by appearance a "personified" democratic state and in reality a the ruling elites, they are the ones who declare and impose a state of exception, in which bare life can be disposed of – killed - without further ado. Boldly stated, Stroessner was the sovereign governor, ruling through the military, and now the elites take on this role, ruling partly through a market paradoxically "closed" by virtue of being liberal (Nonini 2003), partly through segregation, both spatially, bodily and socially maintained. Thus, we see that power might have been more easily revealed when in the hands of an authoritarian ruler<sup>120</sup>, and becomes more diffuse the further into the paradoxical arrangement of democracy we go while sustaining elites in their governing (Sylvester 2006; Agamben 1998: 10).

This implies that capacity to aspire, lifted through the appropriation of voice for the poor (Appadurai 2004), is difficult: the poor can voice themselves as much as they manage, until now they have yet to be respected by ruling elites. The views depicted regarding landless peasants and land invasions above, provide a fruitful ground for a critique of Appadurai's (2004) hope for a voice for the poor; the problem in Paraguay is not that the poor are voiceless, but that their voices are undermined by elite's and the media's discourses of the poor. I therefore hold that the poor may voice themselves by blocking city streets, invading land and sleeping in front of government buildings 24-7, but my informants do not

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<sup>118</sup> Sylvester primarily speaks of Mugabe's Zimbabwe and the Rwandan genocide, but opens up for wider usage of the concept of 'bare life' so that it can be applied to many postcolonial and (under-)developed nation-states.

<sup>119</sup> The "development project" for Sylvester depicts terms and conditions under which development has been and is run. I briefly discuss development as a problematic term in the introduction.

<sup>120</sup> In which by Nazism and Fascism the decision of bare life was transformed into the supreme political principle (Agamben 1998: 10)

acknowledge their voices. Flipping Appadurai's (2004) argument around, the voice of the poor is turned against them and thereby contributes to a further stigma on them as disruptive and disorderly breakers of the law. The poor in Paraguay are thus politicised as a group through the discourse of the media and through my informants as potential threats to both the existence of democracy and to the security of the elites, without being able to act as political individuals.

This point entangles a risk of undermining Appadurai's argument overall; the point of voicing must depend on who their audience is. When voices are only heard and acted in accordance with locally by some, we find that there is only so much for instance NGOs can do when it comes to action in the face of ruling elites. As Norris (2000) pointed out, 'bare life' in itself is not prone to be voiced. If accepting that the poor are living mere bare lives, Appadurai's argumentation can be understood as simplifying the complex matter of how people have become and stay voiceless.

### ***Attempted Conclusion***

Elite perceptions of the poor in play with embodied consumption patterns and sensory-moral judgements, the monuments like the Pantheon with historical narratives, are all invested with power that reproduce "truths" (Foucault 1991b) of the poor and of the nation among the elites are key to the everyday maintenance of this. I have argued that the terms 'structural violence' and 'bare life' are useful to illuminate the resulting (non-) relation between the elites and the poor. I find it pertinent to say that Lewis, who in 1959 contended that "the culture of poverty" had similar traits globally (*in* O'Connor 2001: 117), was of pitch; the discourses *about* poverty have similarities globally, and belong to a tradition at least a century old. Perhaps it is even increasingly adopted at local levels through "the new world order" (Escobar 1995).

We see that albeit not killed by manual violence, "the poor" in Paraguay suffer 'social death' (Sharp 2000), resulting from structural violence. I say a condition of 'bare life' exists in Paraguay where a voice merges into voices, voices which shout out to deaf ears, or, do not shout at all because of illness, lack of knowledge of the appropriate language (Guaraní or Spanish), or, because the speaker is already dead.

Possibly, Foucault's docile body (1991b) is Agamben's bare life (1998), both constructed through structural violence, and somehow, in Paraguay "democracy" is become the imagined new king, who rules but does not govern.

### ***Concluding in Personal Recognition***

At the eve of this thesis, I still believe that in the fight against poverty, one needs to look beyond blame pinning. That is not to say that we cannot evaluate the sum of my informants' practices. They are threatened, robbed and continuously informed of horrid incidents like kidnappings, murders and "dangerous diseases" carried by their proximate others. When they choose to guard themselves through security measures, thus signalling what economic stature they have, it is paradoxical, for they might have been safer if they "blended in" more - .

My informants have the option of revolutionising their own lives, and the means and power to change the situation for those impoverished around them. But they are not prone to do this; the pressure for consumption and potential sacrifice of access to privileged schooling and healthcare in addition to the potential social sanctions from peers explains this.

There is a shifting, context dependent division it seems, between pinning blame on the individual poor and on institutions. Recall that the Paraguayan institutions are weak, so my informants may blame the "state", but since they do not trust and simultaneously "are", the state, they then end up blaming something easily manipulated and corrupted, or themselves. So they blame the individual poor for her poverty, but speak of "all poor" and/or "Paraguayans" under common, group related stigmas. These stigmas allow "excusing" the poor, since "they" are "malnourished and uneducated" at the same time as it deprives the poor of personal recognition, and render them as bare life in the gaze of the privileged.

When disaster happens to someone personally recognised, unfortunate faith becomes "personal tragedy" or other soft terms. What segregation in it's widest sense does, is hinder these terms; My informants do not know the parents of "that kid" sniffing glue on the street corner; they do not see the old lady with large wounds on her feet – and because she has died her hair, her begging is dubious. But if my informants did see the persons behind the people surrounding them, they would probably find themselves in constant agony. For both emotional and practical reasons they thus order the world differently.

I do not think my informants would bear the thought of all the poor around them as everyday strugglers and equal beings. Therefore they deal with the resulting moral dilemmas in the manners they do; by applying ethical solutions to moral problems, and when they cannot, by depicting the poor as lesser humans, who simply do not deserve what they themselves have. If they did not do this, how could they live amid poverty?

In personal recognition of my informants, I do not blame them individually, but regard the power they exercise as part of a diffuse context of power relations, maintained as Foucault holds, in personal encounters, but whose sum is larger than these. When we take the elites “out of the shadows”, they are just people. I think D’Andrade (1995) has an intriguing point when criticising anthropologists pursuing “moral careers” in anthropology. My informants may be oppressors, but will that change if we name them devils, underscore their separateness and make them inhumane others, scaring them off from dialogue? Linger with that question, and think of my informants, even if they do not need advocating and can endure the judgement implicitly passed on them throughout this thesis, with the same seriousness applied to the socially, economically and educationally deprived.



## Appendix

### *The White Man's Burden*

*Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go, bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait, in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child.  
Take up the White Man's burden--  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain,  
To seek another's profit  
And work another's gain.  
Take up the White Man's burden--  
The savage wars of peace--  
Fill full the mouth of Famine,  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
(The end for others sought)  
Watch sloth and heathen folly  
Bring all your hope to nought.  
Take up the White Man's burden--  
No iron rule of kings,  
But toil of serf and sweeper--  
The tale of common things.  
The ports ye shall not enter,  
The roads ye shall not tread,  
Go, make them with your living  
And mark them with your dead.*

*Take up the White Man's burden,  
And reap his old reward--  
The blame of those ye better  
The hate of those ye guard--  
The cry of hosts ye humour  
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--  
"Why brought ye us from bondage,  
Our loved Egyptian night?"  
Take up the White Man's burden--  
Ye dare not stoop to less--  
Nor call too loud on Freedom  
To cloak your weariness.*

*By all ye will or whisper,  
By all ye leave or do,  
The silent sullen peoples  
Shall weigh your God and you.  
Take up the White Man's burden!  
Have done with childish days--  
The lightly-proffered laurel,  
The easy ungrudged praise:  
Comes now, to search your manhood  
Through all the thankless years,  
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,  
The judgment of your peers.*

-Rudyard Kipling  
In McClure's Magazine 12 (Feb. 1899)

*Map of Paraguay*



Map No. 3760 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS  
June 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

## *Map of Asunción*



This map I received at the language school I attended in Paraguay, the IDIPAR. I have not been able to obtain credentials.

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<sup>121</sup> This source is *only* quoted in footer.

