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ARTICLES

AGAINST THE RUN OF PLAY

Masculine Fantasies and the Game of Football in the Gran Chaco

Agustin Diz

Abstract: In Argentina's Gran Chaco, indigenous Guaraní men play football assiduously. This article explores how the game articulates with their sense of masculinity. Historical engagements in the Chaco's extractive labor markets have shaped understandings of masculinity that emphasize strength, courage, and provision. However, the decline of the region's extractive industries has made these forms of masculinity unattainable for young men. Games of football, including betting and drinking off the pitch, create bounded and embodied experiences that allow young men to experience fantasies of productivity and collectivity while disavowing everyday experiences of unemployment. These fantasies are particularly striking because they misrecognize women's growing role as providers even as they sustain an illusion of autonomous masculine politics that elides ties of kinship and dependency.

Keywords: Argentina, fantasy, football, gender, indigenous communities, play, politics, unemployment

Riding on his beat-up moped, Hector pulled up beneath the shade of an old carob tree. I hopped on behind him, and we sped off down the dirt road in the direction of the settlement's football pitch. On the pitch, two visiting teams from neighboring Guaraní settlements had begun the first match of a three-team tournament. This would be my footballing debut with the young men of the settlement I call Aguararenta, and I was worried that I might fail to meet their expectations.

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If I was nervous before the game, my heart sank when I saw the speed, dexterity, and physicality of the game that preceded our own. It was too late to back down, though, so I dutifully began warming up. To my surprise, no one else engaged in this kind of pre-game preparation. Bemused, I returned to the shaded spot near the sidelines where my teammates sat and found that they were sharing a carton of wine and carefully picking out leaves of coca from a green plastic bag. “Don’t you warm up?” I asked. Several of the men exchanged amused looks, and Hector held up the carton. “Wine gives courage,” he explained with a grin. Judging by the tenor of the game that preceded our own, courage was just what I was going to need.

I had not been living in the Chaco long, but I had already found that football was a central activity for the young men who lived in the indigenous communities that dot the border between Argentina and Bolivia. As in most Guaraní settlements in the region, young men played football every day of the week. They avidly participated in weekend matches against other Guaraní communities and enthusiastically joined in formal tournaments organized by the municipal government.

For the most part, the men who played football were chronically unemployed. Without a steady source of income, they relied on their parental families for food and shelter and, in particular, on their female relatives who benefited from state-sponsored cash transfer programs and were more likely to be employed (Diz 2018). Like most of Argentina’s indigenous populations, the Guaraní have typically been excluded from and neglected by the state’s nation-building projects (Gordillo 2006). Nonetheless, plantation bosses, logging crews, and oil and gas subcontractors often sought Guaraní men as a source of cheap yet dependable labor. Given their access to the Chaco’s labor markets, men have historically played the roles of household providers and local political leaders. Moreover, the unskilled type of labor they typically carried out has also informed a sense of masculinity that is grounded in ideas about physical strength and endurance. The stagnation of the Chaco’s commodity frontiers has thus impacted men’s ability to live up to expected gender roles.

My friend Hector was a case in point. By his own account, he had once been a “hell of a player” (*un señor jugador*). At the age of 16, he had accompanied his father to work on a lemon plantation or *finca*. He was too young to receive a wage on the books, but the bosses paid him to play for the *finca* team. Despite his adolescent prowess, Hector struggled to find employment during my time in Aguararenta. This was a blow to his sense of self and particularly to his dreams of securing a brick-and-mortar house for his younger sister. It also made him fear for his prospects of ever having a family of his own. To make matters worse, he had contracted tuberculosis, and his strength and lung capacity were greatly diminished. The disease imperiled his ability to perform the sorts of physically demanding labor that Guaraní men hoped to engage in.

Building on cases like Hector's, this article describes the conditions of structural unemployment and marginality that young indigenous men in South America's Gran Chaco face and analyzes how they create and negotiate forms of masculine fantasy through the game of football. I argue that football provides a space in which men can inhabit masculine fantasies of productive prowess and collectivity that disavow the off-the-field realities of mass unemployment and surplus labor. These fantasies have become particularly powerful because they misrecognize the growing importance of female labor for household subsistence (Diz 2018, 2022) and sustain an illusion of laboring productivity beyond the needs of dependent relatives.

This article draws on archival research, oral histories, interviews, genealogical data, and participant observation, including almost daily participation in football matches (as both player and spectator), during 17 months of fieldwork between 2012 and 2017. After positioning the argument in relation to broader ideas of gender, play, and fantasy, the article contextualizes Guaraní labor histories and explains how their experiences have given rise to a particular understanding of masculinity that is currently in crisis. It then considers how the game is played in relaxed, informal matches that occasion a sense of antagonistic conviviality among equals, before exploring how more formal games become spaces that showcase strength and courage as masculine virtues. Betting, socializing, and forming footballing collectivities are crucial to the experiences of football, ensuring a sense of solidarity and productivity that remains important once the match ends. Finally, I explore football's masculine fantasies in relation to gendered and generational household relations and the challenges they pose to masculinist ideas of provision and labor.

Gender, Football, and Fantasy

Fantasy emerges through play because it allows people to engage in 'as if' situations that mix engagement and distance (Seligman et al. 2008) and enable the creation of new worlds (Göncü and Kessel 1984). Inasmuch as they tell people something about themselves (Geertz 1973: 448), games are often central to the production of fantasies of the self because they build on "shared imagination" and contribute to the creation of recognized "roles and corporate groups" (Bloch 2012: 113). It is precisely football's 'as if' or illusory (Huizinga 1955) quality that makes it such a potent social force. As scholars have shown, the game has been closely related to the rise of modernity (Elias and Dunning 1986), nationalism (Archetti 1999; Gramsci 1994), working-class identity (Clarke 1973; DaMatta 1982), patronage (I. Jeffrey 1992), local politics (Erikson 2013; Pires Rosse 2013; Vianna 2008), and processes of subjectification (Rollason 2011; Walker 2013).

In the Guaraní case, I will argue that the game enables young men to enact individual and collective forms of productivity and 'gendered agency' (High 2010) at a time when the decline of extractive industries challenges their ability to embody forms of laboring masculinity. As a platform for fantasy, it provides a space in which people can experience how they "might desire things to be" (Sangren 2013: 282). Because it is a rule-bound and spatially and temporally demarcated practice, football lets men demonstrate their ability to be "good at being a man" through acts of "performative excellence" (Herzfeld 1988: 16), which run counter to the marginality and lack of opportunities they experience in the day-to-day. These footballing fantasies are particularly poignant in the Guaraní context because they strain against broader political and economic restrictions. Although processes of unemployment and marginalization often stunt young people's trajectories toward recognized adulthood (see Dhillon and Yousef 2009), my focus on gendered fantasies draws attention to the active ways in which young people produce and reproduce social ties that challenge broader structural constraints (see also Honwana 2014; C. Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013).

To some extent, the game plays this role because of the way in which it articulates with political and economic realities at the national and local scales. Football is the most prominent sport in Argentina (Archetti 1999) and has been used instrumentally for political purposes by right-wing military dictatorships (Archetti 2006) and left-wing populists (Rein 1998) alike. In the Guaraní case, powerful actors have often used the game as a vehicle for inclusion and social mobility. When they were in charge of the mission of Aguararenta between the 1960s and 1990s, Franciscans established the first football pitch in the settlement and enjoined their charges to play the game as a way of fostering a sense of collectivity. Older generations remember participating in the football championships that the Eva Perón Foundation organized throughout the country in the mid-twentieth century. These championships brought "children from different towns and provinces together" and gave the best teams a chance to travel to Buenos Aires, "permitting many children to visit the federal capital for the first time" (Rein 1998: 63–64). Today, local celebrities organize similar football tournaments with the aim of identifying stars in the making and allowing them to showcase their talent to scouts from the country's most affluent first division clubs.

In tying together individual experiences with broader political economic movements, my analysis contributes to a growing body of work on the study of 'men as men' in Latin America (Gutmann 2003b; Viveros Vigoya 2003). Rather than concentrating on 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1987) in national centers of power, the focus here is on how men belonging to marginalized and exploited ethnic groups reaffirm a sense of masculine worth that resonates with past historical experiences and shifting political economies. Crucially, I demonstrate that a game like football, which is vastly popular throughout the region,

can give rise to changing and diverging gendered fantasies. As we will see, these fantasies need not lead to male domination, but they can inform and reproduce people's experiences of success and failure as gendered subjects.

Indigenous Labor and the Masculine Body in the Gran Chaco

The northwestern corner of Argentina where Aguararenta is located is a complex part of the country. No less than seven different indigenous groups inhabit the area, including 20,000 Guaraní (INDEC 2004), as well as *chaqueño* cattle ranchers of European descent and more recently arrived 'white' or *criollo* migrants who tend to be wealthier and politically dominant. Most Guaraní live in state-recognized 'indigenous communities'. Community populations range from 200 to 2,000 individuals, and most inhabitants descend from labor migrants and war refugees who escaped from Bolivia during the Chaco War of the 1930s.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the regional non-indigenous elite thrived thanks to lucrative sugar cane plantations. The plantations had a transformative effect on the Chaco as a whole because they drew in a massive seasonal labor force of indigenous workers. *Criollo* employers considered Guaraní workers to be the most valuable and dependable indigenous workers, just a step below workers of European descent (Gordillo 2004: 113). The sugar cane plantations' importance has since dwindled, and the mechanization of harvest work has reduced demand for indigenous labor. Logging, agribusiness, and oil extraction have become the region's prime economic activities. However, many people I spoke to reported that it was increasingly difficult to find hardwoods near Guaraní settlements, and the epicenter of the logging economy has moved deeper into the Chaco. Seasonal migration to work in harvests, as in the case of Hector's father mentioned earlier, was also a common source of work for many, but the sector has become increasingly formalized and has reduced its demand for Guaraní workers. Finally, the oil and gas economy boomed during the late 1990s and early 2000s, creating a wave of short-term but very lucrative employment opportunities. Although the regional industry is in decline, work in the hydrocarbons sector is still highly coveted and has become a driving political motivation for settlements that live near refineries, pipelines, and wells (Diz 2020b).

Throughout these booms and busts, the exploitation of indigenous labor in the Chaco has followed a gendered pattern. In the late nineteenth century, Franciscans lamented the fact that their missions were emptied of men during the sugar harvest season. But these men returned to the missions laden with plantation-bought goods, which boosted their prestige and even cemented their political authority (Langer 2009). Similar processes occurred over the course of the twentieth century during the successive logging, agricultural, and oil booms. In each of these cases, men found themselves in a position

to secure temporary employment and wages. While their wages were often meager, they enabled conspicuous forms of consumption, including motorcycles, cars, or sound systems. Many men also used their wages to construct brick-and-mortar houses or to set up small shops, frequently distributing their earnings among family members and friends in ways that established them as providers. Crucially, the ability to broker employment became central to the authority of Guaraní leaders.

As a consequence of these gendered histories of labor, men and women often spoke proudly of fathers and grandfathers who were *guapos* (lit., 'good looking', but here used in the sense of hard-working) and provided for their households, through both waged labor and autonomous agricultural work. However, younger generations often found that this source of masculine pride was not readily available. Autonomous agriculture rarely provided sufficient economic benefit and was deemed to be labor-intensive and uncertain, particularly in settlements where land titles had not been secured. Furthermore, the industries that had employed their elders were stagnant. Young men now confronted a reality where women were more likely to ensure household subsistence through their access to welfare payments (Diz 2018). Women were also increasingly vocal and critical about gendered discrimination (Hirsch 2008) and were becoming more politically active (Castelnuovo 2015).

Despite the lack of employment opportunities, Guaraní men assertively expressed the links between their capacity to labor and their sense of masculinity. This was well illustrated through the consumption of what people called the "vices" of coca leaves and alcohol. These practices of vice consumption were tightly bound with local ideas of masculine autonomy and prowess. The substances were said to help men be *guapo* because they gave them strength, courage, and energy to work harder and quenched both hunger and thirst. Most men had picked up the habit of chewing coca leaves as teenagers when they first began working for wages—other laborers taught them about the energizing and strengthening qualities of coca. One man emphatically told me that before his boss taught him to chew coca, he simply "did not know how to work." Similarly, consuming alcohol was important for granting the courage and strength necessary to work in the forest, as it helped negotiate access to forest resources widely believed to belong to the Owner of the Forest (*dueño del monte*) (Villar 2011), and was always consumed whenever I joined a logging crew or hunting party. Vice consumption, as we saw in the opening vignette, extends onto the football pitch, where men chew coca leaves while playing football in order to maximize their strength and drink alcohol to be courageous.

This section has contextualized contemporary notions of masculinity within the history of labor in the Chaco and in ongoing practices of consumption. In the sections that follow, I argue that football creates a space in which Guaraní

men can experience a sense of productivity and *guapeza* (a virtuous form of masculine provision) that the dwindling extractive economy has foreclosed. However, because these experiences are often limited to the pitch and to the game's broader sociality, they engender masculine fantasies of how young men would like to be and be seen to be by others.

'All Cousins'

Most afternoons, when the sun began its descent behind the forested foothills, young men slowly made their way toward the settlement's football pitch, colorful football boots in hand. There was no official meeting time, and young men would sit on the grass, waiting for more players to casually drop by. The number of players varied each day, but these informal matches usually drew about 15 players between the ages of 15 and 30. Instead of using the iron goals installed at each end of the pitch, one of the young men delineated the playing space by creating makeshift goals out of empty plastic bottles. Considering the limited numbers of players who would participate in the game, I always felt that the bottles were set surprisingly far apart, and, as a result, there was actually quite a large area to play in. The abundant space favored sprints, long balls, and one-on-one displays of dexterous footwork. In these games, players rarely worried about defending, and passing the ball to a teammate was a last resort, rather than a central part of the game.

The matches were cheerful affairs, and I was at first struck by how loudly the men laughed when a player pulled off a nice trick or was tripped, fouled, or hit with the ball. These were moments of heightened playfulness, unhindered by the constraining effect of rules or tactics. Instead, they drew on the exultation of healthy bodies pitted against each other: the team as such barely mattered. In these games, someone like Hector, weakened by disease, could join in with the other young men. He often attempted incongruously difficult skills as a way of entertaining the others, stopping to catch his breath when he grew too tired.

In part because they were members of a similar age group, these young men were, as people often told me, 'all cousins' (*todos primos*) or 'all related' (*todos parientes*). This classification suggests that they were in a relatively egalitarian relationship with each other, one that contrasted, for example, with the relationship between uncles and nephews. While most Guaraní made a point of treating members of older generations with 'respect' (*con respeto*), the relationships between members of the same generation had a much more relaxed feel. This distinction was emphasized, for instance, through the recurrent use of joking 'nicknames' (*apodos*) that were the main form of nomenclature among young men. The marking of players as 'cousins' and the use of nicknames contributed to the distinctive quality that suffused the social lives of young men.

It is tempting to idealize the nature of this play as an expression of egalitarian conviviality. But young men's social lives, including their informal football matches, were permanently fluctuating between joyful camaraderie and virile dominance that was accompanied by a sense of playful competition. This was evident in the practice of constant joking that forced men to be very careful about what they said and how they said it, lest they be ridiculed for suggesting any sort of participation in illicit sexual encounters. Other jokes sought to undermine a man's position by suggesting that his partner was cheating on him. For example, men might greet each other by asking, "How is our girl?" (*cómo está la nuestra?*), or by calling each other 'partner' (*socio*) in a way that suggested shared sexual access to the same woman.

This kind of playful competitiveness shone through in football games. Pick-up matches provided a platform for affective closeness, but they were also premised on playful confrontation and shaming through the expression of individual skills. Playing football in this way is not dissimilar to classical anthropological descriptions of joking relationships as simultaneously conjunctive and disjunctive, affording space for both friendliness and antagonism (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 197). Among the Trumai, as Emmanuel de Vienne (2012: 165) notes, "the explicit intention of these interactions is … to embarrass and *destabilize* the other." At the same time, joking is "a powerful tool of social integration" (ibid.: 175), the aim of which is "to accept both laughing with and being laughed at" (ibid.: 176). Just as with joking relationships among the Trumai, male sociality among the Guaraní, particularly expressed through their playful games of football, simultaneously produces "affective closeness" (Walker 2013: 387) while creating a space for competitive autonomy.

This form of sociality, which is off limits to women, became a means for young men to informally come together to enjoy their own company while playfully underscoring their own masculine dexterity. As part of the fantasy of masculinity that football gave rise to, these informal daily matches demarcated a space for virile performance and fraternity that was self-contained. With its emphasis on individual footballing and sexual prowess, this space also momentarily severed the ties of dependency that linked young men to relationships of kinship and care within the household. Moreover, when games became more serious, they furthered the recognition of a particular kind of manhood.

Serious Play

In inter-community football matches, the laughter and playfulness of pick-up matches would give way to more serious competition. It was in this register that the "disjunctive effect" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 32) of games truly came to the fore.

While the pick-up games were also disjunctive in that they pitted individual players against each other, there was a sense in which these interactions were not final: shamed players could retaliate and eventually would have an opportunity to shame their opponents. Moreover, pick-up games occurred practically every day, and the relations between teammates and rivals, as allied cousins, were not confined to the pitch. By contrast, inter-community games had a clear beginning and end, and non-footballing relations between rival teams tended to be more sporadic. In these matches, winning mattered.

Decked out in their uniforms, infused with courage-inducing alcohol and chewing on endurance-granting coca leaves, the players would enter the pitch. They arranged themselves according to predetermined positions, and the game began. Players exerted themselves to their full capabilities and played with great energy and strength. The spectators, who typically included vocal groups of women, called for players to run faster and play harder while ridiculing rivals. Although players nominally adopted specific positions so that the team would be organized into defenders, midfielders, and forwards, these distinctions generally broke down during the course of the game. The result was that teams would split into two distinct blocks—a more numerous attacking block and a defending block. From a tactical perspective this meant that the midfield became a vast no man's land, facilitating an "explosive" game (Pires Rosse 2013: 180) that favored fast players with good ball control who could burst into the empty space to create goal-scoring opportunities.

Although football was not an institutionalized rite of passage, a teenager's acceptance into the community's 'first team' (*la primera*) recognized his ability to demonstrate a particular physical disposition toward the game. The footballing trajectories of two fifteen-year-olds are a good illustration of how the game recognized particular qualities. One of the teenagers, Diego, was a technically gifted player and an assiduous participant in the informal afternoon matches who excelled at shaming opponents with his fancy trickery. On the weekends, however, he would often sit on the sidelines and was rarely asked to play. This puzzled me, since I felt that he would be a great addition to the team. I once voiced this opinion to Diego's father—a man reputed for the powerful shooting skills he displayed in his youth—and asked him why his son did not play more often. Diego's father shook his head and told me that his son "lacked courage" (*le falta coraje*). In fact, the few times that Diego did play in the inter-community games, he was often muscled off the ball and seemed to have lost some of the luster of his twinkle-toed style of play.

By contrast, Diego's cousin Carlos managed to gain a foothold on the first team even though he rarely showed up on the pitch during the week. He was less skillful than Diego, but when given a chance to play as a defender during an inter-community match, he put in a stellar performance, tackling older and stronger opponents hard, chasing down every ball, and successfully

challenging for headers. While Carlos was not always asked to play, the team kept him in mind when more players were needed.

When I returned to Aguararenta two years after my initial spell of fieldwork, Diego had given up any pretense of playing in the inter-communal matches, while Carlos had become a mainstay of the community's first team. Diego's and Carlos's respective failure and success in joining the football team show how football allows for the public display of courage and strength in the face of opposition. Without opposition—as in the daily informal games—football is 'mere' play. As a more 'serious' game, however, the sport takes on a new significance and becomes a prime site for men to gain recognition as possessors of essential virile traits—including strength and courage.

Betting and Drinking

I often found the style of play in both informal and formal matches to be individualistic, but soon discovered that collective betting practices and post-match socializing strengthened the team's solidarity and rendered games 'productive' in a material sense.

While a player like Hector no longer possessed the physical strength or stamina to keep up with the formal matches described above, he still accompanied the team as a spectator and participated in the game's social space. Before matches began, Hector volunteered to collect money from each player and a few of the male spectators who had joined them. He would write down how much each player had contributed, sum it up, and shout the total amount to the rival team's money collector, who typically sat on the opposite side of the pitch. This sum of money constituted the team's collective bet, called a *parada*. While the *parada* was composed of individual bets of varying value, the collective *parada* itself was a team bet, and, after some negotiating, the rival teams would agree upon a figure so that both teams were playing for the same amount of money. In other words, these bets were not about playing the odds but about developing a literal investment in the team. If the team won, it was entitled to take the collective bet of its rival team. The winnings thus amounted to twice the stake. In the case of a three-team tournament, the winnings were tripled as the winning team took the *parada* of its two rivals.

During the match, each team held on to its own money. This was important because games were usually played without a referee. Although teams often tried to have someone in the crowd arbitrate, most people were reluctant to do so. During one memorable match, the referee—who was the same age as the players and often played with them—angrily took off the whistle that hung around his neck, threw it to the ground, and stomped off in frustration after his sometime teammates repeatedly accused him of favoring their rivals. Given the

difficulty of finding a willing referee for these matches, most games were played without an arbitrating figure. Instead, teams devised a clever way of collectively making decisions by clapping their hands and interrupting the flow of play. So, for instance, if a player was clearly fouled, his teammates would all clap together and stop playing as a way of calling for a free kick. However, when decisions were not as clear, only some members of the team might clap while others might continue playing; as a result, the free kick would not be granted. This was particularly difficult when calls might have had a big impact on the game, such as granting a penalty kick. In these cases, the offending team would often disregard their rival's claps. Arguments ensued. Although there was no clear way to determine who would win the call, the most emphatic team typically did. On a few occasions, fights broke out, and Aguararenta's team once simply forfeited the match when they felt they were being wronged. Fights and forfeits were generally avoided, though, because if the game was abandoned, then the bets were called off and no money could be made.

In theory, after a victory, each player would receive the amount of his original bet multiplied by the number of rival teams. In practice, though, the team pooled together the money it had won and crowd-funded the post-match drinking sessions. These sessions tended to be lengthy affairs; they began immediately after the football match and often lasted the entire night, or for several days. As I soon learned, it could be difficult to avoid drinking because people would closely monitor whether I had taken a sufficiently large draft. Once all of the bottles were emptied, the person who had bought the drinks in the first place would go back to the store and buy a few more bottles—a process that continued until the *parada* money was gone. This form of drinking furthered a sense of collective solidarity. Failing to participate in drinking sessions was generally frowned upon and seen as evidence of miserliness or an unwillingness to be a part of the team.

The inter-communal matches required teamwork that was different from everyday informal games. When a group of cousins from one community went to play somewhere else, they solidified as a team. To some extent, the codification of collectivity took place through visible markers like uniforms and was informed by the awareness that the rival teams hailed from a different community. While a European observer might find the style of play to be individualistic, it was clear that there was a common objective—namely, to secure the winnings that enabled post-match socialization. The matches became framed within a narrative of collective action, and in these matches victories belonged to the team as a "provisional collectivity" (Vianna 2008: 180). Doing so allowed young men to reproduce the friendliness and antagonism that characterized the fantasies of male fraternity. In other words, what allowed for the emergence of male sociality was the finality of the football match: the combined effort of individual players contributed to the victory of the team. Thanks to betting

practices, that victory also translated into material gain in ways that enabled shared consumption and redistribution. Through these serious games, the fantasy of a self-contained male sociality was reinforced, not just through the recognition of virile traits, but also through the monetary gains to be made. Rather than rely on wages or cash handouts, the game allowed young men to recode their performance of masculine excellence on the pitch into an act of collective provision that was independent of the social and political ties that enabled everyday subsistence.

In the final ethnographic section, I will consider an instance of low-level clientelism to illustrate why the kind of teamwork that emerged through football helps us understand how young Guaraní men conceive of their own productive agency in a context of unemployment.

Teamwork

We had just finished, and lost, a game of football. Exhausted, we sat on the grass catching our breath. As we chatted, one of our teammates excitedly told us that Congressman Olmedo was in the community "politicking." Soon enough, we saw Olmedo and his entourage walking across the football pitch. "Come on, lads!" someone said. "Let's go face him off [*encarar*] and see if he can give us some shirts or some lawnmowers for the pitch."

My teammates, who had arranged themselves in a half-circle, grew silent as Olmedo approached. The congressman wore a bright yellow shirt, the color of his political party, and attempted a warm smile. He inquired about the game we had played and then asked how many teams there were in the community. The group was uncharacteristically quiet and embarrassed; someone murmured that there were two teams. Hector quickly corrected his teammate and told Olmedo that there were three teams *and* a youth team. The politician seemed to see through Hector's ploy and said that he could only offer to help with two sets of shirts. Unfazed, Hector pressed on: "Well, we were wondering what the chances were you might help us by mowing the pitch." Growing serious, Olmedo replied: "I'll be sincere with you, none." He then asked rhetorically: "Do you know who I am? Well, as a national congressman, I have no jurisdiction here." Still, Hector was not willing to give up: "Maybe you can rent a lawnmower. We also need balls and other equipment." Olmedo finally lost his patience: "Look! I'm already giving you two sets of shirts without you even asking for them!" An awkward silence ensued, and Olmedo improvised a nervous joke: "If you want, I can get you a few extra players, maybe that way you'll win next time! Or how about some cheerleaders?"

This instance captured some of the political dynamics that Guaraní men currently engage in. Guaraní people use the Spanish verb *encarar* (lit., 'to face off')

to describe the action of confronting politicians or company representatives to gain resources for political followers. But it is also a verb used to describe a football player's decision to take on a rival, one-on-one. When people say that a leader is *encarador*, they imply not only that he is courageous and assertive but also that he is good at obtaining politically valuable resources. Leaders are expected to actively face off against politicians like Olmedo or the representatives of private businesses. During these encounters, leaders must 'push' to ensure that resources are 'brought down' for followers. However, people were also fully aware that if a leader's encounters were to be effective, they had to be able to demonstrate popular support by 'having people'. More broadly, this anecdote was also representative of an underlying political logic that tended to be suspicious of centralized authority and that viewed virtuous leaders as those who distributed resources fairly (see Diz 2020a for a further discussion). Post-match drinking similarly mimicked the kind of fair redistribution and sharing that ought to inform settlement politics. These political dynamics are also widespread throughout lowland South America and have been discussed by a number of scholars (e.g., Buitron 2020; Clastres 1989; Sarmiento Barletti 2017).

In the scene between the congressman and Hector, we can see how the team was effectively 'facing off' against Olmedo, and how Hector was doing his best to 'push' Olmedo to 'bring down' coveted football equipment. The team was not heavily invested in the outcome of the interaction, though, and Hector's poor attempts at 'pushing' were simply joked about. Although the stakes were low, the vignette illustrates central aspects of how people conceive of local politics. This encounter had allowed Hector—an unlikely leader, but an active member in the social life of young men—to play the role of political representative. Here he became *encarador* in an effort to secure resources for his teammates. Had he succeeded, he would have effectively become a provider for the settlement's teams. 'Facing off' against Olmedo was a productive act, akin to the role that Guaraní leaders were expected to play. Young Guaraní men have also organized centers for unemployed workers that follow a similar logic of productivity by engaging in daring acts of blockade that aim to force affluent outsiders into granting them concessions (see Diz 2020b). The beneficiaries were collectively defined as 'the community,' and each member was assumed to be equally deserving.

The way in which the game of football is played adheres to a corresponding logic of provision and production. Collective bets are secured through the team's efforts to win the match and through their solidarity in enforcing refereeing. A sporting victory thus becomes a perfect example of 'bringing down' resources that are collectively secured and equally shared. Individual players are chosen for their ability to demonstrate courage and strength, qualities that are deemed important for facing off rivals and securing victory. Teamwork on

and off the field has proved to be an important way of garnering resources from people outside the community by recreating desirable political tactics within the demarcated space of football.

Masculine Fantasies and the Misrecognition of Women

While some Guaraní women play football, their matches are overshadowed by those of their male counterparts. Similarly, in the communities I worked with, women's roles in the 'public' arena of institutionalized politics were circumscribed. Nonetheless, women were increasingly important to the subsistence of Guaraní families. Unlike men, who were only occasionally able to secure wage-paying jobs, women were more likely to receive regular food donations, child allowances, and even opportunities for employment as nurses, teachers, or domestic workers. These sources of income typically provided the core resources for subsistence in the majority of households I worked with. In addition, women's unpaid labor in the household was a central but unrecognized form of work. In other words, even as men struggled to be employed in a labor market that had fewer jobs to offer, the increasing demand for women's labor—and the tendency for state and other grants to target female household members—meant that men's contributions to household economies were losing importance. In fact, in some Guaraní settlements women were increasingly affirming their political positions and transforming leadership roles, thanks to increased contacts with NGOs and inter-ethnic networks that have created new identity-based spaces for politics (Castelnuovo 2015).

This situation placed young men in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they increasingly desired to obtain waged jobs, yet on the other, they were unable to do so because of the realities of a weak labor market. Their inability to act as providers was underscored by the presence of and stories about older men whose own strength and disposition toward labor often became a model of *guapeza*, the ideal form of masculine provision. As in other contexts where generational differences between men have given rise to new forms of gendered agency, Guaraní men have sought opportunities to demonstrate who they want to be and how they want others to see them (High 2010: 762; see also Moore 1994).

As we saw during Olmedo's visit, this type of masculinity was closely associated with notions of collective politics that were often informed by the state. Thus, 'the community' as an emerging political body was essentially enacted as a masculine space, but this misrecognized the fundamental contributions of women to local livelihoods and politics. Youthful masculinities were therefore in a strangely productive crisis. While their efforts to secure resources through new forms of political action remained ineffective, the game

of football gave them the chance to experience masculinity as collective and productive. Football and its attendant sociality took place in a space that was entirely masculine, and also echoed a sense of solidarity and political agency that contrasted with the traditional politics of kinship units and earlier generations' ideas of *guapeza*.

Conclusion

The last time I saw Hector was in 2017. Because of the lasting effects tuberculosis had left on his body, he had managed to secure a generous disability pension from the state. Unfortunately, he had not used the pension to further his ambitions of starting a family or to build a new house for his sister. He was an alcoholic, and his drinking had gotten worse. He was emaciated and prone to disappearing for days. When drunk, he became aggressive, shouting challenges and picking fights with anyone he saw. Deemed to be contagious and violent, he was increasingly shunned by most members of the community and his family.

Hector's story tragically encapsulates the lived experience of a masculinity in crisis. The impact of tuberculosis on his physical ability exacerbated a structural lack of employment opportunities and a history of discrimination. Although he finally found the means to become a provider, he had become emasculated and an outcast. His social trajectory was effectively stuck. For a time, football and the social life that surrounded it had given him an opportunity to feel included within a male fraternity. His past footballing talent, his involvement in betting practices, and even his playful attempts at being a leader kept him tethered to the social life of his peers and to a kind of masculinity he valued.

For Hector and other young men, football had become a space of their own. As an instance of play, the game provided a place in which embodied performances were valorized within a particular setting (on the pitch), at a particular time (during a match), and under a clear set of rules. The game as a bounded moment created a 'subjunctive' or 'as if' experience (Huizinga 1955; Seligman et al. 2008), while the "collective life of male fraternity" (Knauft 1997: 241) that emerged through football strained against a reality of dismal employment prospects, widespread marginality, and unachievable goals of provision through labor. Football was a space of fantasy within which young men could experience how they might desire things to be and how they wanted to be seen by others (High 2010; Sangren 2013).

Indeed, while young Guaraní men might experience their gendered sense of self to be in crisis, they could play at being strong and skillful, shaming others but also fraternizing with them. Their tactical preferences recognized particular

forms of masculine strength and courage, many of which resonated with their elders' experiences of physical labor in the Chaco's extractive frontier. Football was a bounded moment, with its own rules, spatiality, and temporality, in which they could collectively deploy their virile skills and face off against others in an effort to secure their resources. When they succeeded, they consumed and shared in ways that reproduced the joking, egalitarian tensions of the informal matches—but even when they lost, they could play at being leaders who 'brought down' resources. In this sense, the game also resonated with tactics and collective forms of solidarity that were important to local politics. Here young unemployed men found a way of being *guapos*, while not having to deal with the ties of dependency and kinship that had been central to their elders' own sense of masculinity.

In describing the kinds of masculinity that the game of football gives rise to as fantasy, my intention is not to discredit young men's values and desires. Instead, the game's fantasies show us how subjective gendered experiences articulate with and are productive of collective social arrangements (Sangren 2013). For the young Guaraní men who were marginalized from Argentina's dominant political structures and who found themselves at the fringes of a dwindling extractive economy, a game like football provided a quotidian opportunity to demonstrate that they too could be "good at being a man" (Herzfeld 1988: 16). In tapping into these fantasies, they were going against the run of play, for the successful performance of masculinity both and on and off the pitch elided the key role of women as providers, even as it glorified a kind productive, laboring manhood that was increasingly out of reach.

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