

undo the outside itself, precisely because she mocks the fiction of cosmological exteriority and thus reclaims the capacity for self-transformation according to unauthorized and co-authored terms. Thus, the *Puye* may proclaim raucously that vice is life, that *urusori* is the only form of reason that makes sense these days. She stumbles and trips across three zones of nonlife at once, a living death and deathly life that is the mirror image to the differentiation and homogenization of the human/nonhuman that is the technique of colonial terror, a mimetic difference the *Puyedie* sell, eat, and smoke. Lines of flight devolve like the delirious mocking words of the *Puyedie* themselves into opposing negative images at the same time, chanted like an incantation to the herky-jerky rhythms of negative becoming in a hypermarginal world.

Her voice was hoarse, her speech slurred:

I was young when I came.
 Before the bus station.
 I was young when I came.
 I was pretty.
 I lived with my gold teeth.
 I was a doctor!
 I was a doctor!
 Now I have no teeth, you see.
 But I was a doctor!
 It is because of my vice.
 I was a doctor!
 Now I have beer!
 Now it is cocaine paste!
 It is shoe glue!
 It is alcohol!
 I was a doctor.
 I left him because he was jealous.
 Listen to me.
 I was young.
 I was beautiful.
 I had gold teeth.
 They killed me.
 It doesn't matter to me!
 Here I am.

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Comments

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Fugitive Field

For over a decade, the intrepid Lucas Bessire (2006, 2011a) has been chronicling the postcontact travails of one of the world's last voluntarily isolated group of hunter-gatherers, who walked out of the forest in northern Paraguay in the early 2000s. Using multiple and intense genres of engagement—deep ethnography, affective filmmaking, and fast-paced theorizing—Bessire argues that the Ayoreo people are best considered not as a “society against the state” (as Clastres [2007] would say) but rather as “ex-primitives” (in Geertz's [2001] words), as they struggle to be present in contexts shaped by endless violence, arbitrary neoliberal economic policies, myopic cultural politics, and unforgiving humanitarianisms (see Biehl 2013:588–591).

This dense, well-argued, and provocative article stems from Bessire's engagement with people known as *Puyedie* (Prohibited Ones), a group of Ayoreo-speaking people whose destitution and marginality are extreme even among the already-marginal Ayoreo. Traversing multiple “nonlives,” the *Puyedie* self-objectify their defacement and inhumanity to unexpected ends, both deadly and vital. Their “hypermarginality” contradicts narratives of multicultural triumphalism, and their fraught existence calls to question a primitive ontology “that is non-interiorizable by the planetary mega-machines”—in Eduardo Viveiros de Castros's (2010:15) elegant but, in this context, vacuous words.

In heartbreaking if all too brief vignettes (more expansion and intermediary steps, please!), the culturally dead *Puyedie* intrude into Bessire's theoretical prose (yes, let some abstraction go and scale back!) and tell us, right to our faces: “Here I am.” They are the beacon of a “suspicious anthropology,” one that is confronted with no “easy escapes of a stable outside” but only “flows of rupture” or “negative immanence.” Bessire draws from this strange vitality, and from various bodies of contemporary social theory, to craft both a critical and an affirmative direction in this article, written as it is with a prophetic urgency: repeople anthropological thought!

The critical dimensions of the article shed light on the politics and scholarship around indigeneity in Latin America today. Bessire shows how recent realignments of governance, market, and citizenship have amplified “preexisting unequal-

ities to the point whereby those excluded from the matrix of culture are no longer deemed worthy of the same kind of life, if they are worthy of any life at all.” At the same time, critical primitivist anthropology, searching for radical possibility in Amerindian ontology, “risks reproducing a crucial metanarrative that liberalism tells about itself and thus reanimating the colonial space of death for ex-primitives like the Ayoreo.”

Bessire thus powerfully suggests that both multicultural politics and neoprimitivist discourses, by valorizing authentic indigenous culture, may work to further exclude and debase “ex-primitives”—those who have lost that connection to culture that would give their lives value. In this way, he sounds an important cautionary note concerning the ontological movement in contemporary anthropology. Bessire claims are compelling and provocative and deserve both engagement and fuller treatment: Are there, for instance, historical and political connections between scholarship on indigeneity and the crafting of multicultural policies in Latin America? Also, is there an alternative form of politics that his lens of hypermarginality might make visible?

The article’s affirmative dimensions hinge on the *Puyedie*’s “everyday sensibilities,” which, Bessire suggests, may have the power to transfigure objectification and disregard. Although the *Puyedie*’s experience is legible only as negation for other Ayoreo, the anthropologist argues for the creativity involved in the *Puyedie*’s transformation of hypermarginal spaces into “zones of livable life, authorized or otherwise”—something akin to what I called “vital plurality” elsewhere (Biehl 2013: 592). Bessire asserts that, in order to unmask the organizing force that a politically revitalized culture concept exerts, and to rescue the possibilism present in the most degraded human conditions, anthropology must summon a “radical optimism.” This call is bold and inspiring, yet I would be interested to hear whether and how Bessire’s radical optimism escapes the charges of wishful thinking that he attributes to indigenous emancipatory politics, as well as to neoprimitivist scholars in search of radical otherness. How different is it?

Bessire’s work is timely and terribly important, and both the ethnographic corpus and critical social theory are better because of it, rehumanized through it. But there is something in the structure of this article that remains unsettled and calls for further thought. In particular, the relationship between the critical and affirmative dimensions of the argument are less clear than the author may have intended. An ethnographic fleshing out of “negative immanence” is in order, as is a deeper reflection on that “will” that defiantly embraces self-negation, and those people who exercise such a will. This would be a chance for all of us to listen and learn, even more intently, from Bessire’s ceaseless returns to these intolerable fields and fugitive entities.⁵

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Bessire’s piece introduces disturbing ethnographic vignettes of homeless Ayoreo—mostly women—known as *Puyedie* (Prohibited Ones) to characterize the effects of the rise of a new regime that fuses politically indigenous culture and legitimate life and evokes its own negative image in the form of the deculturated. By focusing upon the most miserable living conditions, the author questions three current trends in anthropological explanations. Against scholars suggesting that indigenous activism has revitalized and reoriented democracy for all citizens in Latin America, he argues that a new regime of “biolegitimacy” has redistributed rather than diminished socioeconomic inequalities in Latin America. Against those who celebrate the purported incommensurability of primitive cosmologies, the author urges for a political anthropology capable of showing that the multicultural politics of recognition operate in and through the systematic negation of the humanity to a new indigenous subset: “the supposedly deculturated ex-primitive,” abandoned to social death. Against public anthropologists who engage either in culture fetishisms to support strategic essentialisms or in a critical stance that ignores the social life of culture entirely, Bessire argues for a decolonizing ethnographic praxis, capable of accounting for “the fractured and desiring subjectivities of the ex-primitive.” All three caveats are pertinent indeed as a general starting point.

Therefore, hypermarginality emerges as the theoretical concept Bessire proposes to give account of the stigmatized and deterritorialized form of exclusion based upon a culturalization of legitimate life that denies the protections of citizenship to actually existing indigenous alterities, that is, to unruly indigenous subjects deemed as deculturated and thus exposed to violent extermination. Amid a backdrop of neoliberal structural violence and social depersonalization, he interprets the negative immanence of becoming a *Puye* less as a psychopathology produced by the disintegration of culture than as a form of embracing a self-conscious moral desubjectification.

Now, assessing the global dynamics of a neoliberal politics of recognition—done in and through coalescing the effects of heterogeneous policies that can both instantiate and subvert cultural rights—is as problematic as judging how oppositional are the “disordered subjectivities” of Ayoreo-speaking *Puyedie*, seen as “forms of immanence that simultaneously instantiate and subvert the contradictory meanings and values attributed to indigenous ‘life as such’ within the contemporary.” Among other things, issues of social and personal agency are at stake in both debates. To be brief, are all the Ayoreo-speaking non-*Puyedie* duped by the promise of cultural rights? Do they not display practices that “simultaneously instantiate and subvert

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