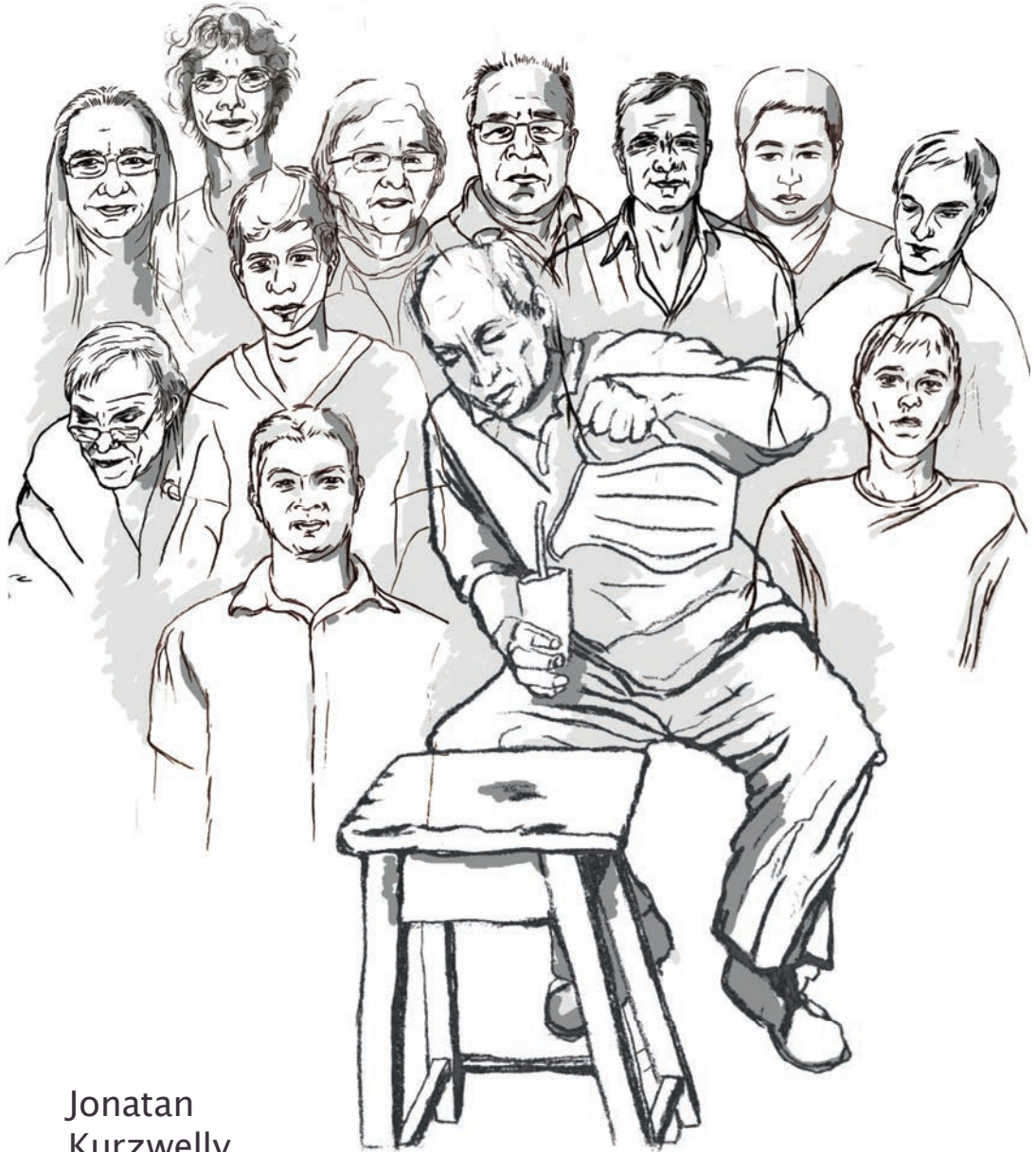


Göttinger Studien zur Kulturanthropologie / Europäischen Ethnologie
Göttingen Studies in Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology



Jonatan
Kurzweily

People and Identities in Nueva Germania

Göttingen University Press

KAAE

Jonatan Kurzwelly
People and Identities in Nueva Germania

This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Published in 2024 by Göttingen University Press as Volume 18 of the Series
“Göttingen Studies in Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology”

Jonatan Kurzwelly

People and Identities
in Nueva Germania

Göttingen Studies in Cultural
Anthropology/European Ethnology
Volume 18

Göttingen University Press
2024

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <https://dnb.dnb.de>.

“Göttingen Studies in Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology”

edited by

Prof. Dr. Regina Bendix	E-Mail: rbendix@gwdg.de
Prof. Dr. Moritz Ege	E-Mail: mege@uni-goettingen.de
Prof. Dr. Sabine Hess	E-Mail: shess@uni-goettingen.de
Prof. Dr. Carola Lipp	E-Mail: Carola.Lipp@phil.uni-goettingen.de
Dr. Torsten Näser	E-Mail: tnaeser1@gwdg.de

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Institut für Kulturanthropologie/Europäische Ethnologie
Heinrich-Düker-Weg 14
37073 Göttingen

This work is protected by German Intellectual Property Right Law.
It is also available as an Open Access version through the publisher's website and the Göttingen University Catalogue (GUK) at the Göttingen State and University Library (<https://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de>).
The license terms of the online version apply.

Typesetting and layout: Sascha Bühler
Cover design: Margo Bargheer
Cover picture: Jolanta Banowska. The people depicted in the drawing are the twelve people whose stories are presented in the book.



© 2024 Universitätsverlag Göttingen, Göttingen
<https://univerlag.uni-goettingen.de>
ISBN: 978-3-86395-636-3
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2024-2625>
ISSN: 2365-3191
eISSN: 2512-7055

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Individual voicings in Nueva Germania—and beyond	
Foreword by Nigel Rapport	9
1 Introduction	17
Nueva Germania—from proto-Nazi utopia to poor rural settlement.	20
2 Identity thinking and its persistence.	39
Situational identities or ‘contextual epistemic permissibly’	41
Social identities as a basis for the sense of self	48
3 Klaus Neumann Gorlitz	53
The green gold of Friedrich Neumann	55
Yerba Mate as a positive form of agriculture	62
The bitter life of Walter Görnitz and the precariousness of Hildegard von Klewitz	73
Sweet home Paraguay	78

4 Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé	87
Becoming a school teacher and a football coach	89
The German school	93
Political prosecution	94
The importance of being kind to others	95
5 Gerda Kück	111
It was hard to make a living	112
Social life	112
Hard work and its consequences	113
Paraguay, Germany, Canada	117
6 Waltraud Haudenschild	123
Surroundings	124
Plants	126
The process of making bricks	129
7 Juana Mercedes Benítez López	133
8 Danilo Haudenschild Fischer	147
9 Fidel Alejandro Benitez Cardenas	153
10 Arnold Garcia Pavon	159
11 Carlos Alberto Benítez Vázquez	169
Cooperativism in Nueva Germania	172
12 Pedro Hernan Halke Arevalos	181
13 Cecilio Alcaráz Sanchez	191
14 Abel Rodrigo Pavon Acosta	199
15 Beyond identities—collaborative and participatory methods	209
Collaborative storytelling	210
Photographic complementarity	212
Understanding emic essentialism and using etic processual terms	215
References	217

Acknowledgements

This book is a reworked version of my doctoral thesis (2017). It is based on my original research (2014-2015), and several follow-up visits to Nueva Germania in succeeding years. This project was made possible thanks to a scholarship received at the University of St Andrews, the institution that provided a wonderful academic home for the period of my doctoral studies.

This book was made possible due to the generous contributions of many people, and I hold a deep gratitude towards each of them. In first place, I would like to thank the contributors to my project whose stories constitute the core of this monograph. In order of appearance: Klaus, Calixto, Gerda, Waltraud, Mercedes, Danilo, Fidel, Arnold, Carlos, Hernan, Cecilio, and Abel. I also want to thank Julia Pavon, Ramón Garcia, and their children Arnold and Andrea, for being much more than just wonderful hosts and for treating me as a member of their family. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to Albert Kuck (may he rest in peace), Carlos Benítez, and Klaus Neumann, who offered me their friendship and countless interesting discussions. I also want to thank all of my other friends from Nueva Germania who are too numerous to list here.

The most earnest and heartfelt acknowledgement goes to Nigel Rapport who not only wrote a generous and insightful foreword to this book, but also previously guided me during my doctoral studies. Nigel always provided constructive and

attentive feedback, engaged in provocative theoretical discussions, offered words of encouragement, and he still remains a source of inspiration. I also thank the examiners of my doctoral dissertation—Andrew Irving and Stavroula Pipyrrou.

My gratitude goes to Regina Bendix, who, as my post-doctoral mentor, was a wonderful discussion partner and kept encouraging me to rework my doctoral thesis into a book. Regina also generously provided funding from her professorial chair at the University of Göttingen towards the publication costs. Additional funding for the publication has also been provided by the University of the Free State in South Africa, where I maintain an affiliation as a research fellow.

The ideas espoused in this book have been further developed and matured in different collaborations over the past few years, especially in the edited volumes and texts on which I worked together with Andrew ‘Mugsy’ Spiegel, Nigel Rapport, Moira Pérez, and Luis Escobedo D’Anglés, all of whom are wonderful colleagues who helped me to grow as an academic and as a thinker.

I also thank members of the new archaeological research project on Nueva Germania—Natascha Mehler, Attila Dézsi, Ruth Alison Benítez, Daniel Schávelzon, Alasdair Brooks, and student assistants Tamara Bühler, Rija Frey, and Timon Zirlewagen. The members of this group generously invited me to join their team and provided excellent companionship during our recent trips to Paraguay. I also wish to thank Jonathan Tracey for his proofreading work.

Individual voicings in Nueva Germania—and beyond

Foreword by Nigel Rapport

The immediate focus of Jonatan Kurzweily's research concerns the identity of those living today in *Nueva Germania*, that area of Paraguay imagined by Bernhard Förster in 1886 to be the site of a new model-community manifesting the superiority of racially pure German society and culture. In 1889, when the colony failed financially and most of the original German families had died of hunger and disease or fled the area, Bernhard Förster committed suicide. His wife, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, then returned to Germany in 1893, where, infamously, she proceeded to curate the work of her dead brother, Friedrich Nietzsche, thoroughly misrepresenting its nature and essence to the extent that she convinced Hitler of its being a fascistic-philosophical underpinning of the Third Reich.

Jonatan Kurzweily's interest in these world-historical events concerns the contemporary legacy of this ethnic and political project in Paraguay. What do residents of the area today think and know of this history? What do they think of their German heritage—if they are descendants of the few survivors? How do German-ness and Paraguayan-ness interrelate in individuals' contemporary behaviours and spoken accounts? In exploring how 'macro' ideologies of nationalism, anti-Semitism and fascism relate to the 'micro' level of quotidian local lives, Jonatan Kurzweily provides a satisfyingly complex and convincing answer. His account is a combina-

tion of fine-grained representations of individual lives with an application of social theory; and a combination of collaborative storytelling with participatory photography ('photo-voice'). His book brilliantly exposes the contradictory realities of national, and ethnic, and religious, and local, and personal, identities: life-stories that vividly portray the eking out of an impoverished existence on the rural margins of contemporary South America while also exceeding their immediate context in their human nature.

Jonatan Kurzweily's writing and photography need no paraphrasing, explicating or otherwise mediating; they speak convincingly for themselves and absolutely succeed in their purpose. What might be attempted in this Foreword is a drawing out the work's wider mission, implication and consequence. 'Much of socio-scientific thinking has not taken the contextual and contradictory character of identities seriously enough, often falling into essentialist or otherwise determinist notions of identities', Jonatan Kurzweily writes. Despite acknowledging how the public ways in which individuals are identified are matters of social and cultural invention—and imposition—and how these definitions owe more to sociocultural classifications at particular historical moments than they do to individual realities, it is too often the case that academics lend their authority to political processes that would claim these imposed classifications as essential truth. Instead, recognising the definition of public identities *as* cultural and contextual impositions—as forms of essentialist category-thinking whose consequences are likely to be pernicious, even fatal, to individual lives and liberties and the fulfilment of individual natures—calls for social scientists to endeavour to annul this 'culturalism'. For, even in their banal quotidian forms, the conceptualisations trumpeted by the contemporary identity politics of 'multiculturalism'—that individuals are essentially 'German' or 'Paraguayan', 'Jewish' or 'Christian', 'racially pure', 'native' or 'parasitical'; that cultures are 'indigenous' or 'settler', 'orthodox', 'traditional', and 'hereditary'—carry with them 'the latency of exclusion, discrimination, oppression and xenophobia'. Identitarian conceptualisations must be contested, Jonatan Kurzweily determines, both in the name of empirical, analytical and theoretical accuracy and of social justice; while the practices and logics of essential 'nations' and 'communities' and 'religions' and 'ethnicities' and 'classes' (still) have increasingly global legitimacy, it is of paramount importance for social scientists to work against the divisive rhetoric of enculturated difference: to deny its truth and its value. 'This book outlines a non-essentialist understanding of identities', Jonatan Kurzweily proclaims, and argues against the 'contextual and reductive epistemic frameworks' that would deny individual natures and the fluid, imaginative, personal identities that they invent.

Ultimately, 'culturalism', the taking of historically contingent and localized constructions and classifications of identity as essential truths, is a reduction and negation both of a universal humanity and of unique individualities. It is the latter that a 'cosmopolitan' anthropology might hope to espouse as truth and value, and have translated into social and political practice.

‘Of each other, we should be kind / While there is still time.’

‘I am Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé. I’m going to write some passages from my life’, begins one of Jonatan Kurzweily’s life-story chapters. Ramirez Mbaivé goes on: ‘I always say that one needs to be kind and offer favours to others’, echoing the famous lines (above) from Philip Larkin’s poetry. Ramirez Mbaivé has a sense of himself as a ‘Paraguayan’ and a ‘Christian’; but he also believes in reciprocity among strangers, that one needs to ‘give favours to others’ and to ‘help those in need’, because there will come a time when one needs help oneself and for the favour to be returned. It could be said that this notion of balanced (as against generalised) reciprocity and self-identifying as Paraguayan and Christian go against the argument and ethos of a universal liberal-cosmopolitanism (of humanity and individuality). However much a cultural imposition—a symbolic-categorical fiction—national-cum-religious notions of a social contract of mutuality among insiders, appears here to leach into the private and personal sense of moral selfhood that Ramirez Mbaivé holds. But the strength of Jonatan Kurzweily’s ethnography, its texture of detailed authenticity, is to enable us to read beyond the surface categories to the cognitive and sentimental awareness of an individual human being. Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé again:

‘At first I did not want to remarry. One of the reasons was that I was afraid that a new wife would not value and respect my children. However, when my oldest son decided that he wanted to go and live in Asunción and work there as a policeman, he spoke with my other children and they asked me to marry again. They thanked me for always being there when they needed me and told me that they wanted me to have a wife, to be happy and to have someone with whom to share all of the household tasks. And very soon I found a new wife. My first wife’s name was Melania Portillo, my current wife is Juliana Pavón. We have one child together. I am very happy because she treats all my children as hers, so as if she is their mother. To this day, it is like this.’

It is a leap—of a cosmopolitan kind—but hearing the voice of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé in this way reminds me of that of Leon Rappoport, as it is brought to the page by Primo Levi in *Moments of Reprieve*. Primo Levi and Leon Rappoport find themselves inmates of Auschwitz together—the Lager where Levi would come to describe his existence as ‘two years of life outside the law’ (1996, 11). Having published *If This Is a Man* (1960) and *The Truce* (1965), and ‘testified’ to events that ‘imperiously demanded he tell them’, Levi found that over the years a host of details kept returning to his mind, especially people he had met in Auschwitz, asking that he grant them ‘the ambiguous perennial existence of literary characters’ (1996, 9-10). They may have been murdered by the Nazis but they were not anonymous, faceless or voiceless: they had their own will and capacity to react, their own unique virtue. Leon Rappoport was one such individual and a chapter on *Moments of Reprieve* is dedicated to his ‘testament’. I might quote from it as follows:

“While I could I drank, I ate, I made love, I left flat grey Poland for that Italy of yours; I studied, learned, travelled and looked at things. I kept my eyes wide open; I didn’t waste a crumb. I’ve been diligent; I don’t think I could have done more or better. Things went well for me; I accumulated a large quantity of good things, and all that good has not disappeared. It’s inside me, safe and sound. I don’t let it fade; I’ve held onto it. Nobody can take it from me.

Then I wound up here. I’ve been in this place for twenty months, and for twenty months I’ve been keeping accounts. The balance—in fact I still have a substantial credit. To tip the balance, it would take many more months of Lager, or many days of torture. (...) So in the sad event that one of you should survive me, you will be able to say that Leon Rappoport got what was due him, left behind neither debts nor credits, and did not weep or ask for pity. If I meet Hitler in the other world, I’ll spit in his face and I have every right to...” A bomb fell nearby, followed by a roar like a landslide, One of the warehouses must have collapsed. Rappoport had to raise his voice almost to a shout: “because he didn’t get the better of me” (Levi 1996, 23-4).

Levi concludes by conjecturing that Rappoport did not survive Auschwitz, and so he had taken it upon himself to recount Rappoport’s ‘philosophy’—as entrusted to him—to his best ability.

The material conditions of individual lives in Paraguay, as met by Jonatan Kurzwelly, are not to be compared with the (incomparable) ones of Primo Levi’s reportage. That is not my point. I am reminded of Levi (and Leon Rappoport) because the virtue of Jonatan Kurzwelly’s ethnography is such as to make the voices of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé—of Gerda Kück, Juana Mercedes Benítez López, Danilo Haudenschild Fischer and others—come alive on the page.

‘An ideal written history’, urged A. M. MacIver (1961, 188), ‘would tell the whole story of everything that ever happened to every human being’: the countless actual doings of countless individuals. I would include anthropology and sociology in this description: the data of human science do not change. But how does one do justice to individual lives that lapse constantly into oblivion? The situation is only made more fraught by discourses that (perniciously) encourage individual lives to be seen essentially as cultural constructs that emanate from social relations, and by forms of category-thinking and identity politics that validate individuals only as they manifest membership of social and cultural classes. One response to MacIver’s urging—and to its denial of culturalism—is to take advantage of the paradoxical nature of human voice.

Voice is ephemeral in nature, as ephemeral as breath: the individual giving momentary vocalization to their identity, their existence. Even should the expression be recorded, the character of individual voicings is inherently tricksterish. Is what is said and heard (recorded) a true, entire, open or plain expression? The ephem-

erality of voice concerns not just the medium of its expression—breath—but also extends to that which is conveyed: does the individual give voice to a world-view that has any abiding authenticity for them? A full voicing of selfhood is very likely impossible, the relationship between voice and individual identity being always an ambiguous one: complex and partial; reflective of the absolute distance that separates one individual life from another, one human consciousness from another. The expression and reception of an individual voice is, in short, always mediated by an intrinsic ignorance, a silence. One cannot will one's way to a direct apprehension of a human Other, nor a full comprehension.

And yet... voice has a character such as to convey a personality (Rapport 2014a). Voices possess an attractiveness; they are intimate, affecting, personal. I find myself touched by Leon Rappoport as I am by Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé. As if I might converse with them. As if I might suppose a common humanity that we share that transcends the particularities, distances and fractures of culture and society, time and space. There is, to repeat, no assurance to be had here, no way of knowing with any certainty that the voice one takes to be Leon Rappoport's or Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé's—or Primo Levi's or Jonatan Kurzweily's—is authentically theirs. Of course, such vagaries apply equally to living interlocutors, to those with whom one converses regularly and routinely, as they do to those no longer alive or those only known on the written page. Human communication is always an individual interpretation, a personal translation from one embodiment to another. *Notwithstanding*, an individual identity and personality *is* conveyed in the way in which words are personally arranged and voiced.

An observation of poet and novelist Elizabeth Smart is pertinent here. 'Artistry' in verbal expression, she suggested (1983), derives from 'the passion that one word has for another'. The artist expresses themselves in such a way that their words possess (and manifest) a particular aesthetic partnership with one another. One knows the artist by the personal signature of their verbal style: the way in which their words are afforded 'passion' through their particular placement. The further claim to be made is that this 'artistry' is manifested by *all* individual speakers: voice inheres in words distinctively and personally arranged and expressed, and is something to which the discriminatory ear of other human beings can be attuned. Jonatan Kurzweily possesses this discriminatory ear such that the individual voices of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé, Gerda Kück, Juana Mercedes Benítez López, Danilo Haudenschild Fischer (and others) can be heard in his pages.

What, finally, does the 'cosmopolitan' leap from the voice of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé to that of Leon Rappoport (or Philip Larkin, or Primo Levi, or Elizabeth Smart) adduce? A human context: I am able to 'hear' the voice of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé and Leon Rappoport, Primo Levi, Philip Larkin and others (Jonatan Kurzweily is able to hear the voices of Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé, Gerda Kück, Juana Mercedes Benítez López, Danilo Haudenschild Fischer and others), and I am able to appreciate the artistry of their use of words, ultimately because as individuals we

yet share a humanity. The substance of other lives remains opaque—the mysterious condition of a discrete consciousness—but the individuality of voice nevertheless possesses a common human character.

The mission of a cosmopolitan anthropology can be described as the interrogation of this fundamental dialectic (Rapport 2012). The human condition is a polar one: at one pole unique individualities, at the other a universal humanity. There are universal species-wide human capacities and these come to be substantiated uniquely in individual human lives, each its own essential instantiation, operationalisation and determination of the universal; while the substance of a human life is unique, the capabilities for making that life and the liabilities to which that life are subject are species-wide; ‘human nature’ is to be at once irreducibly different and universally the same. ‘Together humanity forms a community of exceptions in the world’, Alain Finkielkraut phrases this truth lyrically: ‘All the same—that is, human. Each one different—that is, in themselves’ (2001, 80). The discipline of anthropology is predicated on this paradox. To overcome identitarian, communitarian and cultural ‘fictions’—their historically contingent and ‘accidental’ conceptualisations and classifications—is to do justice to the truth of individual human beings; the moral responsibility of the cosmopolitan anthropologist is to demonstrate how the human data transcend the discriminatory practices that would delimit them according to the fictions of nationality, religion, ethnicity, community and class.

Distilling human identity through individual comparison

Historiography (after MacIver) might be ideally conceived as the inscribing of everything that happened to every human being. Social-scientifically, there is something else besides that anthropology might hope to achieve. That is to distil (or excavate) from unique individual stories a universal human story. How does one particular individual embodiment manifest the humanity of which it is an instantiation? How does this individual life substantiate species-wide capacities?

Jonatan Kurzweily describes his book as the ‘collaboratively generated stories of twelve persons’: life-stories that he re-presents textually and photographically. Each story foregrounds different topics and themes, matters that the stories’ individual owners find to be of particular interest and importance and determine to share with a wider world. In some accounts, this entails individuals resorting to the tropes of reductive culturalist, communitarian and identitarian logics. The point in this juxtaposition, for Jonatan Kurzweily, is that the diversity of these accounts—their contrariety, even cacophony—causes the reader to see beyond individuals’ emic categories; from the ‘representational and intertextual complementarity’ is to be abstracted a wider truth and one that delegitimizes the reductions (and traducings) of category-thinking. The juxtaposition and enumeration, the comparison of individual stories, causes a kind of analytical transcendence, Jonatan Kurzweily is assured, and affords both analytic and moral advance towards a human truth.

The key term here is *complementarity*: the complementarity to be found in the human stories of different individuals. What precisely does such complementarity portend?

George Devereux (1978, 18) wrote instructively on what he called ‘complementarism’ from a methodological perspective. Borrowing from the philosophy of science (from Poincaré, Bohr and Heisenberg), Devereux argued that if a phenomenon was real—whether that phenomenon was natural-scientific or social-scientific—then it should be explicable in more than one frame of reference, one epistemology. The richness of the content of reality—the variety, many-sidedness, subtlety and liveliness—could only be forced into a single order (a social structure, say, a culture, a tradition, a language, a discursive grammar) at the expense of destroying the reality under study. Complementarism was a methodological necessity: the epistemological pluralism that at once proved and testified to the world’s complexity (cf. Rapport 2014b). The further question that Jonatan Kurzweily’s ethnography brings to the fore is how and why such epistemological complementarity exists. The answer to be gleaned concerns the common humanity and universal nature that underly the unique individualities of sense-making and expression that life-stories capture. Excavating the diverse worldviews that Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé, Gerda Kück, Juana Mercedes Benítez López, Danilo Haudenschild Fischer et al. construe and voice is to discern sense-making capabilities—and ‘enculturating’ liabilities—that are species-wide. Here are the beauties, and the shortcomings, of how individual human beings openly attend to the world and create life-projects for themselves, as well as how they may close it down in accordance to particular cultural symbologies. The strength of Jonatan Kurzweily’s book, finally, is how it affords a discernment of the human in the guise of individual diversities. *Ecce Homo*.

Nigel Rapport
St Andrews
November 2023

References

- Devereux, George. 1978. *Ethnopschoanalysis: Psychoanalysis and Anthropology as Complementary Frames of Reference*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Finkelkraut, Alain. 2001. *In the Name of Inhumanity*. London: Pimlico.
- Levi, Primo. 1996. *Moments of Reprieve*. London: Abacus.
- MacIver, A. M. 1961. “Historical explanation.” In *Logic and Language* (2nd series), edited by Antony Flew, 187-202. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rapport, Nigel. 2012. *Anyone, the Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology*. Oxford: Berghahn.

- . 2014a. “Voice, History, and Vertigo: Doing justice to the dead through imaginative conversation.” In *The Craft of Knowledge: Experiences of living with data*, edited by Carol Smart, Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 112-27. London: Palgrave.
- . 2014b. “Epistemological Pluralism.” In *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*, edited by Nigel Rapport, 162-67. London: Routledge.
- Smart, Elizabeth. 1983. Poetry reading at Memorial University of Newfoundland Library, St. John’s, Newfoundland, April 7th.

1 Introduction

‘My mind is German, but my heart is Paraguayan,’ Albert once told me. He believed that several of his distinctive traits expressed his Paraguayanness, whilst other particular traits were related to his Germanness. He cherished hospitality and openness, and the care given to others, which he said is Paraguayan. He was also ready to fight and even sacrifice his life for his *patria*, his fatherland, if necessary. Simultaneously, he considered himself German, which he said manifested in him being well organized, having a strict work ethic, cherishing the rule of law and hoping for a less corrupt government. His understanding of himself through these two identities was at times reinforced and at other times challenged. While visiting Germany he felt uncomfortable seeing the luxuries and individualism of a rich society. This experience of the unfairness of global inequality made him feel distinctly Paraguayan. On other occasions, when faced with the widespread acceptance of corruption or the meddling in elections at home, he felt more German. At times Albert felt distinctly German, at times Paraguayan, or both simultaneously, and in other situations none of that mattered and other categories were relevant. Albert’s reflection on his mixed identities, the belief that such identities manifest through specific personal characteristics, and his recognition that he did not entirely fit into the stereotypical singular understandings of Germanness and Paraguayanness, speak to the central concern of this book.

When we first met in 2014, Albert Kuck lived a humble and largely solitary life in a farmstead on the outskirts of Nueva Germania—tending to cattle, planting vegetables and tenaciously trying to find ways of making some money to get by. Life in the Paraguayan countryside is not easy, opportunities are scarce, and poverty is often self-perpetuating. Albert laid his hopes in a new road that was being constructed near his house, that was supposed to connect a distant peasant (*campesino*) settlement with the town of Nueva Germania. He agreed for this infrastructure project to cut through parts of his land, as he hoped to benefit from the future traffic. He planned to open a small shop by the new road at the riverside, and thus potentially improve his livelihood. He did not live long enough for these plans to materialize. Albert's death was tragic, unexpected, and possibly preventable. Misdiagnosed, he kept working for weeks despite experiencing severe abdominal pain, until he collapsed in front of his house. His neighbours heard his screams for help only hours later and brought him to the nearest hospital in Santa Rosa. The tomograph that could have helped in identifying the cause of his condition had been broken for months. He was left unattended for hours, laying on a stretcher in the corridor. In the end he was only given proper attention when he stopped breathing. All efforts at resuscitation came too late to save his life. When faced with illness and hospitalization, Albert's identities, his Germanness and Paraguayanness, no longer mattered. What mattered was Albert's circumstance: he was a poor peasant from the countryside, treated in an underfunded and badly managed public hospital, worlds away from the slick private facilities in which the rich receive dedicated help in the capital city. This book reflects on such varying contextual importance of identities, and on how at times identities simply do not matter.

Despite the fact that identities having been conceptualised by the social sciences as historical social inventions, and as imagined and fluid, identities are still repeatedly referenced and reproduced in static and essentialist forms in numerous social and academic contexts. Much socio-scientific thinking has not taken the *contextual and contradictory character of identities* seriously enough, often falling into essentialist or otherwise determinist notions of identities. Similarly, socio-scientific understanding of identities has not translated adequately into changes in social and political practice. Conceptualising identities as contextual ways of thinking, rather than ubiquitously defining characteristics, should lead us towards a number of theoretical and socio-political consequences. Importantly, essentialist identity thinking, even in its most banal quotidian forms, always carries with it the latency of exclusion, discrimination and xenophobia. A contestation of identitarian thinking is thus necessary for both theoretical accuracy and for sustained social justice. In a global environment marked by underlying identitarian logic, by identity-based oppression, and diverse forms of identity politics, revisiting fundamental questions about identities and drawing consequent conclusions is of paramount importance. Essentialist notions of identities underly many modes of political organisation and manifestations of ethical values in the contemporary world, and we ought to actively

work against such notions becoming locked-in and immovable as we progress into the future. This book outlines a non-essentialist understanding of identities, arguing for an anti-realist understanding of identities as contextual epistemic frameworks. It also shows how reductive identitarian thinking can be at least partially overcome by employment of collaborative research methodologies.

This book is divided into theoretical and ethnographic sections. Chapters 2 and 15 discuss theories of identities, while Chapters 3-14 present peoples' life stories, stories that escape and transcend reductive identity thinking and that serve as examples for analysis. Drawing on ethnographic examples from Nueva Germania, Chapter 2 elaborates on how a recognition of the contextual character of identities leads to a similarly contextual and fluid understanding of an individual person. As individuals, we engage many incommensurable and at times contradicting identities, while at other times these identities cease to matter. This leads to two important and interrelated questions: Firstly, if identities are situational rather than ubiquitous, if we define ourselves differently in different contexts, then why do we assume that we are coherent singular individuals? And, secondly, if identities are indeed socially constructed and imaginary, as different theorists have argued, then why do they feel so 'real' or important to us? By drawing a connection between *social identities* and *personal identity* (understood as the sense of being a persistent and continuous person), by theorising social identities as imaginary anchors that stabilise the otherwise undefined and ambiguous sense of self, this chapter offers an explanation of the existential importance of social identities. It also outlines differing perspectives as to why essentialist identities continue to be such a pervasive way of thinking, despite their fundamentally erroneous logic, demonstrating how identities operate at the most fundamental level of the formation of a sense of self, and connecting this with quotidian life, history, social interactions, and politics.

Essentialist identity thinking poses not only a continuous hurdle for social theory, but also a methodological challenge. Chapter 15 reflects on collaborative storytelling and participatory photography (photo voice) as humanizing methods that bear the potential of transcending reifying categories and reductive essentialist representations of human beings. This chapter reflects on the life-stories and photographs used in this book to argue that the resulting epistemic polyphony of different voices and mediums allows both the avoidance of singular representation and the enriching of the account with intertextual meanings that would otherwise be inaccessible to the reader. This chapter draws on the stories included in this book, exploring the different aspects of quotidian and inter-personal usages and meaning of identities and arguing for the necessity of seeing all individuals as inherently incomplete, plural and contradictory, abandoning reductive illusions of unified and coherent descriptive categories. Furthermore, the collaborative process through which these textual and photographic accounts were written provided research participants with a platform to represent themselves. Such collaborative methods carry not only epistemic but also ethical potential, as they affords research participants the power to shape the

outcome and discuss issues which they consider important. This approach undermines the representational monopoly of a researcher in classical ethnographic styles of writing.

This opening chapter continues with an introduction to the history of Nueva Germania, a town founded by German settlers in the nineteenth century. The town has attracted some media attention over the last decades because of the anti-Semitic ideology that formed the basis of the town's foundation, and because of the famous historical figures that were involved.

Nueva Germania—from proto-Nazi utopia to poor rural settlement

Nueva Germania was founded as a utopic anti-Semitic colonial project of nationalist ideologues. The dream of a Germanic town in Latin America, far away from any Jewish influence, came from Richard Wagner and was taken up by Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (née Nietzsche) who established the settlement in 1887. This history needs to be understood in the specific context of a deep economic depression, German colonial aspirations and widespread anti-Semitism.

For centuries, Jewish people were subject to diverse forms of discrimination in the Germanic states and in Europe in general, such as additional taxation, exclusion, quotas for work in certain professions and institutions, restriction of habitation to specific zones or city districts and compulsory identificatory clothing such as the 'Jewish hat' or a yellow badge. In the Germanic states, the Jewish Disabilities—the anti-Semitic discriminatory laws applied throughout Europe—were gradually abolished after unification and the formation of the German Empire in 1871.² This, however, did not eliminate widespread anti-Semitic sentiments. On the contrary, anti-Semitism was on the rise.

The strong revival of anti-Semitism in the 1870s and 1880s is often attributed to the combination of the 1873 Vienna stock exchange crash and the mass migration of Jews from imperial Russia. The escalation of violence against Jews, the horror of pogroms and a range of discriminatory policies forced millions to flee from Russia. Many of these refugees came to Germany. The 1873 stock market crash and the accompanying Long Depression had a disastrous impact on industry, agriculture and the economy across Europe, affecting the economic situation of the majority of the German population. The crash strengthened the position of radical political movements and organizations who depicted Jews as the cause of the crisis. This combi-

² In some of the Germanic states, emancipation occurred prior to the 1871 unification. For a discussion of processes and difficulties of Jewish emancipation, see Katz (1998). For the history of anti-Semitism in the German Empire, see Pulzer (1988; 2003).

nation of economic scarcity and increased immigration fuelled fears and hatred. (A parallel might be drawn with the increased Islamophobia in present-day Europe after the 2008 economic crash and the influx of Muslim migrants and refugees.)

Concurrently, scientific racism was solidifying essentialist understandings of human beings and a biologized view of identities, providing legitimization for radical political movements. The so-called ‘race science’ generated biological essentialist ideas about human diversity (see Kurzwelly and Wilckens 2023). Notably, in 1883 Francis Galton ([1883] 2001, 198–200) coined the term ‘eugenics’ to describe planned improvement of populations by selective pairing, an idea that was picked up by racist ideologues dreaming of racial or national purity. Thinking in terms of identity categories in general, and in this case more specifically in terms of the dichotomy of *Deutschtum* (Germanness) as opposed to *Judentum* (Jewishness), was increasingly used as an epistemic framework through which social reality was interpreted and acted upon.

This historical context, along with the general increase in emigration among impoverished Europeans—which, in the German context, was partially led by state efforts to recruit settlers to Germany’s new colonies after the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference—laid out the conditions in which the concept of a pure German settlement, far away from ‘Jewish influence,’ emerged. The idea first came from Richard Wagner who, besides being a renowned composer, was a fierce nationalist and an anti-Semite. His ideas revolved around the strengthening of Germanness, or the *Volk* (meaning ‘the people,’ often in an ethnic, nationalist or racial sense), through cultural enforcement, art and vegetarianism. One of his ideas was to create a vegetarian community in the fertile lands of South America, where the German spirit would be able to develop unimpeded. This idea found a fertile ground in the minds of Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who were members of Wagner’s social circle.

Bernhard Förster was born on 31 March 1843 in Delitzsch, a small town just north of Leipzig. After studying history, German and classics, he became a teacher in a gymnasium in Berlin, where he taught French, German, Latin and history. He served in the Austro-Prussian and the Franco-Prussian wars. Förster viewed sympathized with the ideas of animal protection, vegetarianism and natural medicine. He was a devoted anti-Semite and a nationalist, actively campaigning for these causes. Förster was part of the *Berliner Bewegung* (Berlin movement), a primarily anti-Semitic, anti-capitalist, conservative and nationalist political movement. He was also one of the founders of the *Deutscher Volksverein* (German people’s league), an anti-Semitic political organization. He organized popular assemblies and congresses and gave political speeches. He coordinated a petition addressed to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck with a warning concerning the spread of Jewishness, portrayed by the signatories as disastrous. The petition requested a ban on, or at least a reduction of, new Jewish immigration, and an exclusion of all Jews from positions of power. It also argued for the creation of a Jewish population register. With the support of sev-

eral university student organizations, Förster and his consociates gathered 267,000 signatures. Förster's anti-Semitism was mostly limited to political lobbying and invectives, although records exist of an incident in which he got into a fight with a Jewish man in a tram in Berlin (Kraus 1999, 60–63).

Förster's views represented general völkisch tendencies and a racist and eugenic wish to improve Germanness in racial, physiological, mental and moral terms, and thereby to secure a leading role for Germans in the world. He perceived Jewishness as the main threat to these goals, but also came to believe that Germany itself was beyond repair, ultimately deciding to realize Wagner's idea of creating a new fatherland in South America.

We prefer to leave this most unfortunate of all of nature's produce, "homo sapiens judaco[!]-progrediens communis,"—as natural scientists call them, to die alone in their own vanity. (Förster, cited in Kraus 1999, 29. My translation. Exclamation in original.)

It was through their common admiration of Richard Wagner that Förster and Elisabeth Nietzsche met. Förster-Nietzsche was born on 10 July 1846 in Röcken, a small village south-west of Leipzig, and attended school in Naumburg and Dresden. She had a very close bonds with both her mother and her brother Friedrich. When Friedrich was appointed professor of philology at the university in Basel, she visited him often, helping him with household management and acted as his secretary. It was Friedrich who, during a visit in Bayreuth, introduced Elisabeth to Richard Wagner and his wife Cosima von Bülow. This friendship became very significant in the life of both siblings. Friedrich's rejection of Wagner's national and anti-Semitic discourse led to bitter disagreements between the two men and to deep disappointment, which haunted Friedrich for years. Elisabeth, on the other hand, remained in Wagner's circle of friends and admirers. Through these contacts, she met Bernhard Förster in December 1876.

As Förster-Nietzsche developed a closer relation to Förster and his ideas, the distance between her and her brother grew. She was in regular correspondence with Förster, helped him to gather signatures for his petition to Bismarck and shared his vision of creating a New Germania overseas. Her brother openly criticized their political stance and he positioned himself against anti-Semitism. This can be illustrated by a quote from a letter he wrote to his sister, after learning that an anti-Semitic article referred to the name Zarathustra, a central figure in his own philosophical work.³

³ Interestingly, Friedrich sent his sister a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to take with her on her journey to South America, as one of his letters suggests (Nietzsche 1887a). It is, however, uncertain whether she did indeed take it along and whether the manuscript ever reached Nueva Germania.



Portraits of Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in the Museum of Nueva Germania. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzweily)

Those damned dirty anti-Semitic morons should stay away from my ideals!! I have already suffered so much because our family name is mixed up with this movement through your marriage! Over the last 6 years you have lost all reason and all thoughtfulness. (Nietzsche 1887b)

Friedrich Nietzsche expressed his criticism openly in another letter to his sister:

If the work of Dr. F<örster> succeeds, I will be satisfied with it for your sake and think as little as possible of the fact that it is at the same time the triumph of a movement I hold in low esteem; if he does not succeed, I will rejoice in the failure of an anti-Sem<itic> enterprise and pity you all the more that you have bound yourself to such a cause out of duty and love. [...] Lastly, my wish is that you will be helped a little from the German side and that as a result anti-Semites will be compelled to leave Germany. [...] For the Jews, on the other hand, I increasingly wish that they come to power in Europe, so that they lose those qualities (which they will no longer need) by virtue of

which they, as the oppressed, have asserted themselves up to now. Otherwise, it is my honest conviction that a German who claims to be more than a Jew merely because he is a G<German>, belongs to a comedy: that is, if he should not belong in the madhouse. (Nietzsche 1887c)

Förster-Nietzsche was extremely disappointed with her brother's lack of support. In a letter to her mother, she wrote:

You see, all I wish for is that Fritz would share Förster's views. His ideals aim to make people better and happier. ... You will see, one day Förster will be praised as one of the best German men and benefactors of his volk! (cited in Kraus 1999, 112. My translation.)

After deciding to turn Wagner's dream into reality, Förster travelled to South America to explore the conditions and potential sites for their new settlement. He chose Paraguay because, in his eyes, it was not 'infected' with Jewishness, and had a relatively stable political situation. At the time, Paraguay was a poor country with relatively few European migrants among its population, and offered many possibilities for development. The country was still suffering the consequences of the 1864–1870 Guerra de la Triple Alianza (Paraguayan War) which killed off almost half of the country's population. Where Paraguay had registered 450,000 inhabitants in 1862, the census of 1872 counted only 230,000, of which only 28,000 were men older than fourteen (de López Moreira 2015, 240). Much of the country's infrastructure was destroyed, many of its businesses and farms ruined, tools and machinery were demolished or taken by foreign forces and many of the highly skilled people dead or emigrated. It took decades for the country to achieve even a partial recovery. In this context, the government was keen on receiving European migrants who could help to repopulate the country and strengthen its economy.

Förster travelled to Paraguay in March 1883 and spent two years exploring the country and negotiating with the administration under President Bernardino Caballero. He first acquired a small piece of land of about 2.5 hectares in San Bernardino (the first German settlement to be founded in Paraguay, two years before his arrival). From this starting point he travelled through different regions of the country in search of the perfect place to create his own 'colony'—as migrant settlements are called in Paraguay. After traversing the south and the west, he finally arrived in the district of San Pedro, about 200 kilometres north of Asunción. Although it was hard to reach, Förster liked this region. The land was fertile, appropriate for both agriculture and cattle breeding, and the indigenous population could be 'domesticated,' as he articulated it, and used as a workforce (Förster, cited in Kraus 1999, 151). He returned to Germany in March 1885 and began preparing his ultimate migration.

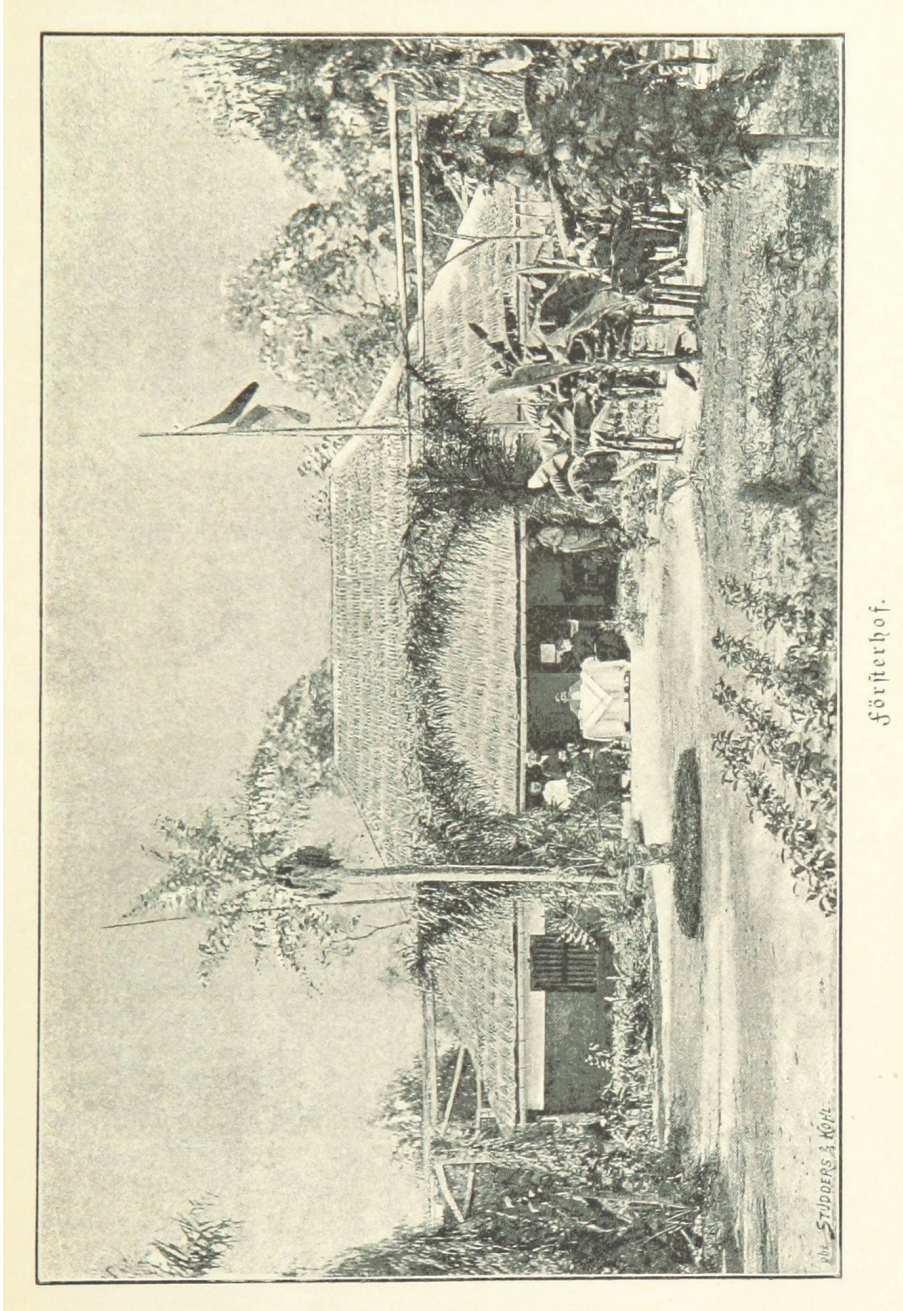
Elisabeth Nietzsche and Bernhard Förster were married on 22 May 1885, on Wagner's birthday, and soon thereafter began an intensive campaign of advertising and recruiting for their project. Förster travelled throughout Germany giving speeches to garner support for his idea of a *Neu Germanien*, securing funding from

different sources and recruiting people who were hopeful about a new prosperous life abroad. Finally, on 16 February 1886, accompanied by a group of settlers, they departed on board a ship sailing from the port in Hamburg. The hopeful settlers had multiple reasons for joining: hope for economic stability and prosperity, search for adventure, or dissatisfaction with private circumstances or the general situation in Germany. Some travelled as families, others alone. It is probable that anti-Semitism was an important motive for some of the settlers, but not for all. And not all of these settlers joined the first group, some followed in their footsteps only later on.

The group reached Asunción in March 1886 and stayed there for the first few months. Förster-Nietzsche and Förster stayed in a hotel and later moved to a rented house on the outskirts of the city. They were negotiating with the government, making business contacts and meeting other German settlers in Paraguay. Förster-Nietzsche tried to convince her husband to establish the colony closer to the capital, but he remained convinced of his initial choice. Ultimately, an agreement for the new settlement was reached with President Caballero, who succumbed to Förster's vision that a great wave of migration would follow from Germany and offered him free land. In November 1886 the Paraguayan government allocated 12 *leguas* (square leagues, approximately 22,500 hectares) to the colony, instead of the 31 leagues that Förster had hoped for. The requirement was for Förster to settle 140 farming families within the first two years; and only then would he receive the title deed to the land. This meant that the land that Förster was selling to the settlers was not yet officially his (Kraus 1999, 158–60). The government's requirement forced the couple to continue with their intensive propaganda campaign in Germany in order to attract more settlers. Their letters and accounts were published by their friends and contacts in the Wagnerian circles and the Colonial Society for Paraguay, which was formed in Chemnitz.

At the end of June 1887, the first group of settlers left Asunción for Nueva Germania. They travelled by boat up the Paraguay River, then followed the course of the Jejuí Guazú, the Aguaray Guazú, and finally disembarked when they reached the Aguaray'mí river. The exact spot of first disembarkation remains disputed among present-day inhabitants of Nueva Germania. The settlers prepared plots of land for the first houses and manioc fields. By September, a second group of settlers had arrived, and agricultural production began. Förster-Nietzsche remained in Asunción as the family house was being constructed in Nueva Germania under Förster's supervision. She moved there in late March 1888, when she received a warm welcome as the *Koloniemutter* (mother of the colony).

Although Förster-Nietzsche was enthusiastic about the settlement, and her letters to Germany kept portraying it as a paradise, the conditions on the ground were rather difficult. Travelling over long distances, the tasks of parcelling the land, the building of a community house, road construction and the purchasing of tools and animals, amongst many other activities, posed continuous challenges. Some new settlers decided to join but did not make up the numbers to fulfil the government



Illustrations from Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's book, published in 1891 after her return to Germany, presenting Nueva Germania as a tropical colonial paradise. (Photo: author unknown, in: Förster-Nietzsche, 1891)

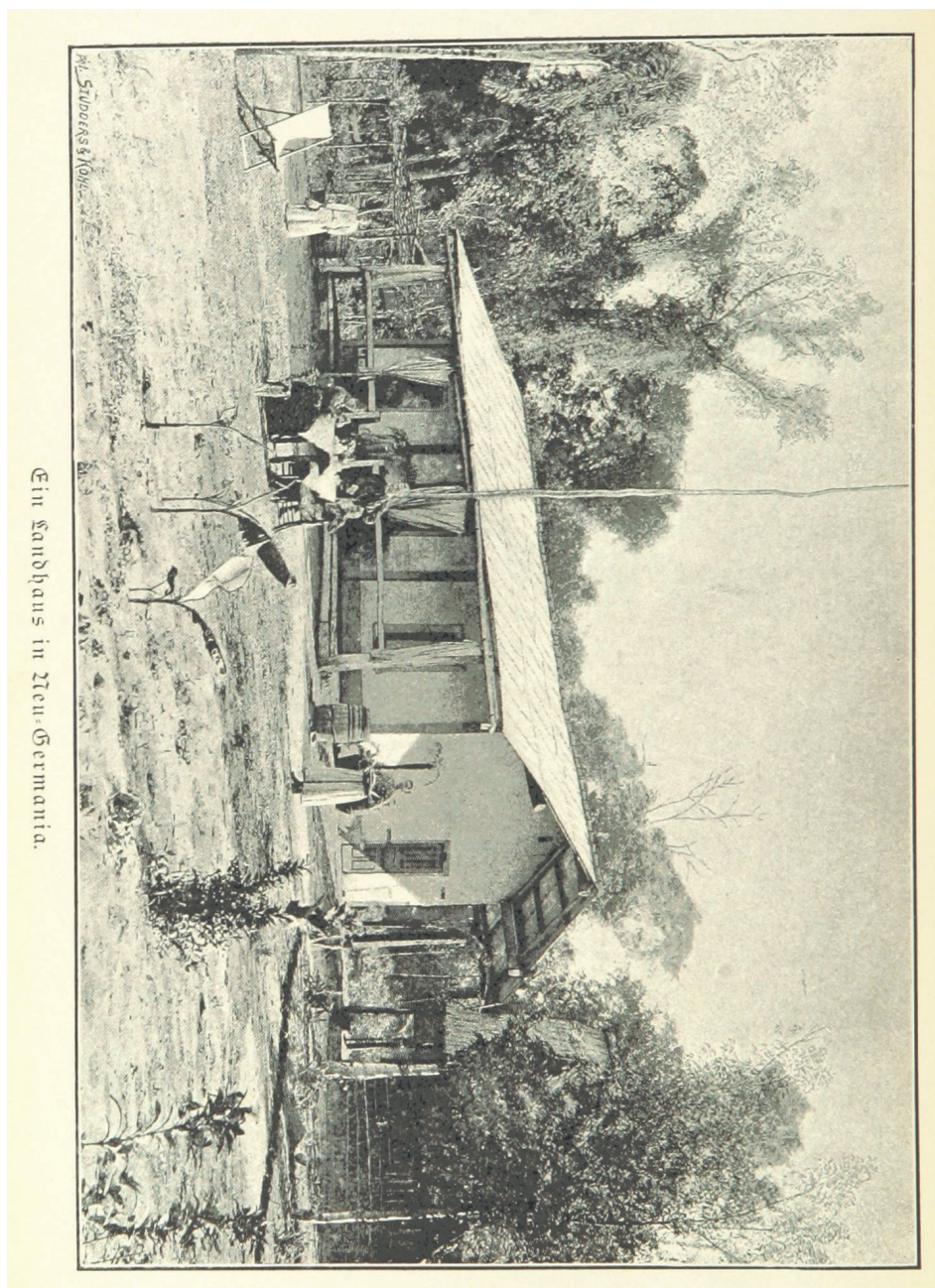
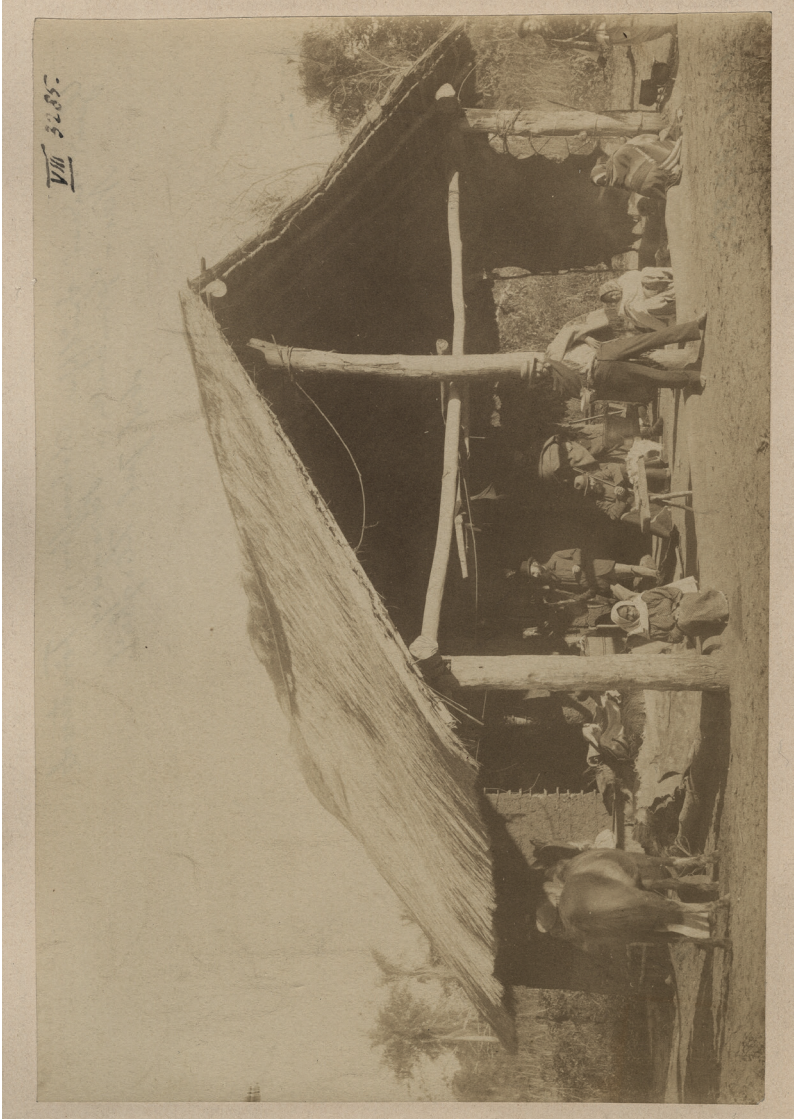


Photo: author unknown, in: Förster-Nietzsche, 1891



A photograph taken by settler Julius Klingbeil, entitled 'A house of a German colonist in Försterrode', portraying a very different image of Nueva Germania. It is interesting to note that local people, presumably indigenous, appear in both Förster-Nietzsche's and Klingbeil's images. Unfortunately, we know little about their lives beyond mentions of servitude, but we can assume that their knowledge and work were crucial to the town's survival. Current inhabitants of Nueva Germania tell stories of the first settlers not knowing how to plant local vegetables or what materials to use to build houses and roofs. For more information on Klingbeil and his photographs see Fischer 2015. (Photo: Julius Klingbeil, 1890, 'Haus eines deutschen Kolonisten in Försterrode', Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, VIII E 717, HF-AM-12)



Other archival photographs, annotated as originating from Nueva Germania and possibly taken in the early years of the settlement, also tell a story that contrasts with Elisabeth Nietzsche's idealised account. (Photo: author and date unknown, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, GSA 101/568 s.25)

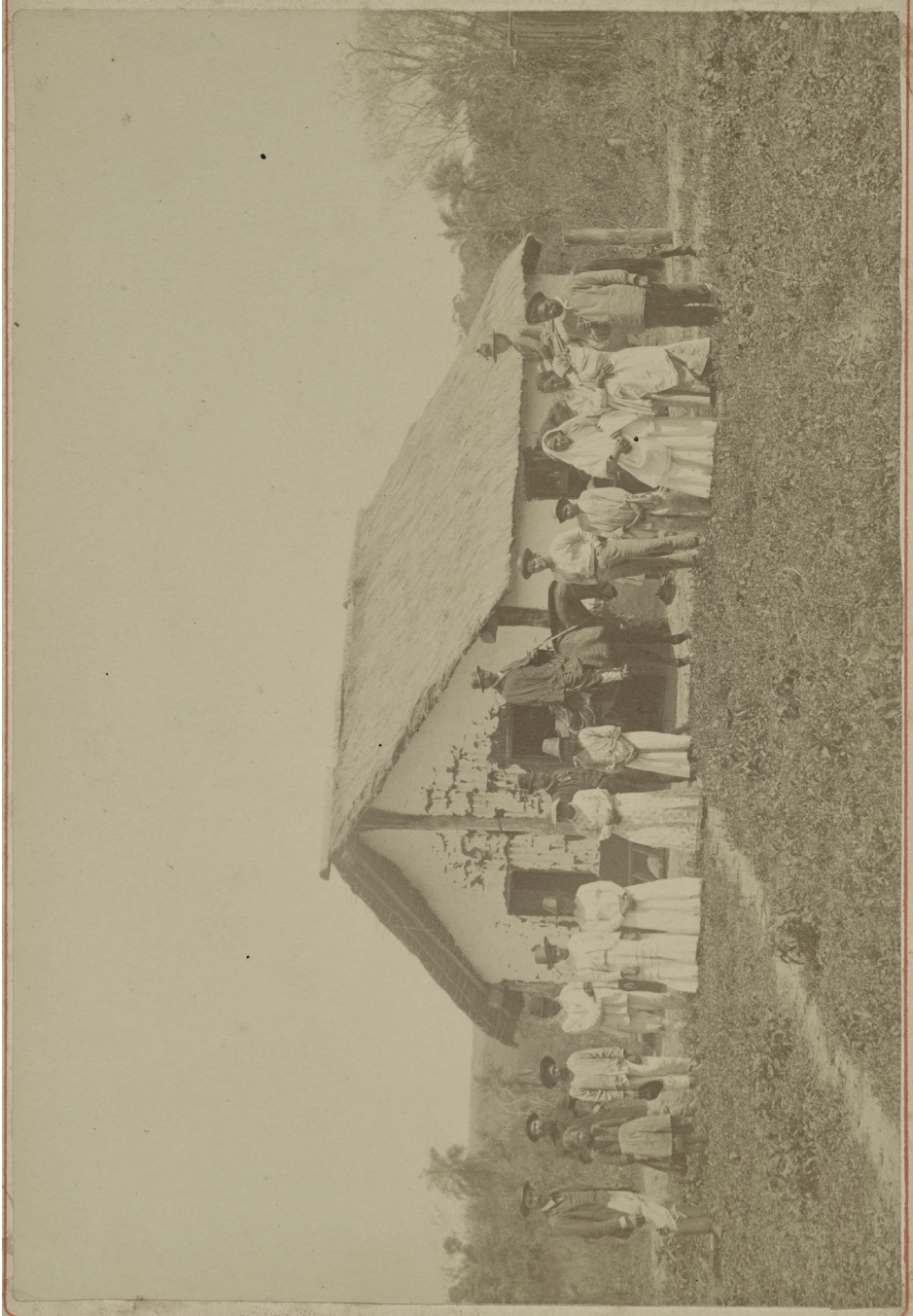


Photo: author and date unknown, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, GSA 72/984 s.15



Photo: author and date unknown, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, GSA 72/984 s.19



Some inhabitants own old family photographs and postcards, though many are unable to identify those depicted in the earliest of these images. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

requirement. Farming did not produce enough surplus to monetize. Due to a lack of other sources of income, Förster was forced to take up additional loans, making an already difficult situation more dire. Förster and Förster-Nietzsche even sold some of their furniture and other belongings. The economic situation of the founding couple and the settlement in general was getting out of hand.

Furthermore, the attempt at advertising the settlement in Germany did not spark enough interest. Some support came from family members and friends in Germany, several of whom even bought empty lots in Nueva Germania, but not enough to improve the economic situation to any significant measure. An additional difficulty arose when Julius Klingbeil, a new settler disappointed with the conditions in Nueva Germania, returned to Germany and published a book on his experiences that portrayed the settlement as a failure (see Fischer 2015). The inability to attract new settlers might also have been influenced by the much larger state-driven advertising for life in the new German colonies.⁴

⁴ The German colonial empire was in control (for differing periods of time) of Togo, Cameroon, Cameroon, German South West Africa (present-day Namibia), German East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) and German New Guinea (today's Papua New Guinea and several smaller Micronesian island-states) (Gottschalk et al. 2016).



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly

Life was difficult for the first settlers in Nueva Germania. Those who were not discouraged by the long and difficult journey from Asunción first had to stay in the ‘newcomer’s house.’ Once they were assigned a parcel of land, they had to cut down the trees and bushes growing on it, construct a house, build a corral for cattle, plant fruit trees, prepare the soil and begin farming. Until the first harvest, they had to purchase all required food in the colony shop, which for many meant falling into debt. According to Paraguayan law, anyone owing money to the colony was unable to leave until they had repaid the full sum. As one settler wrote:

We need to pay very much for everything [in the colony’s shop], and anything we sell is paid for poorly. ... If I had the means I would leave today, but this is the yoke which throws people into misery. I will plant as much tobacco as I can this year. I will then sell my corn to the colony, to earn the money for my travel to Asunción. Therefrom I will sell my tobacco. To cover my debt, I will need to give my land away, which is nowadays worth more money. ... However, if there are no buyers, then it is worth nothing. (Kraus 1999, 206. My translation.)

The conditions in which Förster-Nietzsche and Förster lived were disproportionately better, adding to a general dissatisfaction among the 169⁵ inhabitants of the settlement. The settlers had to adapt to new climatic conditions, animals, plants, insects

⁵ This number is taken from an internal list of residents from 1889 (Kraus 1999, 180). It is unclear whether it includes indigenous or other non-German inhabitants.

and diseases. Many people died in the first years. Anecdotes circulate in Nueva Germania about how the first colonists tried to build roofs of banana leaves (that fall apart as soon as they dried up), did not know how to plant manioc, tried to apply German farming techniques, or died of *pique*, a common sand flea that reproduces in the skin of people and animals. These insects are relatively harmless if quickly removed with a needle, a procedure the first settlers are said not to have known, resulting in severe infections. To make things worse, many inhabitants lived far away from the town of Nueva Germania and from each other (thus the double meaning of Nueva Germania, referring both to the broader terrain of the municipality and to its 'urban centre'). Many lived in isolation and solitude. All of these conditions led to a general disillusionment and dissatisfaction. The struggle for survival was hard, and the initial hopes and expectations quickly faded away. Violent incidents and alcohol abuse became an issue. Many of those who had money decided to leave; the poor, in turn, were forced to stay.

With time Förster spent increasing amounts of time outside of Nueva Germania, desperately trying to secure more capital, effectively leaving Förster-Nietzsche to manage the colony together with Oscar Erck, a friend and settler. The situation was overwhelming and increasingly difficult to cope with. When news arrived that Förster-Nietzsche's brother had suffered a mental collapse in January 1889, she distanced herself from the management of the colony and neglected her other duties. She blamed herself for not being there to help her brother. In this manner, the founding couple became increasingly distanced from the lives of Nueva Germania's inhabitants and their racial project began to fade away.

When it became clear that Förster would not receive any further loans in Paraguay and that his supporters in Germany were unable to raise any additional funds, he found himself on the verge of bankruptcy. His life project had reached a bitter end, and his mental and physical well-being were deteriorating. In late May 1889, he travelled to Asunción and from there to the German town San Bernardino, where he stayed at the Hotel del Lago (the hotel still exists, and is still operational at the time of writing). On 2 June 1889, he went to bed in a miserable state and died in the early hours of the next morning. The German media reported it as suicide by strychnine poisoning, a fact strongly rejected by Förster-Nietzsche and other settlers. The death certificate stipulated a heart attack, though some of the current inhabitants of Nueva Germania claim that this was falsified under pressure by Förster-Nietzsche. Kraus (1999, 229) raised doubts about both accounts of Förster's death, claiming that it is not possible to determine which one is true.

Ultimately, as the settlement was not able to provide for itself, the Paraguayan government took over the supply chain. Nueva Germania transformed from a private undertaking into a cooperative society, managed by Oscar Erck and Förster-Nietzsche. Elisabeth had to repay her husband's debts, which she agreed to do by selling most of their land, animals and belongings to the society. After finding a tenant for her house, she travelled back to Germany in late 1890, where she pro-

moted Nueva Germana and published a book about it. In July 1892 she returned to Paraguay but found her leadership position no longer accepted by the other inhabitants. During her absence, the settlers had negotiated their title deeds from the Paraguayan government. When Förster-Nietzsche critiqued the new leadership, she quickly became unpopular among the residents. Ultimately the settlers demanded her departure. She sold the rest of her land and returned to Germany in August 1893, where she dedicated herself to the care of her brother whose mental illness was progressing. She concentrated her efforts on disseminating his work, notes and letters, famously contributing to the purposeful misinterpretation of his ideas in support of National Socialism. She founded the Nietzsche archive in Naumburg. Later, after meeting and corresponding with Adolf Hitler, she secured additional funding for the archive. Hitler, in turn, attended her funeral in 1935.

Nueva Germania's origins in different ways connect up with German nationalism, anti-Semitism, Friedrich Nietzsche and, ultimately, even with Hitler. This occasionally attracted journalistic interest, captured in media accounts that have often been sensationalist, that limit themselves to the colony's brief foundational history and that draw problematic and often harmful connections between the founders' ideology and the settlement's present-day inhabitants. They ignore the details of the settlement's history after Förster-Nietzsche's departure.

The colony gradually achieved a degree of economic stability, largely because of its yerba mate plantations (see the story of Klaus Neumann and his ancestors in Chapter 3). Nevertheless, for a long time Nueva Germania remained a relatively poor and isolated town. The inhabitants continued to face many problems, such as maintaining a functional school. Employing a teacher proved to be a challenge, so that children's education was often neglected. For a long time a Protestant pastor visited every few years, which is when most marriages and other ceremonies were held (Holst 2005, 227–33). It is unclear, however, when the municipal administration began to be dominated by Paraguayan inhabitants, or at which time the settlement's population became predominantly Paraguayan. Indeed, from the 1890s onwards, the history of the settlement was not well documented.

For a very long time the town remained fairly isolated and poor. Since about 1980 Nueva Germania became more connected to the broader region and the outside world. First a dirt road and later an asphalt road (paved between 2001 and 2005) substantially reduced travel time to Asunción and replaced the previous fluvial means of transportation. Communication technologies, beginning with radio, then later television and mobile phones and, most recently, affordable internet modems, increased the flow of information, facilitated long distance contact and significantly changed social attitudes. As Klaus Neumann once told me: 'As children we were unaware that we were poor. The differences between what we had were all relatively small. One of us had a bicycle and others did not, but we shared and played together anyway. We became aware of our poverty only after television arrived in Nueva Germania, after watching rich people in films.' Television changed people's dreams and aspirations. It

also helped people to learn Spanish and, especially younger generations, Portuguese, due to the Brazilian channels and childrens programs available via satellite. Internet now connects Germaninos with the broader world, connecting via Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Jobs and opportunities remain scarce, but there is a visible increase of commerce and economic activity in general, as well as remittances and exchange with family members living in other parts of Paraguay and abroad.

Nueva Germania keeps attracting visitors and journalists, mostly interested in the foundational history of the town, its basis in anti-Semitic and eugenic ideology, and the figure of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, along with some gossip about Josef Mengele possibly hiding in the colony in the 1950s. (I found no proof for the latter. There are signs that a potential fleeing Nazi criminal stayed in the town for a few months at some point after the war, as several elderly people tell stories about such a person, but I was unable to determine his identity.) These outsider and journalistic interests usually manifest in sensationalist ways, hoping to find traces of hateful ideologies or ‘Nazis in the jungle,’ as it were, searching for confirmation in selective interviews without considering the broader context, and representing people through prism of events from over 130 years ago. Such portrayals are often harmful to the town’s current inhabitants. One of the current residents, Arnold Garcia, captured this well when he expressed his wish that Nueva Germania would be seen not as the first proto-Nazi racist experiment but as the first *failed* proto-Nazi experiment.

Nueva Germania was created as a consequence of a worldview, which in its axiomatic basis assumed an essentialist and categorical distinction between different types of human beings. It assumed social categories of alterity, which determined radically different types of beings—Germans and Jews. This division was often saturated with fears, judgements, hatreds and feelings of superiority. The categories of Germanness and Jewishness were popular and important at the time, informing or even leading some people’s life-projects. Such was the case with Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, whose reasons for creating Nueva Germania were based on essentialist, cultural-relativist identity thinking. Nowadays the social category of ‘Jewishness’ is almost forgotten in Nueva Germania. (One exception is the Stern family, descending from Max Stern who is said to have moved to Nueva Germania because he was deeply in love with one of the young women in the Schubert family who had moved there a few years after the town’s founding. Legend has it that for a few years he hid his Jewish identity behind a false surname. Today, the category of Jewishness no longer has any particular weight or meaning in Nueva Germania, and the Stern family are simply seen as German.) ‘Germanness’ is currently also understood differently (as described in Chapter 2).

The past anti-Semitic epistemic framework for making sense of reality has vanished, previous identities have changed their meanings, and the social categories which guide people’s narratives and actions today are effectively different. Understanding identities as categories or axioms of thinking, as foundations of epistemic frameworks to make meaning of social reality, guided my anthropological research



The western side of Nueva Germania's urban centre. The national route that cuts through the town, connecting San Pedro in the west to Santa Rosa in the east. From the centre of town farming 'settlements' that belong to the municipality extend outwards, with the German ones carrying two names, in two languages: Südstrand—Costa Sur, Westrand—Takuruty, Nordrand—Costa Norte. (Photo: Mauro Espinoza Rodríguez)

interests. My main research focus lay in understanding the importance and impact of being 'German' and being 'Paraguayan' and to draw from these local perceptions more general theorisations of social identities.

This book explores how social identities are understood and narrated, which often stands in opposition to how these identities are lived in practice. Nueva Germania was established as a radical identitarian racist experiment. Its founders confined people to their identities and dreamt of German superiority. They reduced both their objects of fear and hatred (the 'Jews'), and their experimental objects of self-identification (the 'Germans') to essentialising identity categories. It is perhaps fitting to then use histories from today's Nueva Germania to examine, discuss and ultimately refute such identitarian thinking. Contesting erroneous and pernicious identitarian logic (and its political usages) remains one of the key challenges facing us as a common humanity.



After the construction of firstly a gravel and later an asphalted road, Nueva Germania ended a long period of relative isolation. Today travel to Asunción takes only a few hours by car or bus, and mobile phones and internet connect to the broader world instantly. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzweilly)

2 Identity thinking and its persistence

Identity thinking—the attribution of social identities⁶ to a self and to others, identities which are assumed to define who people are—is prevalent. Despite decades of socio-scientific theories which portray social identities as products of historical processes, imagination, and performance, identities are often still implicitly or explicitly assumed to be essential⁷, necessary characteristics of persons, and treated as

⁶ The general term of ‘identity’ allows a higher level of generalisation than when we find ourselves speaking of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, or other such categories, on their own. This level of generality allows for comparison, but also requires us to bracket out the specificities of certain identities. Note also, that being German or Paraguayan, as used in this book, does not easily fit into the analytical categories of ethnicity, nationality or race. In Nueva Germania, ‘being German’ can be variably understood as belonging to a culturally distinct group (ethnicity), it can refer to belonging to both a nation or a state (nationality or citizenship), as well as to an inherited phenotypical difference (social race). Each of these three analytical categories bear different connotations and different consequences beyond theory. For example, distinguishing between Ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) and non-Ethnic Germans, can in practice lead to different legal rights, claims to citizenship and different treatment in general. Academic writing could be used to legitimise such discriminatory attitudes. This stresses further the usefulness of using the general analytical term ‘identity’, as it avoids reaffirming and legitimising particular identity categories.

⁷ Essentialism is understood here as the assumption that people possess *necessary* characteristics which define them, and without which they would no longer be who they are. In the cases described below, the assumption here is that social identities, such as Germanness or Para-

metaphysically real categories of the natural and social world. A view of identities as products of imagination and shared belief, as accidental, fluid and contextually rather than ubiquitously relevant, has not been consequently implemented across socio-scientific theory and practice, including in recent theoretical trends. For example, the ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology often reduced people’s perception to ethnicity or a set of cosmological beliefs (see Graeber 2015, and Martin 2020); similarly the ‘postcolonial’ or ‘decolonial turn’ at times assumed people living in the ‘global West’ and ‘global South’ to be radically different, essentialising geopolitical and racial categories (see Chibber 2013, Hull 2022, cf. Kurzweily and Wilckens 2023); at the same time different contemporary instances of ‘identity politics’ operate on reified identities, often with an explicit engagement of academic theories that support them (Fraser 2008, Reed 2018, and Das 2020, see also Kurzweily, Pérez, and Spiegel 2023 for a general discussion of identity politics). In these instances, fixed identity categories of different kinds are erroneously taken to be revealing and meaningful across different contexts. Because of this widespread use of essentialist identity thinking in both academic analysis and in society at large, revisiting and elaborating on the non-essential and non-determinist character of identities is important. The ways in which identities work and are conceptualised in Nueva Germania is a particularly useful illustration for these arguments.

Beyond scholarly theory, identities are given significance on different levels of societal organisation and interactions. Identities, nationality and ethnicity in particular, are structuring the global political order, which rests on divisions into nation-states and on political sovereignty often being understood as a right that derives from ethnicity. Identities are written into law, leading to the conditioning of rights, obligations, and responsibilities. Identity thinking provides grounds for inclusion and exclusion, mobilises various kinds of action, and can even legitimise killing and dying. The outcomes of such thinking can be found in most spheres of social life. What makes identities seem as if they are fixed, rigid, revealing and essential? This chapter⁸ explores one of the main reasons as to why identity thinking is so pervasive in society, focusing on the fundamental domain of the relation between social identities and the formation of a sense of self—the way in which imagined constructed social identities help to maintain a similarly imagined and constructed sense of being a continuous and persistent self. Understanding this relation can partially help to explain the allure and hold which identity thinking has over our lives. It can also help to outline a non-essentialist, non-determinist and anti-realist view of social identities.

guayanness, define a person, that such identities lie within a person’s quiddity. In contrast, a non-essentialist view of identities sees identities as *accidental* characteristics—historically shaped, imagined, fluid and changeable (see Kurzweily, Rapport, and Spiegel 2020).

⁸ This chapter draws upon and expands arguments made previously in: Kurzweily 2019, Kurzweily, Rapport, and Spiegel 2020, and Kurzweily, Fernana, and Ngum 2020.

The main argument of this chapter is that the very sense of self—the notion of being a continuous and persistent person, also referred to as 'personal identity'—is constituted through imagination, and that one of the key contributing elements in its constitution are social identities. As individual human beings, we are inherently dis-unified. That disunity manifests bodily (e.g., as one ages) and in one's beliefs, psychological dispositions, tastes and memories, all of which may change over time. Furthermore, in different situations we tend to adopt different identities, each of which define us in varying ways. The content and meanings of how we define ourselves changes over time. However, people most often regard themselves as unified and continuous selves, and much of our society relies on this assumption. Following Parfit (1984) I argue that any sense of personal unity is imagined and constructed through 'psychological chains of connectedness', which enable an individual to perceive their own character traits, aesthetic preferences, beliefs, desires and other features—including their social identities—as their continuously defining characteristics. In other words, an individual's imagined sense of being a singular person, persistent and continuous across context, is partially enabled through adopting social identities and assuming their continuous relevance in defining oneself (adopting an essentialist view of such identities). Social identities, usually imagined as stable defining characteristics, help to create a sense of unity and coherence over time. This, in turn, also generates a sense that the social identities themselves are stable and coherent across time, and a sense that they constitute the defining characteristics of a person.

This chapter begins with three examples of local explanations of social identities in Nueva Germania. These *emic* (local) notions exemplify the view of identities as somewhat essentialist, as persistent and definitional. At the same time, a comparison of these local examples can serve to undermine their own assumptions, and reveal the inherently contextual character of identities. Drawing upon this recognition of the situational adaptability and changeability of individuals, this chapter then elaborates on the relation between the sense of self and social identities.

Situational identities or 'contextual epistemic permissibly'

In Nueva Germania, just as in many (if not all) places, people manifest a certain inconsistency or even contradictoriness in how they understand themselves through the prism of identities. Despite people's claims, their identities are not ubiquitously relevant. At times different incommensurable or even contradicting identities become salient. The meanings ascribed to a given identity also differ and change. This section includes examples of situational identities. I will briefly introduce different peoples individual explanations of being German or Paraguayan, and how these narratives are contradicted by a third cross-cutting identity.

People's understandings and interpretations of the differences between Germans and Paraguayans is diverse, and in some ways converges with socio-scientific explanations of identities. They are at times explained as evolutionary, hereditary or performative, as culture, customs or morality. What most of these discourses have in common, is that they assume social reality to be divided between Germans and Paraguayans—reified categories that represent different kinds of people, conditioning or determining their behaviours and attitudes.

Carlos Benitez, for example, explained the difference between Germans and Paraguayans as a heritable result of environmental adaptability to different climatic conditions, which in turn enforced different economic attitudes and work ethics. German customs are based on the adaptation to cold winters in central Europe, which required production of surplus and food storage and conservation techniques. This, he explained, influenced the culture of long working hours and the saving of resources. Carlos also pointed out that Germans in Nueva Germania had to adapt to the new environment, which in turn differentiated them from Germans in Germany.

The Paraguayan customs, on the other hand, derive from the adaptation to a tropical climate and the inheritance of the indigenous Guaraní culture. The availability of food throughout the year does not create a need for long-term storage capabilities. On the contrary, the humidity makes preserving food difficult, thus different methods of securing subsistence were necessary, namely *jopoi* and *minga*. Work was traditionally organised in *minga* [Guaraní for collaborative work and shared profit] and was based on *jopoi* [solidarity] in which the surplus is shared or exchanged for products and favours. This climatic specificity created a culture of solidarity and openness, he argued, in contrast to the Germans.

To give an example, Carlos compared the difference in how pigs are slaughtered. Germans conserve all parts of a pig and eat it over a long period of time, as per their European custom. Paraguayans preserve little and invite neighbours and friends to eat together. However, they expect to be invited in reciprocity. 'Jopoi is another form of food preservation', Carlos said. Germans and Paraguayans resolved the shared human problem of securing food for the future in different ways—the former preserve and store while the latter share and expect reciprocity. The consequences of these different approaches, he argued, reach far beyond food security and influence moral norms, prescriptions for behaviour, social pressures and judgement. Jokingly he said that Germans accuse Paraguayans of economic recklessness and lack of planning, as well as a poor work ethic and laziness. On the other hand, Paraguayans perceive Germans are selfish, stingy, individualistic, and not knowing how to party properly, how to fully enjoy life. Carlos' perspective on Germanness resonates with theories that see identities through the prism of adaptability and cultural evolution which moulded groups of people differently, leading to diverse behavioural and ethical patterns.

Waltraud Haudenschild explained the difference between being German and Paraguayan differently, in a way that to an extent converges with the concept of 'performativity', assuming that it is the performance of an identity that constitute said identity. Economic attitudes and household management were also among the central aspects that she focused upon in her explanation. 'We buy as little as possible, we make everything by ourselves here.' Germans, she explained, cook their own marmalades, bake bread and cakes, make cottage cheese, grow their own vegetables, therefore can save more money. These activities, along with a fluency in German, and attendance of the evangelic-Lutheran church, and other 'customs', define what it means to be German. 'The one that does not do this any more, is *verhiesigt* [Paraguauized].' Paraguayans, according to Waltraud, have a different culture, different priorities and a different way of being, they attribute greater importance to nice clothes, gadgets or electronic equipment, and in consequence they have less economic security.

For Waltraud the difference between Germans and Paraguayans is performative. One needs to perform Germanness to be recognised as such, otherwise one risks losing this identity. This is also reflected in language and the verb *verhiesigen*. *Verhiesigen* means becoming a local (a *Hiesiger* (m) or *Hiesige* (f)), or in other words becoming a Paraguayan—loosing the German within (*Entdeutschen*). In practice, *de-Germanising* usually takes more than one generation. I have heard such words used in reference towards members of mixed families, to those who don't speak German, those who become Catholic, and those who no longer participate in the exclusive festivities enjoyed by German descendants. In contrast to academic theories of gender performativity which detach gender from any pre-existing essence, being recognised as German in Nueva Germania seems to nevertheless pose a requirement of ancestry. A *Hiesiger* or *Hiesige* who has learnt the language and customs, still remains a Paraguayan in the eyes of the Germans. I have not heard any term that would describe 'becoming German'—therefore, Germanness cannot be obtained, it can only be lost. In other words, there seems to be a requirement of a necessary characteristic—a heritable essence of sorts—which then needs to be combined with performativity, in order for a person to be recognised as German.

Both of these examples in which Carlos and Waltraud explain differences between Germanness or Paraguayanness, stress that this is a difference in customs, in social relations, and in ideas about the good life. They also highlight differences in embodied and enacted moral frameworks. In other words, the dichotomy is presented as something of a core element of a person, a definitional essence, that influences behaviour, values and the general worldview. There is, however, one social category in particular which undermines the claim of the strength and ubiquitousness of the German-Paraguayan division; Namely, the '*Germanino*' category, which refers to all inhabitants of Nueva Germania, regardless of any other identities and affiliations which they may hold. This category is evoked and becomes salient whenever a unity of the town or it's inhabitants is sought, having the effect of those included in the



School students carry both flags during the town's anniversary celebrations. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)



Marta Villalba Agüero, member of the Ballet de Nueva Germania folk dance group. German flags are used in this case as symbols representing the entire town. (Photo. Fidel Benitez)

category then distancing themselves from the inhabitants of other municipalities. This may include people from big cities such as Asunción (at times, this is also a way of claiming an essential difference).

For example, during a speech in August 2014 which was celebrating the anniversary of the town's founding year, the city mayor referred to all *Germaninos* as celebrating 127 years of the town's history, inviting and indicating a sense of a shared past or heritage, instead of a 'German settlement' as it is at times referred to, and therefore urging people to draw from the past in order to shape a common future. Similarly, a small historical museum in the area refers to a shared past among the first settlers, and also to a shared history of Yerba Mate production, invoking a commonness and unity for the people of the town. In local schools, all pupils write essays and create artistic works depicting the history and the life of the first settlers, perceiving these stories and artworks as depiction of their common heritage. This is also the case for the town's anniversary celebration, which renders the omnipresent German and Paraguayan flags as symbols of the town and of all *Germaninos*, instead of presenting them as the flags of two distinct nations. Colours of both flags decorate pavements, electricity poles, school and municipal buildings, as well as driving licenses and other documents issued by the local authorities. Another example of this presentation of identity is seen with the local folk dance group, who uses both flags to symbolise their representation of Nueva Germania at different national and international competitions. The category also has a presence in social media, with both groups containing the term *Germaninos* in their name, and people expressing nostalgia or pride for their beloved Nueva Germania.

The category of *Germanino* does not necessarily negate the identities of Germanness or Paraguayanness, but often undermines their importance or attempts to transcend them. This effect, however, seems to challenge the claims of different inhabitants when they explain their understandings of their own German and Paraguayan identity. The logical inconsistency that follows can best be described as a production out of two contradictory metaphysical claims. The first claim is: Germans and Paraguayans who live in Nueva Germania are fundamentally different; this essential difference defines them as distinct types of beings, conditioning their behaviour and ideas, shaping the entire sociocultural landscape of the town. The second claim is: all *Germaninos* are a community, and other social divisions do not matter, or have little significance at best. The contradiction of such opposing claims is, however, not usually apparent in practice. This is because, as I argue, being German, Paraguayan, or *Germanino*, are not real social nor biological kinds. They are not categories that mark significant fundamental differences between people. They are rather imaginary categories kept alive through collective beliefs, narratives and performances. These categories are evoked situationally as frameworks through which persons understand and act upon the world, for example, as a means to establish ties with someone or as a way to exclude them. A contradiction can only become visible or create a cognitive dissonance if both claims are made simultaneously in

the same situation, which usually does not happen. Such identities, are usually only relevant contextually, which goes against an understanding of social identities as ubiquitous and essential.

Identities are contextual and relational. Locally, in relation to each other, people sometimes evoke the distinctiveness of Germans and Paraguayans, whereas at other times, other social identities are at work (not always contradictory, but incommensurable). This is not a new observation. In anthropological literature, for example, Gluckman described this phenomena as 'cross-linking ties', which were able to unite people even in violent contexts, including in situations colonial oppression. 'Certain customary ties link a number of men together into a group. But other ties divide them by linking some of them with different people who may be enemies to the first group' (1973, 10). Gluckman saw a multiplicity of webs of conflicting ties which ultimately contribute to social cohesion. Similarly, Okamura (1981) wrote a review of several theoretical approaches to what he called 'situational ethnicity'.

I propose to conceptualise what Gluckman and Okamura have described as 'cross-cutting links' or 'situational ethnicity', more generally as 'contextual epistemic permissibility' (CEP). 'Contextual' refers to people evoking different identities or social categories, based on different axioms and beliefs, in different situations. Such contextual usages of diverse identities are able to span different generations, different moments of the life of an individual, or, sometimes can take place even within the course of a single conversation. 'Epistemic' refers to the observation that these identities are not real biological or social 'kinds', but are rather axiomatic of general interpretative frameworks—different ways of understanding, ordering, relating to and acting upon the world. 'Permissibility' refers to the observation that people and society usually allow for such incommensurability or inconsistency, and even for incoherence, in the use of diverse epistemic frameworks (despite people's claims of their ubiquitous relevance or essentialist beliefs). In other words—people operate on different epistemic frameworks contextually and will rarely seek a universal coherence, a general applicability of the frameworks in practice, even if they claim such frameworks to be universal and essentialist.

It is also pertinent to add that different social identities are often mixed together in diverse constellations and intersections. Roccas and Brewer (2002) described different strategies which people take towards managing their multiple identities—intersection, dominance, compartmentalisation or merger. In our case, depending on the situation, the Germanino identity is at times understood as compartmentalised, as separate from the German and Paraguayan identities (which in such a situation can become completely irrelevant and non-existent), it can be applied in a merger that incorporates these and other identities, or applied intersectionally when both being German and Germanino matter at the same time. Such constellations of identities often contain different assumptions as to what the contents of these identities are, and how they influence social expectations, further stressing how the meanings of identities are not fixed but are instead fluid and adaptive.

The key question which emerges from this observation, related to our non-essentialist understanding of social identities, is: how can people situationally perform different identities (or different constellations thereof), which differently define who they are as persons, differently define what their roles and behaviours should be, and at the same time believe that they are one person, continuous and persistent in time? Elaborating on this question will allow us to better understand why social identities seem so important to people, and at the same time allows us to form a non-essentialist theory that links social identities to personal identity.

Social identities as a basis for the sense of self

One of the most fundamental issues that can help us understand the social and existential importance of social identities to people, is their role in the construction of the self. The self, or personal identity as it is called more specifically in philosophy, is defined as the sense of being a *continuous* and *persistent* person. The argument here is that social identities are among the key elements which allow us to construct and maintain a sense of continuity and persistence in time, an imaginary sense of being a unified person. To make this argument, I will begin by briefly introducing the philosophical problem at hand.

As I argued in section above, we—all people—operate on different epistemic frameworks which define us differently in diverse contexts. Furthermore, our bodies age and change, our memories take different shapes, our character, beliefs and preferences all change over time. Why then, despite all of these changes over time and across different situations, do we continue to perceive ourselves as singular and unified persons? This is an old philosophical problem, most famously epitomised in the metaphor of the Ship of Theseus. Does a wooden ship of which constitutive elements break and are replaced throughout time, remain the same ship? How much change can a thing undergo while still remaining the same thing? By the logic of Leibniz's law (see Forrest 2020), the identity of indiscernibles, once any change occurs, a thing cannot be considered to be the same. This also holds true for our human bodies—we undergo fast changes on the molecular and cellular levels, we suffer accidents, undergo medical procedures, gain or lose weight, grow and age. The feeling of being a unified person cannot thus be based on an *actual* continuity and persistence of our physical bodies, at best, it could be based upon a *perceived* sense of a continuity or progressive resemblance of our bodies.

Faced with this problem, Locke formulated a different explanation. In a metaphor, he considers a situation in which a prince and a cobbler switch consciousness and all thoughts—who then would be the real prince? This example led him to believe that personal identity depends on the sameness of consciousness, not a continuity of substance:

Self is that conscious thinking thing (whatever substance made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends. (Locke 1997, 307)

He argues that changes in the body do not affect the continuity of self, because this is not where the singular and continuous self resides. However, because we are not always conscious, or conscious in the same way—for example, Socrates is not the same when awake or asleep, he might also lose memory or descend into madness—Locke claims that indeed we are then different persons: ‘But if it be possible for the same man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons [...]’ (Ibid., 308-309).

Setting aside the definitional and metaphysical problems with such concepts as *consciousness*, *soul*, *person*, or *man* in Locke’s writing, for our purposes, it is important to assume that consciousness is as discontinuous and ever-changing as the body. However, people do usually assume a continuity of self, despite going to sleep, or experiencing other changes in states of consciousness, or in one’s cognitive or psychological dispositions. Locke’s attempt to situate the sense of self in consciousness does offer us a solution in describing a plurality of selves. However, his proposal does not help us to understand why people assume such a continuity and persistence where continuity and persistence do not exist.

As Hume (2009) pointed out, the sense of a person’s continuity and persistence in time is fictitious:

It is evident, that the identity which we attribute to the human mind, however perfect we may imagine it to be, is not able to run the several different perceptions into one, and make them lose their characters of distinction and difference, which are essential to them. It is still true, that every distinct perception, which enters into the composition of the mind, is a distinct existence, and is different, and distinguishable, and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive. But, as, notwithstanding this distinction and separability, we suppose the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity, a question naturally arises concerning this relation of identity; whether it be something that really binds our several perceptions together, or only associates their ideas in the imagination. (Ibid., 405–406).

For Hume, personal identity (or Self) is only a bundle of perceptions associated together by imagination.

[...] setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement (Ibid., 396).

In other words, the sense of self or personal identity cannot be ascribed to the body, to psychological character or dispositions, to memory⁹ or consciousness, it is, rather, imaginary. Hume's view negates the existence of an essence of the self, and instead recognises the perpetual flux, incompleteness and the multiplicity of a person. Parfit's (1984) theorisation (which drew upon Hume) can help us to understand how an imaginary sense of a unified self is constructed. This theory can help us to further understand the role that social identities play in the construction of a self.

Like Hume, Parfit also sees the self as a composite of different characteristics: '[M]y main claim is that persons are like nations, not Cartesian Egos' (1984, 275). In other words, a person is not a separately existing entity, distinct from his or her properties and experiences (Ibid., 210). He further explained that:

Most of us believe that the existence of a nation does not involve anything more than the existence of a number of associated people. We do not deny the reality of nations. But we do deny that they are separately, or independently, real. (Ibid., 340)

Through this analogy with nations, Parfit illustrates that a person's numerous properties or components are what constitutes the belief in personal identity and the sense of being a continuous and persistent person.

Parfit explained the imaginary sense of continuity and persistence of self as being constituted through *chains of psychological connectedness*. The different components which form the sense of self are such chains, connecting us with our past and future selves and holding to different degrees through memory and character. A person who liked chocolate ten years ago, likes it now and expects to like it in the future, can partially tie a sense of continuity and persistence of self to this preference. Similarly, a person who had been assigned the identity of German or Paraguayan at birth and continues to be defined and to define themselves through such categories, is also potentially anchoring their sense of self in such identities—especially in a social context which affords much importance to categories such as Germanness or Paraguayanness. Therefore, drawing on Parfit, we can say that social identities (and especially those identities which are socially considered to be important, such as nationality, ethnicity or gender), are also chains of psychological connectedness that contribute to the very sense of being a unified person.

It is important to note that we do not need to actually continuously define ourselves through an identity, the understanding and meanings of the identity can change, and changing identities can still serve as a constitutive building element of

⁹ The discontinuity and undefined character of memory has also been well described by Merleau-Ponty 'My hold on the past and the future is precarious, and my possession of my own time is always postponed until a stage when I may fully understand it, yet this stage can never be reached, since it would be one more moment, bounded by the horizon of its future, and requiring in its turn further developments in order to be understood. My voluntary and rational life, therefore, knows that it merges into another power which stands in the way of its completion, and gives it a permanently tentative look' (2002, 404).

the sense of self. This is because the sense of self is based on imaginary rather than actual persistence and continuity of the constitutive elements. A sense of self does not require individuals to hold coherent identities or epistemic frameworks more generally. We should not see people's essentialist claims about specific identities as having to be ontologically valid, but rather, as potentially indicative of the importance of that given identity for the person and for their sense of self.

The constitution of the sense of self can be complementarily explained as formed through imagination (Hume), through chains of psychological connectedness (Parfit), or also through narration, as Dennett (1992) argued. In similarity to Hume and Parfit, Dennett saw the self as nothing more than an *abstractum*, which he compared to the physical concept of *centre of gravity*. The centre of gravity is a theorist's fiction, has no physical properties of its own, and nevertheless has a fairly robust presence. Dennett also saw persons as largely disunified (and argued that it would be a category mistake to look for the self in the brain). Nevertheless, we create for ourselves an illusion of greater unity, an autobiographical story in which the chief fictional character is one's self. Moreover, no metaphysical miracles are necessary to claim that there is more than one self within a body:

One can discover multiple selves in a person just as unproblematically as one could find Early Young Rabbit and Late Young Rabbit in the imagined Updike novels: all that has to be the case is that the story doesn't cohere around one self, one imaginary point, but coheres (coheres much better, in any case) around two different imaginary points. (Ibid., 287)

To conclude, we can understand the importance of social identities through their connection to the sense of self. The self, or personal identity, is an imaginary sense of being a continuous and persistent person. Such a sense of continuity and persistence is constituted through psychological chains of connectedness and through narration. This is pertinent to our discussion about the importance of social identities, as they can be understood as some of the key components that contribute to the sense of self and thus partially explain why people might contribute such great importance to their social identities. This understanding allows us to form a constructivist and non-essentialist understanding of persons that ties to similarly constructivist and non-essentialist understanding of social identities.

This most fundamental domain of social identity—as one of the means for creating a unified, continuous and persistent sense of self—should be taken as a basis for general models of identities. A unified model of identity should further consider existential, linguistic, cognitive, quotidian, socio-historical, economic and political aspects in order to achieve a more complete complementary understanding of the pervasiveness and persistence of identity thinking. Adopting identitarian ideologies can be existentially attractive, providing a sense of certainty, belonging and purpose, offering a simple interpretative framework and a related ease of moral judgements and prescriptions for behaviour. On the other hand, a recognition of plurality of self could lead to uncertainty and doubt (see Kurzweily, Fernana, and Ngum 2020).

Identitarian logic, furthermore, underlies much of the socio-political world that we are all born into—from law, citizenship, sports, to systems that often include identities as factors in structures of oppression and exploitation, in access to services, or freedom of mobility. However, to present a unified theory of identity lies beyond the scope of this book.¹⁰ For our purposes, it is sufficient to acknowledge the constructed, imagined, disunified and in flux character of personal identity, which is partially constituted through similarly constructed and imagined social identities (such as nationality, ethnicity, or race). This conception helps us to understand why social identities falsely appear to be revealing, fixed and essential characteristics of persons, rather than products of history and imagination, simplistic stories which we use to reinforce the sense of self, and to interpret and interact with the world.

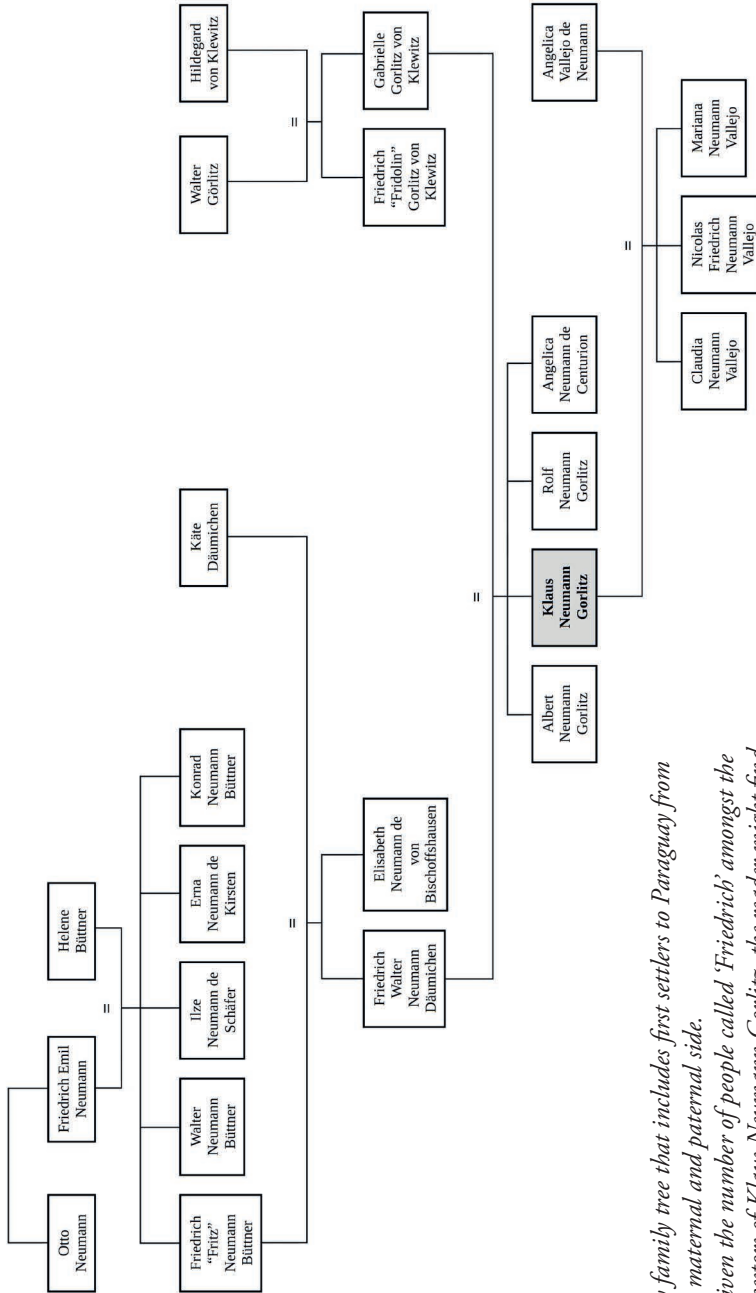
In Chapter 15 of this book we further elaborate upon how reified and essentialist identities can be, at least partially, overcome through the use of collaborative and multi-media ethnographic methods that prioritise a complex and pluralistic representation of persons. Such representations can be found in the following chapters which serve to introduce individuals from Nueva Germania. It should be emphasised that each one of the persons represented in the following chapters are irreducible to simplistic identity categories, such as ‘German’, ‘Paraguayan’, or ‘Germanino’, even if at times they themselves claim otherwise. Each of these persons should instead be regarded as a bundle of constantly changing traits, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, imaginations, relations, goals, and dreams, which cannot be accurately grasped or described. Their stories, however, can hopefully bring them and their lives a little closer to the reader, even if imperfectly so.

¹⁰ See Galliher, McLean, and Syed 2017, and Eidson et al. 2017, for examples of unified multi-scalar models of socio-cultural identities. Such models may be expanded by this more fundamental understanding of the importance of social identities for the sense of self.

3 Klaus Neumann Gorlitz



Klaus Neumann in one of the 'Fortin' Yerba Mate depots. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)



*My family tree that includes first settlers to Paraguay from my maternal and paternal side.
 [Given the number of people called 'Friedrich' amongst the ancestors of Klaus Neumann Gorlitz, the reader might find it helpful returning to this family tree when reading. German spelling is applied to those born in Germany, while Spanish spelling and double surnames are used for those born in Paraguay.]*

The green gold of Friedrich Neumann

My great-grandfather, Friedrich Emil Neumann, was very young when he came to Nueva Germania from Breslau [currently Wrocław]. Together with his brother Otto, they crossed the Atlantic on a ship from Hamburg to Buenos Aires. They were not part of the first group of settlers but came a relatively short time afterwards. Both Friedrich and Otto were unmarried. I was able to establish that my great-grandfather returned briefly to Germany and convinced a young lady, Helene Büttner, to join him in Paraguay. They got married and settled down in Westrand, or Takuru'ity as it is called now.¹¹ Friedrich began something that is not well recognised in Paraguayan history books; however, it is well documented in different materials dedicated to yerba mate. Since his arrival, he was experimenting with the plant and was the first person to understand how to systematically germinate yerba seeds. He was the first to systematically plant *yerbales*¹² and cultivate the plant in a similar way as other commercial products had been. This completely transformed the yerba mate market.

This change in production—from a dangerous jungle activity to having a *yerbal* behind your home—transformed the industry, allowing for many small-scale producers to appear. A hundred and forty years ago, the Paraguayan yerba mate market was dominated by two companies, who extracted the product from wild growing plants in the forests. The Brazilian Companhia Matte Larangeira, which under imperial concession was leased 5,000,000 hectares of land in Brazil—that is 50,000 square kilometres, an area bigger than the whole country of The Netherlands. The other company was called La Industrial Paraguaya and its owners bought almost 2,000,000 hectares (20,000 square kilometres) from the Paraguayan state. These companies employed *campesinos* [peasants] and indigenous people to harvest the leaves. The contracts, however, in accordance with Paraguayan law, specified that an employee who owed any debt to the company would not be allowed to abandon their work under any circumstances. The companies had the right to enforce this rule with the use of violence or confinement. The workers were usually paid only once every three or four months and could only purchase products from the company's expensive shops, rapidly entering into debt. It was a form of legal capitalist enslavement [a form of indentured servitude]. Many people died in these wild *yerbales*. This all ended when the cultivated small *yerbales* started to appear, eliminating the big industry within a relatively short time of twenty or thirty years. This positive

¹¹ They had five children but only one of the men had children of his own—his name was also Friedrich, known as Fritz. Fritz had one male child, my father Friedrich Walter, and a daughter, Elisabeth (who passed away recently in Chile). My father had four children, Albert, me, Rolf and Angelica.

¹² *Yerbal* is a field of yerba mate plants. The Jesuits in their seventeenth century reductions knew how to plant yerba trees. However, after they were expelled from Paraguay, the knowledge concerning the germination of seeds was lost. In this sense, Friedrich Neumann rediscovered the planting method.



*My great-grandfather, Friedrich Emil Neumann.*¹³

¹³ [Photographs for which author information is not specified within this book were either taken by the person whose story is presented in a given chapter, or originate from personal archives of that person—in this case, Klaus Neumann’s personal archive.]

transformation is due to the fact that suddenly one could plant mate trees close to the household, care for and maintain them just as any other crop, like for example oranges or wine.

In 1901, Friedrich Emil Neumann collected the first harvest from his yerbal, as I was able to determine from old notes written by my great-grandmother Helene Büttner, his wife. He produced 8,700 kilograms of dry yerba, from approximately 20,000 five-year-old plants. In the second year of full production, 1902, he already had 52,000 adult plants and produced 45,000 kilograms of yerba mate. This corresponded to a little above forty hectares of land. At the same time, in 1902, he sold approximately 50,000 small plants to other local producers and to German settlers from Hohenau, in the south of Paraguay.¹⁴ He never expanded his own yerbal beyond the 52,000 trees, as he continued selling small plants to other producers. In these times yerba mate was called 'green gold' due to its high price. Friedrich became a wealthy man in a relatively short period of time. His wife, Helene, took their children to Dresden, in Germany, and they were able to pay for all of the expenses. He was also able to send his son Friedrich (called Fritz) to attend school in Buenos Aires.

Unfortunately, Friedrich Neumann's life ended suddenly in 1905 due to a lung infection. His brother Otto carried on the production and sale of yerba mate and continued to send money to Helene and her five children, including Fritz, who still studied at a technical school in Buenos Aires. It is astonishing how much money he was able to make out of these forty hectares of land. Helene and her children were able to live comfortably without having to work themselves. Otto kept supporting them and sending money for fifteen years.

Fritz, the oldest son, joined his family in Dresden only after finishing his studies in Buenos Aires. It was probably in 1912 or 1913. He undertook a job at one of the big electro-mechanic companies, either Bosch or AEG. However, soon afterwards the First World War broke out. In 1914 he and his brother Walter were both adults and both of them had to present themselves for military service. Only a few weeks after enrolling, Walter died on the French front. This tragedy had an enormous impact on my grandfather Fritz, as he had a very good relationship with his younger brother. He continued his military service until the end of the war. According to my father, my grandfather never killed anyone during the war. He was a *Funker* [a radio operator], and even though he served in the trenches on the front line, he was not a combatant himself. He was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant and after the war he received an *Eisernes Kreuz* [Iron Cross] military award for his service.

¹⁴ This was an extremely complicated undertaking, because the small plants had to be transported in boats and on horse or mule carriages. Many plants did not survive these trips. An interesting record exists, from the Swiss-Italian botanist Moisés Santiago Bertoni, who lived and conducted research in Paraguay. At this time he was already famous among agro-producers in the country and was answering readers' questions in a monthly journal. In one of the issues, he was asked if there is any other way of obtaining yerba plants, to which he responded that for now the only way is to travel to Nueva Germania and purchase them there.

During the war it was difficult to keep sending money from Paraguay to Germany. The family began having a hard time to make ends meet. Additionally, not long after the First World War finished in Europe, news arrived that Otto Neumann had died in Nueva Germania. Helen told her son Fritz to travel to Paraguay and take care of the family's *yerbal*. When he arrived, he realized that the situation was difficult. On the one hand, the *yerbal* provided much less money, as the price of yerba kept decreasing in relation to the increasing competition and availability of the product. On the other hand, most of the plants were already approximately twenty years old, which meant that they grew fewer leaves every year. Despite these problems, Fritz decided to stay and to expand the business.

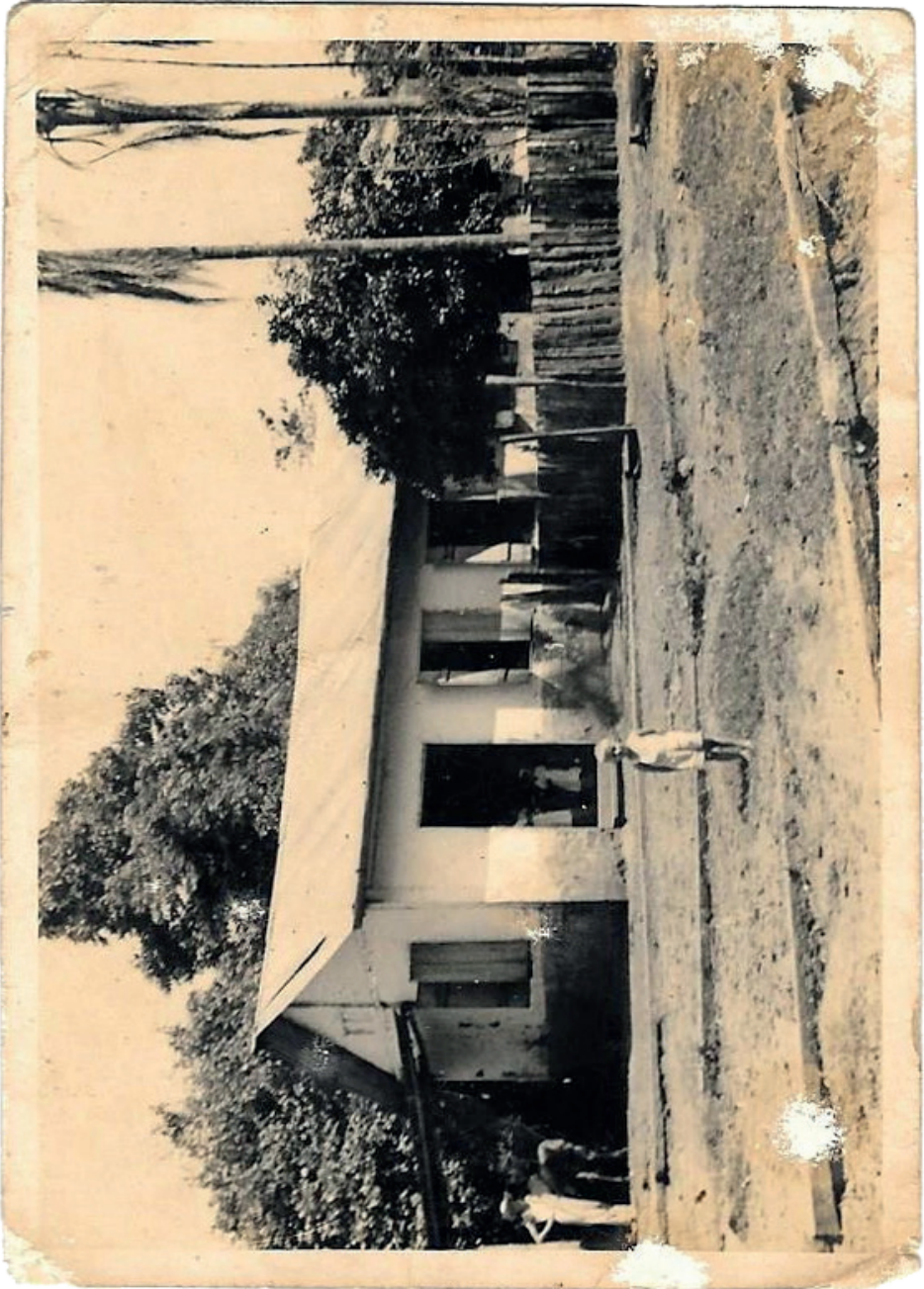
In the meantime, he also wrote letters to his girlfriend, and my grandmother, Käte Däumichen. They had fallen in love before the war and maintained a relationship while Fritz was on the front. He was trying to convince her to come and join him in Nueva Germania. Käthe's family were in a good economic position, and she was used to a good standard of living. Her family owned an important *Konditorei* [confectionery shop] which provided for many cafes in Dresden. She finished her *Abitur* [A-levels] in Germany, which meant that she was rather well educated. Despite all of this, she agreed to join Fritz and to live with him in rural Paraguay. She travelled firstly to Buenos Aires, where Fritz awaited her arrival. They got married in the German Protestant church in Buenos Aires before going together to Nueva Germania. They settled down in the house constructed by Fritz's father, Friedrich Emil. My father Friedrich Walter was later born in the very same house in 1924. He and his sister Elisabeth were the only two children of Fritz and Käte.

The business was struggling. Knowing that he was expected to send money to Germany to his mother, Fritz took a mortgage loan, bought more land and planted more yerba trees. He expected to get the production back on track in two or three years. This, however, turned out to be a terrible mistake. Not long afterwards, in the year 1930, the financial crisis occurred, initiating the period of the Great Depression. The price of all of agricultural products fell significantly. The price of yerba mate fell in a short time from six Argentinian pesos for a kilogram to only one peso. My grandfather was not able to pay the loan back, and as a result he lost all of the inherited land. This resulted in further conflicts between Fritz, his mother Helene and brother Konrad, who both blamed him for the loss and accused him of economic recklessness. Due to the difficult situation, Helene and Konrad decided to return to Paraguay.¹⁵

¹⁵ Helene lived in Paraguay until her last days. She was buried in Nueva Germania. Konrad, on the other hand, firstly intended to cultivate yerba mate himself. He was not very successful. For reasons I do not know, Konrad decided to travel back to Germany in 1939. He was arrested by the British military while still on the ship on the way to Hamburg. Since he was a young man of military age, he was taken as a military prisoner. He died in a prisoners' camp in Canada. Out of the three male children of Fritz, Walter died in the First World War, Konrad died as a prisoner in the Second World War, and only my grandfather, Friedrich Walter, had children himself, passing the family name further on.



Käte Däumichen, Walter, Fritz and Elisabeth, 1933.



The house which Martin Schmid sold to Fritz in 1935. Both Albert and I were born there.

Since my grandfather Fritz lost all of his source of income together with his land, he at first took the position of a teacher in the local German school. However, after Adolf Hitler was elected to office in 1934, the German government started sending teachers to German communities in various parts of the world. They also sent one such teacher to Nueva Germania, who was paid by the embassy. With his arrival my grandfather lost his job. While he undertook some other work as an accountant in a company, another coincidence occurred. His best friend, Martin Schmidt, decided to leave for Germany. There were a few people in Nueva Germania who were influenced by Hitler's propaganda and decided to travel to Germany. He was trying to convince my grandfather to go as well: *Fritz, gehen wir zurück nach Deutschland, jetzt geht es dort wunderbar!* [Fritz, let's go back to Germany, things are going very well there now!] My grandfather was, however, unconvinced and said: 'I already participated in one war, and I do not want to fight in another one. To me it looks like there is going to be another war soon in Germany.' Before leaving, Martin Schmidt decided to give his shop to my grandfather. Fritz was only supposed to pay it off in a few instalments, sending money to Germany. This is how Fritz Neumann became the owner of the most centrally located shop in Nueva Germania. My father had helped out in the shop since he was little and he later took over the business himself.



The students of Nueva Germania School, 1932. Walter is in the top row, second from the left. Their teachers were Fritz and Käte.

When my parents moved in together, they had a lot of work with the management of the shop and so we [Klaus and his siblings] were spending a lot of time with our grandmother Käte. Since she was a person who wanted to have a say in the life of her son, and even more so after her husband Fritz passed away in 1940, it was important for my mother that she did not live in the same house as us. My father constructed a separate small house for my grandmother Käte, about fifty meters away from ours. It had one bedroom, a small living room and a small kitchen. Behind the house my grandmother had a very impressive vegetable garden. I also remember that once a week she baked several big loaves of bread. We loved our grandmother very much. She always came to eat lunch with us at our house. Sometimes she made *Berliner Pfannkuchen* [jam doughnut] for us, which we liked very much. I remember that she had a piano in the corner of her small living room, which she brought with her from Germany and played often for us. She also helped us with all of our homework and with other school activities. At the same time, she taught us how to read and write in German (which was not taught at our school). She was a very demanding teacher, of the old Prussian style, she always made sure that we sat straight, wrote carefully with the right hand and listened attentively. My grandmother Käte never returned to Germany. She wanted to when her father became ill, but it was impossible at the time.

Yerba Mate as a positive form of agriculture

In contrast to the monopoly of the big companies of a hundred and forty years ago, today in Paraguay there are over twenty thousand families who have a certain quantity of the total production of mate. That is to say it is a commodity of small and middle-size producers, assuring a significant annual income. Moreover, mate is a product which practically requires zero usage of agrochemicals and certainly no agrottoxins. It also does not degrade the soil, since it does not require many nutrients in comparison to other plants. Thus, even though some natural fertilisers like cow-droppings can somewhat help the plants, there is no need for a regular enrichment of the soil with any chemicals (as happens with large-scale production of different grains, cereals and oilseeds). Yerba mate trees do not require very much maintenance beyond removing any weeds or bushes from the *yerbal*. If one maintains the plantation in an adequate condition, then every winter from May onwards one can harvest the leaves. This generates a good income for producers during times in which there is a scarcity of other work available to them. It is profitable, suitable for households of different sizes, and good for the environment. It can also be accompanied with other types of economic activities, such as cattle raising or growing other agricultural products.

Most of the current large-scale agriproduction limits itself to grains or to cereals. For this kind of business it is profitable to have three harvests of soy or corn per year, even though this continual harvesting puts great pressure on the environment.

However, yerba mate remains as an interesting and lucrative alternative for small and medium-scale farmers. For most families who own between five and twenty hectares of land, which applies to the majority of the population in this region, a production of grains would not be profitable. A diversified agriculture which includes about two hectares of yerba mate for each producer is a positive alternative.

Paraguay has all of the right conditions for yerba mate production—it has good soil and many rivers, many sources of water. The only problem lies in the initial cost of starting production. One requires between 1,400 and 1,500 small plants for one hectare of land, some of which will inevitably die. This costs somewhere between 400 and 500 US dollars (more or less three plants for a dollar). This is a high cost for a small-scale Paraguayan farmer. This is especially so because farmers will have to wait for a long time for returns on their investment. It is only after five years that such plants become productive and only after seven or eight years that they achieve their highest outcome, which they maintain for between fifteen to twenty years. That is why I believe that this type of economic activity should be supported by governmental agencies and NGOs.

There are only a few things that can harm the plants. Unfortunately, in our company we recently lost a large *yerbal*, with over 100,000 trees. This happened because of a type of worm, some sort of a nocturnal caterpillar. These insects plant their eggs and attack the plants from inside. The larva attack the stems of the trees, perforating it all the way down to its roots. Most of the trees died. This is another reason why I emphasise that yerba should be a production for small-scale farmers. If one simply walks regularly through the *yerbal*, it is easy to spot signs of such an insect invasion and react on time. Moreover, the problem can be contained and cause less damage if small *yerbals* are at some distance from each other. It took about fifteen years of work to raise this particular *yerbal*, which I planted together with my brother Rolf and in less than two months 70% of the plants were destroyed. It was very sad to watch. Unfortunately, there isn't enough support from the state to help farmers who are facing such critical situations. After this misfortune we resisted falling into resignation and planted several thousand new plants.

The lucrative business of the past offers today a positive agricultural alternative, or simply a significant addition for small-scale producers. I am convinced that without discovery of its cultivation and the initiation of production of yerba mate on small plantations close to people's homes, Nueva Germania would have disappeared as a failed project of colonisation. The expensive 'green gold' made Nueva Germania an important centre of yerba production for the first thirty years. However, my great-grandfather did not keep his knowledge to himself; he shared it with others. Vast plantations of yerba mate opened in Argentina and in the south of Paraguay, which drove Nueva Germania into fifty years of stagnation and deep isolation. It was only after the opening of land roads in this region that the situation started to slowly improve. An alternative to the so-far only available fluvial transport, together with a great agricultural development, initiated a gradual increase in the value of the

land and an increase in economic activity. Today, due to the accessibility of cheap transport, small producers can sell their products easily. To conclude, yerba mate is an *umweltfreundliches* [ecologically friendly] product, which secures revenue for small-scale farmers during winter when there are few other economic activities. I am proud to say that my family has been working with yerba mate for 125 years,¹⁶ and I hope that this tradition will continue.



I am holding an adobe brick found on the ground in the place where my grandparents' house stood. Most of the houses were made of adobe rather than burned bricks, and once the roof collapsed the walls deteriorated quickly, leaving almost no trace after a few years.

¹⁶ To be more exact, in 1930 my grandfather lost his *yermal* and the family did not work with yerba mate for almost twenty years. It was only in 1951, about a month before I was born, when my father bought the 'Fortin' company. He was buying dry yerba from local farmers and transforming it into a commercial product—transporting the yerba with ox-drawn carts to the mill and packaging it into large bags. Since then, the company grew (from processing 20,000 kilograms annually to about 500,000 kilograms nowadays).



Young plants and young generations. What started in this place continues throughout time. My son planted these little plants himself. His name is Nicolas Federico [Spanish for Friedrich]—the name is also a part of the family tradition. My great-grandfather was Friedrich Emil, my grandfather was just Friedrich (Fritz), my father was Federico Walter (people just called him Walter) and my older brother is Alberto Federico.



This yerba mate plant grows in the same place where the very first cultivated yerbal once grew. My great-grandfather owned a terrain of about 200 hectares.



This is how a one-year-old yerba mate plant looks like. We planted the seeds during the Easter of 2014, and it will not be until 2020 that the trees will be ready for harvest. For the first two years the plants are very fragile and the risk of them dying is high.



This is young plants that are ready to be planted. An adult plant can produce about eight kilograms of leaves. An optimal plantation should end up having around 1,200 to 1,300 plants per hectare, which can produce up to 10,000 kilograms of yerba. However, an average plantation will normally have an output of 6 kilograms per plant, thus about 7,000 kilograms per hectare. This, however, results in only about 3,000 kilograms of dry product.



This is a traditional barbakua, belonging to the Flaskamp family, over which yerba mate is dried. Nowadays, to guarantee a good quality of the product, it is better to create a roof over it, protecting it from any unexpected rain. In the old days there were no roofs.



Yerba mate should mature in storage for more or less two years. This enhances the taste, just like with maturing of wine. Yerba mate does have refreshing and stimulating properties, but it is not addictive. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)



The final stage of the process is packaging and distribution. In Paraguay about 50 million kilograms of yerba mate are sold per year, very little of which is exported. The domestic consumption is high and can be calculated as on average seven kilograms per person per year. Consumption is much higher in rural areas than in cities. In the rural areas the consumption of any other tea or infusion is practically non-existent—only a little bit of coffee and almost no tea. Interestingly, the only country with a higher average consumption of mate, of about ten kilograms per person per year, is Uruguay. And they do not have a single plant of their own production. They also do not drink it in the form of tereré (cold served) or cocido (warm infusion with milk), but only as warm mate drunk through bombilla [a special perforated metal straw]. A further difference is that their mate is drunk individually—each person drinks only from their own cup and carries their own thermos. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)



The following photographs show the work at and workers of the Fortin company. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley)



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley



Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley

The bitter life of Walter Görlitz and the precariousness of Hildegard von Klewitz

The history of Walter Görlitz, my grandfather from my maternal side, is extraordinarily tragic. He was born close to Berlin, in a family of *Gutsbesitzer* [country squires], meaning that they were quite well-off. Most of them were in the Prussian cavalry for generations, and his father was in a high position within the military. Walter Görlitz, just like his brothers, was sent to a military school in Berlin. Since he had quite a difficult character, the director of the school recommended his father take him out of school and ensure that he learn proper discipline. Since Walter's father had some contacts in Deutsch-Südwestafrika [German Southwest Africa, currently Namibia], he decided to send his son to work there. I am not sure where exactly he resided, I think it was Swakopmund. He did not stay there long, probably less than two years. Walter's father again received complaints about the behaviour of his son and decided to pay for his journey back to Germany. Walter embarked on a ship and very soon after, to his misfortune, the First World War broke out. They did not know about it on the ship and, just before reaching the English Channel, they were stopped by a British military vessel. All men were arrested as prisoners of war. Walter was sent to a prison where he stayed during four long years until the war ended. This experience turned him into a very bitter man.

Walter had a girlfriend in Germany, Hildegard von Klewitz, who was a direct descendant, namely the great-granddaughter, of Wilhelm Anton von Klewitz—an important politician and one of the initiators of the German *Zollverein*, the customs union. That is to say, she was part of the German nobility and higher classes. Walter and Hildegard did not see each other for almost six years after he left Germany for Africa. It was only after the war ended that Walter was able to come back home. The embittered man was blaming his father for all the misfortunes that happened to him. After some quarrels and strong verbal exchanges, the family gathered and decided to solve the situation. They offered Walter to pay him a corresponding part of the family inheritance, under one sole condition—he had to cross the Atlantic and never return to Germany. Walter took the money. Hildegard, who must have loved him very much, decided to go with him. They were married in Berlin and then decided to go to Argentina. The money he received supposedly was worth so much that they planned to buy 1,500 hectares of land in the Buenos Aires province and create a cattle farm. After the wedding, they packed all of their belongings into different cases, some of which still exist today, and embarked on a ship in Hamburg.

While travelling to South America, another tragic historical circumstance occurred—hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. While Walter and Hildegard were on the ship all the money Walter received as his family inheritance was rapidly losing its value. When they arrived in Buenos Aires, he was only able to buy half of the land that he had initially hoped for. His next mistake was to listen to those who advised him to wait, hoping that the situation will improve and the currency will regain in value. The hyperinflation only accelerated and soon they could no longer afford any



Hildegard von Klewitz with Fridolin, Gabrielle and Mariane Görlitz, in 1928.

land in the province of Buenos Aires. At this stage, someone recommended them to travel to Paraguay, where the land was significantly cheaper. They spent part of their money on travel to Asunción, while the rest of their savings continued to lose value. In Asunción they were informed that the cheapest land was in the north of the country, and so their journey continued until they stopped in Puerto Antequerra, close to San Pedro. There they managed to buy a twenty hectares parcel of land in Rosario Loma, a village where some German families lived already. They further sold some of their belongings in order to construct their house and buy a few domestic animals. Walter transformed himself completely into a bitter grumpy man, with a permanent bad temper. Hildegard however, astonishingly, was always seen with a smile.

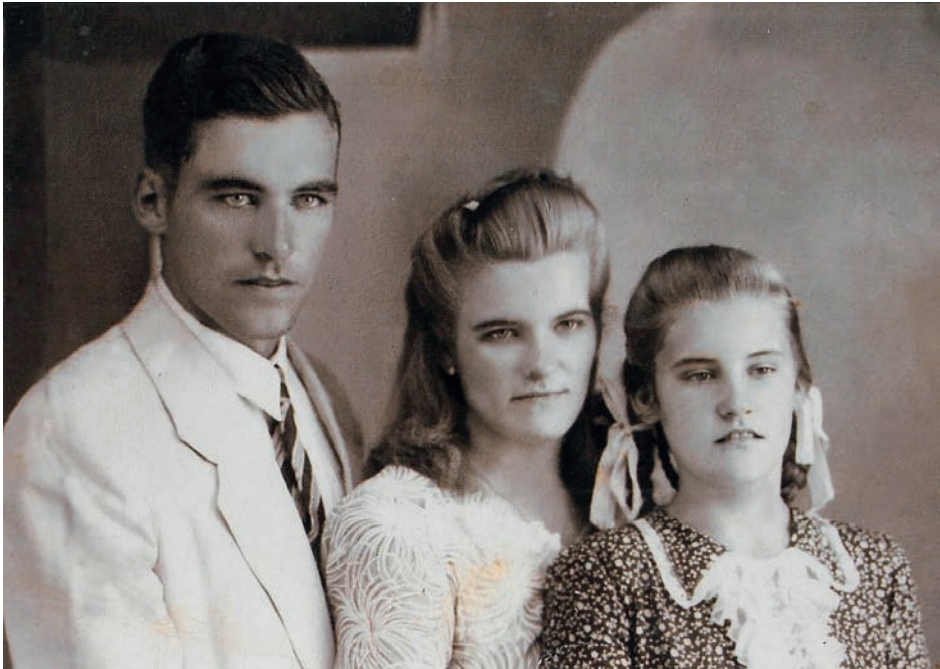
In these precarious conditions, a wooden house with no flooring, they had four children. One of them was my mother, Gabrielle Gorlitz von Klewitz. She was born and grew up on this small farm. To emphasise this historical contrast, you should understand that Hildegard was born and grew up in Germany in almost aristocratic conditions, attending very good schools. She spoke perfect French and good English. She even won a Prussian national award in a student writing competition. Whereas her daughter, and my mother, Gabrielle, never went to school at all, not even for a year. This is the environment and the atmosphere in which my mother grew up, almost like from a García Márquez novel. They lived in a simple house, with walls made of adobe and with a thatched roof. However, they still owned silver cutlery with engravings of their family crests, which I remember seeing as a child.

Walter and Hildegard continued writing letters to Germany, which was a very slow means of communication that allowed for a maximum of two message exchanges per year. Hildegard's sisters knew about their poor living conditions. When their first child Friedrich (whom we called 'uncle Fridolin') was born, the sisters wrote '*Das ist ja so traurig!*' [this is so sad] to my grandmother and offered to finance the education of her first son in Germany. Thus he, in contrast to my mother, received a good education and lived in Berlin for twelve years, after which he returned to Paraguay. While Fridolin was doing his military service in the Paraguayan marine, he met another German descendant from the San Pedro district—Friedrich Walter Neumann. They became friends and after some time my uncle asked my father if he had a girlfriend and recommended him to meet his sister Gabrielle. This is how my parents met.

After more or less three years of a relationship, my parents decided to marry. My grandfather, Walter Görlitz, did not like my father and even less so as a candidate for his daughter. He would have preferred a rich man to marry Gabrielle. When my father went to talk with him about the marriage, he responded: 'Friedrich Walter, du bist ein Schleimschlucker' [Friedrich Walter, you are a sycophant], and ordered him to leave. My father remembered this sentence as one of the biggest offences anyone has ever made him suffer. However, he did not leave immediately. It was midday, the 26th of December, and the temperatures were high. Since Friedrich had come on horseback from Nueva Germania to Rosario Loma in the morning, he told Walter

that his horse needed to rest before returning and that he was going to wait in the shadow of a mango tree close to the house. Walter agreed to that. Then my mother sneaked out of the house, took a horse which she received for Christmas and decided to leave with Friedrich. When Walter realised what was happening, he ran out of the house and ordered her to stay. She responded: 'Ich bin schon 18 Jahre alt, und ich gehe los mit Friedrich' [I am already 18 years old, and I am leaving with Friedrich]. They started to negotiate. Ultimately, under this mango tree, Walter agreed to their marriage. His only condition was that they had to marry before moving in together and that it had to take place within the next two months. This was how my parents got married, in February, without much celebration, and Gabrielle moved to live in Nueva Germania.

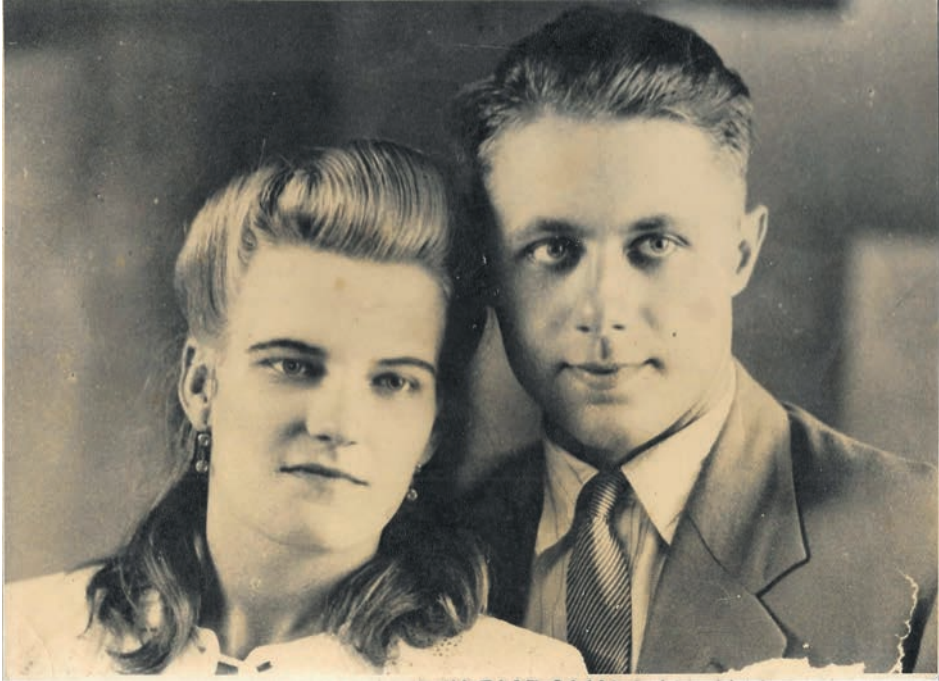
Walter Görlitz died years later. His grave is in Rosario Loma. My grandmother, Hildegard, decided to move back to Germany, to Berlin, where her two sisters still lived. This is how Hildegard von Klewitz spent her last years together with her two sisters, who never got married and who lived together. It is quite an astonishing story of how a young noble lady ends up living in miserable poverty in Paraguay, only to go back to Germany at the end of her life. Yet she always remained cheerful and smiling. I remember her as a very gentle and beloved grandmother. However, my siblings and I did not look forward to visiting them often, since we were all a bit afraid of Opa [grandpa] Walter. Besides, it was a long journey—it was seven or eight hours one way on horseback from Nueva Germania to Rosario Loma.



Fridolin, Gabrielle and Luise Görlitz, 1945.



Gabrielle Görlitz and Luise (wife of Friedolin) holding Gabrielle's last child, Angelica Neumann, 1957.



Gabrielle and Friedrich Walter Neumann—just married, 1949.

Sweet home Paraguay

When I was a child, growing up in Nueva Germania, I often heard the stories of these two families. These were some sort of ‘stories of origin’ for us—on the one hand, the great-grandfather who had the first cultivated *yerbal* in the world and, on the other hand, my mother telling us about our grandmother, a descendant of a very important family from Germany. However, as children we did not pay much attention to these stories. It was only later in my life that I gained much interest in the history of my family and investigated it further.

When I was little, Nueva Germania was a very precarious place. There was no electricity and no press or other media. We did, however, have some books at our home, which was very rare in comparison to other families. It was only later that my father bought a Philips radio, which was powered from a battery and had to be charged regularly from a little generator. We did not have shoes or bicycles. We lived in enormous precariousness. However, we never felt poor. We never felt poor because there were no rich families; we all lived in similar conditions. There was no one who had shoes, or nice new clothes. No one had a bicycle either. Although it might seem strange, in 1955 there was not a single bicycle in Nueva Germania.

We lived in the centre of town where my father had a little shop. He also managed the Fortin yerba mate company, which he bought the same year as I was born. We spoke German at home and Guaraní on the streets. We went to school, without really knowing how to formulate a single sentence in Spanish, which we first learned in class. I finished the first three years of school in Nueva Germania, after which we moved to Puerto Antequerra.

We moved to Puerto Antequerra because of a very Paraguayan reason. My father was a councillor in the municipality of Nueva Germania. At the time he was one of the few councillors, and the only one of German descent, that participated actively in politics.¹⁷ In these times, the Colorado Party was divided internally between the so-called *Guiones Rojos*, who had a more authoritarian position and saw all the Germans as *gringos* [whites, foreigners], and the *Grupo Democrático* to which my father pertained. My father won the internal sectional elections of the Colorado party, against a member of the *Guiones Rojos*. This man publicly announced that 'I will not permit for this gringo to be the sectional director. I will kill him!' One could potentially ignore such a threat, were it not for the fact that this man had already killed people before. That is why my mother said: '*Walter, wir gehen hier los!*' [Walter, let's go away from here]. My mother preferred to go to the south of the country, where some of the rich colonies were located. My father, however, preferred to stay in the region and found an opportunity to buy a shop in Puerto Antequerra (close to the city of San Pedro, at the Paraguay river).

It made quite a difference for us, since Antequerra was a bigger settlement with electricity and many boats and ships stopping regularly in the port. We went to a school there for a year, after which my parents sent us to a school in San Pedro. Then another coincidence occurred. My father bought a new truck for his business and needed to run in its engine (with new trucks one needed to first drive at least a thousand kilometres without a load). He thus went on a journey to the south of Paraguay, to get to know new places and to see how people lived there and how their yerba mate plantations were. During this trip he encountered a German Protestant boarding school in Hohenau, which was supported by a Protestant community from Berlin. Since he always had ambitions for his children to be well educated, he sent me and my brothers to study there. It was an excellent school with a great curriculum. During the day we went to the national school, with classes held in Spanish. During the evenings and weekends, the director of the boarding school, Rudolf Thümmeler, organised various educational and artistic activities for us and everything was taught in German. Even today I remember him as an extraordinary teacher. I learned how to play the trumpet very well and once we even went to

¹⁷ At one time the municipal authorities wanted to change the name of the town in order to honour a recently deceased politician. However, by law they required a unanimous approval of all members of the municipal council. My father was the only one to oppose the change. He argued that in doing so he was honouring his ancestors who came from Germany and who founded the settlement.



School band of the German boarding school in Hohenau in 1963. From the left: 1st me, 3rd Rolf and 8th Albert.

Buenos Aires with our school's music group to perform a concert. We, my brothers and I, only returned home to Antequerra for the summer vacations. After passing the last ninth year of school, we [boys] moved to Asunción and matriculated at the *Colegio Goethe* for the next three years of formal education. We lived in the house of a friend of my parents. Sometime afterwards my parents moved to Asunción as well and my father travelled back and forth managing his shop and the Fortin company.

When I was in the last year of the Goethe School, a friend of mine told me about the American Field Service scholarships that offered opportunities to study abroad. I organised all of the formalities and prepared for the interviews. I was awarded this scholarship, which initiated another very influential moment in my life. I went to a school in Connecticut for a whole year. I travelled in July of 1969, a few days before Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. It was also the time of many protests against the war in Vietnam. I even participated in a few of these demonstrations myself. I remember it had a big influence on me, meeting all of the young people who would do whatever it took to avoid going to the military and dying in Vietnam.

After this year abroad I returned to Paraguay and I had to finish my obligatory military service. As soon as I finished the military service my main goal was to leave Asunción and to go to study in Buenos Aires. I was quite dissatisfied with the general situation in Paraguay, in large part due to the government of Stroessner. I talked to my parents and told them that I already had some contacts in Buenos Aires, even though in fact I did not know anyone. Two or three days after leaving the military,



Taj Mahal with an Argentinian tourist group in 1977. I am in the back row.

I took the bus to Argentina. The first three months were very hard. It was not easy to study and try to find some jobs at the same time. However, I soon realised that besides speaking fluent German and English, I had a natural ability to both talk a lot and interest people in what I was saying. These attributes made me a successful tourist guide. I always received excellent feedback and my economic situation improved significantly. For two years I was studying and working at the same time, until 1976, when the military coup happened. This is when I stopped going to the university, which became a redoubt for the military. In this period, from 1976 to more or less 1981, I worked full-time as a freelance tourist guide for various companies, travelling the whole world. The only region that I unfortunately did not visit was Eastern Europe. I did, however, travel with groups to Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Africa ... I was successful in what I was doing, securing contracts with some of the very important tourist companies. At the age of 26, I already had my own apartment in the centre of Buenos Aires.

After travelling for six or seven years, when the government of Raúl Alfonsín took over, I returned to the university. Soon I got married to Ruth, a girl I met at the Uni. I finished my degree in psychology in three years, while limiting my work to local tourism only. After finishing, I worked for the next five years as a clinical

psychologist, even though people were always telling me: 'Klaus, you are a guy made for talking, not for listening.' I later realised that they were right and that I would cope much better with work that would feel more dynamic to me. Psychological work, especially within the school of psychoanalysis that was predominant at the time, requires a lot of listening and patience. Some patients come weekly, for many months, and often one cannot see many changes. This is normal within the serious cases we were dealing with, but I found it hard to find the patience for this kind of work. Additionally, there was a lot of competition between different psychologists, and I was earning much less than in the tourism industry.

The crucial moment came during a consultation with a regular patient of mine. He was a brilliant and successful scientist but was the most boring patient. During one of our sessions, while sitting in the traditional psychoanalytical setting, outside of the sight of the patient, I fell asleep. I do not know for how long I slept, I think the patient did not even notice, but the very same day I decided to quit this job. All of my friends thought that I was nuts; they would say: '*Klaus, no seas pelotudo, eres el único que puede leer al maestro (Freud) en original, ¿y vas a dejar el trabajo?*' [Klaus, don't be stupid, you are the only one of us who can read the master (Freud) in the original, and you are going to quit the job?]. But I was determined and I initiated the process of directing all of my patients onto other psychologists.

When Carlos Saúl Menem was sworn into office as the president of Argentina, his neo-liberal policies had a dramatic effect on the political and economic situation. During that time I also got divorced. Shortly afterwards a friend of mine, who worked in New York, contacted me and proposed that I become his business associate in a tourist company. I decided to go, even though I lived in quite a good situation in Buenos Aires. They promised to help me with obtaining a green card and with all of the other necessary formalities. I worked in New York for almost three years, managing tours within the city and developing a system of audio-recorded guides for bus tours. We had our offices in the Empire State Building and I lived in a rental flat on 3rd Avenue. Even though I was doing relatively well, I never really felt at home in New York. I suffered a lot from loneliness and missed my family and friends.

After these three years in the United States, my father called me and told me that my mother was ill. It was in 1993 and I was 42 years old. He told me she had probably only three months left to live. So I passed all of my responsibilities to my partners and went back to Asunción. I spent a few months with my parents, being with them and at the same time reconciling myself with the already democratic Paraguay. After these few months, my mother died.

My father asked me to stay some time with him, offering me work in the Fortin company. This is when one of those things occurred that can change a person's life trajectory—I met Angelica Vallejo, I fell in love and decided to stay. A year later we decided to marry, and I have been living in Paraguay ever since. We have three children—Claudia born in 1997, Nicolas born in 1999 and Mariana born in 2002.



Standing in front of the company bus, in front of the Empire State Building in New York, January 1993.

Here in Paraguay is where I feel best, together with my family who make me very happy. I have returned to Nueva Germania after many years of living in Argentina, in the United States and travelling the whole world. After my return, I have realised the strong tie and relation which I have to Nueva Germania and to the northern part of Paraguay. Together with my brother Rolf we managed our family business Fortin, the yerba mate processing and distribution company. It was not easy to return from a life in the city centres of Buenos Aires and New York, back to the rural district of San Pedro. I think, however, that it was the right decision, and I am satisfied with it. I do recognise the strong tie and identity which I have with Nueva Germania. Nueva Germania is an indissoluble part of my own history. At the end of the day, I think that to a degree I am a *campesino* [a peasant] who has travelled the world.

Even though I did not feel truly at home in New York, in Buenos Aires I could quickly integrate as just another Argentinian. I quickly picked up on the *porteño* accent and soon everyone saw me as one of them. Today, however, I prefer to live in Paraguay. In some things I am still a *campesino*—I enjoy to experience rain, to see a tree grow, a certain degree of solitude, silence and a slow rhythm of life. Moreover, I think that the fact of being a German descendant is not completely conditioning but I think that, indeed, my parents have taught me some of the values which come from the German mentality—mostly related to hard work and an austere life. We live today in an extremely consumerist society, which I rather try to avoid. I like things which are durable and useful. The fact of being Paraguayan manifests itself in



Friedrich Walter signing the marriage certificate of Angelica Vallejo and Klaus Neumann, March 1996.

the feeling of being a part of this region and in speaking Guaraní. However, there are also many things which annoy me, which I reject, such as the general acceptance of injustices and corruption. However, I like and associate with the great majority of Paraguayan culture. Thus, I am a German, a Paraguayan and also, to a degree, a *campesino* and maybe even a little Argentinian.



My mother was never sent to school as a child and only learned how to read and write from her own mother. When she died my father decided to build a primary school in a neighbourhood of Antequera and he named it after my mother. He donated the school to the state. My father was the mayor of Antequera for twenty years before that.



This photograph was taken in our summer house in San Bernardino. This was the last time we met all together—my siblings with their partners, our aunt Elisa with her husband, even my mother-in-law is in the picture.



Family Christmas in 2016.

4 Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé



Calixto Ramirez was educated by Spanish missionaries in Concepción and later became a teacher and lay missionary himself. He decided to tell the story of many key events in his life. Calixto passed away a couple of years after participating in this project. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

Calixto began by writing his story himself. When he found it challenging to continue, both due to time constraints and struggling with the written word and his own high expectations towards style, we agreed to adopt a different approach. We recorded Calixto telling his story, following a list of topics that he wanted to discuss. I transcribed the recordings and edited the text, which we then reviewed together. The same method of collaborative voice recording, transcribing and editing stories has been applied in all other chapters as well.

The story begins with Calixto's own writing, describing his early adulthood and first training. These first paragraphs I translated more or less verbatim, while the rest of the text is the result of our collaborative work.

I am Calixto Ramirez Mbaivé. I'm going to write some passages from my life. I was born on the 14th of August 1938. At the age of 16, I started working as a secular missionary and helping three priests—Máximo Rojas Chivije, Benito Lezcano and Ernesto Echaüer. I started the evangelic work in Picada Fernandez, Oratorio, Naranja Ty.¹⁸ In Naranja Ty I stayed in the home of Mr. Lucas Cañate and was attended by Darmazia Ruiz in the Rembo Callaty church. Lorenzo and Fausto Pavon, brothers, have not abandoned me either. From there I moved to Aguaray'mi, and Arroyo Ata. Here I stayed in the home of Simon Mercado. Afterwards I moved to Costa Po'i, where I met young people, even 20–25 year olds, without having received the sacrament of baptism. I asked why, and they have told me that it has been 35 years since a priest had visited them, named Juan Carlos Garcia (who was coming from Concepción). Responsive, I went back to San Pedro in the sulky in which I was commuting. I returned to San Pedro with a bus from Nueva Germania. Sometimes this journey would take a whole day. The bus was named 'The White Bus,' belonging to Mr. Antonio Nol.

Soon afterwards I returned to Nueva Germania and stayed in the house of Gustavo Voll. This man, German, was not Catholic. But he would allow his wife, Alberta Sanches, to follow her Catholic religion ['very respectful,' Calixto commented when reading this passage out loud]. From Nueva Germania I crossed the Aguaray River in a sulky, with the help of others. From there I arrived at a farm belonging to a German lady, who treated me very well during the day. This lady was called Patrona Karumbe. ['I do not know the real name of this lady' Calixto commented. 'Karumbe means "lightning" in Guaraní,' he added.] Later I visited Lima, and this lady was marshalling her animals like a first-class herdsman. She behaved, with a gaiter and a revolver at the waist, like a man. But she was giving me good treatment. In all of these communities carnage raged, between brothers with knives and revolvers.

One week earlier I had gone to work for the church. I had already visited Lima and toured different communities. From Lima I would go to one community and would come back in the evening to the central house where I stayed, and the next

¹⁸ All the towns and settlements mentioned in Calixto's story are in the North of Paraguay.

day the same thing. I was preparing for baptism. I travelled in the name of God and the parish priest would give me money for my food. The favourite sports [in these communities] were horse races and card games.

In these times people were killing each other a lot in those settlements, such as Oratorio, Costa Pucu, Aguaray, Jagua'í ... It would quite often be after card games, when one would lose but would not want to pay. But I was not frightened, because I was going there in the name of God and with His protection. I would spend a week in each community, make preparations for baptisms, confirmation and marriage. After the week of my work three priests would come and would divide the work on different sacraments between themselves. But they would do so under no obligation to the people. On their arrival, they would receive all of the documents that I had prepared, and I would leave for the next community, to again make preparations for the priests' arrival. Usually riding a horse or travelling by sulkey. [Here Calixto recalled the names of many communities he visited and in most cases the names of his hosts.]

It was a Monday to Sunday cycle. It would only be problematic when it rained, as sometimes the carriage could not cross through muddy roads; thus, everything would be prolonged. The *Pa'i* [priest] did not pay me much, but I was not lacking anything. After six months of travel, I would return home to San Pedro to get a little rest before starting again.

I would always be accompanied by a person from the community I visited. Usually it would be a man, but sometimes it would also be woman. And then one has to be careful. When a young lady would come trustfully to assist me, give me food, give me supper and I would stay overnight, I would need to be careful not to commit any sin: '*Para no meter la mano*' [Not to lay my hand upon—a Paraguayan expression relating to intimacy. Often the implicit assumption is made, as part of the masculine 'bragging,' that women are easily 'available' to them.] Surely with God's help, I never sinned. People here always say that a man who ignores an available woman is 'ruined'—is not a real man. But I prefer to be considered ruined than to mess up my good name. Until today I hold myself true to that.

Becoming a school teacher and a football coach

After working as a missionary, I became a teacher. I was firstly contacted by Bruno Romero, a friend and neighbour. He was a teacher in Chingiloma [a German settlement close to San Pedro] who came one evening to my home and told me:

- 'I want you to defend me.'
- 'What happened?' I asked.
- 'I am messing around with a student and I don't want the people to realize it. I want to run away. And I hope you would replace me in the school.'

He was in an amorous relation with one of his students, Adelgunde [anonymized]. Afterwards he disappeared and I took the job. I understood what he was talking about, because in the breaks all students would go to play but this Adelgunde would not leave me alone. But I did not fall! And so I taught for three years in Chingiloma, from 1965. Later the school closed because of the low number of students and the lack of further help from the German embassy.

Sometime afterwards Mr. Roberto Fischer came to see me at my home, accompanied by another neighbour of mine, Iginio Aguero. He offered that I teach in the German school in Costa Norte [a German settlement that is part of the municipality of Nueva Germania; it is called Nordrand by the Germans]. We agreed that I was to come to see him at his house where we would discuss the details. I went to Nueva Germania by bus and there paid 150 Guaraní to rent a horse and go to Roberto Fischer.¹⁹ In the first years I had to teach only in the mornings and in the afternoons, I would watch over his shop. Back then Mr. Fischer's shop was the only shop around here. I would ride on horseback from Arroyo Ata,²⁰ every day back and forth. I taught there for 4 or 5 years before the school moved to Takuru'ity [the neighbouring German settlement, also called Westrand].

I would go to Costa Norte from Monday to Friday. On Saturday evenings I would teach religion to children here in Arroyo Ata. And on Sundays I would teach football, which initially caused some trouble. At first I lost people's sympathy because they were afraid that football would have a bad influence on the youth. 'This man is teaching laziness, he will destroy our families,' they said. For some time, I was not liked amongst the parents. Later, however, they themselves got excited about football. This was partially because I announced that the *mitai* [child in Guaraní] who does not come to the catechism will not be allowed to play football. In this way all of the children were coming.

They did not know the rules of the game. Since I had played before in different clubs, both in Concepción and in San Pedro, I knew them well and I taught them. Additionally, in these times we did not have any sport shoes, and many children did not have any shoes at all. We would use the *plantilla* instead—a piece of a truck cover [tarpaulin] with added twine which we wore on our feet for everyday work. We made the ball out of the *plantilla* as well. Later even the parents decided to join, and they also came to kick the ball with us. Since we did not have a football field, we used the airstrip on the outskirts of the village²¹—it was 546 yards long and 41.5 yards wide. Since so many people wanted to play, we put the posts 164 yards apart, so that we could all fit in. Later we created a proper playing field—up there by the

¹⁹ People often refer to big ranches by the names of their owners. Today many people continue to refer to this terrain as 'ex-Fisher' even though currently it is the Tierra Prometida settlement.

²⁰ Arroyo Ata is a settlement with a Paraguayan population, located further northwards from Nordrand.

²¹ Back then many towns and villages would have their own airstrips—plain long strips of land on which small airplanes could land. As the road system has been improved since and many people own motorcycles and some even cars, most of the airstrips have disappeared.

brickyard, on public land. With time, I gained the trust of the inhabitants—they would do what I told them to. If I had wanted to abuse it, for example by telling them that we needed more money to pay for the hoeing of weeds, they would easily have given me money and I could have kept it to myself. But I did not do it! And by the way, the hoeing was done by Lazaro Espinosa and Tomas Colman, for 1,500 Guarani (which back then was worth much more than nowadays), and we spread the cost amongst all players.

Some of the players were entering the pitch with a knife at their waist. This was a potential risk both to themselves and to others, in case of an argument or a fight. I was afraid that they would get upset if I forbade them to play with their knives. I thought of a method to solve it. I also took a knife, so that everybody could see me, and I entered our football pitch. And then I used to go to the person who had a knife with them, and tell him: ‘What do you say my friend if we put those away? It is hazardous, since if we run after the ball and we fall over, we could get injured. Let us put them away!’ I would then go and put my knife at a safe distance outside of the pitch and they followed. With time they stopped bringing any weapons to the games. This is how I achieved it! With time they stopped carrying weapons altogether. Not completely, because even nowadays there are people who do carry weapons. And some still play cards. But it is nothing like before, when there would be knives, revolvers and other firearms everywhere... They are all becoming decent people. It did not stop completely, but football and religion civilized them.

Football also provided motivation to resolve conflicts. I would sometimes be asked to mediate between people who had a quarrel. If one player threatened another, or if someone came asking for help in resolving a conflict, I would always ask a police officer to accompany me and we would go and talk to them. I never went alone, because if something would happen as a result, I could be accused of it. And I always succeeded! I always succeeded and the next day I could see them already shaking hands and playing football together.

We wanted to play with other settlements. Thus we decided that, in order to appear like a team, we must get proper football sport clothes. The decision about the colours of the outfits quickly became politicized. Firstly, I received a visit from one man who was a *Liberal* [from the Liberal Party] and he told me: ‘order the clothes all in blue—blue t-shirts, blue shorts and blue socks’ [the party’s official colour]. I agreed, with irony. On the next day, a different man came to see me, this time a *Colorado* [from the Colorado Party] and told me: ‘order the clothes all in red—red t-shirts, red shorts and red socks.’ And I also agreed, again with irony. Later I went to see Mr. Roberto Fischer, our *patrón* [boss, landlord], and asked if he could order the clothes for us from Asunción, in return for work. I told him about the problem, that one party wants the outfits to be blue and the other red. I asked him if he could order either the outfits of Cerro Porteño, which have red and blue stripes, or those

of Guaraní,²² with black and yellow stripes. He agreed. And he told me that he had two and two thirds of hectares, which is 27,500 square meters, of manioc field that needed hoeing.

When Mr. Fischer returned, he brought black and yellow outfits for us. He wanted to hand them over to me straight away, but I refused—I told him that we will firstly do the work and then we will take them. When I told all the people that the outfits were already at Mr. Fischer's house, they all got very excited. They kept asking me all the time—'When will we go to work? When will we get the outfits?' Everyone wanted to go and work as soon as possible. And so, we went. We were more than thirty people. We took a big cooking pot and groceries from Mr. Roberto's shop and we named two cooks amongst us. The rest went to do the hoeing. With only short breaks for *tereré*, we finished really fast, before 3 pm. I went to tell Mr. Roberto about this and to ask him to check if everything was all right. He said, 'Excellent hoeing!', and then we went to receive the outfits. Everyone was so happy! We were all still dirty from work, but most of us put the clothes on anyway, and we went down to the Aguara'y River to wash ourselves and to bathe. And still in the water, we were already playing and passing the ball amongst us. We were all so happy and content!

One day a soldier came to see me at my house. He was sent by Juan Rolon, a former classmate of mine, who was the police chief in Nueva Germania. Back then Arroyo Ata fell under the municipality of Nueva Germania, so we were within his jurisdiction. The soldier told me that his major [back then the military was fulfilling the role of police] would like to talk to me and that he was currently in the house of Mr. Fischer. I went to see him. When we met, he told me—'I have come to know that you are teaching football in Arroyo Ata. I think this is great, this will civilize the people!' He announced that he wished to help me but did not say much more. Three days later the soldier came again to see me, bringing a football, size five, sent to us from the major. What a surprise! Since then, we had a proper ball to play with! The major would come periodically to play with us as well.

We started inviting other communities, firstly Isla Guasu, to play with us. We prepared food for everyone and ate all together after the game. And afterwards we would go to them for a rematch. We elected Mr. José Franco, nicknamed José'i [little José], as our club's president. Even though he did not understand much about it, we did the work together and would never oppose each other. This is how the Guaraní club officially started in Arroyo Ata. It was still an internal league at the beginning, we only played with neighbouring villages, but nevertheless it was a club. Much later, when the municipality of Nueva Germania entered the departmental

²² Both Cerro Porteño and Guaraní are first-league Paraguayan football clubs. It is a common practice in Paraguay to name small local clubs after the major national ones and wear the same outfits.

San Pedro league, our club was also invited to join. Our club was renamed (Juan Agüero, Mario Lujan Portillo and Nicolas González renamed it, if I recall correctly), from 'Guarani' to 'Tercer del Marzo' [March the Third].²³

The German school

Students from Takuru'ty had to walk very far every day to the school in Costa Norte. Thus it was decided to relocate the school to halfway between the two settlements, to make the distance comparable for everyone. Mr. Walter Flaskamp offered his land as the place upon which to build the school. I remember still teaching in 1983 in Costa Norte, thus we must have moved the school sometime after that. I was teaching Spanish and Mr. Reinaldo Fischer was teaching German. I was commuting, as always, every day back and forth on horseback. It would take me an hour and a half one way. Later Ms. Margarita Hoffman took over teaching German and I would work with her. We did not divide the classes into subjects, it was called 'plural-class.' The school, registered with the ministry of education under the number 1200, was not only German. There was also one son of a Paraguayan. He was the only one, but in principle the school was accepting both Germans and Paraguayans.

Once we even received a visit from the German ambassador. He came escorted by several police cars. That is because the commissar told me: 'If something bad would happen to him, what would happen to us?' I showed him the school, while the police officers were around the whole building, for protection. This is how it was.

The Germans are very responsible and punctual. It was a pleasure working with them. We would hold meetings with the parents every month. During each meeting I would tell them the date and time of the next one. I knew I would not need to repeat it. On the agreed date they would always be in the school beforehand, waiting for me.

I would receive my salary only once a year from the German embassy. But they would help me out. The director would often give me some money in advance, without even asking for a receipt. They trusted me. I think one time the director tested me. He lent me some money and later it did not appear on the final salary breakdown. 'Mister, I think you are mistaken. The money you lent me is not on the bill,' I told him. It could have been a test. They trusted me a lot. Once even they bought a motorcycle for me in advance, so I did not have to ride on horseback every day, and gave me all the documents without any receipt from me. Until today they trust me and appreciate me.

²³ It is also common for sports clubs to use important historical, religious and political dates for their names.

Political prosecution

I suffered several difficulties because of being affiliated with the Liberal Party. At one time a vicious director of a different school in Nueva Germania went to speak against me to the Germans. She told them to fire me because of being a *Liberal*. But they told her: 'We are not interested in your accusation. Calixto Ramirez fulfils his responsibilities and we are not interested if he is a *Liberal* or a *Colorado*.' They later told me about the whole situation. This is how political affiliations would cause prosecutions.

I worked in Takuru'ity until the school closed. I think it was in 1986. I became unemployed. I was unemployed for a long time. I worked for some time at a big farm, where I was assigned a few workers, and we were rooting out plants. Fortunately, later a director of a school, not far from here, contacted me and offered me a job. I worked there from the year of the coup d'état, from 1989, until 1997, when I negotiated my retirement.

However, the political persecutions against me continued throughout these years, because of me being a *Liberal*. I was accused of being a communist by the sectional and sub-sectional representatives of the Colorado Party. I was arrested three times because of them. The police chief of investigations took me to the police station. However, when he was telling me about all the allegations, at no point would I lower my eyes. Because one should not be afraid, if one has done nothing wrong. I asked for permission to talk, but they would not allow me. I wanted to know who gave them this false information about me, but they also would not say. Later they threatened me: they told me that they would beat me up and that I would go to prison. I told them: 'You have wrong information; I am not a rapist and I am not a communist. I did nothing wrong.' They threatened me further, but I defended myself and did not fall into their traps. Fortunately, later a man, a *Colorado* and a friend of the deputy, entered the police station and came to the room where I was held. He told them: 'With due respect, Sir, this citizen is a *Liberal*, but he would never say that it is cold, that it rains or that he is tired when I need him. This man did nothing wrong. He is a *Liberal*, but he works for me and helps me from time to time.' What he meant by this was that I would help him with different documents or copies (since he did not know how to write very well). I would often help him without asking for any money. Later another man entered and said similar things in my defence.

The persecutions continued even further. I think that this is also why I do not receive my retirement pension. Once I was called to see one of the local superintendents in his office. I was told to go and to see him immediately. I thought that this was about football, since he was the secretary of the club as well. It turned out not to be. He told me: 'Mr. Ramirez, as a former classmate of yours, since we studied together in the second grade, I appreciate you very much. That is why I want to recommend you to affiliate yourself with the Colorado Party. This would be beneficial for your career.' I was surprised. I responded: 'My father was a *Liberal* and this is

why I am a *Liberal*. I do not want to change that, but I am not politically active.' He seemed to respect my answer and said: 'I will not do you any harm, and I will continue as before.' But I think that it was him who later did not pass my work documents, the certificates of how many years I worked, and effectively made it happen that I do not receive my retirement pension. He did it because I did not want to join the Colorado Party. I am not sure, however, if it was him. I do not know who committed this betrayal. All of the documents simply disappeared. This is very upsetting to me, especially because this politics is not important to me. For example, I do have one blue shirt, but I would be ashamed to go and walk the streets in it. I only use it as pyjamas. I have a red shirt as well, but I only use it for work. The party divide is not important to me, what is important is the person. I retired in 1997 and have not had a paid employment since. Until this day, I do not receive my retirement and have to struggle to make ends meet. I sell my cows whenever I need to. Thanks to God, I am surviving.

The man who prosecuted me the most, who made most accusations, died already. I forgave him however ... He was ill for a long time and requested for a priest to see him. Since no one could get a priest for him, I did it. I talked to *Pai* Renato Buccolini and he agreed to come. Together with the priest, we, the local coordinators of the Catholic Church, came along—twelve of us. We waited outside of the house while the *Pai* went to speak to the ill man. Later the priest came out and told me that the man wants to talk to me in confidence. I went in. He was lying in bed, weak, looking at me. He asked for my forgiveness for all of the persecutions. I told him: 'It is because I already forgave you that I organized this visit.' I do not regret forgiving him, despite all of his wrongdoing towards me.

The importance of being kind to others

I always say that one needs to be kind and offer favours to others. One day, when I was coming back home after a day of work, there was a broken car at the side of the road not far from my house. It was raining. I went there to see what had happened and saw the driver struggling with the vehicle and not knowing what to do. I asked him in Guarani what had happened, and he explained that the engine broke and that he was already there the whole day trying to fix it. He had received no help thus far. I told him: 'We are both Paraguayans, my brother. I do not have much, I am poor, but I want to help you. Come to my house to pass the night, we have at least some manioc at home.' He accepted my help. Because it was raining so badly, he stayed for three whole days, working on the engine whenever the rain stopped for a while. His name was Mauro Sosa, he was working as an ambulance driver for the hospital in San Pedro. After these three days he drove back home.

Later, in 1983, my wife got sick. I took her to the hospital in San Pedro. She had meningitis. I was there with her. She had to get an injection every four hours and I had to pay for those. It was like this for a few days and I was desperate because I did not have much money. I did not have enough. And then, all of a sudden, a young fellow came to me and asked:

– Are you Mr. Ramirez?

– Yes, I am. And who are you?

– You know me well, Sir! My name is Mauro Sosa. You helped me and gave me food for three days in your house and you did not charge me anything. Now it is my turn to return the favour. Do not buy these medicines, I will provide them for you.

He apparently had access to some of the medical samples, which he gave me free of charge. He also brought me some food.

After fourteen days, my wife died. She died at night. The doctors were telling me to leave her behind. I was insisting that I could not do that. They asked me: ‘Do you have the money to take the body with you?’ ‘I have a lot of money.’ I lied to them because I had nothing. But they called the ambulance driver, Mauro Sosa, and told me: ‘This man will take your wife to Arroyo Ata in the ambulance. You need to pay him for 25 litres of gasoline.’ And so we went. On the way he ordered the 25 litres of petrol but told me: ‘You will not pay anything, Sir! They have no shame, these doctors. By the law they should pay for the petrol!’ He signed the receipt as if I had paid for it. And this is precisely why I always say that one needs to give favours to others! I always tell my children to help those in need, because when they will need help, people will return the favours.

At first I did not want to remarry. One of the reasons was that I was afraid that a new wife would not value and respect my children. However, when my oldest son decided that he wanted to go and live in Asunción and work there as a policeman, he spoke with my other children and they asked me to marry again. They thanked me for always being there when they needed me and told me that they wanted me to have a wife, to be happy and to have someone with whom to share all of the household tasks. And very soon I found a new wife. My first wife’s name was Melania Portillo, my current wife is Juliana Pavón. We have one child together. I am very happy because she treats all my children as hers, so as if she is their mother. To this day, it is like this. Most of my children live in other places now, but they always come to visit.



Giving a blessing to my son, together with my wife Juliana.



Juliana's mother gives a blessing to her daughters and grandchildren. I was there as well.



Juliana.



Juliana.



Feeding the chickens.



Milking a cow.



Preparing 'chipa'.



Doing laundry.



Boiling a pig's head.



The 'chipa' is ready for the oven.



Baking in the 'tatakua' oven.



The guy without a shirt is the most handsome.



Preparing meat for an 'asado' (grill), while eating lunch.



Preparing the meat.



Before our neighbour passed away, he asked to give food to the children in his memory. This is what his family does every year on the anniversary of his death.



Children getting ice cream.



With the priest.



In the church.



Procession on the day of our saint patron.



The 'asado' after the procession.

Calixto is also one of the local organizers and representatives of the governmental Tercera Edad social program of monthly economic subsidies for the elderly, which was introduced by the government under President Fernando Lugo. [Lugo was in office from 2008 to 2012. He was removed from his position in a very questionable impeachment process.] The following four photographs are from one of their local meetings with the program beneficiaries and were taken by Carlos, Calixto's son. The economic situation of many elderly people in Paraguay is very difficult, often even desperate, and the Tercera Edad is not sufficient to significantly improve their situations.







5 Gerda Kück



Gerda was born and grew up in Nueva Germania in a German family. She had spent the first part of her life in Paraguay and later emigrated firstly to Germany and afterwards to Canada. A few years ago she returned to Paraguay and now lives in the Chaco.

It was hard to make a living

The citizens of Nueva Germania have worked hard to create their lives. My family, as all other German descendants' families, have worked hard in the fields to make ends meet. They mainly dedicated themselves to agriculture and breeding of domestic animals. It was all difficult and complicated. Nothing came easily.

My grandfather, Hermann Kück, came to Paraguay as a young man. At only seventeen years of age he made the long journey from Germany to Paraguay. He came together with his father, his sister, uncles and cousins. They settled in Chingui Loma, which is another German settlement located closer to San Pedro.²⁴ As far as I recall and understood what he was telling me, in these times for them Paraguay was a much better place than Germany. They also came very well equipped, with many necessary tools and other things. They came with money. Thus, for him at the beginning life was not very hard in Paraguay. It was only later, when he got married and wanted to become independent, that life became more difficult. He got married to a girl from the Schubert family and moved to Nueva Germania. The work was very hard with little gain and a very poor standard of living.

My father's life, just as amongst other German children in Nueva Germania, was also very difficult. He received less than two years of formal education in the German school²⁵. As a young man he went to fulfil his military service, in which he spent eighteen months mainly working at road constructions with other soldiers. They were all treated very badly, and did not receive even basic necessities. The military did not pay any salary either. Furthermore, when he finally came back home, anything he would earn he had to give to his father until he turned 21 years old. Only later did he start to put aside some savings of his own. He started to negotiate his independent life with his parents. Together with his brother, they were able to buy a piece of land of 70 hectares in Nueva Germania.

Social life

Religion plays a crucial role in the social life of the Germans, who are Lutheran-Evangelical. The important celebrations are baptisms, confirmations, and other general rituals. The neighbours also meet to celebrate together at Christmas, New Year, Easter, and other festivities, including birthdays and weddings. During such reunions there is always someone playing a guitar and an accordion—a tradition

²⁴ Now it is within an hour drive from Nueva Germania, however back then it was a day on horse-back, as other people have told me. The German settlers from Nueva Germania and Chingui Loma would meet a few times a year for common festivities or religious celebrations.

²⁵ That is why grandfather would understand more things than my father, since he received his education beforehand in Germany

which still continues. The youth also meet on Sundays to play volleyball or football. However, people did not have much time for celebrations, since they could not take many breaks from their work.

Hard work and its consequences

Working manually, with axes and shovels, they cleared the forest and felled trees. Some of which had more than one meter of diameter! Out of the trunk they would make planks and boards. All of this was done by hand. Our house was built upon a framework made from these trees, and so were all of the doors, windows, and all of the furniture. My dad made it all by himself, with manual tools only, and he still lives in the same house which he had built back then.

Yerba Mate was one of the most common economic resources in Nueva Germania. However, in order to harvest this resource, one had to plant it first. And this is a very long and complicated process. The seeds of Yerba Mate have to be harvested very carefully, and only by hand. With the use of a glass bottle they would break the outer shell, to collect the little inner seed. These are later stored in ashes for about 24 hours, which helps to soften the shell and allow for germination. Later the seeds need to be carefully washed and planted intermediately. They are planted in a sandbox, filled with very fine and clean soil. It then takes a whole three months for them to start sprouting. When the little plant has first three little leaves, it is put in greenhouse with a half-shade over it—which is specially constructed out of coco plant leaves. The plants are left there for a whole year where they grow slowly, eventually reaching approximately one meter in height. The next step is again very delicate. Since the plants need to grow in a constant half-shadow, they are planted in a specially prepared forest—which has to be cleared to provide just enough light and shadow. After a further year, all of the other trees are cut, and the yerba mate trees need to be left to grow for a further four years before the first harvest can take place.

After the trees are mature, the harvest takes place once a year. This is when the leaves will be cut. The green leaves need to be passed through a metal drum over a fire, fast enough not to burn them. Afterwards these are thrown on top of a barbacoá [a large spherical frame, on which the leaves rest on top and hot air blows from beneath through a tunnel with fire on the other end]. The wood for the fire is also carefully chosen and dried. The whole process is natural.

Leaves dried on a barbacoá are later processed in a large mill, which is also handmade, with a long wooden crane which is pulled in circles by a horse. This grounded yerba is later stored in a wooden deposit in order to keep it dry. The yerba should be deposited for one or two years. This is a very important part of the process, because the longer the yerba matures the better it tastes. It is only after this time that the yerba can be packaged in bags and is then ready to consume or to sell. It takes more than six years to progress from the seed germination to the first harvest.



The tool that was used to cut trees and tree rolls.



In order to obtain fresh water, they have built a 12-meter-deep well—also using manual tools only.

The quotidian life was not easy, filled with hard work every day from sunrise to sunset. There was no time to read a book or to go out with friends. This style of life has left its mark on peoples mentality and on their way of life. In general, they are more reserved, distanced, and most of the conversation is limited to quotidian issues. With this amount and intensity of hard work, they had no chance to develop in other areas of life—life was focused upon and more about survival than anything else. Yes, they are ignorant, but I think this is due to the lifestyle they had to live. The hard work and lack of time prevented them from acquiring more information or from educating themselves. This is the main cause as to why there was little progress.

They are also resistant to critique. I am not a psychologist, but I think that amongst the older generation, there is still some sort of remorse over their colonisation effort and the will to prove that it was not a failure. They do not accept any criticism and believe that what and how they do, is the right way. My mother, for example, has not fully accepted the changes I made in my life, the pursuit of education and a different lifestyle. However, they are very kind if someone sits with them without criticizing.²⁶ It is impossible to tell 130 years in a few words, or with any words at all, but I think these are the reasons why they are so reserved.

They are indeed ignorant, reserved and even racist. However, they do not realise this, nor can they answer my questions about why they reject the idea of equality. My generation is a bit more open, although it is not a complete change. This is because there was no one to teach them differently. They, especially the older generation, think that we are different than the Paraguayans. Some think that we are more—more intelligent, more beautiful, richer... I on the contrary think that they are right that we are different from the Paraguayans, but only in our customs—we are the same human beings in our core. I do not think however that their ignorance is maliciously intended, or that they are immoral. On the contrary, it is their circumstance that shaped them this way—all of the hard work and also the conditions they lived within. Some of the older people would simply say ‘you should not get together with the Paraguayans’; but if you would ask them, they would not know any reasons for it. I only say it all to emphasise that it is their way of life and what they have been taught before, which made them hold these opinions.

They are however good people and are friendly to others. They always welcome anyone who arrives at their homes, they will offer to sit down, drink *tereré*, or even have something to eat. They do not even limit the time they dedicate to the guests, despite having much work. I think that not many people would be so hospitable. They are humble and hard-working people, with priceless values—values of cordiality, serenity, simplicity and respect, which form part of the cultural richness of all *Germaninos*!

²⁶ This is why I think they liked you, because you are simple-hearted and you did not try to change them.

The German descendants have adopted a lot of the cultural richness of our Paraguayan brothers. Maybe indeed in 1900 both races lived apart from each other, but today we live all together as Germaninos. What is visually different between the German descendants and the local residents is not as important. We do have different traditions; however, we share many of them. We call ourselves all together the Germaninos.

Paraguay, Germany, Canada

Nueva Germania did not offer me what I was looking for in terms of work and education. When I was only fifteen years old, I found a job as a housekeeping assistant with a family, firstly in the Mennonite colony²⁷ Friesland, later in Asunción, and later in Volendam (another Mennonite settlement). It was a true sacrifice—many hours of work for little pay. In these times, housekeeping work was considered very degrading and humiliating. Moreover, the *patrónes* [*patrón*—employer, boss] were not very good and I was treated with little respect. At the age of twenty-two I managed to obtain a place in a nursing course in Loma Plata, the capital of the Menno colony in the Paraguayan Chaco.

In these times my life started to flourish. I achieved what I was longing for—an education and a work which I loved. The Mennonite community of Loma Plata accepted me as if I was one of them. The colony of Menno was established by Canadian Mennonites. Their culture is very different from the Germans in Nueva Germania. They work united in cooperatives. They are also very well organised, with different factories, a hospital, a school, churches... I also had to adopt their religion, since they treat it very seriously and everything is organised in accordance with the Bible. However, I was not a stranger in their eyes, on the contrary, they invited me to their houses and treated me with a lot of affection. It was there that I have met my future husband. He was born in Paraguay, but he is Canadian and his dream was to go back to his country.

Firstly, however we decided to go to Germany, where we ended up living for eighteen months. It was always my dream to get to know Germany, and while being young, together with my best friend—my husband—we had seen it as a great opportunity. I worked there as a nurse. My expectations of Germany were about work, beautiful nature, and a well organised country. I did find all of that; however, what I did not expect was the frigidity of the people. Of course, there were nice people, but compared to the Germaninos who are so much more hospitable... This was quite a shock. Of course, I did have some good friends as well. Especially one friend, who was different from the majority and always treated me well.

²⁷ The word *colony* [Spanish '*colonia*'] is used as an equivalent of settlement or as a smaller region with a few settlements.

On one occasion, my husband and I went for a walk around the city when suddenly some strangers shouted '*Ausländer raus!*' [Foreigners out!]. This happened several times. No one has ever said to me something like this in Paraguay. Many would try to make me feel inferior to them. For example, at work some people would tell me: 'You come from a country where the deceased are being hung on trees'; 'you are from the third world'; 'you don't even know how to fry an egg'; or 'you people are eating with bare hands, you do not even know what a spoon or a fork is.' Some would also say that 'you people sleep with monkeys,' or at the supermarket when I asked some question they said 'can't you read?' Not everyone was like this, but this would happen often.

We were blessed with a daughter while we were in Germany, and so we started our family. We decided to go back to Paraguay and started preparing to move to Canada. We moved there in 1993 and established our home with our two daughters. My very first impression was the friendliness of the people. At the beginning it was not easy for me to learn a new language. Also, both of us had to work. We would take turns, one in the morning and one in the evening, so that someone would always be with the children. In addition, in my previous work I was a leading nurse and there I had to work as a cleaner in a butchery. This was a very hard change for me. But I overcame all of the difficulties. Once the language was no longer an obstacle I was able to find different jobs. Recently I decided to enter further education and started studying Criminal Justice at the University of Winnipeg. This is because I would like to work with traumatised youth.

After twenty-four years in Canada, I decided to come to Paraguay for a bit longer. I decided to come and stay with my parents in Nueva Germania for half a year. I had to adjust to the change in lifestyle, since it is very different between Canada and Paraguay. But while being surrounded by friends and family, it was not difficult at all. What was the hardest to get used to was the insecurity, the dangers and fear with which people here have to live. One has to be very careful and pay a lot of attention, with all of the surrounding injustice, corruption, and restlessness. However, using my new abilities and knowledge, both the experiences of living in different countries and a better understanding of how criminals operate, thus being able to spot danger earlier, I approached it without fear. The fear can be switched off when one sees the happiness of the Germaninos, who satisfy themselves with little, and live dignified lives.

Now, however, it is time to go back to Canada, back to my family.



My grandfather's ID.



After my confirmation.



My group of friends, when we were young.



Social life of the youth.



In the evening.

6 Waltraud Haudenschild



Waltraud decided to contribute a photo-essay only. The photographs are intended to introduce the reader firstly to the local environment and to some important plants. Secondly, they present the hard work of producing bricks. Waltraud's explanation of how she perceives the differences between Germans and Paraguayans are included in Chapter 2 of this book. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzweilly)

Surroundings







Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly

Plants









The process of making bricks









7 Juana Mercedes Benítez López



Mercedes is the owner of the Hotel Germania. At the time of the initial fieldwork for this book it was the only hotel in town. She is not from Nueva Germania herself, but has lived there for many years now. Mercedes is dedicated to fostering the touristic potential of Nueva Germania, which she hopes will grow with time.

Nueva Germania offers its visitors the town's history and the two surrounding rivers, both of which are an unparalleled attraction and curiosity. In the year 1886 the German settlers came to establish Nueva Germania. They were inspired by the ambitious project of their leader, Bernhard Förster, who was married to Elisabeth, sister of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Their main objective was the improvement and conservation of pure German blood. They came to this place by boat from Asunción, through the Paraguay, Jejuí, and Aguaray Guazú rivers. They settled relatively close to the river, where they built their houses, schools, shops, and began cultivating the land. The most important building was the house of Elisabeth Nietzsche, where she lived together with her husband Förster.

In a very short time the project failed. One of the possible reasons could have been the lack of adaptation to the environment and the harsh conditions of the jungle. There may have been other reasons for their failure as well, possibly including some more profound adversities during the implementation of the project, which we do not know about. Mr Förster moved to San Bernardino, where he committed suicide. Elisabeth Nietzsche returned to Germany. Many other settlers returned to their country of origin as well. Some, however, stayed and fought to survive and to make a living. Today both Germans and Paraguayans live in Nueva Germania. The German descendants are slightly isolated within their culture. However, they are good and hard-working people.

Some of the houses built by the first settlers in Nueva Germania still exist. Unfortunately, the first school and the house of Elisabeth did not last. People say that her house burned down years ago. Today it is still possible to see the old floor and fragments of bricks, covered by a thin layer of dirt and leaves. There are also a few old trees, planted by the first settlers. Today Nueva Germania, is a beautiful and clean city, with all of the necessary institutions and services. It is located approximately 300 kilometres away from Asunción, surrounded by its two rivers—Aguaray Guazú and Aguaray'mi, both of which are less than a thousand meters from the city. The rivers are excellent for fishing, beautiful sights, beaches, where one can spend an enjoyable time with family or friends.

My hotel, 'The Germania', opened in the year 2004, on the 31 of December. It was the municipal mayor who gave me the idea to name the hotel 'Germania', relating it to the foundational history. The building initially had four rooms, and was later expanded by another four in 2008. The hotel offers private bathrooms, a large garden, and other facilities, that provide a peaceful and comfortable space for our guests. Hotel Germania is open throughout the whole year. This hotel welcomed different writers, journalists, researchers, some of whom were from other countries. All of these people were interested in the history of Nueva Germania. The hotel also welcomes internal Paraguayan tourism and other people who pass through. The visitors to Nueva Germania are divided into two groups—those few who are interested

in the foundational history of our town²⁸, and an internal summer tourism. Most people come to spend the end of the year in our town, and enjoy the pleasant summer time, beautiful nature, and sometimes some concerts, parties, or other events.

Of course, the service which our hotel offers is one thing, but the development of the whole town is another important issue. People who come to our town, especially those who arrive from far away, want to see something special. Thus, we should suggest and invest in different attractions, which could attract more of these visitors. I have hopes for the future development of tourism in Nueva Germania. The riverside with its beaches has great potential in attracting more local visitors during the summertime. What in my opinion is necessary, is more investments that further expand our attractions and events. Last year's concerts attracted so many visitors, that there were no more free rooms available in Nueva Germania and they had to stay in Santa Rosa. There are some plans by the municipality to further explore this potential and invest in our infrastructure. We will see if these projects will come to life. We would certainly benefit from further developing the riverside (for example, by installing appropriate lightning). It is important to add that all of this should be done with the environment in mind, being ecological and not destroying our beautiful nature.

At the same time the historical museum could be renovated and expanded, in order to attract more visitors interested in Nueva Germania's history. The museum, in its current state, would require a big investment in order to become an important tourist attraction. Another possibility is to expand the agritourism. This could be potentially related, for example, to the production of yerba mate. By improving the production, making it into a special local product, we could also sell it to the visitors.²⁹ We could also consider producing some souvenirs, which could also be sold to the visitors, at the same time creating a source of work and income for Nueva Germania's inhabitants. Furthermore, it would also be important for there to be some people trained as tourist guides, welcoming people to our town. My hope is that by further improving the hotel, and with potential municipal investments in tourism, there will be many more visitors and more income for the inhabitants of Nueva Germania.

²⁸ These guests, guided by their admiration of the incredible person of Elisabeth Nietzsche, came here to investigate the causes of the first settlers' failure to implement their project. Usually their goal is to describe and dramatize this history.

²⁹ In Paraguay festivals dedicated to different agricultural products are quite common—such as the festival of the watermelons or the festival of strawberries.



Our advertisement at the roadside.



Entrance to the hotel.



Elisabeth Nietzsche and statue of the Paraguayan Woman.



The rests of Elisabeth Nietzsche's house.



The rests of Elisabeth Nietzsche's house.



This is our police station.



An old house constructed by the first German settlers.



The water level grew enormously during the last rainy season, flooding the surrounding areas. Some people's houses were flooded. This is getting worst every year. Is it because of climate change?



First of January at the Aguaraymi River. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

The anniversary of the town's foundation:











Bernardino Caballero was the president who gave this land to the German settlers.

8 Danilo Haudenschild Fischer



Danilo was fifteen years old when we recorded his story. He decided to capture different aspects of his daily life, activities and surroundings. He has since studied mathematics and became a school teacher in Arroyo Ata.

Here in Nordrand, we usually wake up very early, around 4 am. I firstly quickly wash my teeth and go directly to milk the cows. We separate the calves from their mothers and then we milk the latter. The amount of work depends on how many cows we have, currently it is thirty four that need to be milked every morning. We divide all the work between ourselves, together with my sister and my brother. Once I am done with my chores, I can come back home, bathe, eat breakfast, and leave for school. Normally I only go for the morning turn, from 6.40 until 11.00. It is only once a week that I go for the whole day, and have to go back for afternoon classes.

We go to school together, the Germans and the Paraguayans. When my mother was a child, they would not go together, since people said it was not good to mix. This has changed now, and we do not think that any more. What we do know however, is that it is not very good when a Paraguayan and a German marry each other. It does not end very well. After a few years they usually start having problems. That is often because the Paraguayan person does not work as much, and this is what causes conflicts.

Some say that the school in Nueva Germania, in the urban centre, has a higher level and that it would be a better choice for us. This, however, seems to have changed. There was an inter-school competition recently, and their students did not perform well. Also, the gossip has it that some people sell drugs in the school in Nueva Germania. Therefore, I am happy that I attend the school in Arroyo Ata. Most of the children from Nordrand go with us to school, however some from Westrand go to the boarding-school in town, and their accommodation is paid for by the Evangelical community in Düren, in Germany.

The first thing I usually do when I come back from school is to enclose the calves together with their mothers. Afterwards, we prepare cheese from the milk which we gathered in the morning. Once this is done, we can eat lunch all together. Our parents quite often take a nap after the lunch, but we do not. We rest for a while and then we have many other tasks to do. For example, we need to weed the manioc field, to make sure the plants grow well and get enough sunlight. We learn all of these tasks from a young age, so that we know how to do them.

In our free time we often play volleyball. Normally just with our cousins and others here in Nordrand. Sometimes, usually for birthdays, we also invite our friends from school. In Arroyo Ata there are sometimes local mini-competitions in football. They often play with money—each team needs to deposit an agreed amount, and the winner gets it all. We, however, do not go there very often.

Some people say that our life here is hard, that there is too much work to do. But I do not think that, I think our life is good. We have no major problems. The only thing which I think could improve is the maintenance of the road. The cattle trucks, which drive to and from the big ranches, destroy it constantly under their weight. It also becomes really slippery when it rains, and it is difficult to go anywhere. Another change that would be good for us is to have better English classes in school. Our teacher does not really speak herself and sometimes says that I understand more than she does, because English is similar to German.



My youngest brother.



In Arroyo Ata they often have parties with reggaeton, and similar kinds of modern music. Here in Nordrand, we usually still play our German music with instruments, with an accordion and a guitar and people dancing.



The landscape seen from my house.



To prevent the little ones from hiding, we lock them up with their mothers.



The swine stalls—we need to clean it with water at least twice a week.



They cool themselves in the humid sand.



Danilo with his siblings and cousins celebrating their grandmother's birthday. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

9 Fidel Alejandro Benitez Cardenas



Fidel was fifteen years old when we recorded his story. He lived together with his parents in the urban centre of Nueva Germania. His photographs depicted the activities of teenagers in Nueva Germania, whereas his story focused mostly on what could be improved in the town and on what he felt that the town was missing. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

When I was younger, it seemed to me that the youth of Nueva Germania were strongly united. They organised many activities together—much more than nowadays. I remember that everyone was dedicating much more time and effort to the Ballet Group, to organising everything themselves. They were making public money collections, and going from door to door, in order to cover the travel expenses and go to different dance competitions. They once went to Brazil and twice to Argentina, to compete. I was not part of the group back then, I only joined later when I was bigger.

Our dance instructor, Osvaldo Carmona, is an excellent teacher. Thanks to him the Municipal Ballet of Nueva Germania won several different competitions. Unfortunately, currently we lack the motivation and the will of the youth for it to work properly. Some people even dropped out. It is not the same as it used to be. The group does not travel as much as before. This same lack of motivation and discipline is visible in other municipal groups and activities. Currently it seems that people think more about partying and drinking, which often leads to conflicts or even fights. People are saying that nowadays some teenagers even use drugs in Nueva Germania—marijuana to be specific.

My hope is that if we organise ourselves better, dedicate more time and effort to common goals, we will achieve much more. We should be more conscious that we, the young people, are the future of Nueva Germania. Thus, it is up to us to improve our town, and this is precisely my point—for young people to realise that united, with common goals and dedication, we can achieve a lot. And there are many things which people say that they want to introduce or improve in Nueva Germania.

However, it is not all that bad amongst young people. We still meet quite often to play volleyball together at the riverside. One of the new 'sports', which many of us practice, is motorcycle tuning. It is only quite recently, the last two years, that people started tuning their motorcycles. It also requires discipline and dedication. One has to learn a lot, buy the parts, and dedicate significant amounts of work. What would be a big improvement for us, what is currently missing, is to introduce some courses that increase our knowledge of motorcycles, but also the knowledge of general road safety and driving rules. There are far too many accidents. Some good workshops or courses, would surely be very useful and increase our safety.

It would also be a great improvement, if the town would have a playground for children, a proper place to practice our ballet, and some other places where we can spend time. Also, our schools are quite good, but we do not have good possibilities for further education in Nueva Germania. Some sort of technical or professional school would certainly permit young people to stay in town, rather than migrate. Another element which is missing, is better access to computers and internet. Children need to learn how to use them. A better education of foreign languages would also be very useful.



This is our Nueva Germania Ballet group. We have recently won a competition in San Pedro.



Our Nueva Germania Ballet group.



Most of us like motorcycle tuning. Recently there even was a tuning competition in Nueva Germania.



Drinking tereré and chatting with my school friends.



Fiesta Fundacional.



Fiesta Fundacional.

10 Arnold Garcia Pavon



Arnold grew up in Nueva Germania and later in his life moved to Asunción. He tells the story of his life, political formation, and work. The telling of his story was very much in dialogue with me and thus, in contrast to other stories in this book, we decided to use a combination of first and third grammatical person.

Arnold was born in 1986. He grew up in Nueva Germania and lived there until moving away for his university studies. Both of his parents are from the region themselves. They own a spacious house in the centre of the town, currently surrounded by grapefruit, lime, banana and papaya trees, which grew taller at the same time as did Arnold and his sister Andrea. The house was built in stages, which themselves are visible in the roof covering—the older part has ceramic tiles, the newer is covered with corrugated metal roofing which makes a lot of noise even with the slightest rain. The house has only one level—very few houses in town extend beyond the ground floor. The main door, from the side of the street, leads to a spacious living room. Currently the living room is occupied by three long wooden tables, which during the day are full of pieces of cloth, colourful threads, garments to repair, and papers with tailoring designs sketches. Sometimes during the evening, sometimes only very late at night, it all gets sorted out and tidied, just to gradually get messy again from the early hours. It is Julia's, Arnold's mother's, workshop.

Passing further through a short corridor, on the right and the left are bedrooms - simple rooms with not much more than a bed and a wardrobe each. These were Andrea's and Arnold's rooms. Both Julia's workshop and these rooms have a tiled floor. The corridor leads into a spacious kitchen with a long wooden table in the middle. There is a high book-stand to the left that contains many papers and some of Ramon's books, however it is usually covered with a material curtain that hangs from its top. Ramon was a school teacher and currently works for the state schools supervision office. On the right of the kitchen there are some cupboards, a sink, a long counter-top, the usual kitchen electro-domestics, and a door to the laundry area and a *tatakua*, a brick-oven outside of the house which it is being used for special occasions. Continuing forward to the very back of the house, there is a spacious room with no floor and with a big brick oven on the right and some old broken machinery on the left. Julia and Ramon used to run a bakery for some time, until a fire accident after which they decided to abandon it. In the back-yard, there are many fruit-trees, some herbal plants and a chicken-coop.

The house itself is located one block from the main road which cuts through the middle of the town and connects it to San Pedro in the east and Santa Rosa in the west. Back then, when Arnold was little, the road was not asphalted and far less traffic passed through. The town was much more isolated and almost inaccessible during the rainy days, when the slippery mud would prevent most vehicles from crossing. When Arnold was a young child, some of the neighbouring houses did not yet exist. Together with his friends, they would spend much time on one of the empty plots, chasing a ball or jumping from the trees and swinging with the lianas, *playing Tarzan*—as Arnold recalls it. Later they constructed a volleyball pitch just by Arnold's house, which became a point of many gatherings and games. Arnold had a rather happy and carefree childhood.

The family is bilingual, but they mainly speak Jopara Guaraní at home. As a young teenager, Arnold became strongly involved with the Catholic Church, at the time locally led by Spanish Catholic nuns. ‘*The nuns would teach us not only the catechism, but would also ask more communitarian questions: How do you feel in the community? What do you think about the population and the poverty?*’, Arnold recalled. They would also engage the youth in voluntary work, like cleaning the streets or repainting signs. Already at the age of 13 Arnold was appointed by the nuns as a leader of a small group of younger children. He recalls that at the beginning he did not know what to do, so he would lead prayers whenever the nuns were around, but once they left he would lead joke-telling contests. With time and experience Arnold was given more responsibilities. At the age of 15 he was already helping the nuns with the *celebración de la palabra de Dios* (the celebration of the God’s word)³⁰. He would help out with different organisational duties, but also act as a catechist, both during the Sunday service and during preparatory courses for first communion and confirmation.

His enthusiasm and leadership skills led to him being recommended for a political education program, *Parlamento Joven* (Youth Parliament), in Asunción. It was funded by Pa’í Oliva³¹, a prominent priest and activist who had worked in Paraguay since the nineteen-sixties, in response to the *Paraguayan March* manifestations.³² Pa’í was seeking to invite and to involve various local youth leaders from the Paraguayan countryside. This is how Arnold received an invitation letter to partake in the fourth edition of the program in 2002, as a representative of Nueva Germania. The meetings took place over weekends, once a month throughout the whole year. The participants were paid for their travel expenses. They brought different foods with them, or bought them together in Asunción, which they shared, cooked and ate all together. They slept in the church buildings or with host families from the local parish.

Arnold, along with youth from various rural areas, learnt about politics and civic engagement, receiving lectures from scholars and activists from different areas of specialisation—such as economists, lawyers, political scientists, and many others. They also had to read different books in preparation for each gathering. On one

³⁰ Nueva Germania had no resident priest at the time. In place of the Sunday mass, the nuns and the Catholic civilians could deliver the ‘celebration of God’s word’ service, which contained almost all of the same elements as are found in mass. The main difference is that the communion wafer had to be consecrated beforehand by a priest, and the consecration would only be remembered during the celebration.

³¹ Pa’í means priest in Guaraní. His full name was Francisco de Paula Oliva, and he was famous for his selfless social work with the poor.

³² *Marzo Paraguayo* refers to the crisis and manifestations which occurred after the murder of Luis María Argaña, the vice-president of Paraguay, in 1999. These events coincided with the annual march of the campesinos (small farmers) from the National Campesinos Federation (FNC—Federación Nacional Campesina) to Asunción. Eight young people tragically lost their lives during these manifestations, seven of them were shot by snipers shooting from the rooftops.



occasion the gathering was a week long and took place in the *Bañado Sur* (one of the poor and precarious neighbourhoods in Asunción, located at the riverside). Instead of the usual classes and debates, they spent this week living with a local family. Pa'í Oliva however did not look for host families who lived in good conditions: he instead asked for the poorest families to invite the *young leaders*. Arnold spent these days with a family who lived in a shed constructed out of pieces of corrugated iron sheets, thick plastic bags, and other recyclable and waste materials. *'Fourteen people lived inside this space of six square meters, out of which six were older children and six were toddlers... With the babies making their physiological necessities inside... They all ate the food which they could find or buy with the little money they could earn.'* Arnold recalled. *'This was a shock for me. It was a brutal realisation about the sad reality of our country. It was January, the middle of the summer, and inside the shed it was around fifty degrees Celsius during the day. Inside the shed I saw an ill baby, lying in a bed made of a wooden tomatoes box. The least I could do was to take it to the hospital... I lived a whole week with this family, inside the shed. I slept on the ground, as they did, with my clothes and my towel underneath. I ate the same as they did. This experience has made me change my vision—it opened my eyes and made me see the whole panorama, the big picture. Since then, each time I went back to Nueva Germania, I saw and became more irritated with the injustices there.'*



The course finished with one more final lesson, on the day of graduation. *‘When I began the formation with the Youth Parliament, we were told that at the end of the year we would be graduates and receive certificates in the National Parliament. In the Congress Building which I had only seen before on TV! I was looking forward to this moment with excitement. Going there together with Pa’I Oliva and receiving our final certificates in front of all the senators and members of parliament.’*

‘Then the moment came, after a whole year; we dressed well and with the whole group went for the graduation ceremony. It is quite a long walk to the city centre. However, after some time we realised that we were not going towards the Parliament... How big was our surprise when we arrived in the centre of the Bañado Sur shantytown, at the rubbish dump called CATEURA. Pa’I Oliva took us to the rubbish dump for the graduation! The public were not senators and members of parliament, but men and women



Arnold, already as an adult, with Pa'I Oliva.

berment that happened several years beforehand—when Santa Rosa seceded and became a separate municipality, taking most of the administrative territory with it. This was done with the agreement of local and national politicians, when Arnold was twelve years old. *'Nueva Germania suffered a big loss, not only a material one, but also psychological. Like with a tortoise when you scare it, it hides its head and stays like this. This had long-term consequences, the transformative period in which I was growing up, limiting or almost eliminating peoples civic engagement.'*

For a few more years Arnold lived in Nueva Germania, where he joined and later became the leader of the *Organizacion Juvenil Germanina* (Germaninos' Youth Organisation). There was a brief period in which the opposition party was elected in the local government, a period during which Arnold and his friends engaged in many activities and projects. The most prominent of these was the creation of the *Museo Multicultural de Nueva Germania* (Multicultural Museum of Nueva Germania). They organised the first annual *Festival de la Yerba Mate* (Yerba Mate Festival), as well as the town's *Fiesta Fundacionl* (the town's foundation anniversary). However, this period was not long lasting and soon the dominant political party took the power back. Due to his political training with the *Youth Parliament*, Arnold became very overt with his opinions concerning the predominant political practices in the northern region of the country.

As the municipal local elections were approaching, Arnold gathered some of his friends together and they decided to lead a 'Citizens' Awareness Campaign'. They would make visits from home to home. They talked to their neighbours about conscious voting, about civic responsibility and about the constitutional right to have



'There are indeed some cultural initiatives. But what I find painful, is that these are all induced from above. Thus it seems that peoples initiative is very limited. I am not sure to what degree this can be called development or progress.'

a vote—rather than seeing it as a mere electoral formality or even worse, as a merchandise (an opportunity to sell their vote), which is a habitual way of seeing things in the area. The awareness campaign was supported by the Sisters from the Congregation of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, who were residents of Nueva Germania.

This church group also organized a collection of signatures to petition against the FTAA agreement (Free Trade Area of the Americas), which was about to be negotiated by the Paraguayan national government. The Catholic Church together with other churches and social movements have led and presented this petition as a means of defending Paraguayan autonomy. Thus, Arnold with his friends walked from home to home. However, the people did not like their work, they ejected and attacked them. That was because, as Arnold says, they thought it was an action against the government and the Colorado Party. In general, all of the political activities that Arnold and his friends undertook had a personal and a social cost. Tensions and pressures in both social and family life had become visible. As Arnold said—*'In this region of the country, thinking differently, raising critiques and actions against the system, bears a social cost for those who risk pushing forward such political initiatives.'*

Arnold reflected on these times: *'I felt much resignation and political impotence, seeing how many talented young people left the town and the region in general, and how there was not much hope for change. I realised that I had to leave home, to continue my personal, political and civic formation. And do not mistake this for just a simple teenage*

rebellion. I think that in some way we, the Latin-Americans, are all a little bit Cheguevaristas. Besides, I simply could not act against my moral principles, stay quiet and look the other way when encountering injustice.'

At the same time, Arnold was offered a scholarship to study law which he firstly undertook in San Pedro, where a branch of the National University of Asunción had just opened. He wanted to gain a degree which would later permit him to return to Nueva Germania and to serve the people there. He did not like it very much in San Pedro and, after only one semester, decided to move to the capital where he continued his studies at the Catholic University. He asked Pa'í Oliva for a place to stay, and the priest permitted him to renovate a garden shed and turn it into a room, where Arnold would then stay for three years. His parents regularly sent him fifty litres of honey, which was enough for him to sell and maintain himself. He was a good student and he received very good grades. He completed two years of study in Asunción, and afterwards he started to travel more around the country, as part of his engagement with the *Youth Parliament*.

When reflecting on his first years spent living in the capital, Arnold said: '*We, the people who come from the countryside, we suffer a lot in the hostile environment of Asunción. Our compatriots, the other Paraguayans, quite often treat us badly just for being campesinos (farmers). We all suffer like dogs, at least the first couple of years. This is because one needs to detach oneself from something so beloved, from the place of one's origin... And that is why the bus terminal is such an important reference point for me. Because each arriving weekend I felt bad, very homesick. But I could only go home once every three to five months, when I was able to pay the bus tickets. So instead I would just pay the 1000 Guaraní for public transportation to go to the terminal each Saturday afternoon, after finishing all of my obligations.'*

Arnold sat in the terminal from the early hours, facing the direction of the incoming buses, taking in the busy, colourful scene. Inside the hall, lined all around the building, are little shops—buildings in their own right with roofs that almost touch the ceiling of the terminal. These boutiques exhibit their merchandise on all of the surfaces that are available to them, both on the inside and on the outside. Joined together, they form a wall of plastic, fluffy, colourful and shiny baroque-alike splendour. The vendors, mostly young women, sit in front of these exhibitions on simple wooden or plastic chairs, either calling to the passing people, chatting to each other, or reading newspapers. This kaleidoscopic line of products is from time to time broken by a fast-food stands, which in its own way also contributes to this sensory palette with an intense olfactory presence. The middle of the hall, besides containing further self-standing kiosks, is also occupied by waiting travellers and by further vendors. Many older women sell *chipa* (cheese corn beagles), or offer *tereré* (cold served yerba mate). Tereré can be served with a variety of fresh herbs with flavour enhancing and medical properties, which the women crush in big

wooden mortars. Navigating between all of these people, luggage porters operate their long metal-frame push carts to help travellers off the buses and into taxis or other means of transportation.

In addition to all of this visual, auditory and olfactory cacophony of travellers and adult vendors, there are also many children and teenage workers in and around the terminal—some offering a shoe polish service, others selling sweets or packs of tissues. There is an NGO with its office on the first floor of the terminal, who work with these children by providing them with classes and fun activities after work. The NGO also fight for the rights of the children, for their fair pay, and also support them through difficult situations. As the NGO recognise that many of these children (and sometimes their families) depend on this source of income, and that a political ban seems unrealistic at the moment, they do not campaign to eliminate child labour in general, but prefer to fight for better working conditions and for the general wellbeing and protection of these children.

Arnold did not really fit into this environment. He sat for hours in one place without an obvious agenda, without any luggage and not selling anything. He did not pay much attention to the surroundings and seemed to be immersed in his thoughts, with an occasional teardrop crossing his face which he would quickly wipe off. He only paid attention to the arrivals on the two platforms where buses from San Pedro district would arrive. With each incoming bus he seemed revived, and tried to spot familiar faces in the stream of passing travellers. Sometimes he was lucky and some fellow Germanino would pass by, greet him, or even exchange a few words before disappearing again behind the terminal's exit.

Arnold would repeat this private ritual each Saturday, when his homesickness would become unbearable. The meditative state together with the possibility of encountering a representation of home—either in the faces and words of passengers, or simply in the presence of a bus and people that several hours beforehand passed through Nueva Germania—had a reassuring effect. Arnold never disclosed his reasons for being in the terminal to anyone, fearing judgement or pity. He did decide however to share this story for this book, as an illustration of the broader difficulties which rural migrants encounter in big cities.

A person who comes to the city from the countryside has only three reference points in Asunción. They either come for a consultation at the hospital, or to arrange something in the Ministry of Education (if they are school teachers), and return to the terminal. They take a shower at the terminal, eat there and sleep there on the benches, awaiting their next morning bus. Those who know the city a bit better go to the Mercado 4, to buy some clothes and gifts for their children. And those who really know the city, would also come to the centre of Asunción to the Plaza Uruguaya. Those are usually the only points of reference for the campesinos. That is why these places have special significance to me. Especially the terminal—even now, each time I come to pick my Mom up and enter the terminal, it evokes very strong memories and feelings.

The reality is that while I was studying and living in Asunción, whenever I returned to Nueva Germania I would encounter two very distinct and distant realities. One would be the reality of Asunción and the other would be the reality of the northern regions of the country, in the districts of Concepción, San Pedro [where Nueva Germania is located] and Amambay—poverty, oppressed society, petty politics, corruption, even the plantation, production and trafficking of drugs, which often leads to murders... All the towns in these northern districts were ruled by mini-dictatorships. All of the aforementioned characteristics turn the inhabitants of Nueva Germania and other towns in the north, into citizens who function under an operating system of elites who dominate everyone else. That is why for me Nueva Germania is an unfinished dream, which I hope to be able to return to at some point in the future. Only time will tell.

I told you about these characteristics of towns in the northern districts, which suffer from the absence of real governance, to come to the fundamental issue—the harm which such a political malpractice causes, for the children of these communities to decide to leave without knowing if they will ever return! Most of the youth leave Nueva Germania. Even if they do not leave far, they leave for the neighbouring cities. Nueva Germania will soon become an old population of forty years and older with no young people at all. I often ask myself whether all the young people leave because they have nothing to do? Do they leave because they want a better future? Or do they also leave, because in some way they have felt what I did—the impotence, anger, the not knowing what to do and how to change things...

Although Nueva Germania is a fruit of these histories of the northern populations, abandoned for its own sake, it never loses hope. Hopefully one day a generation will be born, that will recuperate the forgotten Nueva Germania. Hopefully my children or my grandchildren will witness the wonderful rural town in which their father grew up and lived through some of the hardest moments. Hopefully the town's inhabitants will again be happy, safe, and free... I am confident that I will still see it before I die, since Nueva Germania is worth it, and fighting for it is worthwhile!

Arnold lives in Asunción now, where he is involved in many grass-root political and activist organisations. During the time of my stay in Paraguay he was offered a position at the national branch of the NGO *Fe y Alegría* [Faith and Cheerfulness], which offers different educational opportunities to children and adults. Thus, his devotion to social change and education continues. Since most of the locations are in poor areas of Paraguay, Arnold travels a lot. Arnold also finally finished his university degree through an on-line course, which hopefully will facilitate his work. He travels every now and then to Nueva Germania to visit his parents.

11 Carlos Alberto Benítez Vázquez



Carlos is originally from Asunción, but he has been living in the department of San Pedro for almost four decades now, and very much feels to be a Germanino.

As a little boy, Carlos3 remembers his mother secretly participating in the organisational part of the 'Movimiento 14 de Mayo' (The Movement of the 14th of May—named after the independence date of Paraguay). It was an armed guerrilla organisation, which in 1959 attempted an unsuccessful military intervention. When he was older he joined a revolutionary group himself, a secretive movement against the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. Part of the group decided to undertake an armed action, despite the disapproval from other members, and the action turned out to be unsuccessful. There were repercussions for all members of the movement. Carlos had to hide and live on the run for some time, and fortunately managed to avoid capture. He suspects that this explains why all of his official school records had been erased without trace from the institutional registers. This was the reason why he could never enrol into a university, which as he says had an impact on his whole life.

In my story, I would like to share my experiences, observations, and reflections about the socio-economic organisation of people in Nueva Germania, and about our current initiative to form a new cooperative. Firstly, however, I need to introduce the situation and the challenges of today's farming communities. In this region, and in Paraguay in general, agriculture has always been the basis of economic activity for most families. Moreover, family agriculture³³ is not only an economic practice, but is also a culture in itself. This activity permits a *campesino* [peasant or small-scale farmer] to live from it, communicate through it, relate to other campesinos, and to the environment. It is an economic, social, political and environmental issue. It is a type of agriculture which is oriented mainly towards the sustenance of one's family, community, and towards the continuity of a way of life. This is a key difference with large scale agribusiness, which is oriented towards the accumulation of wealth, and is keener on quick industrial solutions which poison the environment and disregard other people. It provides few work places and expels family agriculture. For such large scale agribusiness, to plant something is to make business, rather than a way of life and a culture. The workers and owners quite often do not reside in the places in which they plant. It is solely an economic activity. That is why I do not want to call those who engage in extensive capitalist agriculture 'farmers'—they are businessmen who are only interested in accumulating wealth.

Unfortunately, the modern society, the government, and the system itself, gradually force the farmers, the campesinos, to incorporate the agribusiness methods of production. It wants them to reproduce the capitalist model. This however does not work, since the capitalist model requires precisely the one thing which the campesinos do not have—capital, in the form of financial resources. They only have

³³ ['Agricultura familiar', also known in English as 'family farming', is a very broad subject, well described in academic and non-academic literature, as well as in general political terminology (an example being the 2014 International Year of Family Farming, of the United Nations).]

their labour, and their human and natural resources. Moreover, even with sufficient financial resources, the scale of campesinos' production is insufficient to compete with the agribusiness which will always be able to offer lower prices.

It is however possible to adapt the family agriculture to the capitalist system. There is an alternative to the monopoly of agribusiness. Because the world always has a demand for food, campesinos need to produce a surplus, and to find ways to commercialise it. This is the central aspect of the philosophy of agricultural cooperativism. Its goal is to satisfy the food market with high quality products, and provide the farming families with sustainable income. It prioritises people over the accumulation of wealth, and it is possible to achieve it within the capitalist system. United in cooperatives, the campesinos are enabled to sell their diverse products and to compete in the market. Farmers within cooperatives, rather than competing with each other, benefit together from everyone's successes, thereby increasing both cooperation and ultimately the quality of their products. These can thereby reach, or even exceed, the quality of agribusiness products.

Unfortunately, products that have ecological and family agriculture certificates are in demand in markets that have high purchasing power and high social consciousness, which is not the case of Paraguay. Moreover, the process of certification is too complex and too expensive to achieve for small regional cooperatives of campesinos. Furthermore, the discussion about whether GMO food (Genetically Modified Organisms) is harmful for people's health has not been resolved, and it is not a debate that we want to engage with. These are not the arguments which can convince campesinos to produce organically. However, according to my own experiences and observations, organic farming is cheaper, produces better results, and empowers the campesinos. For us it is important that the farmers remain the owners of their own means of production—both owners of their seeds and in control of the fertility of their soil. Agribusiness solves all encountered problems with investments in chemicals or machines—something which the small-scale farmers cannot afford. These are the reasons why organic methods of farming are better for family agriculture. One of our future goals is to fight a widespread belief in agribusiness methods and agrotoxics, to raise people's consciousness and to educate them in fully organic and ecological methods of farming.³⁴

Once a cooperative is established, it can expand further. In order to cut out intermediaries, it is possible to form an alliance or an agreement with consumers, providing them directly with high quality agricultural products. This model assures a fairer redistribution of wealth, which moreover stays in the region, rather than be-

³⁴ For example, recently it has finally been proven that it is counter-productive to dig up the soil before sowing, because it kills microorganisms and reduces the mineral content. A direct seeding into shallow holes proves to be much more profitable and ecological. Another example is that often an appropriate diversification of different crops reduces the threat of pests, because some plants act as repellents. This allows one to eliminate, or at least reduce, the need to purchase any chemicals. Family agriculture has yet to learn and incorporate such methods, while demystifying and abandoning the harmful habits.

ing transferred elsewhere. In a cooperative with many extending functions, different work places are created and highly educated people are required. There is a need for agricultural engineers³⁵, accountants, lawyers, medical doctors, electricians, veterinarians, and many other professionals. The farmers' children are encouraged to study, knowing that they can find employment at home. Currently most of the young people that leave Nueva Germania, especially those who pursue specialised education, do not come back due to the lack of opportunities. Moreover, a cooperative can decide to dedicate part of their profits to the community, making investments such as the construction of a nursing home, a cultural centre, or general improvements to the infrastructure. A successful democratic cooperative has the potential to, over time, revitalise farming communities.

To conclude, nowadays campesinos have expenses which have been introduced to them by the modern consumerist society, and from which they cannot escape any more. Goods such as electricity, running water, mobile phones, motorcycles, and many other things, demand a continuous cash flow. All of these things were not used previously and so the campesinos did not require a lot of money to get along. In Nueva Germania electricity was installed only 25 years ago and there were only two telephones in town. A lot has changed since then. From today's perspective we ask ourselves how we were able to live like this. We cannot imagine a life without these commodities any more. We all became much more dependent on money. The family agriculture model needs to fight to maintain its culture and its values, but it also needs to adapt itself to the capitalist system in which we live. In other words, the consumerist capitalist system is global, and the campesinos are already a part of it. We should not seek to separate ourselves from it, but to introduce alternative models which can assure our existence within it. Cooperativism is a solution which allows for a sustainable family agriculture, which can compete with the destructive agribusiness models.

Cooperativism in Nueva Germania

I came here as an official of the ecumenical non-governmental organisation *Comité de Iglesias* [Committee of Churches]³⁶. During those times we were conducting a rural aid program, created in the year 1979, for agricultural land acquisitions. We were helping different campesinos' organisations to obtain land or to overcome any legal difficulties that they were facing. I was firstly appointed to work in Alto Para-

³⁵ Unfortunately most agricultural university careers focus currently only on industrial agribusiness methods. Young people who finish such studies are not prepared to work with family agriculture and campesinos. They know a lot about large soy plantations and different chemicals, for example, but nothing about small scale diverse farming with cooperative organisation, organic pest control, or natural remedies for plants diseases.

³⁶ It later changed its name to *Comité de Iglesias Para Ayudas de Emergencia* [Committee of Churches for Emergency Relief].

na, later in Chaco, and only afterwards, in February of 1987, did I come to Nueva Germania and I have stayed since then. The *Comité de Iglesias* was invited to work in this region, by the local German evangelical congregation (who are part of the *Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata*, the Evangelical Church of the River Plate). Some of the local farming communities were in conflict over their land rights, or did not possess property titles, and required our assistance.

One such example was Aguaray'mí, the campesino settlement located close to the urban centre of Nueva Germania. One man used his contacts in the Stroessner government, and registered the whole land area of this old settlement in his name. People had occupied this land, and had been living there for many years. Suddenly this man came and claimed the right to all their properties. At the beginning, he wanted to sell it to a company, but the current occupants protested against this. He did not manage to sell the land to the residents themselves either, since he was asking for very high prices. He ultimately took a mortgage loan from one of the Paraguayan banks, with this land as a guarantee, which he did not intend to repay. This is how the ownership titles of this land were passed on to a bank. We were involved in helping out with the negotiations. Ultimately the bank sold the land titles to the residents, for a relatively low price.

This was just one of many such stories of the farming settlements that I worked with. In Paraguay in general, people just used to occupy an area of land and work it. There was enough available land, thus it was not a big problem. Only when the land began to have a high monetary value, in more recent years, it has become much harder for campesinos to obtain it, or fight legal battles against its official owners. (I think that the ownership of land should not be secured solely by possession of a title, but also by cultivating it productively!) My work initially was to help with the organization and collective actions of the people in the settlements, and in helping with the formalities and with the negotiations.

At the *Comité de Iglesias* we believe that organizations such as ours should not only help the campesinos obtain their land titles but also assist them with making a profitable use of land. That is why further assistance in improving their crops and sales is crucial. Together with an agricultural engineer who was also sent here by the *Comité*, we worked on the improvement of cotton production in the different settlements of campesinos in this region. Cotton was the primary agricultural product in Paraguay at the time. Furthermore, we convinced the people to sell their harvest together as a collective. By doing so, we were able to bypass the intermediaries and secure a better price, thereby generating a higher income from the product. This was sort of a cooperative system.

In parallel, pastor Detlef (who was the Evangelical pastor in Nueva Germania back then), told us that he was thinking about creating a consumption cooperative, a store in which all members could purchase cheaper products. We worked with him in the organization process, convincing many people to join the cooperative (many of whom were from the cotton producing settlements). We named the cooperative



The buildings of the former Jopoi and the technical school are unfortunately falling into ruin

‘Jopoi’, which is a Guaraní word that means mutual help, or an organization based on reciprocity. We achieved something unprecedented in Jopoi: we managed to connect and to integrate, for the first time, Paraguayan and German descendant families.

Over time, the store became very big and well equipped. It not only sold everyday groceries and utensils, but also different agricultural tools. Additionally, the store functioned as the collection centre for the cooperative sales of agricultural products. We even came to have a yerba mate processing machine (a grinder), packaged it, and sold it within the region and to the rest of Paraguay under our own brand—‘*Ka’a Jopoi*’ (Ka’a means yerba mate in Guaraní). It was of a truly excellent quality and was in high demand. Additionally, the Evangelical congregation had a tractor and a pickup truck, which was also used by the cooperative. We often worked in a *minga* system. *Minga* is a Guaraní work which means ‘mutual help’, usually related to work exchange.³⁷

The success of the cooperative converted the surroundings of the store, which was located behind the Evangelical church, into the centre of the town’s social life. In Jopoi there were no religious, political, or national distinctions—the whole com-

³⁷ The difference between the words *jopoi* and *minga* can be illustrated via the following examples: *Jopoi* is when someone says ‘I will kill a pig today and I will give you part of it. When you will kill a pig next week, you will give me a part as well.’ Whereas *minga* is when someone says ‘today I will help you working on your field, and tomorrow you will help me on mine.’



munity was welcomed.³⁸ As a result of this integration, we created a social club—*El Club Centenario*. Its name derives from the fact that we were celebrating the town's centenary anniversary. Since we did not know when exactly the first settlers arrived here, we chose the 23rd of August for the town's foundation day. Many guests arrived, including foreigners from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. This is when the cooperative Jopoí was officially inaugurated. It was a beautiful celebration and a very good time for Nueva Germania. Unfortunately, it lasted only about five years. When pastor Detlef left Nueva Germania, the whole cooperative fell apart within a few months of his departure.

In Detlef's times, many other great things were achieved. For example, a professional technical school was created, in which young people could choose to learn different subjects—horticulture and organic agriculture, electronics, mechanics, carpentry, as well as social organization (of which I was the instructor). It was an excellent school, but it also fell into ruin. When Detlef left, it was decided to hand it over to the state, to the ministry of education. The school closed within a year or two. It fell into ruin quite literally, since today the buildings are falling apart.

One of the main causes of this failure was that the new management of Jopoí lacked Detlef's rigorous scrupulousness and administrative skills. People were not well enough prepared to manage such an undertaking by themselves. This also relates to the general lack of political and social education, necessary for people to ful-

³⁸ It could be said that our integration was in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which took place not long before. The Council increased ecumenism between Catholics and Protestants.

ly incorporate such a cooperative approach.³⁹ It is also true that he was an important leadership figure whom people trusted. No one was able to replace him in this role. Another important factor was that he was very good at obtaining external funding for all of our projects, much of it from Germany, and when he left no one knew how to do it. Most of the initiatives were not yet developed well enough to maintain themselves without external economic support.

This was an attempt to create a social and cooperative of consumption and production. Jopoi had the possibility of becoming a much larger cooperative, and the plan was to formally register it as such. Unfortunately, the attempt failed. After Jopoi closed, the cooperative sales of agricultural products, which we initiated with the *Comité de Iglesias*, continued for another few years. Since I did not work with them any more, there was only one person from the *Comité* who kept on helping the campesinos. However, it was mainly technological agricultural help, and there was no one to coordinate and oversee the social organization of the whole undertaking. After some time the cooperative sales of agricultural products also ceased to exist.

There were two other attempts at cooperativism in our town. I did become a member of one of them—not as a representative of any organisation but as an inhabitant of Nueva Germania. However, it seemed that it was only profit oriented, with people seeking solely individual gains, thus it fell apart rather quickly. Afterwards there was another attempt, with a few people who were socially oriented, in which they created a cooperative of production, commercialization, and consumption. They obtained some international funding and started to work together. This cooperative at the beginning worked well, but due to a lack of administrative skills it went bankrupt after about five years. One of the main causes was the amount of loans that the cooperative gave out and never managed to get back. The legal troubles have not been fully resolved yet, but the cooperative does not exist any more.

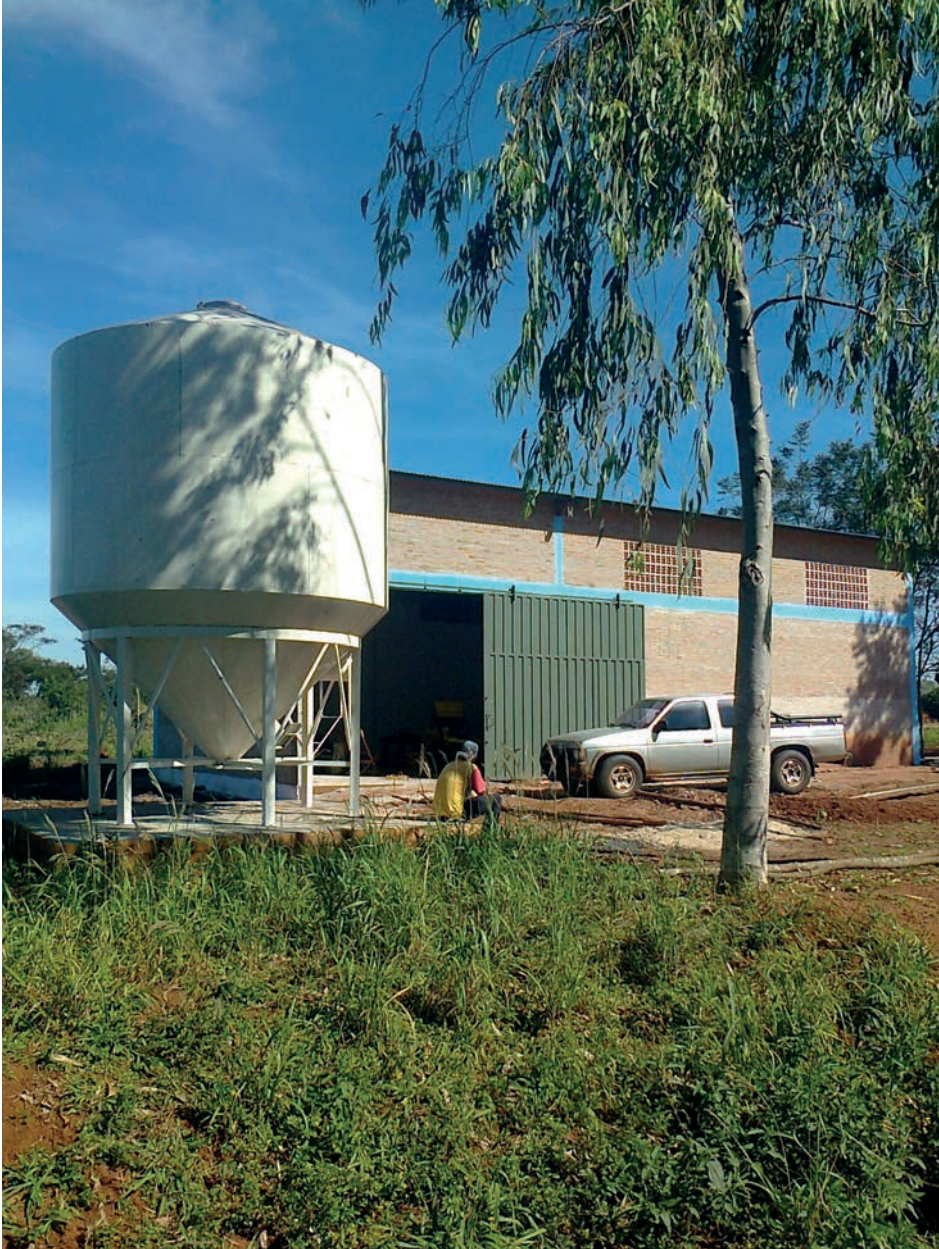
There were a few other attempts at cooperativism in the region, which came about as a result of the work that we have been doing with campesinos in different settlements. One of them is in General Diaz, called Py'Aguapy, and has been working officially as a cooperative for several years now. Some of the people whom we worked with as the *Comité de Iglesias*, are currently involved there, in the local politics and management of this undertaking. It works well for them, it is a democratic structure, and they are producing and commercializing different agricultural products together—currently it is mainly milk. Just recently they decided to expand beyond production and commercialization, and to open a cooperative store as well. It is still a relatively small organisation, with only about sixty active members; however, we have high hopes for its growth and expansion. It is one of the few examples of, so far, successful cooperatives which benefits both its members and also the community.

³⁹ There were also issues with some German descendants opposing any decision of choosing Paraguayans as successors in management roles. However, they did have some legitimate grounds for such doubts, since the culture of corruption was already well visible in Paraguay at the time.

What is mainly lacking in our region is administration and management training for campesinos. There have been numerous examples of different projects, many of which I was involved in as an advisor, which fail due to the lack of basic administrative skills. Some organisations like this work well as long as they rely on the help of external advisors, like myself, and later struggle once they have to work by themselves. Sometimes it is the general management that is lacking, and sometimes it is just a specific set of skills which is missing. Quite recently the government helped one campesinos organisation to create a small plant for the production of balanced animal feeds (mainly for cattle, but also for poultry, swine, and other farm animals). They received a governmental loan and the plant was built for them within a few months. It has the potential to produce a big income, since animal feeds are in high demand in this region. The organisation is built on a cooperative model, in which the members would deliver their corn and soy to the plant and at first receive the payment for it at the market's price. However, once it would be processed and sold to the cattle ranches, the additional income would be divided in accordance with each member's contribution (after discounting the expenses and the agreed percentages for the development of the cooperative, of course). However, this campesino organisation did not think of a good way to repay the government loan, and they risk losing the plant. They asked me for advice with their financial problems. They also seem to struggle with the efficiency of their work. All of this demonstrates their lack of preparation. They received a loan, a building, a silo, and all the necessary machines, but they did not receive management and accounting training. This threatens the whole undertaking. Such stories repeat themselves often. Stories in which people lack the capacity to administer resources that have suddenly been injected by the government. Often they receive none, or only very short and insufficient training. Within such projects they should either receive proper in-depth training, or should be given the possibility to employ a manager.

There is also a general problem with the lack of a sociable approach and with harmful attitudes amongst many farmers. Some people think that as soon as they have formed a cooperative, or an association, the government is obliged to give them different things. Once they receive something, they also often lack the initiative to invest their own money and the time to develop it properly.⁴⁰ Some even say: 'This

⁴⁰ Such is the case with the repayment for the animal feeds plant. It is not a big debt, it is about 30 000 000 Guarani [approximately 5000 euro at the time]. If it were divided between all of the three hundred members, it would become fairly easy to repay the debt. However, many of the members do not want to invest any of their own money. They do not understand, or do not trust in the future benefits for the whole community. They are currently at risk of losing the whole plant. One of the options that they are considering includes the possibility of renting the plant to a private entrepreneur for a period of five years. The entrepreneur has offered to repay the debt if this rental goes ahead. This example highlights the lack of education and preparation of the people, to successfully manage and participate in a democratic cooperative. It also highlights the lack of leaders with managerial capabilities, who could easily generate this kind of money from other sources of communal work.



The small factory of balanced animal feeds.

was a gift from the government; if we want to, we can sell it and share the money amongst us.' This approach still exists amongst many people in Paraguay. A lot of educational work is required, but there are not many of us educators... Together with such governmental investments, there is a need for administrative, economical, management, and political education—all of the elements which are currently neglected. Moreover, in my opinion, such education should come first, before any other investments towards the infrastructure.

Despite all these problems, I do believe that cooperativism is the only solution for small-scale family farming. Campesinos have no other way in which to compete with the large agribusinesses than to form collectives or organisations in which they produce and commercialise together. We should learn from the mistakes of all past attempts, and create a new cooperative. This is what I am working on currently, developing a new undertaking which we call '*SOSTenible*' [sustainable]. It will be a cooperative that not only produces and commercialises together but also unites different professionals (educators, advisors, engineers, and so on) who will offer their services to its members and to different organisations. I am currently negotiating with the Evangelical community, here in Nueva Germania, to rent the building of the old abandoned technical school, in which we want to create our office and our production line. The idea is to focus firstly on cooperative sales of milk. In Nueva Germania cattle raising was always a significant economic activity;⁴¹ however, most people only breed cattle for meat, and milk commercialization is largely neglected. We want to change this. We are in the process of obtaining government funding for three, strategically located, refrigerated storage stations, and for a vehicle with cooling capabilities. This will enable us to collect milk from all local producers and then to sell it directly to the industry, thereby bypassing the intermediaries and generating higher profit. Our next step, hopefully achievable in the next year, is to begin our own yoghurt production, further increasing our income and the profits of our members. Moreover, we already negotiated with several potential, large partners, who are very much interested in buying our milk and yogurt, thus the market is already secured. Our hope is to create a dynamic and a fast growing undertaking, which will expand into different types of cooperative activities and services and will benefit not only its members but also the whole community.⁴²

⁴¹ There is even an example of an instance that may sound contradictory—there are many 'landless small-scale cattle ranchers.' They are people who keep their animals at roadsides, or who rent pieces of land.

⁴² Importantly, however, we decided not to offer any kind of financial loans, since this is exactly what had ruined many past cooperatives. Such loans bear high risks. Although we will not give loans ourselves, we will be offering to aid people in obtaining governmental or bank loans themselves.



A meeting with members of a cooperative.

12 Pedro Hernan Halke Arevalos



Hernan grew up and lives in Nueva Germania. He decided to tell the story of the Tierra Prometida campesino settlement, in the establishment of which he was involved. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

Before the year 2000, a big piece of land was sold and given to the landless campesinos [farmers] from Nueva Germania. They formed the settlement *Chamorro Kue—La Germanina*. However, around 100 people had been left out and did not receive any land at all. Together with these people, we formed a committee, which we named *El Resto* [The Rest—meaning, the rest of the people who were left out of the new settlement]. Our goal was to obtain land for all of us. We started meeting regularly, every week, in the home of Don Spitaleri, who was our committee vice-president. After a year the first president Roberto Denis resigned, and the vice-president, Spitaleri, took over the leadership of our initiative. These meetings continued for another three years, and during these times we were debating on how to collect funds and which parcel of land would be available. Most of the people wanted the land north from Nueva Germania, which belonged to Don Fischer, a parcel of 1700 hectares. After some time, however, Mr Spialeri resigned from his function as well. We organised an assembly and voted for a new president—Mr Habram Pereira. It was he who proposed that it would be beneficial to hold our meetings in front of the parcel of land which we wanted to obtain. This is when we put a tent at the border of the land area and started to gather regularly there.

Habram Pereira, did not know how to read or write, and only spoke very little Spanish (he only spoke Guaraní). He did not know Asunción either. This was an organisational problem for us, since we had to be able to negotiate with the authorities in the capital. This is when I stepped up to the role of secretary, to help with all of the formalities. We decided to travel to Asunción, to ask personally about our case at the IBR, *Instituto de Bienestar Rural*⁴³ [Institute of Rural Well-being]. It turned out that during the four years of our meetings and organisation, the committee was not officially registered with the IBR. So, how were we supposed to obtain any land, if we were not even recognised by the state as a committee of campesinos? Our plan from the very beginning was to ask the government to lend us the money that would be necessary to pay for the property and the initial costs of creating a settlement. The very first step should have been to be recognised as an association. I do not know if the previous presidents of our committee did not know about it, or just did not bother to register us.

With time it became clear that our committee needed mostly this kind of work, which Mr Preira could not really perform. This is when we changed the president again and elected Eugenio Perez. I kept working as an informal secretary of the group. Together with Mr Perez, we started the negotiations with Don Heriberto Fischer, the owner of the land. We went several times to his home, at a different ranch that he owned, close to San Pedro. Ultimately we received a formal written offer of sale. Within the letter of offer, he agreed not to cut down any trees from the proper-

⁴³ In 2004 IBR changed its name to INDERT—Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Rural y de la Tierra [National Institute of Rural and Land Development]. They are a governmental institute who help campesinos [farmers] to obtain land, regulate its use, and they work towards a general development.

ty while we were trying to secure the government loan. He however did this, some time later, and started to sell thousands of cubic meters of wood from the property. This is when some people got a bit angry. Additionally, a short time afterwards, Mr Eugenio Perez resigned from the position of the president of our organisation, and moved to a different municipality. This is when I was elected to the role of the president of our campesino association.

Shortly after I took over, the deadline of the offer of sale passed. That is to say, the government did not pay Don Fischer the money for our land in time, and he offered it to someone else. He signed an official offer of sale to a Brazilian, Jair Antonio Kieffer. When we found out that the land had been offered to someone else we went again to talk to Mr Fischer. We told him that we would not allow any Brazilian to enter this property, even if he bought it. Don Fischer got quite offended and told us to leave his house. We were telling him not to sell the land, since we were determined to borrow the funds from the government and buy the land from him, but he had made the offer to the Brazilian anyway. In response, we occupied the entrance to the property and did not allow the Brazilian to enter when he came to see the land. He came with all the details about the property, aerial photographs, information about the soil quality, but we were 120 people strong, opposing his purchase. This caused a major conflict, since we were all camping in front of the entrance, taking turns; and we did not even allow the owner, Mr Fischer, to enter. He still had approximately seven hundred cattle on this land, which he wanted to transport elsewhere. We did not allow him to do that either. Thirty big trucks came to transport the cattle. We, however, told the drivers to go away, since we would not allow them to take any of the animals. I even started receiving calls from Don Fischer, offering me each time bigger sums of money to encourage me to withdraw from the role of president and from the association in general. I did not accept it.

At this time, it also happened that the president of IBR, the government institution we were talking to, changed. A man called Erico Ibañez became the new head of IBR, which was quite a fortunate change, since I knew this man. He invited me to meet him. We went there to Asunción, together with the new secretary of our association. Don Erico Ibañez told me that the IBR was indeed offering to buy the disputed land for us. Additionally he asked us to allow the owner to enter his property and to wait for another two or three months, without invading the property.

We were happy to hear this news. As a symbolic act, we installed a Paraguayan flag at our campsite, on the border of the property. We were not expecting however, that our fight would be ongoing, and indeed that it was going to intensify. Some employees of the Brazilian came. They destroyed our whole campsite, and they beat up the few people who were there at the time. I was not there at the time. When I came, our flag, with a tear in the middle, was lying on the ground. I picked it up and kept it as a symbol of our fight for the land. The struggle was not over.

The government was not quick enough with negotiating the purchase of this land for us. Shortly after this fight, Don Fischer formally sold the land to the Brazilian. The contract had been finalised, and the Brazilian transferred the full payment, officially becoming the new owner. A few days later, we realised that the Brazilian and his employees had entered the property, using a different entrance located on its other side, with heavy machinery (bulldozers, excavators, tractors, and other machines). We called for an urgent assembly of our group, in order to decide upon our course of action. We decided to force the people to leave, take their machines with them, and to expel the Brazilian from this land. We were determined not to give up. We entered the property all together. We firstly spoke with the Paraguayan employees, and told them to step aside and not to intervene. They agreed. We then talked to the Brazilians, and told them that they had two hours to leave the property and take their machines with them. They all left rather quickly.



Hernan Halke holding the old torn flag and standing in the exact spot where years ago he, and other 'landless farmers' (campesinos sin tierra) camped and fought to obtain a piece of land. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelley)

The new owner, the Brazilian, issued a formal complaint to the police, which complicated the issue even further. We did, however, endure this as well. We were called to a meeting with a judge in San Pedro, where we had to defend ourselves, putting forward the case that the government had promised to buy this land. Meanwhile, the Brazilian brought a whole unit, of approximately 60 men, of heavily armoured riot police from Asunción. When the police came they told us to leave the property,

and so we left and waited at the roadside. They tried to provoke us into a fight, but we did not let them. However, as soon as the police went away to eat or to rest, we entered again. This is the strategy we had agreed on in the assembly of our committee. We kept doing this, and the police got annoyed, since they had no one to fight against. Some people did construct some home-made firearms and other weapons but, thank God, they never used these. The Brazilian, on the other hand, had to pay for all the policeman's expenses—pay them a salary, pay for their food and drinks, pay for their transport... The police stayed for twenty days, so he must have lost a small fortune.

More or less a month afterwards, again a big tractor entered the property from the other side. This time we reacted more violently. People were really upset and beat up the driver, who was a Brazilian. His wound was not very big, nevertheless this caused more problems, because the Brazilian owner made another formal complaint. This time it was quite serious, since it was to the higher police officials in Santa Rosa. I told the people that we needed to go all together and present ourselves at the police station. It was more or less a hundred of us who travelled by bus to Santa Rosa. We told the prosecutor that if they wanted to, they had to throw all of us into jail. Happily, the very next day we have received an official declaration from IBR, signed by Erico Ibañiz. The document confirmed that the price had been agreed upon with the Brazilian, with Antonio Kieffer, and that the government would purchase the land for our association of landless campesinos. This was our victory!

The people were so happy that they wanted to enter the property immediately. And the president of IBR warned me not to do that yet, and to wait for one more month. This was due to the fact that the Brazilian wanted to receive the whole payment at once, which was not within the governmental practice (the practice was to firstly pay 20%, make sure over some time that all of the details regarding the property were correct, and only afterwards pay the remaining 80%). Ultimately the government agreed and paid the whole sum at once.

Afterwards, we received a phone-call from the IBR inviting us to discuss the details of our future settlement. They were asking us what model of settlement we wanted to implement. One option was for the settlement to be based upon a nuclear model—all houses gathered closely together, in a centre, with peoples fields extending to the outskirts. The other option was to implement the traditional model—which in Paraguay means that all families live in long rows, alongside roads, with the fields extending into the back areas of each of the houses. This decision caused further conflicts and divided the group. We proposed to incorporate the nuclear model, with individual small parcels of land and one extensive cooperative field. The idea was for everyone to have their own small land on which they might cultivate whatever they wanted, and to dedicate 200 hectares to a big communal field, for a mechanical planting of such plants as soy, sunflower, manioc, or other similar crops. We could thus communally own some

heavy machinery and make a better profit. However, the people voted differently. They preferred to divide the whole settlement into individually owned parcels of land and to incorporate the traditional settlement model.

Afterwards I was asked by the IBR president to present a proposal for the construction of houses. Our proposal was accepted and we have received 124 economical houses, paid for by the government and made by a contract company. The government also constructed roads, a school, the electric grid, and a water well with piping for our settlement. We even received food provisions for six months, to be used by the people before they started gathering their first harvests. The agreement with the government stated that we received all of this, and only after ten years we had to start paying it off.⁴⁴ It is also important to mention that we have chosen *Tierra Prometida* [Promised Land] as the name of the settlement, in order to recognise the history of our struggle. The previous government agreed to buy this land for us, but at first they did not fulfil the promise, and we had to fight for it. Some people did not like this name, but at the end it was officially registered as *Tierra Prometida*.

After the construction of the houses, I was still trying to convince people to agree on creating a communal field, which could be worked with big agricultural machines, work from which we would all benefit. The IBR was also in favour of this idea, and offered to provide us with machines to prepare the land. But it was impossible, since the people did not want it. Paraguayans are not accustomed to work in cooperatives. The conflict arose to the extent that during an argument, my brother Jorge Halke was shot dead. He was also active in the organisation and planning, and was also strongly advocating for the cooperative field management. We were working at the time, making corrections and adjustment to the newly constructed houses⁴⁵, when it happened. My brother did not have any firearm with him, whereas the other man had a revolver. My brother's four children were left without a father. The person who murdered my brother ran away, was never captured and never returned to Nueva Germania. When this happened, I resigned from the position of the president of our association.

⁴⁴ This time has passed and now we need to start returning this loan. Each family needs to decide whether they want to pay it all in one single payment (which results in being 40% cheaper—it would be 17 000 000 Gs [approximately 3000 euro, in 2014]), or to pay it little by little in instalments. Formally any given family will only become the full and sole owner of their land and house, after paying this back to the government. In practice however, many people have already sold their houses, despite the law that forbids it.

⁴⁵ The company who won the tender to build our houses did a poor job. The design of the houses was inadequate and with any strong wind or storm the roofs were literally flying off. Roofs of eighty houses were damaged, some ripped apart completely and thrown onto the ground metres away. Only a few of them were repaired by the company and we had to repair the rest ourselves. This system within which different companies compete to win governmental contracts is not very good, because it often results in work that is completed cheaply and poorly.



We encountered two such grave stones when we entered the property, but we did not understand what it means. We decided to leave them where we found them. (Photo: Jonatan Kurzwelly)

I want to emphasise that the reason I got into all this, my reason for becoming a campesino leader, was to fight for my people and for my community.⁴⁶ But at this moment, I had to withdraw for a few years from any such public roles after the two negative things that happened: firstly, that people did not accept the cooperative model, and secondly, that my brother was murdered. If we had agreed on the cooperative model our settlement would have been an example for others. The plan was to firstly have a big communal field, later to construct a silo to deposit the grains, and to provide work and a source of good income. Now, ten years later, people want to work the land with agricultural machines. But now it is too late to change it all.

⁴⁶ That is especially so since Nueva Germania lost 70% of its terrain, out of its original 263 000 hectares. This had happened after Santa Rosa had separated itself as a separate municipality, with the agreement of the local municipal politicians. With this succession, we lost an even bigger percentage of our population. This is why I think that it is crucial to repopulate our municipality of Nueva Germania, and this is best done with the creation of new settlements.

Along with his story, Hernan also took many photographs, documenting his family and different events in Nueva Germania. Below is a selection of these images.



They were cooking Caldo Ava, a soup made with all the different animal rests, which are not good for grill or other purposes—for example, the intestines.



This is a mute guy, people call him by the nickname Mbeje [his real name is Gregorio Alfredo Sánchez]. He also does not know how to read or write, however, one man is currently teaching him how to write his own signature. Mbeje is very visible in Nueva Germania, because of his couch-assistant role in one of the local football clubs. He also works in a grocery shop, next to the pitch. He communicates through hand and body gestures.



The grandmother.



Family lunch.

13 Cecilio Alcaráz Sanchez



Cecilio is a school teacher in the settlement Tierra Prometida. At the time of creating this story, he was 27 years old. His brief photo-essay documents several aspects of his life.



The Paraguayan president, Horacio Cartes, wants to implement the APP, La Ley de Alianza Público-Privada [The Law of Public-Private Alliance], which would privatise a vast amount of public developments and services—such as road constructions, expansion of the international airport, and many others. The new law would allow for public companies to realise these developments of public infrastructure or services in exchange for a long period of benefits from the given investments. Many people, and many organisations of campesinos, have been organising protests against the new law. We do not want Paraguay to be sold, little by little, to big companies (some of which are probably owned by the politicians themselves). We organised road blockades and marches against this and other such new legislations. In order to pay for the expenses of our demonstration, we collect money in different ways—in this photograph we were selling different agricultural products at the roadside in Nueva Germania. At the same time we used this opportunity to spread the news about this dangerous new law and to tell people about our action against it.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ [Despite enormous protests, in all parts of Paraguay, the law has been introduced and implemented towards the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014.]



On sunny summer days it is too hot in the building, which is why we sometimes choose to have classes outside, in the shadow of a tree. All of our struggles, demonstrations and political actions, are also for our students—for the young people to hopefully live in better conditions in the future. Our school building, for example, requires further investments to fit all students and also to assure adequate learning conditions. If the schools remain public, we hope to be able to obtain all of these things through political negotiations or pressure, or through entering into politics ourselves with our own political party. However, the risk of privatisation and laws such as the APP are that private companies would prioritise their monetary gain over educational necessities. There would be no hope of improving schools in poor rural regions, where parents are not able to pay for their children's education. This is one of the reasons why we protest against this new law.



This photograph was taken during the Teacher's Day. In spite of all the difficult circumstances—overcrowded classrooms, poor facilities, lack of educational utilities, and false accusations from the politicians about us being mediocre teachers—we prove each year that we are able to teach well and we have very good relations with our students.



In this photograph there are all the teachers from our school in Tierra Prometida—I am third from the right. I have already worked for four years as a teacher. I studied in the Instituto de Formación de Educadores [Teachers Training Institute], which is a public institution, and I received my diploma in 2010. There are almost no other subjects one can study for free, since there are no other public institutions. Almost all professional and higher education is private, bearing costs which very few campesinos can afford. That is why studying to become a teacher was the only way in which I was able to continue my education. This demonstrates the importance of accessibility to public education, rather than expensive and private businesses.



In this photograph you can see part of my family. We are eight—seven brothers and a sister. My family has been always fighting for our community and our political causes. We were amongst the campesinos who fought to obtain this land and construct our settlement. (I was not an adult yet at, I was only sixteen at the time, which is why I did not receive a house of my own once we had won the fight for this land.) We continue the struggle to improve our conditions. We are all currently opposing the implementation of the APP law. There are however many other political battles which need to be fought. One other example is that we are all campesinos who produce many agricultural goods, but we have nowhere to sell them. It should be governmentally regulated, to secure a market for the fruits of campesinos labour. For us it is also impossible to compete with the rich large-scale agribusiness. They not only can sell their products at very low prices, but they also harm our plants, and the environment in general when they fumigate and use agro-toxics on their fields not far from here. The government should introduce laws that benefit and protect campesinos.



In this photograph, my mother is preparing a chicken for dinner. We produce most of our food ourselves—not only fruits and vegetables, but also meat. Our fight is to have better conditions, while still maintaining our way of life as campesinos, maintaining the importance of close relations with one's family, community, and land. This shows that politics is not something abstract, but that it is present in, and influences all aspects of our daily life.

14 Abel Rodrigo Pavon Acosta



'I was not really studying at that moment, I just posed for the photograph.' Abel lives in General Díaz, a campesino town bordering with the municipality of Nueva Germania. Abel was 31 years old when we recorded his story. He decided to tell the story of his accident and its consequences.

I would like to tell the story of how I lived before and how my life is now. It is also the story of my mother, my father, and of my entire family. Both of my parents are from the district of San Pedro. My father is from here, from General Díaz. His father was one of the founders of this settlement. My mother, on the other hand, is from Villa Rosario. We, my four siblings and I, were all born here. My mother's story is of a daily struggle to keep up with the domestic work—to care for the animals, to wash clothes, to cook, but also to take care of me. My sister works at home together with my mother. My father, together with my brothers, dedicate themselves to the production of carbon. They have also worked with different types of agriculture in the past. They all help me every day, with everything I need. I used to work with them, but my life has changed completely. I now dedicate myself to my studies. My intention is to become a professional psychologist. It will be difficult, but it is not impossible.

When I was little, I went to school firstly here in General Díaz until the sixth grade. Afterwards I went to school in Arroyo Ata, where I had to cycle every day 15 kilometres one way and 15 back. After I finished the third grade of the second school, I finished my education and started working. I worked a lot and very hard, together with my family. We bought our first tractor when I was about eighteen years old, and I have driven it since then. My father and my brothers are all *tractoristas* [tractorists] as well. And then, six years ago, when I was 25 years old, I had an accident. I almost died. However, God gave me a second chance, and I survived.

I was working in the forest, and pulling large tree trunks out of it. There were only two of us, with two tractors, without any other workers. My friend has left with his first load, and I was supposed to follow him a bit later. This is when one of the large trunks fell on top of me. At first I lost consciousness, but after an hour or so I woke up. The trunk fell to the side, however, the tractor was still running and pulling forwards, with a gear switched on. A large root was blocking it from behind, and with the wheels still turning, it pulled the front of the tractor up in the air. It was about to fall back at any moment, on to the other large tree trunks that were lying behind it. If it had turned upside down, it would have crushed me to death under the weight of the tractor. I was not able to do anything—I could not move, I could not switch the tractor off, I could not get out of it. I was hanging in the air, bent in the tractor's chair, unable to do anything. I could not move my body, I could only feel the pain. I was there, in this situation, for another hour, or an hour and a half. I thought that I would die there.

After my friend unchained the trunks from his tractor at the roadside, where we were loading them onto trucks, he drove back into the jungle. This is when he found me. He switched off the motor, and pulled me down from the tractor by himself. The doctors say that this probably further fractured my bones. He then called for help and my family came to rescue me with their pick-up truck. They took me to the hospital in Santa Rosa. In Santa Rosa they called for a private air plane and transported me to Asunción to Emergencies. They conducted the first basic examinations. Unfortunately they had no free beds in the hospital and I had to wait

somewhere between 12 and 24 hours on a stretcher in the corridor. This is when my parents and my aunt started making calls, and managed to obtain a place for me in the military hospital. It is a semi-private institution, thus my family had to pay for everything. I spent three weeks there. Firstly the doctors had to perform different types of procedures, which were necessary before the main surgeries. They had to cleanse my stomach, liver, and also to drain my lungs. I almost died out of the continuous high fever that I had for two weeks. Only once the fever dropped, were they able to operate on my spine, and insert a surgical plate. The doctors explained to me that the spine and the nerves were fractured, the impulses could not pass, and this was why I could not feel anything in the lower part of my body. They doctors said that it was impossible to fix.

After these days in the hospital my family managed to gather some further resources to pay for physiotherapy. I stayed in the house of my uncle, attending thrice weekly sessions with therapists in a medical centre. It was mostly different types of exercises, mostly stretching, necessary to both maintain my muscles and increase my mobility (I could not move my arms very well at the beginning). After the initial six months, I applied to a special foundation, where I started learning how to move in a wheelchair and manage myself on my own. I could only go there for a month because it was too expensive. Afterwards my family paid for a private therapist, and I continued having daily meetings. Altogether, I stayed for an entire year in Asunción. Afterwards I moved back home, to General Díaz, where I now live in the house of my parents. We still travel from time to time to Asunción, but not very often.

The pain is sometimes unbearable. I do not have feeling in the lower part of my body, I cannot feel if someone touches me; however, I do feel pain. Sometimes it is so strong, especially during the night, that I wake up crying. Because of these pains, we went recently for an examination in a hospital in Curitiba, in Brazil. The doctors said that the initial surgery was performed badly. That the material of which the plate on my spine is made is very bad and this could be the reason for these pains. We are in Paraguay, so maybe the doctor messed it up, or maybe he used a cheaper material to keep more money for himself. . . The doctors in Brazil said that I would need to undergo another surgery, to change the plate for one of better quality, and then hopefully the pain would stop. For now it is not possible, because of the high cost it would bear.

In parallel to all the procedures, already in the hospital after the accident, I started meeting psychologists. When the news came, that I would not be able to walk any more, that I would be tied to wheelchair, I lost the will to live. I wanted to die. I wanted to take my own life. I never really tried to do it, but I kept thinking about suicide. Thanks to the professionals, and to my family who never left me alone, even for a minute, I continued living. Their presence, as well as thinking about them, stopped me from doing anything. To be honest, the suicidal thoughts are a daily struggle for me even today—this one voice keeps coming back to my mind, telling me that this would be the best solution. However, there is another voice, which tells me I should keep living. It is a daily internal battle in my mind.

Since I came back here, I have had nothing to do. Each day I would just drink *tereré* and watch TV. I had many friends before the accident. After I came back, they were trying to take me out, to do something together, but I closed myself off and did not want to see anyone. I did not want to leave the house at all, since I am ashamed to go out like this, to be seen by other people. I rejected my friends, and with time they eventually stopped coming or calling. During this time, my mind would be all the time busy with different negative thoughts. I was in a bad state, I felt terrible, I almost did not sleep. I talked to a psychologist I knew, who was visiting me here from time to time, and told her about my internal struggles. She advised me that I had to dedicate myself to something, to find new goals. It was she who suggested that I could study for a university degree. This never occurred to me before, especially since it was many years since I left school, and I never wanted to study much anyway. It was not an easy decision either—on the one hand I wanted to, but on the other hand, I was afraid to do it. My family was very supportive and encouraging. I finally decided for it. They were all very happy to hear that.

Since this friend, the psychologist, was involved in the opening of a new faculty in Santa Rosa⁴⁸, she told me that I could study either psychology or law there. I know how much help I received from different psychologists, that to a big extent I am still alive because of them, thus I decided to study psychology. I very much like the idea to work in the future as a psychologist myself. I know how helpful it could be for other people in a similar situation to mine. There are almost no psychologists in the region, and many people who have had accidents live as I do, closed and isolated in their homes, with little to no help. Moreover, none of the psychologists I met were in a wheelchair themselves. Thus, I think that if I worked as a psychologist it would be different, since I could draw from my own experiences while talking to patients. I think that it could be potentially much more helpful. I would really like to work in a hospital, for example in Santa Rosa, helping others.

This friend of mine helped me with all of the formalities, and recently I started studying. After meeting all of the people in the course, and going for a few meetings, I started liking it. They meet three times a week, but since it is so far away, I go only once a month and study the rest of the time on my own at home. However, to be honest, I am still afraid and struggle internally each time before going to Santa Rosa. I am afraid of being a failure, of disappointing myself and others. This is because I do not feel well prepared, I feel that I lack knowledge and skills. A few days before going I start eating less and am very nervous. It is because often when I read, I do not remember much of it afterwards. It is also because I have not been meeting other people for so many years, and now I have chosen a career in which I have to

⁴⁸ [In Paraguay there are hundreds of small universities (by some called ‘garage-universities’) of different levels. They are all rather small, in comparison to what the reader’s idea of an ‘university’ might be.]

be able to share with others... Even though with time it becomes a bit easier for me to go to Santa Rosa, I am still stressed and nervous each time. And then, each time on the way back, I feel very happy.



My family—they are my reason to keep living. They give me everything. Unfortunately not everyone is in the photograph.



My accident occurred on a very similar tractor, the same model, when I was pulling tree trunks out of the forest. I had a girlfriend before, with whom I have a son. My accident occurred two days before his first birthday. He will soon celebrate his seventh birthday.



This is how carbon is produced. One has to fill it with wood and then burn it slowly in high temperature, so that only smoke is coming out. It's my family's business. I have not seen this place for six years now—it is more or less 50 meters from our house, but there is no path for the wheelchair. I asked my sister to take most of the photographs.



This is my brother working. Before my accident I also did this type of work.



The most delicious are the young, small pigs, since they have less fat.



This is my house.

15 Beyond identities—collaborative and participatory methods

As I argued in Chapter 2, social sciences often reproduce reified and essentialist views of identities. Reified and essentialist notions of identities are not only fallacious, but potentially dangerous. Smith (2021) made the point well, explaining that essentialist assumptions validate discrimination, oppression, and genocide. Essentialism is key to most, if not all, ideologies that dehumanise particular groups of people. Similarly, Stanton (2004 and 2005) in his eight-stages model of genocide argued that classification and symbolisation are the ‘early warnings’ that preceding dehumanisation and violence. Nueva Germania emerged historically as a project which was based upon an essentialist and xenophobic understanding of Germanness and Jewishness. Although the initial anti-Semitic ideology that motivated the founders of the settlement failed to develop into horrendous dehumanising forms (in contrast to Europe), essentialist views of different identity categories still persist in the area. This is, of course, not unique to Nueva Germania as, arguably, across the world today we can find people and political structures that are reliant upon reified and essentialist view of identities. Due to its inherent inaccuracies and also due to its potential for misuse, an essentialist understanding of human beings should be actively worked against both in social sciences and in politics.

The issue at hand goes further than essentialist identity categories, as it also relates to all scholarly reductive representations of individuals and society. Relying on a limited set of axiomatic assumptions, which lead to somehow reductive representations of reality, is an inevitable limitation in all specialised scholarly pursuits. The dangers of reductive representations, however, are particularly weighty in the social sciences, risking limited or inaccurate explanatory models, and confining people to simplistic categories or concepts. Devereux argued that singular explanations make the studied phenomenon ‘perfectly comprehensible, controllable and foreseeable in terms of its own specific frame of reference’ (Devereux 1978, 1). As a solution, he argued for the necessity of both pluridisciplinarity and complementarity. In a similar fashion, Rapport asked the question: ‘How to resist the temptation [...] to reduce social experience to single models?’ He calls for us to be distrustful of the notion of essences and of claims that reality can be described accurately, singularly and holistically. An anthropological account should ‘maintain [...] a conversation between different ways of being in the world; as reality is multiple so its realistic representations might eschew any singular, authoritative framing’ (Rapport 1997, 191). In practice, both authors argue for a complementary juxtaposition of different types of analysis and description.

In line with these ideas, I have attempted in this book to produce a diverse and complementary portrayal of Nueva Germania and its inhabitants, utilising methodology and a specially chosen form of representation. This book intertwines collaboratively generated stories of twelve persons, all of whom have chosen different subjects that they find interesting and important to share with the wider world. Even though in some of the accounts specific individuals might resort to reductive culturalist or identitarian logic, it is through the juxtaposition and the number of diverse perspectives, including the analytical framing of myself as the anthropologist, and through the use of both text and photographs as a medium allowing different forms of interpretation, that such reductive thinking becomes delegitimised within the pages of the book. This chapter elaborates on elements of such anti-essentialist methodology as are espoused in the monograph.⁴⁹

Collaborative storytelling

Narrative life story research allows us to represent persons beyond both emic and etic reductive categories. Through a focus on individual particularity, this method allows us to transcend such categories (including national and ethnic identities). This method does not eliminate identity and category-thinking, but does help us to overcome it. Categorisation is inevitable as it is the very foundation of language, and it also shapes and mediates social interaction. Simmel, one of the founders of

⁴⁹ This chapter draws upon and expands arguments previously made in Kurzwelly 2019 and Kurzwelly and Escobedo 2021.

sociology as a discipline, argued: ‘in order to know a man, we see him not in terms of his pure individuality, but carried, lifted up or lowered, by the general type under which we classify him’ (2010, 10). In other words, we are bound at least to some extent, to conceptually and symbolically classify, and classifications influence our perception and cognition. This is true both in regard to classifying others, as much as it does when classifying oneself. As I argued in Chapter 2, the narration of a story about oneself (which often will include reductive and reified categories) is the very basis through which one establishes an imaginary sense of persistence and continuity as a person—a sense of personal identity. In that sense, reductive classifications are inevitable.

Reductive and reified classifications and identities are not absent from the stories presented in this book, and many people have used them in their accounts. However, the danger of them becoming dominant and singular interpretations is neutralised by representing a plurality of different aspects of people’s lives, and through the intertextual⁵⁰ complementarity which occurs by contrasting the different accounts with each other. While some of the interlocutors used essentialist identity categories, this kind of categorisation constitutes only parts of their accounts. For example, in Danilo’s story he said that Paraguayans and Germans should not marry each other, as these marriages can cause problems (a view he adopted from others, as he also remarks on how schooling of Germans and Paraguayans was separate in the generation of his parents but no longer is so nowadays). Yet this statement is presented amongst other ideas during an account of daily life, of work on the farm and details about going to school. He appears through the story as a young person who cannot be easily reduced to a single category. Simply reducing him to being ‘German’ would be a mistake. The juxtaposition of his story with those of others, including those who identify as Paraguayan, to an extent neutralises Danilo’s essentialising statement and any strong division of people into ethnic or national categories. Out of the intertextual complementarity of diverse voices, Nueva Germania emerges as a place of numerous stories and numerous categories. It is not just a place of ‘Germans’ and ‘Paraguayans’, but also a place of quotidian life, of tending to animals, of going to school, of motorcycles, of poor peasants’ struggles, of politics, religion, church and football. Most importantly, however, it is a place where individuals live, all of them with their own separate personhood and very different life concerns.

Working with life stories and detailed ethnographic accounts, instead of with structurally over-determined identities and simplistic categorisations, allows us to bring forth a humanising individuality. As Rapport has argued:

⁵⁰ ‘[...] intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another’ (Kristeva and Roudiez 1980, 36).

[...] the individual discloses the human. “Humanistic narratives” portray the efforts to make meaning that are common to the lives of Everyone. Through the stories of particular lives, of individuals amid the histories of their own particularities, social science can offer a global authority to the possible authenticity of individually conducted lives. (2009, 199)

Abu-Lughod (1991) called such approaches ‘ethnographies of the particular’, a form of ‘tactical humanism’ that opposes simplistic and fallacious categorisations intended of freezing and solidifying differences between groups of people and resulting in forms of ‘othering’ that anthropology and other social sciences were, and often still are, guilty of.

Storytelling, moreover, should also be seen as a practical resource that people can employ to craft own representations and meanings. In that sense it changes the balance of representational authority in anthropological writing. It is not only the conceptual interests of the researcher—considerations about ‘identities’ in the case of this book—but also the concerns and representational preferences of the interlocutors that make it into final printed outputs and circulation. It recognises people as narrators and thinkers in their own right, affording them a platform as active interlocutors rather than passive research subjects. It also offers the researcher an opportunity to bracket and critically reflect on their own interests, positions and politics (see Wahab 2005). In other words, this methodology carries both potential epistemic and ethical benefits (see Fluehr-Lobban 2008 and Lassiter 2005).

Photographic complementarity

It is not only through text and collaboratively written stories, but also through photographs, that this book avoids an epistemic closure. Photographs in this book fulfil different functions—ranging from descriptions of places (as in the story of Waltraud or Mercedes), historical remembering (as used by Gerda or Klaus), political statements (some images made by Cecilio or Arnold), to insights into one’s psychological vulnerability (as in the story of Abel). Photography is a versatile ethnographic tool, allowing for different kinds of meanings.

Much of scholarly theorisation about photography focuses on its relation to a physical or external reality and apparent objectivity. John Berger posed a question: ‘Are the appearances which a camera transports a construction, a man-made cultural artifact, or are they, like a footprint in the sand, a trace naturally left by something that has passed?’ (Berger and Mohr 2016, 94). Many theorists ascribe varying weights to the subjective input of the photographer in shaping the image, and to the physical processes that give the medium a tone of objectivity. The intention is often to pin-point the trace or indexicality of photographic images, which, many will argue, gives them a different status than other forms of art or communication. These discussions quite often compare painting to photography, claiming that the

first is only a subjective interpretation while the latter has a less subjective status. Or as Berger put it, 'Photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them' (2016, 98). Such debates are, however, highly dependent on one's metaphysical stance. They are of lesser importance in revealing the ethnographic potential of the medium. What makes photographs so versatile for our purposes, are the variety of their social uses and possible interpretations. I'll refer to the story of Abel Pavon, and the images he took with the help of his sister, to briefly mention some of the different intertextual and complementary meanings which photographs, together with text, can provide.

A very common use of photography relies on the assumed trace to external reality and as a proof or documentation of it. To an extent, Abel's photographs were intended to have an indexical outcome. We are being given a glimpse into how the house and its surroundings appear, how it must be difficult to move in a wheelchair on the sandy ground, or how charcoal is produced. The images function as a deixis: they point towards the different physical truths of that author's reality. By seeing it, the viewer ought to be convinced that this is how it 'really' is. This conviction should be stronger than those resulting from any possible utterance about the subject, since photographs do not lie. Such use of photography often relies on the higher trust afforded in the medium.

In parallel to serving as evidence, Abel's photographs represent an intangible psychological reality, identity, and social relations. The images show not only the elaboration of charcoal or heavy machinery, but also a family occupation, the source of subsistence and identity. Through text and images Abel wants to represent his family as *campesinos*, as peasants, whose self-definition is closely related to their relationship with work, place, animals and family. We could argue that in the accident Abel lost not only bodily mobility but also his occupation, his social roles and thereby his work-related identities. Abel is no longer seen by others as a *campesino*. Note that Abel's photographs have been carefully taken to hide the wheelchair from view, and he told me that he did so on purpose. Abel does not want to be constantly perceived through the prism of the wheelchair, to be reduced to his disability. These images are his objection to such a reductive view of him. Through posing with his parents and lecture notes, and choosing this photograph to begin his story with, he tells us that he wants to be seen as a member of a family and a student. This relates to the discussion about the importance of identities in Chapter 2.

As argued in Chapter 2, social identities such as nationality or ethnicity, are for some people of crucial psychological importance, aiding in the constitution of their sense of personal identity. Perhaps the identity of being a *campesino* was of similar importance to Abel? Alongside the loss of bodily mobility and tremendous physical pain, he also ceased to be a *campesino*, a strong man that provides for others, and became dependent on the help received from his family. Additionally, he not only suffered from disability as a bodily condition, but also from the ascription of the unwanted identity category of a 'handicapped' person. Crafting new roles and iden-

tities, becoming a student, are not easy, but give hope for a different future and a reinforced sense of self-worth. Abel's photographs are part of such an intervention to not only represent himself differently, but to contribute to such a transformation of how he is perceived. The complementarity of images and text facilitates a glimpse into an otherwise hardly accessible world of inner thoughts and emotions. It is this potential that makes photography, and photo-voice in particular, a useful anthropological too.

The making of photographic meanings is a multi-layered process that does not limit itself to the initial choice of frame and the brief moment of releasing the shutter; in our case it is crafted in complementarity with text, and continues through the editing and publishing process, and through a confrontation with the reader's gaze. There is only so much that authors can control, and the meanings further depend on the readers interpretation. The very act of looking bears the expectation of meaning (Berger and Mohr 2016, 113–21). The meanings are thus not set across time and context, and most certainly will differ and keep changing. As authors, Abel and I tried to *anchor*⁵¹ the meaning through text and through this analysis. This is only possible within the confines that language permits, since '[...] not all thought processes take place in language, and they routinely incorporate various non-linguistic and non-symbolic modes of thinking and being that operate beyond or at the threshold of language [...]' (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016, 71). This refers to Gadamer's (2013) hermeneutic approach, in which all meanings are contextual and historical. Thus, an act of interpreting a text (a work of art or a photograph are in this sense texts as well) involves a 'fusion of horizons'—an ongoing process of a dialectic tension, or a dialogue, between the text's horizon in the past and the reader's horizon in the present. At the same time, however, the authors attempt to set the boundaries of interpretation, through the choice of frame, the *anchorage* through description, and a careful choice of intertextuality between different images and the accompanying text and analysis.

It is important to keep in mind this tension between attempts to confine meaning, and meaning escaping its confines. Berger emphasized how photographs can resist time by immortalizing an instant in which the image has no past and cannot lead to the present, only potentially providing evidence of one slice of time-space. As an example, he mentioned photographs of deceased people who were familiar to the viewer, which particularly evoke this rupture in time, provoking uneasiness or discomfort with the discontinuity and absence. Yet, on the other hand '[t]he significance of the instant photographed is already claiming minutes, weeks, years' (Berger and Mohr 2016, 105), since the photograph is interpreted with additional intertextual meanings; and if not provided, such meanings are given by imagination,

⁵¹ The concept of *anchorage* was developed by Barthes (1977, 38–40). Barthes (2006) also famously made a distinction between the interpretation of photographs as *studium*—a detached, political, historical or other interpretation of a photograph; and *punctum*—a touching, personal and emotional interpretation.

empathy, categorizations, history, etc. In this sense, photographs and words have a similar potential for the telling of stories. Pairing them together, photographs and words provide the possibility of a complementarity of different modes of perception and thinking, a complementarity that can be helpful in avoiding singular and reductive representations of social reality.

Understanding emic essentialism and using etic processual terms

Anthropological methods and analyses ought to transcend essentialist and reductive representation, while at the same time, they should help us to understand emic essentialism as a social phenomenon (as proposed in Chapter 2). For this purpose, collaborative methods are insufficient in and of themselves, and the resulting text could still be interpreted as giving legitimacy to essentialist and reified categories. Etic analysis and description ought to make sure that this does not happen.

In the stories included in this book, and in Nueva Germania more generally, some people do at times employ identitarian narratives based on prejudice and stereotypes, and use them as explanations of different social phenomena. This could also be interpreted as motivated by a desire for simple explanations and clarity. For example, a person identifying as German-descendant, who fell victim to a series of cattle thefts explained these events by attributing Paraguayanness to the thieves and affirming that Paraguayans are lazy and immoral. This allowed him to adopt a simple explanation, a positionality and collective judgment based on reductive identities, and by extension a positive evaluation of himself. On the contrary, a consideration of all aspects of the social phenomena of theft, in the complex context of very unequal distribution of resources, would make it harder to draw simple conclusions and explanations, leading to potential ambiguity and uncertainty. Note too that the same may be true about the thieves, who could have felt that in stealing from a rich *gringo* (as people seen as German are often pejoratively called) was morally justified. We ought to interpret these emic usages of identity categories as valuable ethnographic information, and at the same time take care not to reproduce them in etic description.

Rapport (2020) argued that such essentialist and reductive identitarian thinking provides a shorthand for understanding of the world; affording clarity, positionality, attributing value to social categories and establishing a sense of hierarchy. This form of thinking can also become especially enticing when facing the insecurity, ambiguity and precariousness of life. Having to face others who might want to undermine one's worth and place in society, or when facing other forms of injustice, one might wish to gain some certainty via essentialist and reductive concepts, as a shorthand way to make sense of oneself and of others. Reductive and essentialist identity thinking renders the world into definite, stable and comprehensible shapes. Adopting a positive

reductive understanding of self and social identities can provide a sense of security and worth, a clarity made of simple answers, although this can be at the cost of those who find themselves on the negative, receiving end of such reductionism (see Kurzwelly, Fernana, and Ngum 2020). Reductive identity thinking contributes to a sense of unified self, as argued in Chapter 2, and provides a clear understanding of social reality. Although these ideas lead to simple judgements and prescriptions for behaviour, they potentially also give one an increased sense of agency and noticeable reduction in uncertainty and ambiguity. This makes identity thinking attractive for psycho-emotional reasons. It would be, however, a methodological error to take such narratives at their face value, and to reinstate the logic of our interlocutors as analytically valid.

Transcending emic essentialist categories happens, on the one hand, through representational and intertextual complementarity, as argued above. On the other hand, it is the role of analysis and adequate analytical concepts to support this effect, to anchor the life-stories and photographs in an anti-essentialist framing. One simple but effective intervention is to resist the use of identity categories as qualifying adjectives, and move towards terminology that stresses and reflects the processual, performative and contextual nature of social identities. In this sense, identities are not fixed social kinds, they are not *what we are*, instead they are actions and behaviours that *we do*, ideas *we believe in*, stories that *we tell*, and ways in which others perceive and approach us (things that others *do to us*). A person is not German or Paraguayan, but identifies and/or is identified as such. A person is not black or white, but can be racialised as such, or can self-racialise as such. In response to essentialist categories, we should not uncritically assume such categories of practice, but instead use adequate processual terms—such as racialisation instead of race (see Malinowska and Żuradzki 2023), ethnicisation instead of ethnicity, identification, or *ascription of* identity, rather than identity.

There are many ways in which essentialist thinking is reproduced in socio-cultural anthropological writing (see Kurzwelly, Rapport, and Spiegel 2020b). It can be due to a view of society as a single coherent symbolic system, an identitarian culturalism, an uncritical use of emic categories as analytically valid, or other theoretical errors, many of which may be corrected by applying a fluid and contextual view of social identities, as I have argued for in Chapter 2. Essentialism in social sciences can also be a result of methodological shortcomings, such as a research attitude that imposes analytical categories onto social reality, reifying them in the process, a reductive representation of individuals, or research driven by a single issue and thus communicating a single story. Such methodological shortcomings, as this chapter argues, can be partially mitigated through collaborative and multi-media (or polyphonic) research. In the case of identities it is also important to carefully distinguish between emic and etic categories, and to resist treating the first as analytically valid. This is made possible when we make a shift from the use of fixed adjectives, and instead employ terminology that emphasises the processual and contextual character of identities.

References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing Against Culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard Gabriel Fox, 137–54. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- . 2006. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Berger, John, and Jean Mohr. 2016. *Another Way of Telling: A Possible Theory of Photography*. London: Bloomsbury
- Chibber, Vivek. 2013. *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. London: Verso.
- Cox, Rupert, Andrew Irving, and Christopher Wright, eds. 2016. *Beyond Text? Critical Practices and Sensory Anthropology*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Das, Raju. 2020. "Identity Politics: A Marxist View." *Class, Race, Corporate Power* 8 (1). <https://doi.org/10.25148/CRCP8.1.008921>.
- Das, Raju. 2023. "Why Is Identity Politics Not Conducive to Achieving Sustained Social Justice?" *Dialectical Anthropology* 47 (1): 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-022-09673-6>.

- Dennett, Daniel. 1992. "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity". In *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, edited by Frank S. Kessel, Pamela M. Cole and Dale L. Johnson. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Devereux, George. 1978. *Ethnopschoanalysis: Psychoanalysis and Anthropology as Complementary Frames of Reference*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Eidson, John R., Dereje Feyissa, Veronika Fuest, Markus V. Hoehne, Boris Nieswand, Günther Schlee, and Olaf Zenker. 2017. "From Identification to Framing and Alignment: A New Approach to the Comparative Analysis of Collective Identities." *Current Anthropology* 58 (3): 340–59. <https://doi.org/10.1086/691970>.
- Fischer, Manuela. 2015. "Images from the colony Nueva Germania in Paraguay." In *Exploring the Archive: Historical Photography from Latin America. The Collection of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin*, edited by Manuela Fischer and Michael Kraus. Köln: Böhlau Verlag.
- Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. 2008. "Collaborative Anthropology as Twenty-First-Century Ethical Anthropology". *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1 (1): 175–82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cla.0.0000>.
- Forrest, Peter. 2020. "The Identity of Indiscernibles." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed January 10, 2024. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/identity-indiscernible/>.
- Förster-Nietzsche, Elisabeth. 1891. *Dr. Bernhard Förster's Kolonie Neu-Germania in Paraguay*. Berlin: Commissions-Verlag der Actien-Gesellschaft "Pionier".
- Fraser, Nancy. 2008. "From Redistribution to Recognition: Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age." In *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*, edited by Kevin Olson, 9–31. London: Verso.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2013. *Truth and Method*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gallihier, Renee V., Kate C. McLean, and Moin Syed. 2017. "An Integrated Developmental Model for Studying Identity Content in Context." *Developmental Psychology* 53 (11): 2011–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000299>.
- Galton, Francis. 2001. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. Electronic edition. <http://galton.org/books/human-faculty/text/human-faculty.pdf>.
- Gluckman, Max. 1973. *Custom and Conflict in Africa*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble.
- Gottschalk, Sebastian, Heike Hartmann, Stefanie Müller, and Arnulf Scriba, eds. 2016. *Deutscher Kolonialismus, Fragmente Seiner Geschichte Und Gegenwart*. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum.
- Graeber, David. 2015. "Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality': A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.003>.

- Holst, Enrique. 2005. *Deutsche in Paraguay: Eine Schilderung Über Deutschsprachige Einwanderer Im Crazon de America Und Deren Vereine*. Asunción: Arandurá Ed.
- Hull, George. 2022. "Epistemic Ethnonationalism: Identity Policing in Neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality Theory." *Acta Academica* 54 (3): 131-55. <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa54i3/7>.
- Hume, David. 2009. *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. Auckland: The Floating Press.
- Katz, Jacob. 1998. *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Kraus, Daniela. 1999. "Bernhard Und Elisabeth Försters Nueva Germania in Paraguay: Eine Antisemitische Utopie." PhD diss. University of Vienna. https://www.fjum-wien.at/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/daniela_kraus_thesis_nuevagermania-1.pdf.
- Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S. Roudiez. 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Kurzweily, Jonatan. 2017. "Being German and Being Paraguayan in Nueva Germania: Arguing for 'contextual epistemic permissibility' and 'methodological complementarity'." PhD diss. University of St Andrews. <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/12180>.
- . 2019a. "Being German, Paraguayan and Germanino: Exploring the Relation Between Social and Personal Identity." *Identity* 19 (2): 144–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1604348>.
- . 2019b. "Photographic Complementarity, and the Story of Abel Pavon." *Visual Anthropology* 32 (5): 460–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2019.1671752>.
- Kurzweily, Jonatan, and Luis Escobedo. 2021. *Migrants, Thinkers, Storytellers: Negotiating Meaning and Making Life in Bloemfontein, South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Kurzweily, Jonatan, Hamid Fernana, and Muhammad Elvis Ngum. 2020. "The Allure of Essentialism and Extremist Ideologies." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 43 (2): 107–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2020.1759435>.
- Kurzweily, Jonatan, Moira Pérez, and Andrew D. Spiegel. 2023. "Identity Politics and Social Justice." *Dialectical Anthropology* 47 (1): 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-023-09686-9>.
- Kurzweily, Jonatan, Nigel Rapport, and Andrew D. Spiegel. 2020. "Encountering, Explaining and Refuting Essentialism." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 43 (2): 65–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2020.1780141>.

- Kurzwelly, Jonatan, and Malin S Wilckens. 2023. "Calcified Identities: Persisting Essentialism in Academic Collections of Human Remains." *Anthropological Theory* 23 (1): 100–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14634996221133872>.
- Lassiter, Luke E. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Locke, John. 1997. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Penguin Books.
- López Moreira, Mary Monte de. 2015. *Historia Del Paraguay*. Asunción: Servi Libro.
- Malinowska, Joanna Karolina, and Tomasz Żuradzki. 2023. "Towards the Multi-leveled and Processual Conceptualisation of Racialised Individuals in Biomedical Research." *Synthese* 201: 11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-04004-2>.
- Martin, Keir. 2020. "Subaltern Perspectives in Post-Human Theory." *Anthropological Theory* 20 (3): 357–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499618794085>.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1887a. Letter, "An Elisabeth Förster in Asuncion, [aus] Nizza (France) pension de Genève, den 11. Nov. 1887." Nietzsche Source, Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe, eKGWB/BVN-1887, 949. <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1887>.
- . 1887b. Letter, "An Elisabeth Förster in Asuncion (Entwurf), [aus] Nizza, Ende Dezember 1887." Nietzsche Source, Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe, eKGWB/BVN-1887, 968. <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1887>. My translation.
- . 1887c. Letter, "An Elisabeth Förster in Asuncion (Entwurf), [aus] Sils-Maria, kurz vor dem 5. Juni 1887." Nietzsche Source, Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe, eKGWB/BVN-1887, 854. <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1887>. My translation.
- Okamura, Jonathan Y. 1981. 'Situational Ethnicity'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4 (4): 452–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1981.9993351>.
- Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Clarendon Press.
- Pulzer, Peter G. J. 1988. *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2003. *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Rapport, Nigel. 1997. "Edifying Anthropology. Culture as Conversation; Representation as Conversation." In *After Writing Culture, Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*, edited by Andrew Dawson, Jenny Hockey, and Allison James, 177–93. London: Routledge.

- . 2009. "Power and Identity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Power*, edited by Stewart Clegg and Mark Haugaard. London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021014>.
- . 2020. "Britain and Brexit: Imagining an Essentialist Sense of 'Britishness' and Navigating amongst 'the British'." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 43 (2): 94–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2020.1740604>.
- Reed, Adolph. 2018. "Antiracism: A Neoliberal Alternative to a Left." *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (2): 105–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-017-9476-3>.
- Roccas, Sonia, and Marilynn B. Brewer. 2002. "Social Identity Complexity." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6 (2): 88–106. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0602_01.
- Simmel, Georg. 2010. *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, David Livingstone. 2021. *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stanton, Gregory H. 2004. "Could the Rwandan Genocide Have Been Prevented?" *Journal of Genocide Research* 6 (2): 211–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462352042000225958>.
- . 2005. "Early Warning." In *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, edited by Dinah Shelton. Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale.
- Wahab, Amar. 2005. "Consuming Narratives: Questioning Authority and the Politics of Representation in Social Science Research." In *Critical Issues in Anti-Racist Research Methodologies*, edited by George J. Sefa Dei and Gurpreet Singh Johal, 29–51. New York, NY: P. Lang.

Nueva Germania, a rural Paraguayan settlement, was founded at the end of the nineteenth century as a racist, eugenic, and anti-Semitic project. Its founders, Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Nietzsche, hoped to create the nucleus for a new Germanic empire far away from Jewish influence. This history is often used to portray present-day inhabitants of Nueva Germania through a reductive prism of events long past. Nueva Germania is, however, a place where different identities and ways of life intertwine, providing an excellent historical and ethnographic point of departure. This book argues that social identities—such as nationality, ethnicity, or race—are best understood as things we do and stories we tell, rather than things we are. The illusory sense that identities constitute fixed and essential characteristics of people can partially be explained through the significance attributed to identities in the process of generating a sense of a continuous and persistent self. By elaborating on this link between social and personal identities this book elucidates the basis for an anti-essentialist theory. Contesting essentialist and identitarian modes of thought is an urgent undertaking not only in social theory, but also as a political act in the context of the global rise of movements and ideologies that prey on such logic.

The book's additional novelty lies in the collaborative research on which it is based. Twelve participants tell stories from their lives which they themselves considered to be important, using words and photographs as the vehicles of their communication. Some elements of these stories are analysed in the theoretical chapters, while other aspects are left to speak for themselves. This methodological and ethical choice breaks with the conventional imposition of a singular scholarly lens. The polyphony of voices introduces Nueva Germania as inherently constituted from different perspectives. This approach transcends identitarian interpretations and proposes a way by which the social sciences might move beyond essentialist identities.

Jonatan Kurzweily
is a Senior Researcher at the
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt in
Germany and a Research Fellow at the
Department of Anthropology, University
of the Free State in South Africa.



 GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN

ISBN: 978-3-86395-636-3
ISSN: 2365-3191
eISSN: 2512-7055

Göttingen University Press