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PARAGUAY. A TERRA INCOGNITA IN THE SOUTHERN CONE

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AN ISLAND SOURROUNDED BY LAND



Representations of Paraguay

- In 1977 Augusto Roa Bastos, the most well known Paraguayan author defined his country as an island surrounded by land. Since then the expression has been repeated once and again whenever addressing Paraguay and as a way of introducing it. In a sense it can be said that it has even created this sensation of isolation; BUT actually
- In 1793, a chronicle written by Juan Francisco de Aguirre, talks of “confine”, and “back room (trastienda)” (Brezzo, 2010)
- Before the war in 1864-1870 an Argentinian writer and president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento stated that Paraguay, “was far from the movement of the world,'as an **island in the middle of a sea of forests,**”(D. F. Sarmiento in Scavone Yegros, 2011: 14).

A quick historical periodization

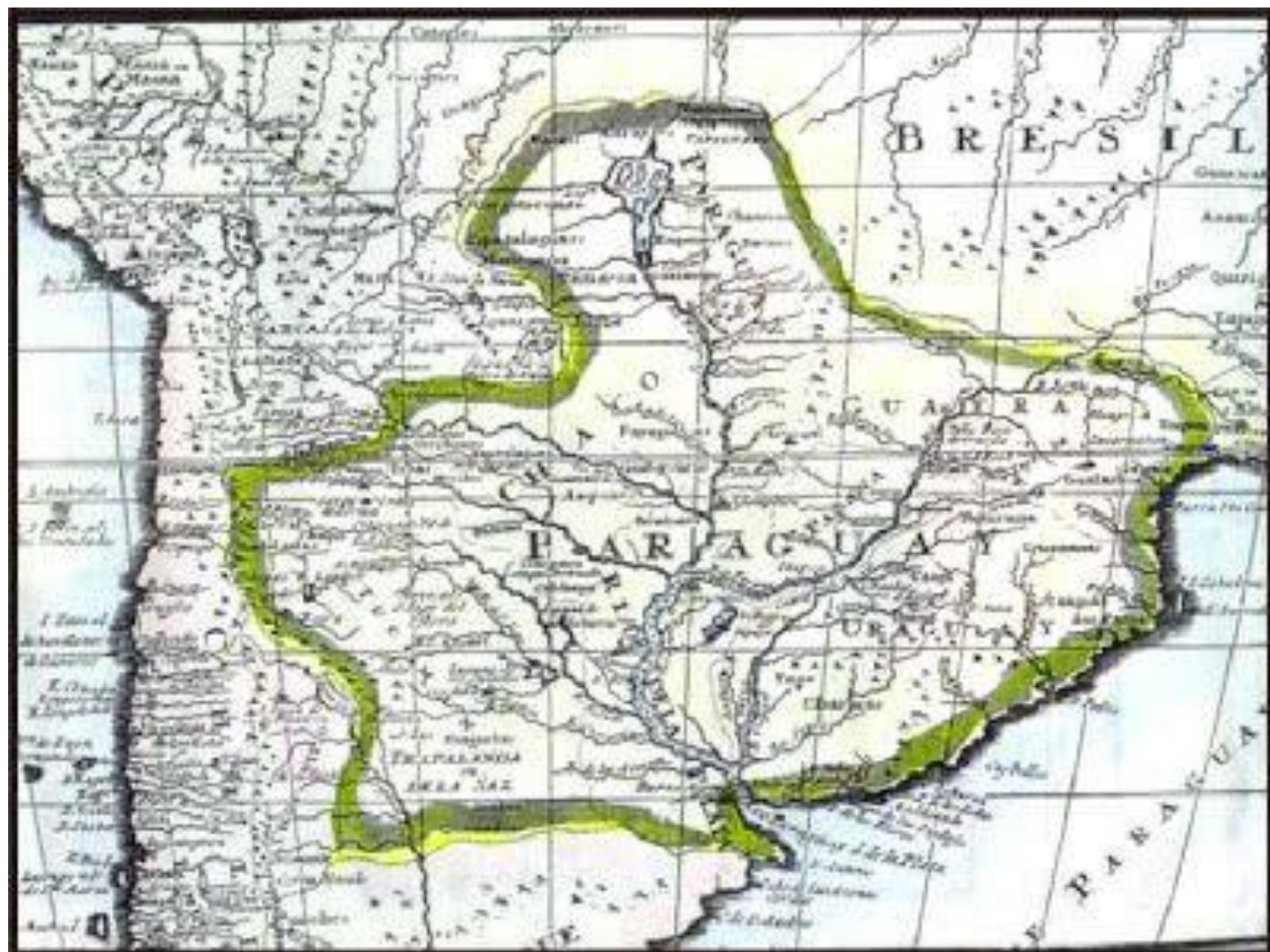
- Colonial period: 1536-1811
- Independent period: 1811-1870
- The afterwar period: 1870-1954
- The dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner: 1954-1989
- Democratic period: 1989- to date

Colonial routes



Colonial times: from Giant Province of the Indias to “back room” of the Río de la Plata

- Paraguay was discovered in 1524. In 1537 Asunción, the capital city was founded in its actual location by an expedition that was seeking a road to the gold of Potosi, the sierra del Plata, in the actual territory of Bolivia.
- The extension given to Don Pedro de Mendoza was so big, that acquired the name of “Provincia Gigante de las Indias” Giant Province of the Indias



Colonial times

- In its first years, and due to the good relationship that Spaniards achieved with the Guarani Indians, more specifically, the tribe of carios, Asunción was the departure point to establish more than 70 cities, including Buenos Aires, that has been previously founded and destroyed and Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia.
- Asunción was then a headquarter and a port. This fact gave Asunción the name of “Madre de ciudades” Mother of cities, a denomination that still makes its citizens very proud.
- But, as children are supposed to leave their mother, in 1617, when the Gobernación de Buenos Aires was created, dividing the Gobernación de Paraguay in two, Asunción lost its small prestige to the Port of Buenos Aires.

The beginning of isolation

- **The absence of metals, the betrayal of the “sorcerer name” River of silver, and the closure of the route to Potosí, due to the road enabled from Peru, implied for Paraguay a gradual but constant process of isolation with respect to the colonial political centers and the same colonizing process in general.**
- The ultimate function assigned to Asunción was a defensive one, against the advance and pressure of Portuguese.

The particular development of colonial Paraguay

However, the isolation also involved the development of some characteristics that later will have a great impact on the next development of the history of Paraguay:

- 1. In the first place, the process of miscegenation or “mestizaje” resulting from the union of Spaniards with indigenous women, whose fundamental consequence was the use of the Guaraní language as the language of the whole society, as well as some kind of homogeneity in the population.**

From the beginning the Paraguayan colony spoke an indigenous language that the Spaniards themselves were forced to learn.

The particular development...

2. **In second place, the isolation involved the development of a very particular political identity and autonomy**

As early as 1562, after more than a decade of isolation from the Peninsula, the authorities of Asunción, elected "according to God and their consciences" - wrote Ruy Díaz de Guzmán - admitted that the abandonment of Paraguay by the Crown was due, to the "little or no credit that these provinces have, seeing their many armies and people who have come to her and the few or none that *return because there is no gold or silver or profitable farms that are the main causes of the perpetuity of the lands* ", as reported by the real accountant Felipe de Cáceres (Durán, 2010: 65).

The particular development

3. Third, the need **to organize themselves militarily** to protect the territorial limits of the Portuguese advance resulted in the development of a native military organization long before the others provinces, that later became countries.

This is linked to another element very important: the establishment of the Jesuit Order in Paraguay.

The jesuit presence

- Jesuits arrive to the Province of Paraguay in 1570
- They organized the indian population in reducciones
- They **gave Guarani language a written grammar and they spoke Guarani**
- Jesuits were in charge of the **yerba mate commerce**
- Missions served as a barrier and **defense against the portuguese bandeirantes**, this implied an early military organization of the indian population
- The relationship between Asunción neighbors and Jesuit was never easy. They had many conflicts that involved crown authorities.

Colonial isolation and identity

This colonial particularities implied as a result, **an early pregnant identity, with projection in time which** results from the intersection of the following factors :

Factors of identity

- 1) The absence of valuable metals and therefore economic interest, and the consequent **relative isolation of the province from the viceroyalty movement that led to a series of negotiations around the integration of the society, and a certain permeability with respect to the hierarchies imposed by the crown.**
- 2) The location in the confines of the empire and in a margin in dispute with the Portuguese crown implied the **early design of strategies of delimitation, definition and defense of a territory as a space of belonging.**

Factors of identity

3) The early conformation of a local army in defense of interests defined around shared interests implied that the indigenous population in charge of Jesuits integrated to an institution in pursuit of the **defense of "own" interests.**

4) **With a fundamental character, the survival and expansion of an own and previous linguistic unit, in which the Guaraní language became integrated into a certain community of belonging that describes and constructs with particular effectiveness, a national identity.**

Particularities of the paraguayan colonial identity

- **Identity is a key concept** if we are to understand the subsequent development. It is important to mention that:
- It has been built in opposition to the hegemony of the crown and the colonial metropoli
- It has been deeply rooted because of the contradiction resulting from an indigenous language being used by a community that will soon conform as a nation state.
- It has a history of confrontation with power in defense of own interest.

1811 The Independence from Spain

- With the Napoleonic invasions, the independence process began in Latin America.
- Very early Paraguay declares itself independent from Spain and renounces to Buenos Aires declaring itself as a Republic, and actualizing the old administrative, political and economical troubles that Paraguay had with Buenos Aires
- The Buenos Aires government did not accept this until 1852.

Independent Government: Rodríguez de Francia and the closure of the island

- José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia was one of the mentors of national independence.
- He assumed the presidency in 1813 and was declared a Perpetual Dictator until his death in 1840.
- The main characteristic of his government **was the closing of borders and the development of an economy of self-sufficiency that lasted almost 30 years.**
- It is not possible to understand the subsequent processes without taking into account this government



In words of a contemporary german explorer

The administration of Doctor Francia offers Paraguay, for a more or less near time, some compensations for the evils he has caused. First by having formed a military state, able to be respected among its neighbors; and also by organizing the state income he has made his country fellows realise that they can be independent

Rudolf Rengger

The government of Carlos Antonio López (1844-1862)

- With the money left by the strict administration made by Dr. Francia, the country had enough money to begin modernisation and open to the region and the world without the need of external financing
- López established the free navigation of rivers in 1852, which implied an abrupt growth of commerce handed from the state.
- Education was developed, many people was sent to Europe and Teachers were brought.
- López tried to solve the territorial limits issue, that were stopped due to Dr. Francia complete isolation and closure.



1862-1870 Francisco Solano López Government and the Triple Alliance War



The government inherited by Mariscal Lopez

- By 1860 Paraguay had a considerable superávit in its commercial balance. It was seen in Europe at the same time as one of the most developed countries in South America and one of the more promisory commercial partner in the región. Tabacco and yerba mate were exposed in the world exhibition in Paris in 1853 where they received several prizes. The period 1852 - 1865 is therefore referred as the Golden age in Paraguay. The national feeling and confidence were considerably strengthened in that time (Kleinpenning, 2009, I: 70)

ANTI PARAGUAYAN PROPAGANDA IN BUENOS AIRES

In the years prior to the War against the Triple Alliance, the political regime in Paraguay was the subject of persistent criticism from journalism in Buenos Aires, which also constituted a disseminator of the protests and allegations of the Paraguayans. **Long before the beginning of military actions, the need to carry out a war of liberation or regeneration to the Mediterranean Republic of South America was sustained there. The Buenos Aires newspapers frequently denounced the authoritarianism of the Paraguayan government, its military preparations, the obstacles it imposed on river navigation and the monopoly it exercised over the trade in yerba mate and wood.** The motivations of these criticisms varied with time, but the disapproval of the administrations of Carlos Antonio López, and of his son and successor, General Francisco Solano López, manifested itself recurrently since 1857 in the press of Buenos Aires (Scavone Yegros, 2011: 6).

CAUSES OF THE WAR

A DIFFERENT PATH FROM LIBERALISM?

- The remarkable state presence policies established by C A López government could not be accepted by liberals. It was not only different, but more dangerously, it had undoubtedly a big success.
- Many of the critiques were directed to the monopoly of the state in commerce.
- The opening of the markets necessary for the expansion of the international economy implied the opening of the financial centers in the metropolis with the introduction of the debt system, in which, fundamentally, Argentina was already embarked in times of conflict.
- Paraguay did not need British financial aid.

GREAT BRITAIN HEGEMONY

One last element to take into account to build the plot prior to the outbreak of the war and that goes through the aspects we have mentioned before, is the hegemony enjoyed by Britain in the region. It must be said that British's degree of involvement and responsibility in the conflict has been the subject of a constant historiographical dispute. Although the denunciation against the British imperialism has sometimes been described as a passive victimization on the part of Paraguay, the economic presence of the British island in the region is an undeniable factor, although not the only one, and fundamentally not in an autonomous way or separated from the other factors .

- “Among the causes of the conflict, the policy developed by the belligerent countries in the 1850s and 1860s had much to do with a large number of unresolved issues that defined issues of sovereignty and territoriality of the new states of South America. The pressure from foreign interests, especially the British, who were the main suppliers of arms and technical personnel to the Paraguay of the Lopez, also had an impact.
- Likewise, we can not fail to point out that, although the export of arms and ammunition to the Río de la Plata was prohibited in 1865, Brazil continued to receive them through a fluid maritime communication.
- In addition, both Brazil and Argentina obtained financing for the war through English borrowing houses, which was convenient for Britain, since it was going through an agonizing situation due to the cotton crisis, caused by the American Civil War. (1861-1865), although he had quickly sought supplies from other producers such as Egypt and Brazil itself.
- In any case, Paraguay could open up new investment prospects for Great Britain, before the new but growing cotton production registered in 1863, as a result of the 800,000 hectares planted in Paraguayan territory. However, the issue was that **Paraguay had its own industry and was reluctant to enter into credit negotiations with London's high banks**, which is why Great Britain tipped the scales in favor of Argentina and the Brazilian Empire” (Areces, 2010: 190).

THE ARMED CONFLICT

- The conflict as such began in Uruguay in 1864. Uruguay was a friendly country and a destiny that Paraguay saw as its best option to gain access to sea against its historical disagreements with Buenos Aires. Uruguay called Mariscal Lopez for help when Brazilian invaded its territory. The Marshal Francisco Solano Lopez, declared war on Brazil that had invaded Uruguay, (in what Paraguay considered as an interference that also affected their interests) counting on the fact that Argentina would support him given its historical disagreements with Brazil.
- But Solano López was wrong.

SECRET TREATY OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

- “Solano López was convinced that an Argentine-Brazilian military alliance was not possible. His authoritarian regime was popular on the side of the Argentine federalist leaders, so he thought he could count on the support of the great caudillo of the province of Entre Ríos, General Urquiza.
- But, when at the end of April 1865 he sent an armed body to the Argentine region of Corrientes with the aim of attacking Rio Grande do Sul (in Brasil), he did so after having directed, on the 13th, a declaration of war to the Argentine government that had not allowed him the passage for the Paraguayan army through its territory. Luck was cast. Urquiza joined Buenos Aires. The Argentines of Corrientes, whose identity was much closer to that of the Paraguayans than to that of the porteños, did not lean towards Solano López's side.
- On May 1, 1865 in Buenos Aires, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay signed the treaty called the Triple Alliance, whose text was to be kept secret. **The allies jointly committed to carry out the war against the "government" of Lopez, not against the "people of Paraguay", and to guarantee the free navigation of the great rivers at the end of the conflict. However, article 16 redesigned, for post-war, the borders of the disputed territories for the benefit of Argentina and Brazil.** With the excuse of an ideological war carried out as a defense of the peoples of the region, opposing the liberal urban elites of the Atlantic ports to the authoritarian regime of Marshal Lopez, it was mainly about neutralizing Paraguay” (Capdevila, 2010: 30-31).

SOME PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARAGUAYAN ARMY

- The beginning of the war did not let guess its end. The first campaigns gave Paraguay a certain pre-eminence based both on its tradition of military discipline, which contrasted with the difficulties that the Allied army faced in that sense, and on the characteristics that defined national identity in terms of belonging to a community recognized as own.
- In the context of the events, it is possible to distinguish some characteristics that point out the scope of the identity process in Paraguay before the war and at the same time its exalted culmination throughout the conflict

Paraguayan identity during the conflict

- Thomas Whigham mentions some elements that allowed to develop Paraguayan nationalist sentiment during the war. One of those elements was the mandatory universal conscription since 1850 and the full participation of the population in the army, in which social hierarchies did not mediate, and where even the rich had to take off their shoes to match the troop.
- Another element was the organization of popular festivals during the war, and the third, the publication, throughout much of the conflict, of a press written both in Spanish and, particularly in Guaraní, through the newspapers Centinela, Cacique Lambaré and Cabichuí, until 1868 (Whigham, 2007: 29-30).

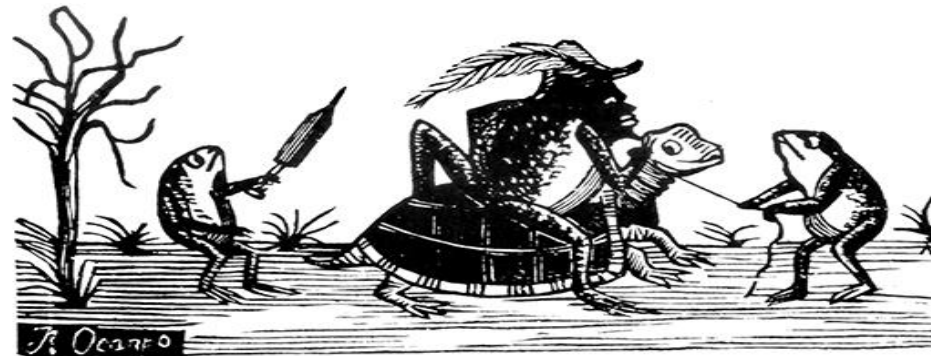
The press during the war



The press during the war



CABICHUI
EL ARTE DE LA GUERRA DEL PARAGUAY
Colección del Museo del Barro



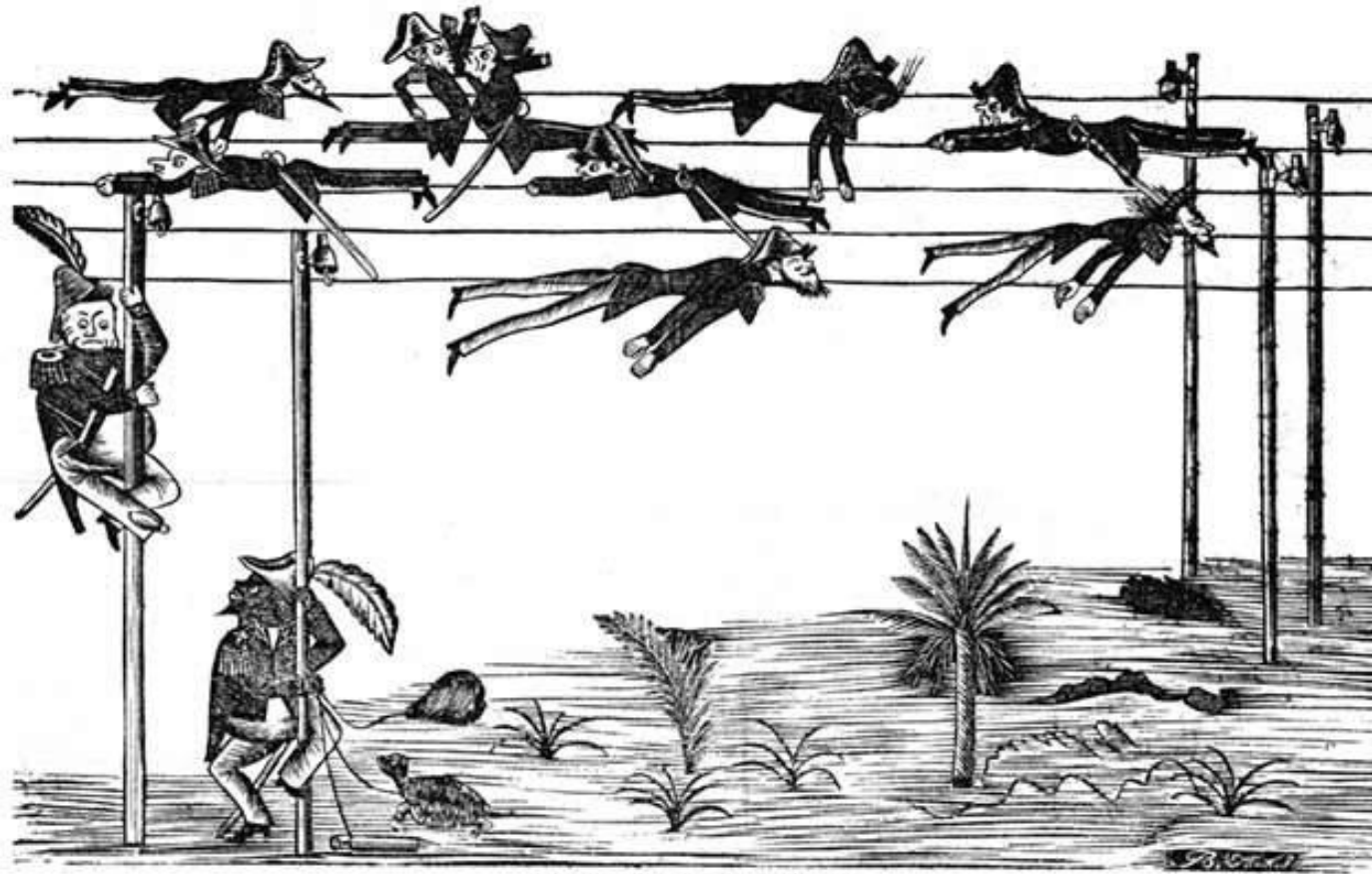
Caxias domando su nuevo Carumbé.

Xilografía, 1868



Xilografía, 1868

The press during the war



Telegrafia electo-negratlen.

The remains of the previous development

- The existence of the press reveals an aspect that should not be underestimated, which was the production of both paper and inks, materials scarce due to the blockade imposed by the allies since the Battle of Riachuelo, which took place as early as the middle of 1865 and from which, *Paraguay had to face self-sufficiency due to the fluvial blockade exercised by the allies.*
- This meant that during the war, and in situations that went from severe to extreme, there was not only ink and paper, but also other materials that resulted from the implementation of **really avant-garde recycling strategies even in terms of contemporary ecology.**
- This included the recovery of wood and ammunition from the countryside, donation of pots and kitchen utensils for the recovery of metal and its subsequent smelting to produce weapons and cannons, the harvesting of cow udders to produce vaccines against smallpox, transformation of old tissues in bandages and even collection of urine from the troop for the production of saltpeter destined to the production of gunpowder (Capdevila, 2010: 64).

The remains of the previous development

- The level of production of materials during the war, shows the scope of the plan launched by Lopez to develop the national industry and supply the state, but also brings to mind the validity of self-supply practices as an economic strategy that until the day of today appears as a longing and vindication of the peasants in Paraguay in their fight against industrial transgenic agriculture (mostly soy bean and corn)
- Several of the productive capacities were maintained for a long time, even until the beginning of the final withdrawal phase (1869) of the remains of the Paraguayan army. The exaltation of the sense of belonging, assumed during the war, as evidenced by the aforementioned elements, characteristics that recovered for themselves several of the factors already present during the colony, reinforced during the governments of Francia and Lopez, and finally testing the war against the Triple Alliance: military organization, territorial defense, common language with historical weight, and also, it must be stressed, obedience, or for many, submission to the constituted authorities.

The use of Guarani Language

- The use of the Guarani language appears as a particular identity emergency that is present already from the immediately previous period, given that it was the language spoken by all the inhabitants of the national territory.
- Carlos Antonio López had started a campaign recognizing Spanish as a factor in the modernization of the country, at the behest of the Guaraní; especially from the educational policy promoted by his government. **The conflict, however, immediately summoned the language as a primary element of identity.**

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

- For the neighbors, the war of the Triple Alliance, finally meant the consolidation and organization of national unity around a state, as well as the geopolitical stabilization of the region. For Paraguay, the war of 70, or Guasú War (great) as it is frequently called, implied a cut, a rupture, a closure of the tensions and contradictions settled in the incipient construction of a first national state and operational as constitutive elements of identity.



Consequences of the war

- Indeed, and without room for moderation we can affirm that the end of the war implied for Paraguay a disaster of important dimensions. Brezzo writes that "[...] the hecatomb was of such magnitude that all its economic, social, political and cultural ties were broken" (Brezzo, 2010b: 200).
- The population was reduced to approximately 230,000 people in 1872, and "**the country lost a total of 156,415 km² of its territory** (Kleinpenning, 2009, II: 28).
- Barbara Potthast and Thomas Whigham (1998: 147-159) estimate that between **60 and 69% of the population disappeared in the conflict.**

Consequences of the war

- The conflict lasted for 5 years, during which time Paraguay became a desolate desert. The scope of the violence exceeded the limits of the thinkable on all sides. In Paraguay even children fought.
- The scope of the conflict implied a multiplicity of actors, generally absent from the stories of the time as a specific group, and included in the case of Paraguay due to the relevance that the situation gave them.
- Such is the case fundamentally of women, whose role is not limited only to their different forms of participation in the conflict, but fundamentally, to the role that they had to play later, given the resulting demographic and therefore social panorama.
- Barbara Potthast calculated on the basis of the censuses of the time that in the mid-1900s, more than half of the household heads were exercised by women (Potthast, 1996). The same author comments that "there were an average of four women per man; in some places, however, the ratio was one to ten or twenty" (Potthast, 2005: 439).

Consequences of the war

The economic and political situation resulting from the war clearly produced a shift to the opposite side of the previously known situation.

- The country went straight to the liberal economy devoid of any resource and with all its infrastructure absolutely destroyed.
- The old system of land tenure by the state was replaced by the sale of public lands to foreign companies. The economic independence of the state was postponed forever with the contraction of onerous loans to finance the costs of war.

The new political order

- Paraguay was forced by allies to sanction a “liberal” constitution.
- Two political parties, (colorado and liberal) still alive, were created
- The memory of the war was repressed. It was forbidden to pronounce the name of Mariscal López

Paraguay's political development in the post war: political constraints

There were several political consequences in the post war period:

- the combination of an "a priori" political framework and an unfortunate social situation left no room for the construction of viable exit alternatives.
- the new state and economic order started from an economic situation of bankruptcy, with debts of war, without income and with a population depleted in number and capacities.
- To this must be added the protectorate of the neighbors who were more concerned with looking after their interests than in consolidating those of Paraguay.

Paraguay's political development in the post war: political constraints

These political and economical constraints were therefore inscribed with **three intrinsic elements** that delimited its development and potentialities and whose temporal recurrence allows us to better understand its structural inscription and the weight they have not lost in the political and economical reality of Paraguay

Political constraints

- 1. First, **the poverty of most of the population**, a fact that could never be alleviated, and that is in open contradiction with the creation of great fortunes that have no other source than the benefits resulting from the private administration of the state. **This element is the foundation stone of the problem of exclusion and inequality in Paraguay which is undoubtedly a rural, agricultural country.**

Political constraints

- In the second place we can name the **denial of previous history, repressed as an identity discourse** and later transformed into a passionate discourse that does not cease to be linked to violence as a constitutive element of the political exercise.

Political constraints

- In the last place, **the validity of the paradox resulting from authoritarianism as a way of exercising politics**, which implies from the beginning, the legitimation of the split between the constitutional mandate and its effective application.

Political constraints and political structure

These elements make it possible to **better understand the apparently cyclical character of the governments of the two parties that still rule Paraguay and to point out the continuity between them in terms of political practices**, as well as its ideological unity before the appearance of forces that could question the structure of political power.

From Triple Alliance to Chaco War and from Dictatorship to nowadays

- Since the end of the war the two political parties created in the immediate post war dispute the power in Paraguay.
- None of them has been able to take the country out of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.
- Between 1932 and 1935 Paraguay fought a war with Bolivia, and won the war, but this time, once again and although the military victory, the country could not develop and the political order turn to military power.

From Triple Alliance to Chaco War and from Dictatorship to nowadays

- In 1954 after a period of very violent inner wars for political reasons, a general, Alfredo Stroessner assumes the power after a military cup.
- He remained in power until 1989, establishing an authoritarian corrupt government that tortured and killed many people, and whose policy was based on a clientelistic structure that subsequent governments have not been able to overcome.
- **Yesterday, the son of Stroessner secretary of State won the elections in Paraguay**, becoming President after almost 30 years of the end of Dictatorship with a political discourse that praised the ex dictator government.

Actual validity of post war dilemmas

- “For the electoral process that the country will have in 2018 it does not matter who the candidates will be, it will be a fiction of democracy: a systematic expulsion and marginalization mechanism that banishes the peasants to benefit the big producers and an urban economy that informalizes and subjugates the workers.
- Unemployment, poverty and inequality in Paraguay guarantee that political turbulence continues
- Until the mechanisms of distribution, social justice and equality and basic rights are activated, turbulence will continue”. (Magdalena López, 2018)

Paraguay today

Today Paraguay has
6.725.000 inhabitants

406700 km²

90% of the population speaks Guarani and less than 7 % doesn't.

- Paraguay is a very unequal country.
- The economy has been growing due mostly to the soy bean exports, but the social structures makes it very hard for people to improve their condition
- **5 % of the population owns the 90% of the land, in a country with no considerable industries.**
- 30% of the population is poor, and Paraguay is the 4th poorest country in Latin America, and the poorest in South America
- Frontiers with Brazil are subjected to brasilian drugtraffic cartels and growing violence.



400.000 children live in extreme poverty in Paraguay



en Paraguay, según ONG. Foto: EFE

Less poverty, more inequality



Is Paraguay really exceptional?

After a closer look at Paraguayan history (and given the fact that poverty and exclusion seems to be everlasting facts of Latinamerican economies) we can ask ourselves **whether Paraguay is really an exception**, or on the contrary, **this discourse of isolation as exception tends to hide the path that modernity has taken in Latin America**, leaving behind the promises of freedom for a never ending inequality and social exclusion of the majority of the population.

Isolation discourse as a mechanism of concealment?

Paraguay could then be seen as the explicit side of poverty in Latinamerica instead of as an unknown island, and the contrast its history has to offer can help us trace the historical development of poverty and inequality, as well as the actual presence of the indigenous past, as Guarani language clearly shows.

Paraguay as an observatory

- This implies the question of **whether it is possible to look at the Paraguayan case as an observatory of the challenges that the Latin American society poses to an unaccomplished modernity, or, in another words as an observatory of unsolved historical contradictions** (ie: the colonial imposition vs the guarani subsistence; local development vs global impositions).

FINAL WORDS

- **Turning an established point of view with respect to poverty and inequality** can may be serve us to broaden the scope of answers that we can provide.
- **This can also derive in the construction of more efficient alternatives to the social, political and economical imbalance, inequality and exclusion** of million of people that still persist in Paraguay, in Latinamerica and at a global level as well.

I thankyou all very much for your presence here today.