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Comparative Studies and the South American Gran Chaco

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INTRODUCTION

This article reviews the historical and present prospects of ethnohistorical and ethnographic work in the South American Gran Chaco. Geographically the Chaco is a semi-arid central South American plain, some one million square kilometers in size, encompassing portions of northern Argentina, eastern Bolivia, and western Paraguay. Average rainfall oscillates around 800 mm/yr, with the peripheries being wetter and the central Chaco drier. Some 250,000 indigenous people belonging to more than twenty ethnic groups live in the Chaco. Traditional ethnolinguistic categorization classifies them into six main linguistic groups: Mataco-maká (Wichí-Mataco, Chorote, Nivaclé-Chulupí, Maká), Guaycurú (Toba, Toba-Pilagá, Pilagá, Mocoví, Mbayá-Caduveo), Lule-Vilela (Chunupí), Lengua-Maskoi (Lengua, Sanapaná, Angaité, Enenlhet), Zamuco (Chamacoco-Ishir, Ayoreo) and Tupí-Guaraní (Ava-Chiriguano, Chané, Tapiete, Ioseño-Guaraní, and Guaraní Occidental). The last group is the largest, including nearly 100,000 people, of whom the majority live in Bolivia. Unlike their Amazonian and Andean counterparts, Chaco indigenous peoples have yet to establish transnational, pan-indigenous representative bodies of their own. The present position of Chaco scholars is in many ways isomorphic to that of Chaco indigenous peoples, as Chaco

anthropology has not established itself as an internationally recognized field of endeavor. Nevertheless, recent scholarship in the region is currently producing an original synthesis of many of the long-standing concerns of Andeanist and Amazonianist scholarship, respectively. A case can also be made for a new direction for research, based upon intriguing anthropological and historical parallels between the North American Great Plains and the South American Gran Chaco. The very indefiniteness of Chaco scholarship may also be its principal strength, and the past and present directions of Chaco research both draw upon and make a persuasive case for returning to comparative and area studies approaches in anthropology.

ETHNOHISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The Chaco has a long history of exploration and evangelization from various fronts: the Andean Audiencia of Charcas to the west, Tucumán in present-day Argentina to the south, and Amazonia and the Chiquitanía to the north. As a result there exists a considerable corpus of written sources that permits the retracing of its history as far back as to the mid-sixteenth century. Though often shepherded into the category “lowland South America”, in this respect the Chaco is strongly differentiated from Amazonia. The paucity of written sources for the colonial period has become something of an obligatory lament in the ethnographic and ethnohistoric literature of the Amazon. By contrast, the multitude of sources available for the Chaco is comparable in many respects to the rich archival documentation extant for the Andes. There are some noteworthy differences. In the Chaco, the availability of written sources varies temporally. For example, there is an almost total absence of documentation for the seventeenth century, following the realization by the Spanish that establishing a permanent land route between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts would be impractical. The availability of sources also varies spatially: much more documentation exists for the periphery than for the interior of the Chaco. In fact, the way information about the interior was mediated by groups living on the periphery has become an interesting topic of research in its own right. Apart from a few missions established in the eighteenth century, Europeans passed through the Chaco but only established themselves on its margins. The information that we have, therefore, is up until the latter half of the nineteenth century derived from travelers’ and explorers’ logs and not, as in the Andes, from more exact materials such as censuses, tributes, complaints, and petitions originating from indigenous

peoples themselves. Finally, in the Chaco, in contrast to the Andes, there is a near-absence of archaeological data, due to a combination of three factors: the absence of suitable lithic raw material for stone tools, soil conditions that are not conducive to the preservation of organic and faunal materials, and a lack of research (Salas 1945; Fock 1961, 1966; Sánchez and Sica 1990; Méndez et al. 2000; Méndez et al. 2003; Dames and Moore 2001; Ortíz and Ventura 2003; Balbarrey et al. 2003; Calandra & Ferrarini 2003; Calandra & Salceda 2003, 2008; Calandra et al. 2005; Colazo et al. 2004; Lamenza et al. 2006).

There exists, nevertheless, a rich historical bibliography about the region and its frontiers that more than rewards consultation although it cannot without effort be regarded as properly ethnohistorical (Gandía 1929; Arze Quiroga 1953; Finot 1978; Maeder 1996; Pistoia 1989; Querejazu Calvo 1975; Tomichá 2002). The written sources used for historical and ethnohistorical analyses are the same, and include archives, chronicles and histories (Angelis 1835; Camaño 1955; Cardiel 1912; Cardús 1886; Charlevoix 1756; Comajuncosa 1836; Comajuncosa y Corrado 1884; Cortesão 1955; Díaz de Guzmán 1835, 1979; Dobrizhoffer 1968; Egaña 1954; Fernández 1994; Giannecchini 1996; Jiménez de la Espada 1965; Jolis 1972; Levillier 1922; Lozano 1733; Martarelli 1918; Mingo de la Concepción 1981; Misioneros del Chaco Occidental 1995; Tommasini 1937; Montenegro 1964; Mujía 1914; Muriel 1955; Nino 1908, 1912, 1918; Pastells 1912; Pastells and Mateos 1956; Rodrigues do Prado 2004; Sánchez Labrador 1910; Torres Revello 1941; Paucke 1942-1944; Calzavarini 2004-2006; Julien 2008), dictionaries and grammars (Chomé 1958; Giannecchini et al. 1916; Hervás 1800, 1990; Santiago de León 1998), records of voyages and explorations (Ayoroa 1927; Azara 2009; Balzan 2008; Belaieff 1924, 1925; Bennati 1875; Campos 1888; Cominges 1892; Cornejo 1972; Núñez Cabeza de Vaca 1994; d'Orbigny 1839, 2002; Schmidel 2008; Suárez Arana 1919; Thourar 1997) and a corpus of maps which have been particularly important in the Chaco¹. Another source, properly ethnohistorical and only recently valued seriously, is oral history (Amarilla-Stanley 2001; Cordeu 2003; Encuentro Interconfesional de Misioneros 1997; Fric 1909; Gordillo 2005; Riester 1998; Riester and Weber 1998). These sources enable an organization not so much of Chaco indigenous history as of its contacts with colonial and republican society into the following four periods: (1) early phase—sixteenth and early seventeenth century exploration; (2) Jesuit phase—end of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth century; (3) colonization phase—the nineteenth century up to the Chaco War (1932-1935); (4) modern

phase—from the Chaco War to the present. It is important to note that while the mere existence of early sources distinguishes the Chaco from the Amazon, the limitations of these earliest sources mean that arriving at a real approximation to the pre-Columbian era is not possible here as it is for the Andes.

The very existence of sources across the *longue durée* paired with the absence of clear geographic boundaries for the region have meant, first, that a strongly historicist component has always been present in Chaco anthropology and, second, that Chaco anthropology has always demonstrated a marked bent toward comparativism and even, in its founding generation, toward diffusionism. The Chaco “classics” are the works of Erland von Nordenskiöld and his disciple Alfred Métraux, which particularly track Andean influences on Chacoan peoples. Nevertheless, the inescapable backdrop to all Chaco studies up to the present day is the substantial ethnic diversity of the region, reflected even in the very earliest sources. This, of course, is not a characteristic exclusive to the Chaco, but the availability of a body of historical sources makes possible here what is difficult in the case of Amazonia: tracking across the *longue durée* unfolding processes of population, ethnic composition, fusion and fission, mediations and contacts—that is to say, ethnogenesis generally. The development of this mode of analysis began with regional syntheses and reached its apogee with the work of the Slovenian-Paraguayan scholar Branislava Susnik (Métraux 1942, 1946a, 1996; Susnik 1961, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1978, 1981; Kersten 1968; Renard-Casevitz et al. 1986; Saignes 1979; Braunstein 1999; Braunstein et al. 2002). Her very ambitious style of broad synthesis is today only found in general introductions or single book chapters. Contemporary scholarship, instead, focuses its attention on case studies that are at once more modest and more exact, about particular indigenous groups or micro-regions (Nordenskiöld 1917, 1920; Métraux 1927, 1928a, 1928b, 1930, 1934, 1946b; Lussagnet 1961; Pifarré 1989; Saignes 1982, 1984, 1985, 1990; Santamaría 1995; Beck 1994; Langer 1994, 1995; Carvajal 1998; Saeger 2000; Nassis 2005; Citro 2008). While most recent efforts strongly emphasize oral histories (or “ethno-ethnohistory”), they only rarely complement these rich narratives with information available from archival documentation (Chase-Sardi 1981; Cordeu 1993, 1995, 1998; Fischermann 1993; Schuchard 1981, 1995; Segovia 1996, 2005; Siffredi and Santini 1993; Mashnshnek 2000; Gordillo 2002; Bossert and Villar 2005).

Finally, a few contemporary studies are distinguished by their simultaneous attention to history and to anthropology, focusing on

ethnogenesis and considering Chacoan indigenous identities in the *longue durée* and as historical products (Braunstein ed. 1989-2008; Cordeu 1993, 1995, 2004, 2008; Combès and Saignes 1991; Combès and Villar 2004; Combès 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; Combès and Lowrey 2006; Bossert 2008; Richard 2008). These studies stress cultural hybridity, linguistic borrowing, diatopic variation, interethnic marriage and particularly the diachronic association of regional complexes based both in hierarchical (Mbaya-Guana-Chamacoco, Chiriguano-Chané) and symmetrical (Wichí-Chorote-Nivaclé) symbiosis. These latter works have also been concerned to avoid explanation in terms of cultural “traits” linked to linguistic “families”, and have moved away from a previous predilection for directly applying theories forged in other contexts (Amazonia in particular) to Chaco ethnohistory. Chaco ethnohistory, then, like Chaco anthropology *tout court*, is beginning to forge its own methods and analytical tools.

ETHNOLOGY

Chaco anthropology is marked by an antidogmatic eclecticism that derives in part from the peripheral position of its amateur and professional scholars. What may be called the “classical” period extends into the second half of the twentieth century, during which time disparate authors such as Erland Nordenskiöld (1910, 1920, 1929, 2002), Raphael Karsten (1915, 1923, 1932), Max Schmidt (1937, 1938) or Alfred Métraux (1937, 1943, 1946a, 1946b, 1996) carried out systematic empirical and descriptive studies from an analytical point of view which combined a collector’s zeal, a classical evolutionist theoretical bias and a diffusionist comparative standpoint. Several studies have been written about this pioneer phase (Lindberg 1995; Krebs 2005; Gordillo 2006; Bossert and Villar 2007), and the concerns of its major figures are echoed in the foundational, if stylistically abstruse, investigations of Susnik (1961, 1968, 1971, 1972). In terms of thematic problems, this pioneer phase concentrated on issues such as anthropometry and ethnoastronomy (Lehmann-Nitsche 1907, 1924a, 1924b, 1924c, 1924d, 1924e, 1924f, 1927), indigenous religion (Métraux 1937; Palavecino 1948), material culture (Rosen 1924; Fock 1966; Métraux 1930), and ethnohistory and “social organization” defined in quite a loose sense (Baldus 1931; Belaieff 1936; Boggiani 1894, 1897; Brinton 1898; Métraux 1946a; Susnik 1983). In addition, some scattered works attempted to establish the Gran Chaco as cultural area in its own right (Imbelloni 1941; Métraux 1946a; Palavecino 1948; Susnik 1972).

With the academic institutionalization of scientific anthropology, modern approaches gradually shifted the thematic emphasis to shamanism (Sebag 1965; Bernard-Muñoz 1977; Tomasini 1997; Califano & Dasso 1999), mythology (Kelm 1971; Bórmida and Califano 1978; Clastres 1992; Cordeu 1969, 1984; Cordeu and Siffredi 1988) and particularly the dynamic processes of absorption of missionary theology (Catholic, Anglican, Mormon, Evangelical, etc.) by indigenous cosmologies (Bartolomé 1972; Cordeu and Siffredi 1971; Miller 1975, 1979; Dasso 1999; Wright 2002, 2008; Ceriani Cernadas 2008a, 2008b; Villar 2007, 2008). Considered as a whole, Chaco anthropological literature is striking both for its relative poverty of kinship studies (Miller 1966; Wicke and Chase-Sardi 1969; Braunstein 1983, 1992; Palmer 2005; Barúa 1995) and of regional generalization (with a few exceptions, such as Cordeu and de los Ríos 1982; Braunstein 1983; Braunstein and Palmer 1992). Nevertheless, it also shows a considerable variety and richness regarding issues such as ethnoastronomy (Braunstein and Gómez 2004; Giménez et al. 2006; Gómez 2007), processes of ethnic definition and interethnic articulation (Braunstein 1988; Gustafson 2002; Combès 2005, 2006; Combès and Villar 2004, 2007; Cordeu 2004; Gordillo 2006a, 2006b; Bossert 2006; Lowrey 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007; Villar 2005, 2006), and particularly the analysis of meaningful relationships between material culture and ethnic identity, symbolism, and cultural change. A significant tendency of Chaco anthropology has been the collecting of extensive compilations of oral literature (Nordenskiöld 2002; Métraux 1946b; Chase-Sardi 1981, 2003; Clastres 1992; Cordeu 2003; Riestler and Weber 1998; Wilbert and Simoneau 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1987, 1988). Current foci include the relationship between oral history and ethnohistory (Saignes 1990; Siffredi and Santini 1993; Cordeu 2003, 2004; Combès 2005; Combès and Lowrey 2006; Combès and Villar 2004; Bossert 2006; Córdoba and Braunstein 2008) and changes in sociopolitical organization (Mendoza 2002; Combès and Villar 2004; Combès 2005; Combès and Lowrey 2006; Palmer 2005; Córdoba 2008; Lowrey 2007; Villagra 2008). Recently, several major collective works on problems such as cultural change (Miller 1999), ethnic classification (Combès 2006), political leadership (Braunstein and Meichtry 2008) and the structuring impact of the war of 1932-1935 between Bolivia and Paraguay (Richard 2008) have been published.

Regarding conceptual, methodological and theoretical frameworks, evolutionist and diffusionist approaches gradually gave way to phenomenological perspectives that analytically privilege the description of the internal logic of Chaco indigenous cosmologies. The tendency in

this latter phase has been to focus upon conscious meanings implicit in oral history, myth, autobiography and several other forms of discourse rather than on underlying economic, historical, political or sociological structures. This idealist emphasis is particularly evident in perhaps the only identifiable “school of thought” in Chaco anthropology, embodied in the works of Marcelo Bórmida and his disciples from the early 1970s to the near-present. Here recurrent theoretical references include Ernesto de Martino, Edmund Husserl, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Mircea Eliade and Maurice Leenhardt (Bórmida 1973-1978; Califano 1999; Dasso 1999; Idoyaga Molina 1995; Tomasini 1997). To a certain extent this tendency has persisted in the contemporary eclecticism and interdisciplinarity of Chaco studies, particularly in Argentine academia where the majority of Chaco scholars function. In most contemporary studies, however, a broadly phenomenological point of view is loosely combined with analytical strategies of religious hermeneutics, existential and deconstructive philosophy, gender theory, theories of performance, cultural studies and even different varieties of structuralism (Sterpin 1993; Alvarsson 1998; Braunstein 2006; Cordeu 1984, 1999; Cordeu and Siffredi 1988; Wright 2003; Citro 2006; Hirsch 2006; Ceriani Cernadas 2008a, 2008b). Isolated attempts have also been made to analyze ethnographic data within different analytical frameworks, mainly derived from ethnohistory, descriptive linguistics, ethnobotany and sociology (Kidd 1995; Arenas 2003; Gordillo 2004; Bossert and Villar 2004; Palmer 2005; Combès 2005; Villar 2005; Montani 2008; Richard 2008). A related contemporary tendency is the slow revival of the comparative method in several approaches that strive to relocate the Gran Chaco within a wider Amerindian perspective, reestablishing comparative dialogue between regional data and Amazonian structuralist theories (Combès and Saignes 1991; Sterpin 1993; d’Onofrio 2003; Villar 2007; Tola 2007; Barúa 2008; Bossert et al. 2009).

Many of the aforementioned studies focus on Guaraní-speaking peoples. These groups live primarily on the outer margins of the Chaco proper and for the most part practice settled agriculture, supplemented now by cattle-raising and wage labor. The arid interior Chaco remains extremely sparsely populated even today and was until the War of the Chaco the almost exclusive terrain of nomadic groups speaking Zamucoan, Guaycuruan, and Matacoan languages. For this reason one also finds in the Chaco literature many works that consider indigenous life in terms of a “hunter and gatherer” analytical framework (e.g. Mendoza 2002). The archetypical Chaco people here, the one to whom the majority of such studies are devoted, are the Ayoreode of Paraguay and Bolivia. Some

of these contributions have a strongly sociobiological perspective while others employ a more or less “primordialist” lens; inevitably, the politics of NGOs, development projects and environmentalism and their interactions with nomadic Chaco peoples have become subjects of investigation as well (Renshaw 1988, 1996; Bremen 2001; Fischermann 1976, 2006; Bartolomé 2000; Blaser 2004a, 2004b; Bessire 2006).

WHY COMPARATIVE AND AREA STUDIES?

As a cultural and geographic zone, the Chaco exists in the shadow of the Andes and of Amazonia. It is similarly positioned in the anthropological imagination. The conceptual playing fields of South American anthropology are, clearly, Amazonia and the Andes. It is significant that in the *Handbook of South American Indians* the indigenous peoples of the Chaco appear in the volume devoted to “Marginal Tribes”. When reading the regional literature, it can feel to “Chacologists” as though the Chaco—tucked away into lowland South America, which is to say Amazonia—did not exist at all. The theoretical models that dominate ethnological analyses for the region have been forged on the basis of Amazonian data, while regional historiography is strongly shaped by Andean events, sequences, and narratives.

As the previous two sections demonstrated, Chaco scholarship has defined itself principally in geographic rather than theoretical terms and has continuously relied on the comparative approach in its self-constitution as an investigative enterprise. While Chaco researchers are sometimes self-conscious about this “anthropological relativism”, it is appropriate to the field and its data. Attempts by Chaco indigenous peoples to form a transnational organization of their own have stumbled repeatedly and are inevitably comparative undertakings, the models being the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) and Andean confederations. The ethnographer’s magic works, after all, on the material at hand. Amazonian indigenous peoples have achieved worldwide recognition as complex interlocutors of environmental politics. Anthropologically, the Amazon is South America’s playing field for theories about the relationship between nature and society (Viveiros de Castro 1996): structuralist above all, but including historical and cultural ecological debates over demography and environment. Meanwhile, and most spectacularly marked by the election in Bolivia of President Evo Morales, Andean indigenous peoples continue to forge compelling

syntheses of pre- and post-colonial history. Andeanists, in their turn, have their fiercest intellectual battles about which history is most relevant to the present: the Incaic and pre-Incaic kind, or the colonial and post-colonial variety (Starn 1991). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that like Chaco indigenous peoples themselves Chaco scholars are selective and critically-minded comparers and borrowers, taking theories about structure from the Amazon, and taking historiographic inspiration from the Andes. Meanwhile, Chaco history and ethnography has had virtually no impact upon Andean studies, and after *Mythologiques* few Amazonianists have sought inspiration in Chaco ethnological data (for exceptions, see Lévi-Strauss 1985; Fausto 2008).

There is, then, a remarkable isomorphism between the literal and the conceptual field of study. The Chaco is and always has been a zone of exchange, of reciprocal influence, and of mixing. If the strong points of Chaco scholarship are meticulous ethnography and definite (if under-utilized) historiographic potential, its great faults are its internal indefiniteness and a certain—perhaps related—predilection for obscurantism. The work of Branislava Susnik, a figure who is in many ways the patron saint of Chaco ethnology, manifests both tendencies in canonical fashion. Ethnographers of the Chaco have long paid as much attention to the internal heterogeneity of inter-ethnic relations in the Chaco as to relations with non-Chacoan peoples (including non-Indians). This approach guided Susnik's work and is one of the reasons Chaco scholars continue to make the considerable effort involved in engaging her writings. This simultaneous attention to external influence and to internal complexity is perhaps the principal merit of "Chacology", and as such can offer an example to Amazonian and Andean scholars alike. Indeed, Chaco scholarship might aim to play more explicitly, as it sometimes has implicitly, the classic role of the "included" or "sublimated" inferior term relative to both the literature from Amazonia (with its emphasis on social and theoretical structures) and the Andes (with its emphasis on history and histories). It could thus act as an agent of mediation and of transformation within the whole formed by South American scholarship. There is ample reason to believe the peoples of the Chaco have often done so within that whole formed by South America. If the Amazon is the privileged field for the generation of theories, and the Andes for historical debates, perhaps Chaco scholarship is best located as a middle ground of synthetic reconciliation between structure and history.

To sink from airy conjecture back to the sandy earth in question, what differentiates the Chaco from the Andes and the Amazon most starkly is its flat, dry, brambly-thorny ecosystem, home to rheas, anteaters, armadillos

and endless flocks of birds. The socio-ecological metaphor for the Andes is the “vertical archipelago,” the systems of relations that connect the steep dry cold altiplano and its llamas and potatoes to the gently sloping warm moist foothills and their corn and fruit (Murra 1975). The socio-ecological metaphor for the Amazon basin is the “fractal river,” the systems of relations that recursively figure the downriver as white and full of manufactured goods and the upriver as Indian and full of forest magic (Gow 1994). A similarly aquatic metaphor can be conjured for the Chaco, though it is an arid flat expanse stretching from the Andean foothills to the Brazilian shield. One might imagine the plain as a waterless inland sea, at once a barrier to and means of connection and communication. The settled Guaraní agriculturalists on its margins then become the decent coastal fisherfolk, the linguistically diverse nomads in the interior—especially once they adopted the horse—the feared and unpredictable pirates of the high seas. This anti-waterway has long linked the Andean archipelagoes to the Amazonian fractal rivers in some ways and acted as an obstacle between the two in others (Lowrey 2006a).

Considering the Chaco in this way, it becomes evident that the Americas contain another such arid interior sea: the Great Plains. Like the Chaco, the Plains have long served as both avenue and obstacle to Indians and settlers alike; like the Chaco, the definition of the outer limits of the Plains is subject to dispute but its core evident (Rossum and Lavin 2000). This might be a mere geographical curiosity, but what is remarkable is that so many similar patterns hold in what might be called these two American heartlands, North and South (for useful Plains comparisons, see for example Albers 1993; Albers and James 1985; Biolsi 1984, 2004; Fowler 1994; Harmon 2002; Holder 1970; Holm 2002; Newcomb 1950; Osburn 1983; Strauss 1994; Turner Strong 2002; Wedel 1947). Contemporary anthropologists are not accustomed to thinking this way. The comparative ambitions of Lévi-Strauss’s *Mythologiques* are now viewed with considerable caution even in France, where a truly Americanist tradition at least exists (Désveaux 2006). In South America, comparisons between South and North America are more readily made, not least because South American anthropologists are more likely to read English than North American anthropologists are to read Spanish or Portuguese. However, it is disappointing that the program for comparative thought put forth in French historian Thierry Saignes’s essay “Indios de Abajo” has been so little engaged (Saignes 1979). Saignes suggested that in the eyes of their would-be colonizers, the Indians of the Chaco and the Indians of the Plains were respectively figured as the paradigmatic “wild Indians” in each case. His suggestive observations can be amplified. In the Spanish-

language literature, the phrase “horse complex” is deployed in the original English, borrowed from the Plains literature and applied to the adoption of the horse by nomadic Chaco groups (Nichols 1939; Métraux 1946a; Kersten 1968). Susnik famously described the Chaco as having been “colonized by cows” in the mid-nineteenth century before settlers followed in the second half of the century. In the most striking oversight—especially given the enormous literature on the Ghost Dance and the importance of Wounded Knee to the scholarly and popular American imagination—no one other than an amateur Bolivian historian (Sanabria Fernández 1972) has devoted even a portion of a scholarly monograph to comparing that movement to the remarkably similar, and nearly simultaneous, Apiaguaiqui Tumpa movement that ended in a massacre of several thousand Guaraní speaking Indians by Bolivian military forces at Kuruyuki in January 1892, little more than a year after Wounded Knee in December 1890.

There is nothing in the history of the Plains to compare to the War of the Chaco, but other parallels proliferate: where the American West got Mormons, the Chaco got Mennonites (Hack 1978-1980; Klassen 2002; Niebuhr 2001; Ratzlaff 2001; Roa Villalba 1997; Stahl 2007; Stoesz and Stackley 1999); where by the first half of the twentieth century everyone supposed the Chaco and Plains Indians to be finished by the beginning of the twenty-first their populations are larger than ever before. Finally, many of the same practical and political issues are presently paramount in the two contexts: land-holding is tied to huge ranches; settler models of agriculture have exhausted the land; petroleum reserves lie under the soil while the absence of spectacular natural or cultural landmarks have made it challenging to promote and establish protected areas above the ground. Territorially the majority of the Chaco belongs to Argentina, like Canada and the United States a country that considers itself a nation of white settlers. If the Chaco indigenous experience does share commonalities with the Plains Indians experience in North America, the drawing of scholarly attention to these parallels might even foster strategic mutual awareness between Plains and Chaco native communities.

CONCLUSION

Chaco scholars are accomplished magpies, reading Andean historiography, Amazonian theory, Plains ethnography and ethnohistory, and an autochthonous quasi-Boasian tradition of cataloguing/activist approaches to cultures as unique geographically-influenced expressions of the human geist. The present essay documents the growing trove

of historicized ethnography, true ethnohistory (what Schwartz and Solomon (1999) call “Indian histories” as opposed to “histories of Indians”), ongoing fieldwork, and productive engagement with extant Andeanist and Amazonianist scholarship that is the result. Beyond that lays a potentially productive avenue of renewed Americanist engagement with North American Plains materials. This multiply-peripheral region, simultaneously isolated and inter-connected, is a model of and a model for its own scholarship, which has accepted long, complex histories and mixed, hybrid identities as givens rather than as surprises. It contributes to the discipline at large a demonstration of the continuing value of comparative and area studies in anthropological scholarship.

NOTES

1. Mainly, the ones by Samson d'Abbeville (1657), Retz (1732), Lozano (1733), Anónimo (c. 1735), Cardiel (1772), Dobrizhoffer (1784), Camaño (1789), Campos (1883), Corrado (1884), Aráoz (1885), Cardús (1886), Thouar (1883, 1886), Baldrich (1890), Pelleschi (1897), Cattunar (1911), Nino (1912), Nordenskiöld (1912) and Belaieff (1932).

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AHN Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid)
ANA Archivo Nacional de Asunción
ANB Archivo Nacional de Bolivia (Expedientes Coloniales, Mojos y Chiquitos, Rück)
ANG Archivo General de la Nación Argentina (BN: Biblioteca Nacional; AL: Fondo Andrés Bello; G: Gobierno)
ARSI Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (Roma)
BNM Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid
BNRJ Biblioteca Nacional de Río de Janeiro (Fondo Pedro de Angelis)

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