

# THE PARAGUAY READER

HISTORY,  
CULTURE,  
POLITICS



*Edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson*

## The Paraguay Reader

## THE LATIN AMERICA READERS

Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

### THE ARGENTINA READER

Edited by Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo

### THE BRAZIL READER

Edited by Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti

### THE COSTA RICA READER

Edited by Steven Palmer and Iván Molina

### THE CUBA READER

Edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff

### THE ECUADOR READER

Edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler

### THE GUATEMALA READER

Edited by Greg Grandin, Deborah T. Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby

### THE MEXICO READER

Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson

### THE PARAGUAY READER

Edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson

### THE PERU READER, 2ND EDITION

Edited by Orin Starn, Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk

## THE WORLD READERS

Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

### THE ALASKA NATIVE READER

Edited by Maria *Shaa Tláa* Williams

### THE CZECH READER

Edited by Jan Bažant, Nina Bažantová, and Frances Starn

### THE INDONESIA READER

Edited by Tineke Hellwig and Eric Tagliacozzo

### THE RUSSIA READER

Edited by Adele Barker and Bruce Grant

### THE SRI LANKA READER

Edited by John Clifford Holt

# THE PARAGUAY READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

*Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson, eds.*

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS    *Durham and London*    2013

© 2013 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Typeset in Monotype Dante by BW&A Books, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data appear  
on the last printed page of this book.

# Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction i

## I *The Birth of Paraguay* ii

The Foundation of Human Speech, *León Cadogan* 15

Contact, Servitude, and Resistance, *Branislava Susnik* 21

Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay,

*Elman R. Service* 28

The Land-without-Evil, *Hélène Clastres* 32

The Republic of Plato and the Guaraní, *José Manuel Peramás* 37

A Vanished Arcadia, *R. B. Cunninghame Graham* 41

The Revolt of the Comuneros, *Adalberto López* 46

## II *The Nationalist Experiment* 53

A Report on Paraguay in the London Press of 1824, *Anonymous* 55

A Nation Held Hostage, *Justo Prieto* 60

In Defense of Doctor Francia, *Richard Alan White* 65

Autonomy, Authoritarianism, and Development, *Thomas Whigham* 70

The Treaty of the Triple Alliance 75

"I Die with My Country!," *Thomas Whigham* 82

A Chronicle of War, *Leandro Pineda* 90

The Lomas Valentinas Note, *Francisco Solano López* 96

Memoirs of the Paraguayan War, *Gaspar Centurión* 99

The Women of Piribebuy, *Juan O'Leary* 104

The Death of López at Cerro Corá, *Silvestre Aveiro* 108

Sufferings of a French Lady in Paraguay, *Dorotea Duprat de Lasserre* 113

Declaration and Protest, *Eliza Lynch* 118

The Psychology of López, *William Stewart* 125

### III A Slow Recovery 129

- Paraguayan Society in the Postwar Decade, *Harris Gaylord Warren* 131  
The "Lincolnshire Farmers" in Paraguay, *Annie Elizabeth Kennett* 138  
My Pilgrimage to Caacupé, *Norman O. Brown* 143  
What It Is Like to Work in the Yerba Plantations, *Rafael Barrett* 146  
The Treatment of Tree Fellers and Timber Workers,  
*Reinaldo López Fretes* 153  
The Golden Age (Without a Nickel), *Helio Vera* 159  
The Causes of Poverty in Paraguay, *Teodosio González* 163  
The Mennonites Arrive in the Chaco, *Walter Quiring* 168  
The Paraguayan Character, *Juan Sinforiano Bogarín* 172  
The Paraguayan People and Their Natural Tendencies,  
*Natalicio González* 178  
Cultural Exile, *Agustín Barrios* 184  
Profession of Faith, *Agustín Barrios* 186  
A New National Ideology, *Oscar Creydt, Obdulio Barthe, Anibal Codas,*  
*and others* 188

### IV From the Chaco War to the Civil War 193

- Capturing Volunteers, *Carlos Federico Reyes* 195  
The Battle of Boquerón, *Alfredo Seiferheld* 198  
Memoirs of a Man from Concepción, *Carlos María Sienra Bonzi,*  
*as told to Roberto Sienra Zavala* 203  
A Visit to Villa Hayes Military Hospital Number 16,  
*Reginald Thompson* 208  
Scenes of Thirst, *Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá* 211  
A Handful of Earth, *Hérib Campos Cervera* 213  
Proclamation of the Febrerista Revolution, *F. W. Smith*  
*and Camilo Recalde* 216  
How Beautiful Is Your Voice, *Ernesto Unruh and Hannes Kalisch* 220  
The Revolution of 1947, *Carlos María Sienra Bonzi, as told*  
*to Roberto Sienra Zavala* 228  
A Half Hour in My Childhood, *Eva Bichsel* 232

### V Dictatorship and Resistance 235

- Toward a Weberian Characterization of the Stroessner Regime,  
*Marcial Riquelme* 239

The Revolutionary Spirit of the Colorado Party, <i>Luis María Argaña</i>	244
The Tragedy of Fram, <i>Jorge Rubiani</i>	248
Be Careful, Dictator, <i>Elvio Romero</i>	253
The Worm inside the Lotus Blossom, <i>Graham Greene</i>	255
A Short History of the Northern Ache People, <i>Kim Hill</i>	261
The Testimony of Saturnina Almada	270
An Interview with Corsino Coronel	275
Apocalypse, <i>Alfredo Boccia</i>	281
My Farewell Speech, <i>Carmen de Lara Castro</i>	290
The Death of Somoza, <i>Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll</i>	294
My Vote Is for the People, <i>Alcibiades González Delvalle</i>	298
Paraguay's Terror Archive, <i>Andrew Nickson</i>	300
"A Hundred and Eight" and a Burned Body, <i>Anselmo Ramos</i>	305
The Final Report of the Truth and Justice Commission, <i>Andrés D. Ramírez</i>	309
Alfredo Stroessner: Revisiting the General, <i>Isabel Hilton</i>	314

## VI *A Transition in Search of Democracy* 321

We Have Left Our Barracks, <i>Andrés Rodríguez</i>	325
Reestablishing the Status Quo, <i>Andrew Nickson</i>	326
My Deepest Respects to the Colorado Party, <i>Helio Vera</i>	331
The Characteristics of Oviedismo, <i>Milda Rivarola</i>	334
In Homage to the Victims of Ycuá Bolaños, <i>Luis Irala</i>	338
Where Are They?, <i>Alberto Rodas</i>	341
The Ayoreo People, <i>Mateo Sobode Chiquenoi</i>	342
So Much Exoticism Can Be Deceptive, <i>Alfredo Boccia</i>	348
Inaugural Presidential Speech, <i>Fernando Lugo Méndez</i>	350
First Person: Margarita Mbywangi, <i>Margarita Mbywangi,</i> <i>as told to Jude Webber</i>	355
Lessons on Paternity from Lugo, <i>Clyde Soto</i>	357
Itaipú: A Historic Achievement That Will Need to Be Closely Monitored, <i>Ricardo Canese</i>	362
A Fine Woman, <i>Andrés Colmán Gutiérrez</i>	367
Ciudad del Este's Deadly Trade Route, <i>Jude Webber</i>	370
The Challenge of Conserving a Natural Chaco Habitat in the Face of Severe Deforestation Pressure and Human Development Needs, <i>Alberto Yanosky</i>	376



<b>VII</b>	<i>What Does It Mean to Be Paraguayan?</i>	383
	History, Identity, and <i>Paraguayidad</i> , <i>Peter Lambert</i>	385
	Change and Continuity in Paraguayan History—1811, 1911, 2011, <i>Andrew Nickson</i>	394
	The Arcadian Tragedy, <i>George Pendle</i>	400
	The Bicentenary of Paraguayan Independence and the Guaraní Language, <i>Miguel Ángel Verón Gómez</i>	404
	People of African Descent in Paraguay, <i>Ignacio Telesca</i>	410
	Authoritarian Ideology: Final Comments, <i>Guido Rodríguez Alcalá</i>	417
	With the Help of Doña Petrona We Make an Incursion into Folk Cuisine, <i>Helio Vera</i>	420
	Enough of the Triple Alliance!, <i>Jorge Rubiani</i>	422
	Tereré as a Social Bond, <i>Derlis Benítez Alvarenga</i>	426
	The Status of Women, <i>Riordan Roett and Richard Scott Sacks</i>	433
	Self-Portrait, <i>Bernarda</i>	437
	María and the Serpent, <i>Pepa Kostianovsky</i>	443
	Erico, <i>Jorge Barraza</i>	446
	Recipe for Chipa Guazú, <i>Doña Aída</i>	449
	The National Anthem in Guaraní, <i>Félix de Guaranía</i>	450
	Epilogue: The Impeachment of President Fernando Lugo	451
	Suggestions for Further Reading	457
	Acknowledgment of Copyright and Sources	463
	Index	471

# Illustrations

## PLATES, FOLLOWING P. 52

Historical map of South America

The Jesuit mission at Trinidad

The “Lincolnshire farmers” arrive in Paraguay

Book cover, *Erico para siempre* (Erico forever)

Advertisement promoting Paraguay’s 2010 World Cup campaign,  
with Salvador Cabañas as the “Mariscal”

*Días de Gloria* (Days of glory), young people protesting an attempted coup  
outside the National Congress in March 1999

World Wildlife Fund maps showing deforestation in Paraguay (1945–2009)

Typical “arcadian” rural landscape in Paraguay

“*Plata Yvyguy*” (Hidden treasure), two panels of a triptych by Enrique  
Collar

## FIGURES

### *Introduction*

Map of Paraguay 2

### I *The Birth of Paraguay*

Grupo Anabsónico “Wu’o” performing a ritual dance to exorcise  
demons and using rattles for music 22

Portrait of a *cacique* of the Toba tribe of Chaco Indians 35

### II *The Nationalist Experiment*

Portrait of Dr. Francia 68

Portrait of President Carlos Antonio López 72

Illustration by Saturio Rios: Mocking the Triple Alliance 76

Illustration by Saturio Rios: The Triple Alliance threatens Paraguay,  
which is personified as Liberty and Justice 83

Illustration by Saturio Rios: Pedro II suffocates Mitre and Flores  
with the cap of Liberty 85

x *List of Illustrations*

- Illustration by Saturio Rios: Mitre and the watchmaker 87  
Illustration by Saturio Rios: Mitre and Flores carrying Pedro II 87  
Portrait of President Francisco Solano López 97  
Paraguayan prisoners of war 105  
Portrait of Eliza Lynch 119

III *A Slow Recovery*

- “Emigration to Paraguay: Caution to Emigrants” 139  
The *mensú* carrying heavy loads of yerba mate 147  
Puerto Pinasco tannin factory 154  
Indian workers dance at Puerto Pinasco 155  
1904 Revolution street scene 165  
Cigar-smoking *bolichera ambulante* (traveling saleswoman) sits at  
the side of the road 173  
Asunción market scene, circa 1900, featuring Paraguayan staple food,  
*mandioca* (cassava) 181  
Agustín Barrios in costume as “Chief Nitsuga Mangoré” 187  
Liebig’s Extract of Meat Company advertisement 191

IV *From the Chaco War to the Civil War*

- Paraguayan troops moving guns during the Chaco War 199  
Tattered Paraguayan soldier and his mule, transporting water  
during the Chaco War 206  
Musical band entertaining the troops 214  
The Paraguayan Central Railway 233

V *Dictatorship and Resistance*

- Peasant League booklet in Guaraní 276  
Peasant League demonstration 278  
Signed photograph of Alfredo Stroessner 303  
Postage stamp of the Itaipú hydroelectric plant 318

VI *A Transition in Search of Democracy*

- Portrait of President Fernando Lugo 351  
The Itaipú hydroelectric plant on the River Paraná 363  
Recruit poses in front of the flag of the Paraguayan People’s Army  
(EPP) 368  
Portrait of the Swiss-born naturalist Moisés Bertoni 377

VII *What Does It Mean to Be Paraguayan?*

- Tereré, the national drink of Paraguay 427

## Acknowledgments

The production of a work as complex as the *Reader* has necessarily involved the help, encouragement, and support of many people. At the end of what has been a fascinating, enjoyable, and exhausting process we find ourselves greatly indebted to friends and colleagues alike.

We would like to thank our editors, Valerie Millholland and Miriam Angress, who have been supportive of this project from the moment we first approached Duke University Press right through to completion. We would also like to thank the various interns and others at Duke who have helped us throughout the process. Our special thanks go to the extremely efficient, patient, and ever-positive Vanessa Doriott Anderson, who was tireless in her support, especially in the laborious task of contacting authors and publishing houses for permissions, and Maura High, our outstanding copy editor. We could not have hoped for a more helpful publishing team.

We were also very fortunate to be able to count on the invaluable and generous support of two dear friends who played an integral role in the production of the *Reader*. In England, Nick Regan was an extraordinary proof-reader with a great eye for detail and a masterly command of English that helped turn our often stilted translations into fluent and poetic texts, always finding the *mot juste*, however long it took. His knowledge of Paraguayan culture and language as well as his advice and suggestions were invaluable. In Paraguay, the journalist Andrea Machaín carried out the painstaking work of contacting authors and publishing houses in order to obtain copyright permissions. We could not imagine completing the *Reader* without the help of these two friends.

We would also like to thank all the living contributors who were so generous in offering their work for inclusion. It is remarkable that despite the economic recession, not one author requested payment for their work, not one refused our request to include extracts from their work, and many of them went beyond the call of duty in helping with the *Reader*. It was truly a pleasure to work with such esteemed writers. We would especially like to thank Alberto Yanosky of Guyrá Paraguay and Thomas Whigham of the

University of Georgia for having responded so positively to our requests for texts specially written for *The Paraguay Reader*.

Our friend Martin Romano in Paraguay has been an inexhaustible source of information—always replying immediately to our questions about historic documents, local copyright law, and graphic images. Like Martin, Jorge Rubiani, Javier Yubi, and Milda Rivarola have opened up their personal collections of historic images and postcards for viewing, for which we are most thankful.

We would also like to thank the following people. In Asunción: Martin Burt, director of the Fundación Paraguaya, Rogelio Cadogan, Roberto Céspedes at UNDP, María del Carmen Fleytas of the Fundación Bertoni, Roberto Villalba and Clyde Soto of the Centro de Documentación y Estudios, Rosa Palau, director of the Centro de Documentación y Archivo, Museo de la Justicia, Jorge Barraza, Carlos Salcedo Centurión, Margarita Morselli, director of the Centro Cultural de la República El Cabildo, and Raquel Zalazar at the Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero. Thanks also go to Benno Glauser of the Iniciativa Amotocodie in Filadelfia and Margaret Hebblethwaite in Santa María. We very much valued the advice of other friends in Paraguay including Ricardo Flecha, Techí Cusmanovich, José Rivarola, Mati Da Costa, and Carlos Carvallo.

In the United Kingdom we would like to thank Pauline Thorington-Jones of the University of Birmingham, Vania Vitillo of the University of Bath, and Joseph Nickson for their great help in scanning high-resolution images for us. Thanks also go to Robert Munro, Claudia Regan, Jeremy Howat, Ricardo Medina, and Hugh O'Shaughnessy, as well as Jimmy Cadogan in Australia. We would also like to thank the historian Thomas Whigham (again), who with his vast knowledge of Paraguayan history was a constant source of help and advice, and Will Fowler at the University of St. Andrews, who generously offered to read through the entire text and offered very useful suggestions, as well as providing much-needed encouragement at a critical time.

Finally we would of course like to thank our wives Yasmina and Carolina, who have supported (as well as *soportado*) us over the time it took to write the *Reader*. Peter would also like to thank his young children, Pablo, Khalil, and Felix, for putting up with a dad who kept disappearing into his office for far too long.

# Introduction

Paraguay has long been seen as one of the forgotten corners of the globe, a land falling off our conscious map of the world, a place that slips beneath the radar of most diplomats, academics, journalists, and tourists in Latin America. Even backpackers, who may spend months in neighboring countries, rarely spend more than one reluctant night in transit in Asunción.

Part of the reason for this is that Paraguay is a country defined not so much by association as by isolation. It has been variously referred to as the Tibet of Latin America (in the nineteenth century it was called the “China of the Americas”), a mysterious place cut off from the rest of the continent. The renowned Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos famously remarked that Paraguay’s landlocked isolation made it like an island surrounded by land. Indeed, hemmed in by the vast, arid Chaco to the west and impenetrable jungles to the east (at least until the 1960s), Paraguay’s access to the outside world was limited to the River Paraná and the cooperation (or not) of Buenos Aires, for long the administrative and commercial center of the region, and a gateway to the sea. As a result, Paraguay is exceptional in the degree to which it has been defined by isolation and difference from its neighbors, from Latin America, and from the wider world. This isolation is epitomized by the resilience of Guaraní as the preferred language of the vast majority despite repeated official efforts to impose Spanish and the fact that the indigenous population is extremely small (under 2 percent). Indeed, even in colonial times, the Spanish simply gave up trying to impose their own language beyond official arenas, and instead adopted Guaraní.

Isolation is also related to internal communications. Paraguay is almost as large as France yet it has a population of only seven million. With most people living in urban areas, it is a very sparsely populated country, and one which has only been opened up (through massive deforestation) relatively recently. Nowhere is this clearer than in the countryside, where until only a few decades ago isolated communities seemed to lie adrift in the “oceans” of surrounding cattle land and forest, cut off from modernity.

It is also a land of contrasts. The Itaipú hydroelectric plant, jointly owned by Paraguay and Brazil, is the world’s largest, with an installed capacity of



Map of Paraguay. By Bill Nelson.

14,000 megawatts, generating around 90 million megawatt hours of electricity, yet Paraguay still has no heavy industry to speak of. The shopping malls and mansions of parts of Asunción would not be out of place in the richest suburbs of the developed world, but are often just a few blocks away from shacks, reflecting Paraguay's huge inequality in wealth, land, and power. Authoritarianism has been the political norm since independence, yet Paraguay has a rich history of people's struggle for social justice. It is the fourth largest exporter of soy (and home to infamous "green deserts" of agroindustrial, highly mechanized production), yet the majority of farmers use traditional subsistence techniques on tiny plots of land. In many towns gleaming

four-wheel-drive vehicles still compete at the traffic lights with horses and ox-pulled carts.

Yet Paraguay is also a nation in transition. While it may be true that no other Latin American country has managed to slip under the international radar, and avoid the spotlight of media attention and planeloads of tourists quite as effectively as Paraguay, the image of a quaint country stuck in a time warp is unlikely to last for much longer. Paraguay is developing and globalizing fast. It is a major exporter of electricity, soy, and beef; its economy grew by 14 percent in 2010, the second fastest in the world; and it has one of the world's largest deposits of titanium, recently discovered in the northeast of the country. Asunción is waking up from its long siesta to the pressures of a rapidly growing population, the choking smell of fumes from seemingly unending traffic jams, and the fear of crime around every corner. In the east, new vibrant cities are emerging, buoyed by commercial agriculture, as well as drug trafficking and contraband. Over half a million Brazilians now live in Paraguay, mostly working in (and often controlling) lucrative agricultural projects, and representing a powerful political force. The deafening whine of locally produced Chinese mopeds has replaced the sound of crickets in most town squares, mobile phones exceed the number of citizens, and supermarkets are rapidly replacing tiny family *despensas*. Membership of Mercosur, a regional economic bloc set up in 1991 with Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, has helped drag Paraguay into the globalized world of trade and customs agreements to the disquiet of traditional *contrabandistas*. Even the military seems to have been caught a little off guard and since 1989 have largely retired from politics back to their barracks.

However, this long, historical isolation (geographical, cultural, and political) has meant that Paraguay has been largely neglected by historians, journalists, and travel writers, leading to a dearth of serious writing on its history, politics, society, and culture. This has led to considerable misunderstanding of the country based on lack of knowledge. Ignorance has allowed Paraguay to become a perfect blank space for others' writing and imaginings, where nothing seems too far-fetched, where exaggeration and imagination may go unchallenged. For centuries Paraguay has been exploited by writers of popular history, fiction, travel, and lifestyle—writers who have fallen into the trap of merely applying or repeating stereotypical images, ideas, and perceptions. Viewing Paraguay with a mix of suspicion, humor, fondness, and disdain, they have too often glided over complex issues of culture and politics, replacing them with tired references to either crazy wars, endemic corruption, Nazi war criminals, and savage natives or tin-pot dictators and brutal tyrants. In Graham Greene's *Travels with My Aunt*, Paraguay



is the moral end of the line, the orange-blossom-scented paradise where the opposition is routinely “disappeared,” where smuggling is a national industry, where corruption is rife, and where generals rule with an iron fist. Paul Mazorsky’s film *Moon over Parador* perpetuated the myth of the nation defined by corruption and dictatorship, as did Robert Carver’s recent foray into cliché and myth in *Paradise with Serpents*. Paraguay becomes a dystopia, a land corrupted by man’s most base instincts.

In the midst of all this, Paraguay has become a byword for a strange, exotic land, falling off the edge of our mental maps of the world—Latin America’s answer to Timbuktu. Repeatedly presented as an isolated and underdeveloped cultural backwater, a dangerous but attractive land where magical realism and reality seem to collide, it is often portrayed as the epitome of exoticism, peculiarity, and exceptionalism, in a self-perpetuating circle of myth and stereotype. Indeed, whether by ignorance or design, myth and cliché have managed to replace reality in much of the reporting and travel writing on the country. Such an image is insidious because it conveniently overlooks and ignores (and even eradicates) the less sensationalist reality of a country struggling against underdevelopment, foreign intervention, poverty, inequality, and authoritarianism, of individual and collective struggles for social justice against enormous odds, and of a nation that has developed a rich, diverse, and fascinating cultural heritage.

It is also an image that is difficult to shake off, as the national soccer team has experienced. Despite having appeared in four consecutive World Cup finals between 1998 and 2010 and being ranked among the top ten national teams in recent years by FIFA, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, Paraguay is still seen as a surprise package, a small plucky nation somewhat out of its depth against international opposition, more akin to Jamaica, Slovakia, or Tunisia than to the “greats” alongside it in the rankings. Such invisibility is not limited to soccer, but is apparent in far more important arenas, such as trade, investment, tourism, diplomacy, and politics, with damaging results.

It is true that some of these stereotypes are rooted in history. Paraguay does have a history of authoritarian rule, from the nineteenth-century nationalist dictators to the infamous General Alfredo Stroessner, who, when he was overthrown in 1989, was the longest-ruling tyrant in Latin America (and almost the world). When Fernando Lugo won the presidential elections in 2008, it was the first time that power had peacefully changed hands between parties in Paraguayan history. Levels of corruption have indeed been significant, from the days of General Stroessner, who defined it as the “price of peace,” to 2002, when Paraguay came 129th out of 132 coun-

tries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and the then president (Luís González Macchi) was found to possess a stolen BMW. Paraguay has indeed provided refuge for an array of dictators (Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza, for example), Nazi war criminals (Josef Mengele, the "Doctor of Death" at Auschwitz, and Eduard Roschmann, the "Butcher of Riga"), and international fraudsters. These factors are undeniable elements of Paraguayan history, but a historian could easily focus on such elements to categorize or ridicule any other country; reality is more complex and less damning.

Yet this image of Paraguay exists alongside another myth—that of the *Lost Paradise*, the *Vanished Arcadia* (to quote just two book titles on Paraguay). For centuries the country has been regarded as a potential utopia, a land where anything is possible, a land simply waiting to be turned into a tropical paradise; the "land without evil" as Guaraní mythology terms it. From the writings of the Jesuits to the epic poem *A Tale of Paraguay* published in 1825 by the English poet laureate Robert Southey, to Roland Joffe's 1986 film *The Mission*, Paraguay is portrayed as an unspoiled land, a pre-industrial utopia, a blank canvas for the creation of paradise on earth.

This may not have been altogether true—the arid Chaco desert in the west provided little opportunity for settlement until the resilient Mennonites began to settle there in the 1920s—but the lure of Paraguay has remained constant. For centuries foreigners have viewed the country through their own ideological and religious gaze, often seeking to create their own utopias over existing realities. When combined with the fact that Paraguay has long been seen as an underpopulated refuge, a land for new beginnings and endless opportunity, it is easy to explain the waves of immigration over the past 150 years. Despite, or perhaps because of, its isolation, Paraguay has been a melting pot of immigrants; Spanish, Italian, German, Balkan, Middle Eastern, black African, Russian, Japanese, Korean, South African, Latin American (the list goes on) have all mixed in Paraguay, leaving a distinct impression on language, food, music, and culture in general. Some have sought to retain their identity, most notably the Mennonites, and the former escaped slaves at Cambá Cué near Asunción, but most have been assimilated into the *teko*, the Paraguayan way of life.

Isolation has also led the country to suffer a number of unique experiments throughout its history. The Spanish soon realized that Paraguay was not El Dorado, nor did it provide a viable route to the riches of the Andes; rather, it offered a relatively safe and comfortable location for settlement. The Spanish settlers took advantage of less hostile, friendly (or simply terrified) local indigenous peoples to create a colony based initially on the con-

cept of family ties (harems in exchange for peace) rather than genocide, giving rise to an allegedly more cohesive population. The Jesuits created an empire within an empire through their *reducciones* or settlements, in which Guaraníes were organized into productive communities, indoctrinated into Catholicism, but protected from marauding Brazilian slave traders. When independence came in 1811, Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia sought to avoid the anarchy and chaos of other newly independent Latin American states by establishing a dictatorship that destroyed the power of the Spanish elites (he forbade marriage between whites), the church, and the landowning class. This experiment was developed by his successor Carlos Antonio López (1840–62), the “Great Builder of the Nation” who oversaw Paraguay’s emergence as an important regional power, complete with railway, telegraph lines, a shipyard, and an iron foundry. And throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thousands of migrants ventured into the interior of the country, seeking to create their own experiments in taming the land and establishing new communities, based on nationality, religion, ideology, or simply to begin anew.

Paraguayan history also reflects a strong element of tragedy, or idealism betrayed or at least corrupted. The Spanish conquerors soon resorted to traditional forms of repression to dominate their indigenous “family”; the Jesuits were expelled in 1767 and the “reductions” fell into ruin while their inhabitants were either enslaved by landowners who had long resented the Jesuits or fled into the forests. Francia became a feared tyrant who imprisoned his opponents (and erstwhile friends), while Francisco Solano López, the son of Carlos, led Paraguay into the catastrophe of the Triple Alliance War (1864–70) in which the destruction wrought by the allied forces of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay brought a dramatic end to Paraguay’s state-led development.

The following eighty years were defined by political conflict, authoritarianism, and instability as Paraguay struggled to recover from defeat. Indeed, when Stroessner took power in 1954 he was the thirty-fifth president in fifty-four years. The period also contained another major international war, this time against Bolivia over the disputed Chaco region (1932–35). Paraguay gained in terms of territory (inhospitable, desolate, and arid as the “Green Hell” may have been) but lost some thirty to forty thousand lives in the process, many of them from thirst. Scarcely recovered, the country fell into a brutal civil war (1947) and then, seven years later, into the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. Stroessner continued Paraguay’s isolationist stance, while cashing in on U.S. support for anticommunist allies during the Cold War and crushing his “subversive” opponents in the name of the defense of

Western civilization. Together with his cronies, he ruled Paraguay harshly, thinly concealed beneath a veneer of democracy, of “peace, progress, and work,” as his own propaganda maintained.

Even the transition to democracy rapidly became tainted. Led by Stroessner’s former military strongman, General Andrés Rodríguez, who deposed Stroessner in a military putsch in 1989, the transition introduced a new constitution, free elections, and civil liberties, but ensured a strong dose of continuity. The Colorado Party, the mainstay of the Stroessner dictatorship, continued to win elections throughout the next two decades, despite the growth of corruption, poverty, and inequality, economic mismanagement and stagnation, crisis and political infighting. Only in 2008 did the opposition candidate, the former bishop Fernando Lugo, manage to end over sixty years of Colorado rule and usher in his aptly titled “new dawn” for Paraguay. Unfortunately, even the new dawn fell short of popular expectation because the new president, not helped by his admissions of having fathered various illegitimate children, was unable to push through much-needed reforms.

However, beyond this stereotypical image of an exotic mix of paradise lost, of tragedy and former grandeur, of a forgotten land of magical realism, where anything seems possible, Paraguay holds an unrelenting fascination for those who have the honor and pleasure of getting to know it. The rhythms of *guaranias* and polkas, the poetry of the Guaraní language, the scent of jasmine and orange blossom, the music of the crickets, the red color of the earth, the extensive unbroken landscapes, and the measured pace of life are emotional ties that continue to draw and enchant visitors. Both of the editors found their initial short visits extend into years and then into a lifetime relationship. With that relationship came the discovery, as this book aims to show, of an extraordinarily rich history and cultural heritage.

Our aim in writing *The Paraguay Reader* has been to produce an enjoyable, informative, and well-structured anthology of writings on the politics, society, and culture of the country. We have sought to include texts that will be accessible to a wide and varied readership but that are analytical and significant in their own right. Throughout we have contextualized the extracts, many of which are abridged, by using explanatory (and hopefully engaging) introductions. In the broader sense, we have striven to produce a body of work that would include the best writing on what we feel are the key issues, events, and trends in Paraguayan history. Over the course of nearly two years we consulted, debated, argued, and agonized over what texts to

include and what not to include—whether we should prioritize depth or breadth of coverage, the aesthetic or the practical, complexity or simplicity of analysis. We would not claim to have always reached the right decision and accept the inevitable criticisms of aspects that we have left out or overlooked. However, we have painstakingly gone through every source that we have found or been guided toward in order to judge whether or not we should include it. The result is a final book that fulfills our initial aims and that we feel is a worthy tribute to the wealth of writing on Paraguay.

The *Reader* is divided into seven sections that cover issues of politics, society, and culture. Six sections are chronological, from the first, “The Birth of Paraguay,” to the sixth, “A Transition in Search of Democracy.” The sections vary in length, since we wished to give a more contemporary emphasis to the volume. Hence we have tried to create a balance, giving major historical events (such as the Triple Alliance War and the Chaco War) due attention, but at the same time expanding the more contemporary sections. The final section, “What Does It Mean to Be Paraguayan?,” examines key issues surrounding identity—ranging from national identity and cultural characteristics to ethnicity, language, and gender. We felt this section was essential, in that it provides an insight into the multiple expressions and dimensions of ever-changing identities in Paraguay, which in turn are essential for a deeper understanding of the country’s history, culture, and society. The special focus of this section also allowed us to group together fascinating extracts that would have been misplaced or lost in the chronological sections.

Wherever possible we have tried to include “voices from below” or at least contemporary accounts by Paraguayans, thereby giving priority to how ordinary people saw and experienced major events. This decision did, however, pose a specific problem in the case of Paraguay, primarily for reasons of language. Historically the majority of the population, and especially rural and poorer sectors, have expressed themselves in Guaraní rather than Spanish. Guaraní is an oral language (even today very few people write in Guaraní) and this fact, combined with low levels of literacy and education, has resulted in a lack of written historical testimonies and memoirs “from below” in comparison with many other Latin American countries.

Related to and partly as a consequence of the above, the most revealing, interesting, and engaging observations are often found in the writings of foreign travelers and residents. We have therefore included a number of pieces written by foreigners, but in all cases the criterion used for their selection is that they are the best piece of writing available on a specific theme.

Wherever possible we have also tried to use voices from the period under consideration. However, again, suitable extracts have often been difficult to find, and thus in some cases we have opted for more recent analyses, by outstanding historians, who we feel deserve a place in the book. Thus, we have included writings by, for example, Branislava Susnik, R. B. Cunningham Graham, Harris Gaylord Warren, Ignacio Telesca, and Thomas Whigham because we felt they were the clearest, most analytical, and objective writings available. However, in general, we opted against most of the (dozens of) academic books that we ploughed through on the grounds that they were not sufficiently accessible, or that they lacked the concise analysis we required, or because we found an alternative piece that was more from the period itself or “from below.”

Most of the texts that we selected are being published in English for the first time. We translated them ourselves but used the services of a professional proofreader who offered the advantage of having lived in Paraguay for many years and who is also very knowledgeable about Paraguayan history, politics, and culture. As a result we believe the translations are of a very high quality, not only in terms of grammatical and linguistic accuracy, but also in terms of style, fluency, and “voice.” Such is the high standard of the end product that many of them sound, at least to us, not only authentic but also as if they had originally been written in English.

We are particularly proud of some of the texts that have not been previously published in any language or which carry particular significance in the *Reader*. For example “Lincolnshire Farmers,” “How Beautiful Is Your Voice,” and “The Psychology of López” are all published here for the first time, while “The Sufferings of a French Lady” was published just once in Buenos Aires in 1870 and is hardly known. The English translation of “The Foundation of Human Speech” was written by León Cadogan himself for a distant cousin, and we publish it here for the first time. Many other texts are simply off the radar of mainstream publishing and academic libraries.

We took the decision early on to use the introductions to each extract in order to contextualize the piece, fill in any presumed gaps in the knowledge of the reader, and highlight its importance, uniqueness, or significance. The result is that the introductions may be a little long in some cases, but this ensures that each extract stands on its own feet, allowing the reader to dip into the book as he or she pleases and to gain a more complete understanding of the text.

We have tried to be as eclectic as possible in terms of the tone, style, and nature of the extracts we have chosen. Hence we have included examples

of testimonies, light-hearted journalistic pieces, academic analyses, political tracts, poetry and song, literature, and even a recipe. At the same time we have also tried to cover all major historical events, sectors, and issues—although we are painfully aware that there will be some inevitable gaps.

As we have discovered, and despite our best efforts, it is of course impossible to reflect Paraguayan history, society, and culture in a single volume. What we have therefore tried to do is to give the reader a multifaceted insight into the country through a number of different political, historical, cultural, and social lenses. By varying the kinds of texts included we believe that the *Reader* will be able to engage a very broad readership; it should prove fascinating for academics researching or writing on Paraguay (we certainly learned a huge amount ourselves about the country in the process of editing this manuscript); it serves as a very useful point of reference for students of Latin America; and it is sufficiently accessible to be of interest to those simply interested in Paraguay, whether active travelers, arm-chair adventurers, or prospective visitors. Hopefully, if nothing else, it will stimulate interest to find out more by following our suggestions for further reading.

As we noted at the beginning of this introduction, Paraguay has long been represented as a blank canvas or as a backdrop for the location of utopias, dreams, and even dystopias. This has necessarily led to an ignoring of Paraguayan history and the silencing of Paraguayan voices. Given this, we hope that *The Paraguay Reader* will make a small contribution to our collective knowledge and understanding of this fascinating country, its people, and culture. We hope that, in so doing, it will help dispel the many myths about the country, and that it will strike a small blow for people's history over fantasy, cliché, and stereotype.

## *The Birth of Paraguay*

The first *conquistadores* to enter what is now Paraguay came in search of gold: Aleixo García traveled overland from the Atlantic coast of Brazil in 1524 en route to upper Peru in present-day Bolivia and, in 1528, Sebastian Cabot sailed up the River Paraguay as far as present-day Paraguay. False accounts of the mineral wealth of Paraguay arose because some local *caciques* possessed gold, which came from their intermittent trade with the Incas beyond the Chaco. The first expedition up the River Paraguay to establish settlements in Paraguay was consequently motivated by the mistaken belief that Paraguay was the famed El Dorado. On August 15, 1537, Asunción was founded by Juan de Salazar y Espinoza, and in 1541, when their initial settlement at Buenos Aires was abandoned in the face of attacks from hostile Pampa Indians, the Spaniards sought refuge in Asunción.

For the next fifty years the town became the headquarters of the Spanish conquest of the southern half of South America, as well as a strategic outpost for repelling Portuguese expansion westward by *bandeirantes* (marauding gangs in search of slaves) from Brazil. As the starting-off point for expeditions to create eight new settlements, Asunción became known as the *madre de ciudades* (mother of cities). When in 1549, the fruitless Chaco expedition of Domingo Martínez de Irala returned to Asunción with the news that upper Peru had been conquered from the Pacific, it became clear that Asunción would not be the gateway to the silver mines of Potosí or El Dorado. In 1617 a royal decree separated Buenos Aires from the province of Paraguay, after which Asunción declined in importance as the colonial administration was transferred to Buenos Aires. With no gold or silver mines to attract further immigration from Spain, and with no outlet to the sea, Paraguay became an economic backwater and remained isolated and weakly integrated into the world economy throughout the rest of the colonial period.

Henceforth, the indigenous peoples of Paraguay soon became the primary resource to be exploited by the relatively few conquistadores who remained in the province, especially after 1615, when growing attacks by



bandeirantes forced the colonial authorities to divert human resources to the military defense of the province. From 1600 Indians were principally used for the production of yerba mate (Paraguayan tea), which soon became the major export throughout the colonial period. To this end, two radically different means of institutionalizing control over the indigenous peoples were employed, which ultimately came into conflict: that of the *encomienda* system of tribute in the form of forced labor, and that practiced by the Jesuit missions. The introduction of the *encomienda* system led to a radical change in the relationship between the Spanish and the indigenous people, as alliance and friendship were replaced by exploitation. The *pacto de sangre* that produced the predominantly mestizo population, which resulted from miscegenation between the Spanish and indigenous peoples, was achieved through *rancheadas*, the violent abduction of Indian women whom the conquistadores used as concubines, keeping as many as fifty each. There were eighteen major rebellions in opposition to the *rancheadas* and the *encomienda*, from the uprising of Jueves Santo in 1539 to the repression at Areca'yá in 1660, generally led by spiritual leaders called the Ñande Ru, who sought a return to the precolonial integrity of Guaraní culture that had been shattered by the conquest.

In the early seventeenth century, foreign Jesuits began to evangelize the Guaranís of eastern Paraguay, many of whom had fled from the area around Asunción after the Spanish conquest. They established autocratic but self-sufficient economic units in thirty fortified settlements, called *reducciones*, which reached a population of over 200,000. Political tensions arose between the *encomenderos* (rural landowners) and the Jesuits over the appropriation of Guaraní labor for the production of yerba mate. This tension erupted in armed conflict in 1649–50 during the governorship of Bernardo de Cárdenas and more seriously, in the Comuneros rebellion (1721–35) led by the mestizo elite against what they saw as Spanish support for the privileges of the Jesuits. Although the leaders of the rebellion were executed, their objectives were eventually achieved in 1767, when the Jesuits were expelled from Paraguay and the rest of Latin America.

The seventeenth century was a period of territorial retrenchment and demographic stagnation for the province of Paraguay, and there was virtually no further European immigration during the century. Constant attacks by Chaco Indians and bandeirantes gradually whittled down the effective size of the colony, which by 1676, had been reduced to the area of the present-day metropolitan area of Asunción and the largely self-contained Jesuit missions in the southeast of the province.

The eighteenth century was a period of gradual territorial and demographic growth, assisted by the process of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) and the extinguishing of the *encomienda* system. With the introduction of cattle ranching, forestry and tobacco, the period also saw the gradual diversification of the provincial economy away from extreme dependence on yerba mate, and the beginnings of economic growth. In 1776, nominal control over Paraguay passed from Lima to the newly created Viceroyalty of the River Plate. The Bourbon Reforms introduced by King Carlos III had a significant impact on Paraguay, relaxing trade restrictions, and integrating Paraguay more closely into the regional economy of the River Plate. Foreign trade rose rapidly as commercial traffic on the River Paraguay increased substantially. This acceleration of economic activity encouraged the immigration of foreign merchants from the 1780s, who soon challenged the political and social hegemony of the traditional *encomendero* elite and gained a foothold in the *Cabildo* (municipal council) de Asunción, thereby contributing to the growing independence movement. After three centuries of external control and geographical isolation, a strong basis for a nationalist sentiment had been created in Paraguay, as the Spanish Empire began to collapse at the beginning of the nineteenth century.



# The Foundation of Human Speech

*Transcribed by León Cadogan*

*Language is central to the indigenous culture of the Guaraní and is reflected in the strong oral tradition of contemporary Paraguay. This is exemplified by the following opening passage of the greatest text of Guaraní literature, the classic sacred chant and creation story of the Mbya-Guaraní, Ayvu Rapyta (The foundation of human speech).<sup>1</sup> The story was first recorded and translated into Spanish in 1949 by Paraguay's foremost anthropologist, León Cadogan (1899–1973), the son of Australian colonists to the Nueva Australia socialist community. Cadogan grew up near Villarica, speaking English and Guaraní, and dedicated his life to the study and defense of the rights of indigenous peoples. The text shows how the very identity of the Mbya-Guaraní depends on a shared language, a willingness to love each other, and adherence to a common religion. So important is language to identity that without a name, a human being ceases to be considered as such. We present Cadogan's own translation into English of the first two chapters of Ayvu Rapyta, which he undertook in 1966 for his cousin, Lillian Williams, in Australia. They are published here for the first time, along with the original notes.*

## *Chapter One: The Habits of the Primeval Hummingbird*

I

Our first father, the absolute one,  
Emerged amidst  
Primeval darkness.

2

He created the divine soles of his foot,  
The little round seat<sup>2</sup>  
In the midst of primeval darkness,  
In the course of his evolution.

3

The mirror of his divine wisdom (organ of sight),  
The divine hear-it-all (organ of hearing),  
The divine palms of his hands and the wand (emblem of power),  
The divine palms of his hands with the flowering branches,  
Ñamanduï created them all in the course of his evolution,  
In the midst of primeval darkness.

4

The flowers which adorned the divine feather headdress<sup>3</sup>  
Were dewdrops.  
Amidst the flowers of the divine headdress,  
The primeval bird fluttered,  
The hummingbird.

5

While our first father was creating, In the course of his evolution,  
His divine body,  
He lived amidst the primeval winds,  
  
Before having conceived his future earthly abode,  
Before having conceived his future heavens  
His future earth  
Which first appeared  
The hummingbird refreshed his mouth:  
He who sustained Ñamanduï with products of paradise,  
Was the hummingbird.

6

Before our true father, the first one,  
Had created his first heaven,  
In the course of his evolution,  
He did not know darkness;  
Although the sun did not as yet exist,  
The reflection of the wisdom of his own heart  
Illuminated him,  
He caused the wisdom contained  
Within his own divinity  
To serve him as a sun.

7

The true father Ñamandu, the first one,  
Lived amidst the primeval winds.

Wherever he stopped to rest,  
The owl produced a shadow,  
And thus caused foreknowledge of night  
To be perceived.

8  
Before the true father Ñamandu,  
The first one,  
Had created his future paradise  
In the course of his evolution,  
Before he had created the first earth,<sup>4</sup>  
He lived amidst the primeval winds.

The original wind amidst which  
Our father first lived is reached,  
Every time that the primeval time-space (winter)  
Is reached

As soon as the primeval time-space ends,  
Announced by the blossoming of the lapacho tree,<sup>5</sup>  
The winds shift to the new time-space;

New winds arise, space-time is renewed,  
And the resurrection of time-space  
Takes place (spring arrives).

## *Chapter Two: The Foundation of Human Speech*

1  
The true father Ñamandu, the first one,  
Out of a small portion of his own godliness,  
And out of the wisdom contained in his  
Own godliness,  
Caused flames and tenuous mist to  
Be begotten.

2  
Having emerged in human form,  
Out of the wisdom contained in his own godliness,  
And by virtue of his creative wisdom  
He conceived the foundation of human speech.  
Out of the wisdom contained within his own godliness,

And by virtue of his creative wisdom  
 Our father created the foundation of human speech,  
 And caused it to form part of his own godliness.  
 Before the earth existed,  
 In the midst of primeval darkness,  
 Before there was knowledge of things,  
 He created the foundation of future human speech,  
 And the first true father Ñamandu  
 Caused it to form part of his own divinity.

3

Having conceived the origin of future human speech,  
 Out of the wisdom contained within his own godliness,  
 And by virtue of his creative wisdom  
 He conceived the foundation of love of one's fellow men.  
 Before the earth existed,  
 In the midst of primeval darkness,  
 Before there was knowledge of things,  
 And by virtue of his creative power  
 He conceived the foundation of love of one's fellow men.

4

Having created the foundations of human speech,  
 Having created a small portion of love,  
 Out of the wisdom contained within his own godliness  
 And by virtue of his creative wisdom  
 He created, in his solitude,  
 The beginning of a sacred hymn.  
 Before the earth existed,  
 In the midst of primeval darkness,  
 Before there was knowledge of things  
 He created, in his solitude,  
 The beginning of a sacred hymn.

5

Having created, in his solitude, the origin of human speech;  
 Having created, in his solitude, a small portion of love,  
 Having created, in his solitude, a short sacred hymn,  
 He pondered deeply  
 About sharing the origin of human speech,  
 About sharing the words of the sacred hymn,  
 About sharing the love for one's fellow men.

Having pondered deeply,  
Out of the wisdom contained within his own godliness,  
And by virtue of his own creative wisdom,  
He created those who could share his godliness.

6

Having pondered deeply,  
Out of the wisdom contained within his own divinity  
And by virtue of his creative power,  
He created the brave-hearted Ñamandu;<sup>6</sup>  
He created him simultaneously with the reflection of his wisdom  
(the sun).

Before the earth existed,  
In the midst of primeval darkness,  
He created the brave-hearted Ñamandu.  
For the father of his future numerous sons,  
For the true father of the word-souls of his future numerous sons  
He created the brave-hearted Ñamandu.

7

Following these things,  
Out of the wisdom contained within his own divinity  
And by virtue of his own creating power,  
To the true father of the future Karaí,<sup>7</sup>  
To the true father of the future Jakairá,<sup>8</sup>  
To the true father of the future Tupá<sup>9</sup>  
He granted knowledge of godliness.

8

Following these things,  
The true father Ñamandu  
To seat herself opposite his own heart,  
Imparted knowledge of godliness  
To the future true mother Ñamandu.

The true father Karaí  
Granted knowledge of godliness  
To whom would seat herself opposite his heart,  
To the true future mother Karaí.

The true father Jakairá, in the same manner,  
Imparted knowledge of godliness  
To the true mother Jakairá.



The true father Tupá, in the same manner,  
 To whom would seat herself opposite his heart,  
 Imparted knowledge of godliness,  
 To the true future mother Tupá.

9  
 For having assimilated  
 Divine knowledge from their own  
 True father,  
 After having assimilated  
 Human speech,  
 After having inspired in love  
 Of one's fellowmen,  
 After having assimilated the series of  
 Words of the sacred hymn,  
 After having inspired themselves  
 In the foundation of creative wisdom;  
 We call these, also,  
 The sublime true fathers of  
 The word-soul,<sup>10</sup>  
 The sublime true mothers of  
 The word-soul.

### *Notes*

1. The hummingbird named in the title of the opening section is considered a messenger of the gods by the tribal shaman.
2. Apyka (little round seat) is a symbol of the incarnation in Guaraní mythology.
3. A feather headdress is an emblem of manhood or masculinity.
4. The first earth was later destroyed by the Flood and replaced by the present world.
5. The blossoming of the lapacho announces the end of winter and coming of spring.
6. The brave-hearted Ñamandu is god of the sun.
7. Karáí is the god of fire.
8. Jakairá is the god of medical lore and sorcerers.
9. Tupá is the god of thunder, rain, and water.
10. "Word" and "soul" are synonymous in Guaraní.

# Contact, Servitude, and Resistance

*Branislava Susnik*

*Relations between the Spanish and the Guaraní evolved rapidly over the first fifty years of contact. Initially, relations were based on mutual benefit and cemented through kinship ties that for the Guaraní at least, were binding. Second came a series of Guaraní rebellions, provoked by perceptions of violation of kinship codes and the gradual demographic decline of Guaraní communities. Once these rebellions had been put down, relations based on kinship were replaced by violent coercion and owner-servant relations, leading to the great pan-Guaraní revolt of 1546, a final and unsuccessful effort to rid their lands of the Spanish. Only in 1551 was the colonial encomienda system imposed.*

*Branislava Susnik (1920–96), Paraguay's foremost anthropologist and the director of the Museo Etnográfico "Andrés Barbero," was one of the most important writers on the relationship between the Guaraní and the Spanish. Her studies dispel the myth of the peaceful encounter and coexistence of the two cultures and argue that while mutual benefit might have characterized initial relations, this state of affairs was soon replaced by the destruction of the Guaraní through both mestizaje and violent repression and persecution.*

## *The First Hispano-Guaraní Contact*

The Guaraní found themselves in an atmosphere of insecurity due to the permanent threat from the Guaicurú and the Payaguaes on the River Paraguay. In addition, interethnic relations were strained, with frequent struggles among the Guaraní themselves.

According to a census carried out by Irala, there were only about four hundred Spanish settlers before the arrival of Alvar Núñez de Cabeza, all of them male, with not a single female settler among them. The Guaraní witnessed the arrival of the four hundred Spanish men; they saw the horsemen, the arquebuses, and the metal, and to them everything seemed absolutely novel and magical. They accepted it because it was new but also because behind it they saw the power of magic.



The Chamacoco people of the northeastern Chaco belong to the Zamuco linguistic family. This photograph, taken in Puerto Diana in 1956, shows members of the Grupo Anabsónico “Wu’o” performing a ritual dance to exorcise demons and using rattles for music. The actors wear masks, paint their bodies according to complex symbolic codes, and don exquisite feather decorations. Photograph by Branislava Susnik. From the collection of the Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero, Asunción.

This conceptualization of the arrival of the Spanish as magical is important and explains why the Guaraní immediately gave the first Spanish arrivals the name of *karaí*, which is derived from the name of *karaíva*, which the ancient Guaraní had called their traveling shamans.

We should bear in mind that for the Guaraní everything of value held a magical connotation and what was not magical held little value . . . magic and not knowledge or understanding. For the Guaraní, knowledge was relative: anyone could acquire it; what was of greatest value was magic.

The Guaraní of the area north of the River Paraná heard of the arrival of the Spanish or *karaí* from the Chandules, the Guaraní of the islands along the River Paraná. The *cacique* of Arambaré (today a neighborhood of Asunción known as Lambaré) and other *caciques* of the area decided to block their advance.

Once they heard of the arrival of the Spanish, they held a war council

and brought together warriors from across the area. However, the attempt to block the advance of the Spanish by the cacique of Arambaré was in fact a purely symbolic act, designed to await the arrival of the Spanish and see what kind of relations they would offer.

After a short and insignificant skirmish with the Spanish, the Guaraní caciques began negotiations with Ayolas, establishing what we can term a pact of interests. The Spanish needed the Guaraní; they had arrived after three months of traveling upriver from Buenos Aires to Asunción, passing through lands inhabited by nomadic hunters, with no crops of any kind, and suffering all kinds of hardship. They arrived in a region where they found crops under cultivation and immediately understood the importance of these as a secure provision of supplies. And even though the Spanish had not come to found Asunción but rather to build a settlement from whence they could continue their search for El Dorado, they immediately understood the importance of settling in a place that was populated by agrarian communities that could meet an important need for supplies.

Furthermore, the caciques offered their young warriors to accompany the Spanish on their expeditions, since they had already heard of Candiré. This explains why the Spanish were able to count on a force of about two or three thousand Guaraní warriors. Thus, they had corn, provisions, warriors to accompany them, and information from the Guaraní regarding where they had previously crossed the Chaco and the Province of Chiquitos in search of El Dorado, all of which represented the basic reason why the Spanish formalized the aforementioned pact.

For their part, the Guaraní were also interested in such a pact. Their first demand that the cacique of Arambaré put to the Spanish during the early stages of the negotiations was for an expedition to wipe out the Payaguaes, especially those who lived on the other side of the River Paraguay from the Guaraní settlements. They demanded that as soon as the first houses had been built on the shore where Asunción now stands, Ayolas should launch an expedition as proof of his friendship. Before he left on his expedition northward up the River Paraguay, Ayolas therefore did indeed take a Spanish force and attacked the Payaguaes, destroying their canoes, and complying with the demands of the Guaraní who required this proof of friendship and alliance.

The Guaraní offered the Spanish their women in order to formalize the pact because in this way they became relatives of the *karaí*. In a Neolithic society such as the Guaraní, only by way of political kinship was it possible to found a true interethnic friendship. Through kinship they could expect

reciprocity, since for the Guaraní, as for all Neolithic peoples in general, to give is to receive, and to offer a favor implies the tacit security of the favor being reciprocated.

In this way we can identify a first phase of interethnic contacts between the Spanish and the Guaraní, characterized fundamentally by relations of friendship between both groups.

### *The Second Phase of Hispanic-Guaraní Contact: The Tapi'i*

Until 1539 the relationship between Guaraní and Spanish was a peaceful one, an alliance based on family ties. Nevertheless, there followed a major change in the system of relations: in 1539 there was a major rebellion among the Guaraní of Asunción.

What is important is the motive behind the decision of the Guaraní caciques to unleash this rebellion that obviously ended in the massacre of the rebels, when the objective was to massacre the Spanish. The fundamental cause was anger due to the failure of the Spanish to treat them as relatives, but instead as *tapi'i*, or servants. The Guaraní had historically considered all those who did not speak Guaraní and were not racially or ethnically Guaraní as *tapi'i*, as slaves, and inferior beings.

When Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca arrived in Paraguay, the policy toward the indigenous people did not fundamentally change. Only that Alvar Núñez, who represented central Spanish power while Irala was an exponent of the so-called *comuneros* in Spain, demanded some regulation of relations with the Indians. Alvar Núñez was the first person to question the disorder that was the result of an already weakened system based on friendship and kinship ties, a system that lacked any kind of regulation and under which each Spaniard felt free to follow his own kind of relationship with his women.

Obedying their ties of reciprocity, the Guaraní accompanied Cabeza de Vaca on his famous expedition to the Chaco and to the place termed Paradise Island in Alto Paraná, today known as the Matto Grosso. On this expedition, the Guaraní acted as vanguard troops, always first in line of attack against the other tribes.

Meanwhile, the whole system of relations was in a state of flux. The Spanish no longer limited their contacts solely to the Guaraní from the region between the rivers Manduvirá and Tebicuary, but as they explored further north into the Alto Paraná to find another route to El Dorado and Peru, they came into contact with other Guaraní, such as the Guarambarenses. These expeditions advancing up the River Paraguay with two hundred or

three hundred Spanish and fifteen hundred to two thousand Guaraní warriors needed provisions and thus relations began to grow with these other Guaraní, as the Spanish sought contacts with agrarian tribes that could provide them with supplies.

When Irala was sent by Alvar Núñez to search for a new route from the River Paraguay to the Province of Chiquitos and then on to Peru, he demanded that the Guarambarenses supply his force with all the necessary provisions. He also tried to force the cacique Aracaré to organize a group of warriors to explore the Chaco around where Fuerte Olimpo is today, in search of a new route. When the Guarambarenses refused and rebelled, Alvar Núñez ordered Irala to punish them. Irala ordered the cacique Aracaré to be hanged.

However, given the Guaraní system of kinship and social relations, many caciques were bound to each other by political ties, based on reciprocal agreements. Hence, when Aracaré was hanged, his relatives found themselves obliged to seek revenge on the Spanish. Thus began one of the first great revolts of the Guaraní, led by the cacique Tavaré. The Guaraní refused to supply more provisions or more troops, and they refused to accompany the Spanish on their expeditions. This also reflected a fear among the Guaraní that the warriors that set off with the Spanish toward the Andes would not return, leading to further depopulation and weakening of their communities.

The expedition sent from Asunción to put down this rebellion did not have an easy task, since the Guarambarenses had fortified their settlements with large ditches surrounding their communal houses, which they lined with spears and covered with foliage, as a trap for the advancing Spanish. Furthermore, they erected three concentric circles of wooden barricades around their villages, from where they could fire their arrows and repel attacks.

Nevertheless, the power of firearms prevailed and the majority of the Guaraní fled to the hills. Tavaré sued for peace with the Spanish, fearing that they would take all the Guaraní women to Asunción, which would have led to a sociodemographic crisis for the Guaraní. Thus in the end the rebellion was put down with relative ease.

Meanwhile the Spanish suffered from infighting. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca was taken prisoner and sent back to Spain in chains. For the first time, the cry of "freedom" reverberated through the streets of Asunción. In fact, the cause of this revolt was the opposition to the efforts by Alvar Núñez to impose some sort of regulation on the province with regard to the treatment of Indians. The cry of freedom in reality referred to the freedom of

the individual, the freedom of each conquistador to “go by his manner and in his own manner to civilize the Indians,” as the documents state.

### *The Third Phase of Contact: The Rancheadas*

In the first years of the second government of Irala, a new period of Hispano-Guaraní relations began, characterized by violent and large-scale *rancheadas*. According to the documents from the time, the term *rancheada* meant that each conquistador had the right, according to his needs for women or labor, to go into any Guaraní village, whether near the River Manduvirá or Acahay, Guarambaré, or Monday, and by agreement or force, take the Guaraní that he needed to his own settlements.

The rancheadas, which prevailed for almost five years, were clearly a form of violent extraction, involving disproportionate violence, through which the conquistadors, in the name of the individual freedom that they had upheld in the rebellion against Alvar Núñez de Cabeza, sought to strengthen their freedom to exploit the Indians.

The reaction of the Guaraní came in the form of a great revolt, more widespread and better organized than ever before, a revolt that was truly pan-Guaraní.

It began in 1546. By this time the great majority of children born were mestizo, while there were few pure Guaraní births. Due to relations between the Spanish and the Guaraní women, the majority of the population was already mestizo, reflecting an increasing weakening of the Guaraní communities.

A low demographic index, a notable fall in pure Guaraní birth rates and a marked resistance among the mestizos to remain in Guaraní communities, were among the causes of the revolt. The constant and growing weakening of the communities in turn led to the tendency among Guaraní women, whose importance as the procreators among the Guaraní I have already highlighted, to show a marked preference to live with the Spanish.

Furthermore, as a result of the aforementioned violent rancheadas, and as a consequence of the violent imposition of the Spanish *karaí* over the Guaraní, a radical change emerged in the nature of the relationship, from one based on kinship ties to one based on *yará* (owner) and *tembiguai* (servant or slave).

The rebellion began in Areguá. As a first step the cacique Mayrarú organized his defenses and troops against the advancing Spanish. When Irala saw how fired up the Guaraní warriors were, he feared ordering an attack by his “friendly Indian” troops, partly because he did not fully trust them.

Therefore in order to gain victory and definitively put down the rebellion, Irala made a pact with the Guaicurú and the Yaperú from the Chaco, who were keen on collecting Guaraní scalps, and incorporated them into his force.

When Mayrarú saw that not only the Spanish but also their feared enemies from the Chaco were approaching Areguá, he ordered a retreat toward Acahay and Quiindy, where his forces entrenched themselves in a secure place on the River Mbuyapey behind wooden barricades and surrounded by almost impenetrable forest. As he advanced, however, Irala came upon an isolated Guaraní village. When he took prisoners including the cacique, the remaining villagers showed themselves willing to betray their fellow Guaraní rather than see their community destroyed. The cacique himself led the Spanish to the Guaraní hideout. Once they had been found, what the Spanish did not do, the Guaicurú did, finding an excellent opportunity to carry out a brutal massacre.

Many of the rebels managed to flee into the forest, traveling along the River Monday and then the River Acaray, to the mountains of Caaguazú, from where they turned north along the River Ypane to the region of the Guarambaré. Irala decided to inflict a lesson on the Guaraní and to put an end once and for all to their rebellions and great gatherings. He returned to Asunción, traveled up the River Paraguay, and then followed the River Ypane into Guarambarensen territory, where he unleashed a series of repressive attacks on the rebel Guaraní.

The defeated Guaraní fled into the mountains toward Amambay. The large numbers of captives brought back to Asunción further weakened the Guaraní communities and represented a further factor in the stamping out of these rebellions. The practice of personal servitude by the Indian to the Spaniard now became established.

So it was in 1500 that the true biological decline of the Indian population began and its gradual replacement with a mestizo population, the youth of which would serve the Spanish, while the Guaraní survivors fled ever further into the mountains near the River Paraná, where the Spanish could not reach them.



# Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay

*Elman R. Service*

*Just what makes Paraguay different from the rest of Latin America continues to provoke debate and disagreement. A pioneering attempt by the U.S. anthropologist Elman Service to answer the question has fueled much controversy. This extract forms the conclusions of his study Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay, which argues that after the conquest interbreeding took place far faster and more extensively than elsewhere because of isolation, the small number of colonists, and the absence of hierarchical structures in traditional Guaraní society. As a result of this rapid process of cultural homogenization, Paraguay developed a stronger and earlier sense of national identity than elsewhere in the region. Controversially, he also contended that, as a corollary, this led to the replacement of Guaraní by Spanish culture. This was reaffirmed by his study Tobatí: Paraguayan Town (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), the first anthropological study of a Paraguayan community, in which he presented a revisionist interpretation of Paraguayan social history, dispelling what he termed the Guaraní myth and arguing that, apart from the Guaraní language, there is little that can still be described as indigenous in the rural culture of Paraguay.*

## *Conclusions*

In general, the outstanding difference between the colonization of Paraguay and that of better-known regions in Spanish America was the rapidity and thoroughness with which the aborigines were adapted to Spanish culture in Paraguay and integrated into a self-sufficient colony which developed national characteristics very early in its history. The conclusion seems inescapable that Guaraní culture was so quickly altered because of the special structure of the *encomiendas*, which actually fostered, rather than retarded, the assimilation of the Indians into the dominant Spanish culture patterns. This unusual effect of the *encomiendas* in Paraguay, for its part, was a prod-

uct of purely local circumstances which were quite different from the conditions in Mexico, Central America, and Peru.

The culture of the Guaraní differed considerably from the aboriginal cultures the Spaniards encountered in Mexico and Peru. The society was not politically unified nor class structured,<sup>1</sup> and the villages were small and only semi-permanent. This meant that the Spaniards could not simply place themselves in the position of the top-level native rulers for purposes of control and exploitation through subsidiary chiefs. The Indian *pueblos* had to be reduced to permanency and eventually to be made larger than the simple kinship units which had composed the aboriginal villages. These adjustments also necessitated personalized control by the Spaniards, which was obtained by *pobleros* who lived in the new Indian villages and enforced the fundamental changes which were to disrupt Guaraní society. Another circumstance which affected the relationship between Spaniards and Guaraní was the isolation of Paraguay from the normal currents of trade with the other colonies and with Spain. The absence of mineral resources or other important marketable wealth contributed to the commercial isolation, and the people were reduced to a barter economy. This had important consequences for the *encomienda* system, since there was no exportable product of sufficient value to be used as tribute from the *encomienda* Indians. These factors also prevented the development of a large trading class and thus inhibited the spread of middle-class attitudes, so that the gulf between the ideology of a money economy and that of the Indian production-for-use economy was never as great in Paraguay as in most of Latin America.

Even the influence of the Church was unusual in Paraguay. In most of the important areas of Spanish America the clergy usually exerted its strength against the exploitation of natives by lay Spaniards and was important in aiding the enforcement of the Crown policy of segregation of *encomienda* Indians from Spanish colonists. Clerical influence in central Paraguay, however, was relatively unimportant; there the Spaniards, and later the irreligious *mestizos*, completed the secular acculturation of the Guaraní with little opposition from the powerless clergy, the reverse of the trend observed in Mexico and Peru.

Since the country was unattractive to Spanish colonists, peninsular Spaniards were soon in such a minority that the ruling population was predominantly *mestizo*, and the remaining Indians were then subjected to a dominant culture which was somewhat different from the original Spanish.

The position of these *mestizos* in Paraguayan affairs after about 1580 is, from the standpoint of Indian acculturation, one of the most significant of the several unusual characteristics of the colony. The large population of

somewhat bicultural mixed bloods succeeded true Spaniards in positions of authority as political officials and *encomenderos*. Thus, ties of kinship between *encomenderos* and Indians became stronger, linguistic barriers ceased to exist, and, in general, cultural and racial differences between the two classes of society were lessened. The Indians probably had considerably more affinity for a feudal-like non-commercial society, the members of which spoke Guaraní and possessed a comprehension of Guaraní culture.

One of the important consequences of the rather unusual form of the colonization of Paraguay was that the few Spaniards, the many *mestizos*, and the acculturated Indians came to form a true, culturally independent nation with distinctive institutions much earlier than most of the other areas of South America. Although the early Spanish rulers had added such elements of nationhood as political, economic, military, and religious institutions rather than replaced them, as in Peru and Mexico, the unusual form of the *encomienda* rapidly introduced the bulk of the aboriginal population into colonial life, with the consequent local pride in national language, territory, and customs. The “*comunero*” revolts which presaged the national wars of independence in most of Spanish America had their inception in revolts by Paraguayan *mestizos* before the colony was fifty years old,<sup>2</sup> and subsequent revolts against Spanish authority characterized most of the remaining colonial period in Paraguay. In other South American countries many of the important national movements did not take place until the eighteenth century.

The isolation of the early conquistadores from political and commercial ties with Spain left the colony virtually self-ruled from the beginning. The military alliance with the Guaraní and the economic dependence on the “harems” of Guaraní women gave the Indians an important role in the life of the colony, for the Spaniards desperately needed their help during the early years. The nearly continuous wars and expeditions made complete military control of the Guaraní necessary and also tended to make the tribe an integral part of the colony almost from the first year of the contact. The small number of Spaniards in the colony and its subsequent rapid diminution left *mestizos* and acculturated Guaraní Indians as the dominant groups in all classes of the society.

It would seem that the type of acculturation which occurred in Paraguay must have resulted in the replacement of much of Guaraní culture, with the exception of the language, the role of women, certain food crops and cookery, and perhaps a few miscellaneous items of folklore and superstition. As has happened with the beginnings of national consciousness in most of the countries of the world, pride of language or dialect became greatly exalted. The heavy preponderance of Guaraní-speaking *mestizos* naturally re-

sulted in the preference for the Guaraní language over the Spanish under the circumstances of the feeling against Spain. The continuation and perhaps accentuation of the intense nationalism since the devastation caused by the War of the Triple Alliance in the 1870s has kept Guaraní in use as a national language to this day in an atmosphere similar to what has been called "revivalism" or "nativism" in more primitive societies. Probably most other elements of true Guaraní culture have long since been lost. It would seem that, although Spanish-Indian racial and cultural mixture took place to some extent in all of Spanish America, two general trends were unusual in Paraguay—the rapid loss of Indian social and cultural integrity, and the retention of the language due to the same rapid amalgamation of the Indians into a colonial society which developed national characteristics at a very early date in its history.

#### *Notes*

1. Recent studies by Kubler (1946) and Gibson (1948) give good accounts of the importance of the Inca political and class structure in determining the nature of the political controls used by the Spaniards in Peru. These provide a most effective contrast to the Paraguayan situation.
2. In a sense, the successful revolt against the Crown's governor, Cabeza de Vaca, by the followers of Irala was a "national" or "comunero" movement as early as 1545!

# The Land-without-Evil: Tupí-Guaraní Prophetism

*Hélène Clastres*

*Despite the myth of a harmonious relationship between the Spanish colonists and placid Guaranís, in reality there were frequent rebellions against Spanish rule. In her outstanding critique of previous interpretations of Tupí-Guaraní religious movements, Hélène Clastres seeks to explain the causes behind some of these conflicts as well as the concept of the Land-without-Evil. She refutes the notion of mystical revolts led by messianic cults in resistance to colonization. Instead, she argues that the revolts and migrations were a response to internal political tensions and struggles that predated the arrival of the Spanish. The following account analyzes the revolt by Obera, a village leader and prophet, in 1579 which briefly threatened Spanish rule. This was essentially a supratribal war, rooted in political struggles, local rivalries, and loyalties, rather than a religious uprising. The account is also interesting in that it reveals the role of the supernatural in guiding the Tupí-Guaraní in political decisions and in battle. However, it also reveals the intertribal rivalries, the tensions between village chiefs and the karaí (prophets), the suspicion toward such karaí who claimed to represent the gods and thus challenged their rule, and the balance between political pragmatism and consensus, on the one hand, and the need to follow the supposed will of the gods, on the other. As Clastres makes clear, the lack of unity among the Tupí-Guaraní, which the Spanish exploited, was key to the Spaniards' survival and conquest.*

The following account of the uprising led by Obera in 1579 is taken from Lozano.<sup>1</sup> Obera, whose name, says the author, means “splendour” in Spanish, was a magus and the chief of a village situated not far from Asunción, hence in a region under the system of *encomienda*. This new predicament had not yet affected the traditional way of life; Lozano points out that, although all Indians of the village had received Christian names, they had stayed as firmly attached to their gentility as before their baptism; magical art was flourishing, as were other “abominations.” Obera proposed to free the Indi-

ans from their submission to the Spaniards; he was sure to succeed in this task because he had become master of a comet that had appeared a few days earlier, then disappeared to the west. In short, he was a *karaí* and he could give a guarantee of his power as god-man. He not only convinced his own people, but also secretly concluded an alliance with three large neighbouring villages. He then left with the people from those four villages, sending part of his army in one direction and going himself toward the Paraná; it was necessary to secure as many alliances as possible in order to return in strength and attack Asunción. The results of his initiative were not long in coming: Guaraní everywhere took up arms, so that the entire province was soon in rebellion, save for the *encomendados* of Villarica. "There was not a single Indian left in the other *encomiendas* who agreed to serve the Spaniards; on the contrary, they began to strike across the entire country in surprise raids."<sup>2</sup>

The danger was great. In order to avert it, the governor of the province, Garay, at the head of a small troop of well-armed soldiers (a scant one hundred and thirty of them, because Asunción had to be guarded), decided to try to block Obera and prevent the Guaraní from the Paraná from joining the rebels of the region of Asunción. Arriving near the headwaters of the Ypané, Garay learned that a group of Indians was making its way in a forced march toward this point; he then hastily decided to establish a fortified camp and wait for them there. Hardly were the Spaniards barricaded before they saw two Guaraní warriors walk out of the forest. Naked and without weapons, these came forward until they were within call and challenged to single combat any two Spaniards equipped with spear and shield or sword and buckler. They had been instructed by Tapuy-Guazú, their chief, to vanquish the enemy without bows and arrows, despite the inequality of the weapons. The double combat took place, with an outcome to the disadvantage, as could have been assumed, of the Guaraní. Wounded, they went back to the Tapuy-Guazú, who, it is told, was angered by their cowardice and had them immediately put to death.

Further, the chief considered their defeat to be a bad omen and came to doubt Obera's power and promises. He found the means, under some pretext, to convene a council of warriors and, as first among them, gave a speech, the substance of which was this: public affairs, involving the interest of all, cannot be guided only by the opinion of one person, even though he may be the wisest. The relish the Guaraní always had for their freedom and their acknowledged superiority over other peoples demanded that they no longer stoop beneath the Spaniards' yoke. If it were as easy for Obera to fulfil his promises as it is for him to make them, certainly the Indians

would follow him without hesitation; but already difficulties had arisen, so that the Tapuy-Guazú did not feel that he had the right to make the decision for all to start a war that did not augur very well. Everyone should voice his opinion; should the Indians follow Obera, or should they without delay be allied with the Spaniards? Having so defined the alternatives, he invited the eldest councillor to give his advice. There is no need to linger over the details of this debate: supporters of peace and partisans of war confronted one another. All, nevertheless, agreed on one point: Obera had deceived them; he was but a *pajé* [shaman] in no way superior to others, and not the god-man he pretended to be. If, consequently, the war was to be pursued, there was no reason to accept the leadership of someone who now appeared to be an imposter: and no supernatural aid should be expected. The council chose peace, and the Tapuy-Guazú immediately sent messengers to Garay to offer him his alliance. Garay accepted it with the greater eagerness as it was unexpected.

The decision of chief Tapuy-Guazú is infinitely more interesting for it is most unusual: duels were not customary among Guaraní—at least not duels between enemies. Why then did he require a preliminary fight, and why this deliberately unequal fight? The following events enable us to understand his motives. The question for the chief was not whether this war (imminent now that the enemy was present) was pleasing to the gods; only shamans could determine that, and the fact that this war was led by a *karaí* himself should sufficiently have guaranteed it—provided that he was a true *karaí*. And this is what suddenly was being questioned. The outcome of the duel was a way of verifying *the authenticity of Obera himself*; this authenticity is what the chief questioned and wanted to test before committing himself. He may have been ready to recognize Obera; but not without first putting him to a test. If Obera were a god-man, the two warriors would triumph, whatever the conditions of combat; that is what the chief wanted to see.

Why then did a Guaraní chief want a *karaí* to demonstrate his power? Perhaps because this *karaí* was at the same time the chief of another village; or more likely, it seems to me, because he had arrogated to himself a right excessive in scope: he had decided *alone* in favour of a war in which he wanted to involve *all* Guaraní tribes—thus abolishing the *de jure* if not *de facto*, intertribal political relations and situating himself above other chiefs—and he invoked his divine nature to justify his right to do so. Rallying to his war consequently signified acknowledging this right. Tapuy-Guazú may have been ready to accede, but provided only that Obera would reveal his divine nature, in other words, that he give proof of his *legitimacy*.



Portrait of a *cacique* of the Toba tribe of Chaco Indians. Postcard image by an anonymous artist. From the collection of Martin Romano.

Once the deception had been exposed, all means became good means with which to combat it, including alliance with the Spaniards.

Let us go back to the end of the story. Returning from the expedition against Tapuymiri, Garay learned from his new allies that Obera and his supporters had built a fort, protected on all sides by palisades and ditches. Almost three thousand warriors, led by the most renowned chiefs of the region, had drawn into the fortification and were going through martial exercises in the hope that the Spaniards would come and storm the fort. They even feverishly awaited the attack, so great was their impatience to witness the effects of the supernatural aid promised by the prophet. He had had a calf sacrificed and burned, and had dispersed its ashes on the wind, thus



portraying the ease with which the enemies would be vanquished. Garay, who was kept informed of all the preparations, chose to attack. The assault was violent and the Guaraní soon realized, at dear cost, that the Spaniards were much more dangerous warriors and had much more deadly weapons than they had imagined.

At the first battle Obera ran away. As soon as the Guaraní noticed his disappearance, they stopped defending the fort and concentrated solely on withdrawing, and this in the greatest confusion. Distressed over the unexpected flight of the prophet, the chiefs were unable to control their warriors, and the Spaniards were the masters of the battlefield: numerous Guaraní had been killed, others were taken prisoner almost without resistance. Eventually, the Spaniards went back to Asunción; order was restored in the province. As for Obera, no one subsequently heard of him again.

Such is the story. Not the story of a mystical revolt engendered by a dream of a golden age or a desire to escape to the Land-without-Evil. But the story of a supertribal war incited for a political purpose by a village prophet-chief, whose motives probably were not very pure, even if he was convinced he was right. About to be questioned by all those less clever than the Tapuy-Guazú who had followed him, he chose to take to his heels, thus dropping the mask.

### *Notes*

1. P. Lozano, *Historia de la conquista del Paraguay, Río de la Plata y Tucumán*, ed. André Lammas, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: Casa Editora Imprenta Popular, 1873).
2. *Ibid.*, 213.

# The Republic of Plato and the Guaraní

*José Manuel Peramás*

*By the end of the eighteenth century, political notions such as the Enlightenment were challenging the legitimacy of the monarchy and proposing ideas of a liberal state without hierarchies, in which reason is the way to understand reality and to achieve individual and social well-being. Opposition to such views was led mainly by the Catholic Church and its intellectuals, who distrusted pure reason and considered monarchy to be the best form of government.*

*One such intellectual, the Jesuit missionary José Manuel Peramás, chose to defuse liberal philosophical criticism of colonial evangelization by drawing on the unquestionable authority of Plato to support the church-monarchy position. Peramás's essay "The Republic of Plato and the Guaraní," published in the year of his death in 1793, draws an analogy between the organization of the Jesuit reducciones (reductions) and Plato's ideal Republic. Peramás had worked in reductions—settlements in which Guaraní were organized into productive communities, indoctrinated into Catholicism, but protected from marauding Brazilian slave traders. In this essay, he proposes that the monolithic wisdom of the Catholic Church and the Spanish monarchy had been able to make Plato's utopia a reality through the Jesuit reductions. Christian theocracy, he argues, was the true vehicle for happiness in all areas of the public and private life of the citizen. The following extracts, taken from his essay, offer fascinating and detailed descriptions of various aspects of the organization of life in the reductions.*

## *Common Goods*

45. Among the Guaraní, some goods were held in common, others not. To each was assigned a section of land for cultivation, sufficiently extensive that the head of each household might sow, for himself and his family, Indian wheat (which constitutes their principal crop; they do not hold our wheat in great esteem), various types of vegetables and edible roots: one called *mandió* [manioc] and another *mandubí* [peanuts], which on the stem next to the root, has pods containing something like nuts, similar to our almonds.