

Cheryl Lynn Duckworth

Land and Dignity in Paraguay

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By

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*I am honored by the time, friendship and support offered to me by
so many in Paraguay, particularly the indigenous leaders who
took the time to share their stories with me. It is to them that
I dedicate this work. Arriba Paraguay!*

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Map of Paraguay



Source: CIA World Factbook

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List of Abbreviations

BID/IADM:	<i>Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo</i> /InterAmerican Development Bank
BWI:	Bretton Woods Institutions (eg, the World Bank and the IMF)
CIRD:	<i>Centro de Información Y Recursos para el Desarrollo</i>
DAI:	<i>Departamento de Asuntos Indígena</i>
ECBs:	Ecclesiastical Base Communities
ECLAC:	Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean
ENM:	<i>Equipo Nacional de Misiones</i> (National Catholic Missions Team)
FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT:	Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP:	Gross National Product
GNI:	Gross National Income
HRC:	Human Rights Commission
IACHR:	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
IBR:	<i>Instituto Bienestar Rural</i> (Institute for Rural Well-being)
IMF/FMI:	International Monetary Fund/ <i>Fondo Monetario Internacional</i>
INDI:	<i>Instituto Nacional del Indígena</i>
LAC:	<i>Ligas Agrarias Christianas</i> (Christian Peasant Leagues)
MEC:	Ministry of Education and Culture
MERCOSUR:	<i>Mercado Común del Sur</i> (Common Market of the South)
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OAS:	Organization of American States
SMO:	Social Movement Organization
UN:	United Nations
USAID:	U.S. Agency for International Development
WTO:	World Trade Organization

Timeline of Major Events

- 1537: Spanish begin invasion and colonization of Paraguay
- 1750: Treaty of Madrid signed, forcing numbers Guaraní resettlements and inciting open rebellion
- 1768: expulsion of the Jesuits all but complete
- 1776: Paraguay transferred from the control of the Vice-royalty of Peru to the Vice-royalty of La Plata (the capital of which was Buenos Aires)
- 1811: Independence won
- 1865–1870: The Triple Alliance War, against Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia, in which Paraguay lost Igua Zu Falls, access to oceanic waterways and an estimated half of its population
- 1932–1935: The Chaco War against Bolivia, in which a young Alfredo Stroessner made his military name
- 1954: General Alfredo Stroessner seizes power in a military coup
- 1973: Brazil and Paraguay sign a treaty to build the Itaipú Dam, in which Paraguay agreed to sell its neighbor electricity at rates well below the market
- 1975: Activist-anthropologist Mark Münzel accuses the Stroessner regime of genocide
- 1981: Law 904/81 was passed, legalizing land and cultural rights for the indigenous people of Paraguay, in a watershed movement victory
- 1987: Archbishop Rolon leads march of over 30,000 in vigil march for democracy through Asunción
- 1988: Pope John Paul II dedicates Mass to indigenous and other landless communities of Paraguay
- 1989: Stroessner ousted in “palace coup” by Gen. Andres Rodriguez

- 1991: Treaty of Asunción signed, establishing MERCOSUR (the Common Market of the South), with charter members Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay
- 1992: Paraguay ratifies new Constitution which explicitly recognizes the dignity and value of indigenous culture to Paraguay, as well as protects communal land rights
- 2008: President Fernando Lugo inaugurated as the first non-Colorado Party president since 1954, the beginning of *El Stronoto*
- 2009: Under President Lugo, Brazil and Paraguay renegotiate the Itaipú Dam Treaty

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1

Introduction

An Overview of the Impact of Land Privatization

Just beyond the city limits of Asunción, Paraguay, lie shanty towns which have developed as citizens flock to the capital. The leader of one community (my confidentiality agreements with my research partners prevent me from naming either him or the community) walks a nearly 45-minute *carrito* ride (a rickety wooden, horse-driven cart) to *Radio Solidaridad* where he speaks on Guaraní culture, history, struggles, and visions for the future. To support his organizing efforts, he sells small wooden crafts, but the Santa Ana community is nearly as poor as his own community of *desplacados* (Displaced Ones) and the results are meager. Across town, in the city center, a group of indigenous leaders from throughout the country gather at an Episcopalian meeting center to discuss how they should best react to a recently proposed change in Paraguay's law governing the sale of indigenous land. Research by scholars such as Peter Lambert, John Renshaw and the World Bank's Estanislao Gacitua Mario, indicates that, among a number of factors precipitating this loss of land in Paraguay, two are prominent. One is the deregulation and privatization of land, typically for agribusiness or resource exploitation. The second is the dependence on wage labor of the poor, indigenous population who hope to, but typically cannot, find work in Asunción. What is the impact of land privatization on the lives and livelihoods of Paraguay's indigenous citizens? How are indigenous leaders in particular responding to this phenomenon? Why has the Dignity Frame occurred in this particular time and place? What have been the results of their responses and why? What might all of this suggest both for conflict resolution theory and practice, as well as for the consolidation of Paraguay's new democracy?

These are the central questions that this study will address. This work will ultimately offer my analysis that the Dignity Frame occurred because of the dehumanizing context of successive dictatorships, the dramatically more open political landscape post Stroessner, and the ability this provided to partner with NGOs. Once Stroessner's regime had collapsed, previous narratives around dignity could crystallize into active social mobilization around the Dignity Frame. As a basic human need and universal value, framing one's movement around dignity not only directly addressed the deeply dehumanizing conditions many indigenous communities find themselves in, but it also provides a strategic tool to enable the essential partnerships. From the viewpoint of this frame, such policy reforms as land rights, language equality, and full access to health care and education are a natural conclusion.

Framing, of course, is a process by which a social group involved in a movement understands, presents and explains their worldview and the specific claims they are making. As this study will explore, frames are a significant factor in successfully mobilizing people. Framing is a hotly contested, contingent, and social process. Indeed, the ability to put one's frame out before or ahead of opponents has meant success or failure for the claim-making of some groups. Framing therefore is itself a battleground for participants in social movements. Much of what is fought for through the whole repertoire of activities that social movement actors take on is itself the supremacy of one's frame. It can be both means and end. Consider the opposing frames relevant to abortion. Those who frame themselves as "pro-life" subtly imply that those who do not support them are against life; those who frame themselves as "pro-choice" do much the same regarding the value of freedom. Recently those who oppose the current war in Iraq have rejected and challenged the frame of the war's supporters that to oppose the war is to oppose the troops. The reply of "Support Our Troops: Bring Them Home" directly refutes this and advances the argument of war opponents that the troops are not "supported" by having their lives risked in a war they perceive as ill-conceived and unnecessary. To frame is to define a problem or issue and thereby set the rules of debating it, and the boundaries and means of understanding it.

I am particularly interested in the implications of the Paraguayan indigenous social movement around land rights for conflict. As John Burton classically theorized, humans have certain basic psychological and social needs that are not negotiable. They include such needs as belonging, esteem, security, dignity and identity (Burton 1990). Burton issued this theory in the context of a stinging critique of "real-politik" and the conventional

approach to conflict resolution and peace making in general, which he felt relied far too heavily on negotiating settlements which rarely held because they did not deal in a fundamental way with the inequitable social and political systems that were causing the conflict to begin with (Burton 1997 Online, Burton 1998). As I will discuss in more detail later, this is well expressed in his notion of “provention,” a hybrid of “proactive prevention.” I understand this idea to challenge the tendency of conventional, especially “track one” (governmental) approaches to conflict resolution to be reactive and hence less effective. Burton argued that a deep understanding of the systems which were preventing human beings from meeting their basic needs could allow us to then transform those systems, and prevent future conflicts from emerging to begin with.

As I will explain, Burton’s theory of basic human needs is an important theoretical building block for my analysis for a number of reasons. It clarifies that negotiation is not likely to be a sufficient solution to the conflicts arising over land rights and privatization in Paraguay. Because the loss of traditional or even ancestral land represents such a fundamental existential threat to both cultural identity and livelihood, negotiation is not possible. One cannot negotiate food security, for example. Nor can one “negotiate” away belonging, esteem or identity, which Burton argues, and I agree, are human needs just as essential as one’s daily bread.

These observations lead us to another fundamental conflict resolution theory. I refer to Johann Galtung’s notion of “structural violence,” a concept that is very familiar to peace scholars but remains controversial in the mainstream (Galtung 1996). Just as someone can be physically harmed or killed by an act of physical violence, Galtung argues, individuals and communities can be victims of very real violence caused by unjust social or political systems. To illustrate, if a person dies because there is no food, a tragedy has occurred, but no violence was done. If someone dies, and there was food to nourish him or her, a real act of violence was committed. In other words, Galtung’s theory of structural violence proposes that actual weapons are not necessarily required, nor is intention required, for violence to have occurred. Neglect will suffice.

Galtung’s notion of structural violence also is an important theory for building my case. While much of the violence directed against indigenous communities is actual violence involving torture, guns, or fire, the structural violence of contaminated water, forced relocation by the State onto reservations, or loss of the ability to provide food for oneself is also causing much illness, injury, and death. Because the Dignity Frame directly addresses the reality of structural violence and dehumanization which has

been dominant for so long in Paraguay (as elsewhere), its use by indigenous leaders in Paraguay is quite expected. The more hidden aspects of the violence against indigenous communities in Paraguay, as described above, make structural violence an important theory for my analysis of the indigenous rights movement in Paraguay.

Indigenous leaders, civil society advocates, and indeed many anthropologists and Latin America or Paraguay scholars seem to view land privatization as structural violence, though I at least have not seen that precise theory invoked in those words. For example, as Richard Reed, an anthropologist who specializes in Paraguay, observed this during his time living with a Guaraní community:

As entrepreneurs buy and clear the forests, Guaraní are forced onto small reservations. On these small reserves, sometimes only a tenth of their previous area, they do not have the extensive forests they need for hunting, gathering and shifting agriculture. As Guaraní are forced to abandon their traditional production systems, they lose control of their relationship with the larger society. Traditional residence patterns, kinship systems, religious beliefs and political institutions are giving way to the authorization and hierarchical relations of the larger society. (Reed 1997, 3)

Shifting agriculture is a method of forest use and management which exploits a specific area of the forest for a brief period, until soil and other natural resources reach a point where they need to replenish themselves. At this point, the community will move the entirety of their community to another part of the forest. The Guaraní view this system as central to their culture and cosmology for several reasons. One, it previously produced a (comparatively) modest profit for them and enabled them to interact with the market and the *Paraguayos* with some power and autonomy. Secondly, the Guaraní (who refer to themselves as “People of the Forest”) believe they originated “from the forest and each person maintains a personal spiritual connection with it. Religious activity not only expresses this connection, it develops and strengthens the relationship” (Reed 1997, 6).

Such ethnographic data substantiates my own qualitative data, in which indigenous community leaders shared with me their losses, responses and hopes. One man (“H”), for example, has traveled in between the capital and *el Interior* (that is, the rural areas outside of Asunción) organizing a council of other indigenous leaders to discuss how to best make their claims to the government, secure and defend land title, and similar. Another leader

(“A”) provides a link between communities currently fighting off attacks on their land, by pressing their claims to INDI and providing support to jailed activists.

The numbers validate such a view. According to a World Bank socioeconomic report, among others, indigenous citizens are the poorest of any other communities in Paraguay. This report notes that “a key issue for Paraguay is land tenure” (Mario 2004, online). They specify that “the search for better employment opportunities and expansion of the agricultural frontier seem to be the main reasons for migration” (Mario 2004, online). In addition to land sales to foreign agriculture, land privatization has allowed immigrants, especially from Brazil, to buy indigenous land and “evict” indigenous groups (Mario 2004 online, Hilton online). Writes Ramon Fogel, a Paraguayan anthropologist and former government official, “. . . the rural structure [of land ownership] became increasingly polarized as powerful new actors appeared on the scene—the modern agricultural entrepreneur . . .” (Lambert 1997, 97). The result has been a highly unequal distribution of land: “1.1% of the landowners over 1,000 hectare owned 77% of the land, while the small producers under 10 hectares, who represent 5% of the landowners, owned only .9% of the total land” (Lambert 1997, 9). This is exacerbated by the fact that “informal labor arrangements account for roughly half of the national workforce” (Mario 2004, online). Increasing the threat to daily survival, almost half of Paraguay is employed by export-dependent sectors (such as commercial goods), leaving a large majority of Paraguay’s workforce directly vulnerable to the shocks of an increasingly deregulated market. As with many developing nations, Paraguay’s economy is primarily agricultural, (40% according to Sengupta). Hence the indigenous subsistence farmers have been the most effected by government policies of clearing forests and the commercialization of agriculture (Sengupta online, Lambert et al., 1997, 114–130, Renshaw 2002, 65–87). Political economist Donald Richards noted a specific impact of neoliberal incentivizing of agribusiness on employment: “Moreover, the transformation of Paraguayan agriculture in recent years has been accompanied by a concentration of land holdings as well as increased mechanization and sophistication of the production processes in a way that has decreased employment opportunities for unskilled labor. The result has been an increase in rural-urban migration” (Richard 2000, 189). Families have been left either in shanty towns outside of Asunción (ironically, just across the river from the presidential *Casa Blanca*) or landless altogether, with the obvious implications for food security, community stability and dignity.

Neoliberalism in Paraguay

Because it is the worldview of many of Paraguay's policy makers, neoliberalism's historical development is context essential to understanding the current conflict in Paraguay. Consider, for example, this recent interview with President Frutos in which he argues that even social economies "accept the market economy." He added that he is "not at all in agreement" with the model of a "socialist society with centralized government planning" (Ruiz Online). It is also an important context because it is the ideology of the decision makers which can either approve or deny future loans, as well as decide how current loans will be paid (Paraguay currently owes nearly three billion dollars, according to the World Bank). The president is well aware of this, as his response to Ruiz's question about Paraguayan emigration to Spain demonstrates: "True, we are seeing massive emigration. And we are not going to be able to remedy the situation if loans are blocked." (Ruiz Online). Given the stunning recent election of Padre Lugo, a Catholic Priest who had run on an explicit platform of land rights and economic justice, the dominance of neoliberal economics may be about to change, but of course, only time will tell. Land privatization is best understood in the context of both global and regional neoliberalism because it is in and of itself a neoliberal policy. Neoliberalism is a set of economic policy prescriptions quite uniformly adhered to by major international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and regional development banks (to include *Banco InterAmericano de Desarrollo (BID)*, the InterAmerican Development Bank). The hallmark policies of neoliberalism are market and trade liberalization, deregulation and privatization. A theoretical underpinning of this study is that neoliberalism, the ideological engine of economic globalization, is more than a mere set of neutral policy prescriptions. Rather it is a set of cultural assumptions and values regarding how human nature is to be understood and how human society is best organized. The underlying values of capitalism include efficiency, individualism, and productivity. Alternatively, numerous data sources (ethnographies, media reports, observational data, and personal interviews, for example) demonstrate that indigenous economies value equity, community, unity, sustainability, and conservation. Economic globalization is, among other things, a project to extend and normalize free-market capitalism. Although cultural identities are malleable, they are not infinitely so and, as Burton classically theorized, they cannot be negotiated. Hence the movements responding to neoliberalism which have predictably arisen in countries throughout the Global South; Paraguay included.