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Indigenous Peoples in Paraguay: Dispensable Citizens?

This article aims to sketch out the current situation of indigenous peoples in Paraguay, both from a legal standpoint in terms of rights, that they supposedly enjoy and from the socioeconomic standpoint, which often reveals a huge contrast between reality and law. To this end, the author will briefly review the history of relations between national Paraguayan society and indigenous peoples, the legislative and ideological changes that have shaped this relationship, and the subjective perception that the majority of society has of native peoples.

Key words: Paraguay, Indigenous Peoples, indigenous rights, nationalism

Introduction

In Paraguayan society, which perceives itself exclusively as mestizo, indigenous people are a minority not only numerically, but above all symbolically. While nationalist discourse emphasizes the roots of the Paraguayan Guarani mestizo and proudly boasts descent from the glorious "warrior race", society as a whole tends to despise indigenous peoples, who are marginalized and even excluded from the national community as "non-Paraguayan" and archaic vestiges sentenced to perish by natural selection. The existence in a society an Ethnic Other that wants to be thought of as having uniform practices often leads to ethnocide, whose purpose is to physically or symbolically eradicate that which does not fit into the dominant cultural and socioeconomic molds. In this work, the author will review the most important authors of Paraguayan anthropology[1] and their studies on historical

[1] In Paraguay, anthropology is not a priority discipline for the State, which does not have sufficient funds to support development beyond small specialized centers and a few researchers, mostly of foreign origin, many of which are Catholic priests. Thus, we have some private institutions such as the Center of Anthropological Studies at the Catholic University (Centro de Estudios Antropológicos de la Universidad Católica CEADUC) directed by Father José Zanardini, the Visual Arts Center Museo de Barro, and the Dr. Andrés Barbero Ethnographic Museum – all in Asunción. In terms of public institutions, the National University of

and present indigenous populations, especially in terms of their relationship with the Paraguayan State.

The Indigenous Population of Paraguay – General Information

Today, the territory of Paraguay is inhabited by approximately 113,000 Indians, constituting 1.7% of the total population (*Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos*). Twenty ethnic groups are divided into five different language families that are mainly concentrated in the western part of the country (Chaco), which is less populated and more inhospitable than the East. The largest group, the Guarani, is divided into six ethnic clusters, four of which are settled in the eastern region: Tavyterá; Mbyá pai; Ava Guarani, and Ache. The others inhabit the western region: Western Guarani; and Guarani Ñandeva (Zanardini and Biedermann 17). The majority of the indigenous population lives in rural areas (91.5%), although the percentage of urban indigenous people continues to grow year by year. Some groups tend to be sedentary and engage in extensive farming of lowlands, but the majority of them lead a hunter-gatherer, nomadic or semi-nomadic life. In both cases, this highlights the importance of land and territory, as well as the whole ecosystem, which is necessary for their physical and social survival.

Table 1. The indigenous population of Paraguay by ethnic group and language family (Zanardini and Biedermann 17)

Language Family	**Ethnic group**
	Western Region (Chaco)
Guarani	West Guarani (Guarayo, Chiriguayo) Ñandeva Guarani (Tapieté)
Maskoy	North Enlhet South Enxet I Angaite Sanapaná Tuff Guaná
Mataco (Mataguayo)	Nivacle Maka Lumnanas (Manjui, Choroti)
Zamuco	Ayoreo Ybytoso (Ishir, Chamacoco) Tomáraho (Ishir, Chamacoco)
Guaicurú	Qom

Asunción (UNA) does not have a Faculty of Anthropology, or offer a major in anthropology. The most important Paraguayan anthropologists are: Miguel Chase-Sardi; León Cadogan; Branislava Susnik; Ramón Fogel; Bartomeu Meliá; and José Zanardini. The most prestigious anthropology magazine is the *Anthropological Supplement* (CEADUC), co-founded in 1965 by the first director of the Center, Miguel Chase-Sardi.

Language Family	Ethnic group
	Eastern Region
Guarani	Mbyá Ava Guarani (Chiripá, Ava Katu Eté) Guarani-Kaiowá Aché (Guayakí)

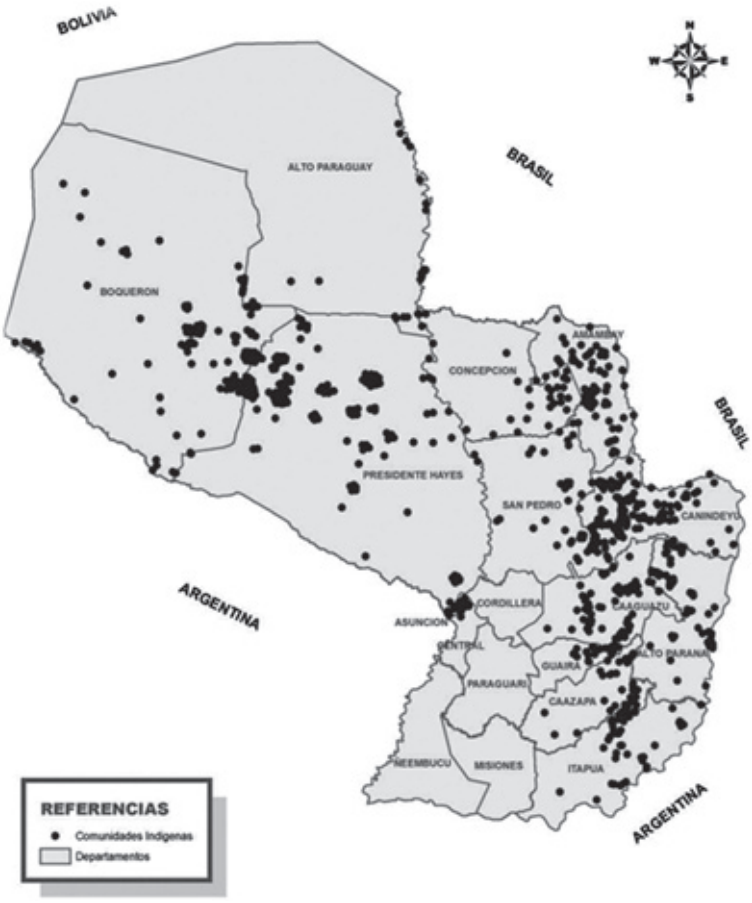

Figure 1. Map of indigenous communities in Paraguay
(Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos).

Historical Background and Legal Status

The history of relations between indigenous peoples and national society is long, complex, and – although it is unique and in some ways has original features – not so different from that of other Latin American countries. The natives survived the Spanish colonization in three different socio-historical ways: as *indio montés* (a wild

Indian); as *indio encomendado* (an *encomienda* Indian); and as *indio reducido* (a reduction Indian), (See: Fogel *Los pueblos guaraní*, Meliá "Los pueblos indígenas: una colonización ininterrumpida", *El Paraguay inventado*, and Susnik) The *indio montés* resisted conquest and subjection until the 1950s, when they retreated to more inhospitable territories, where they continue their traditional practices today. The second category, *indio encomendado*, refers to the Guarani who lived through the *encomienda* regime after its establishment in Paraguay in 1555. The regime forced the Guarani to join the political, cultural, and economic system imposed by colonists, and turned them into a disciplined and semi-enslaved workforce. The last category, *indio reducido*, refers to the Guarani Jesuit Missions (1609-1767), protected from the *encomienda* regime and isolated from the Spanish-mestizo population in order to preserve their linguistic and cultural purity, and at the same time to instill in them a model of "exemplary" Christian life. However, after the expulsion of the Jesuits from the continent, the natives were forced to join colonial society.

A crucial moment for the integrated indigenous population was the government of Carlos Antonio Lopez (1844-1862), who finally ended the colonial legacy with the Decree of 1848, which made Indians "disappear" legally for 133 years.[2] Article 1 and 11 of the Decree dispossessed the Indians of their land in exchange for illusory citizenship. Article 1 states, "It is declared that the indigenous peoples of the twenty-one nations are Citizens of the Republic". Article 11 states, "It is declared that the assets, rights and actions of the aforementioned twenty-one nations of native peoples are property of the State".[3] As noted by Enrique Gaska, Indians became Paraguayans instantly, "free citizen[s] without land or identity" (17-26). The identity of the Indians was thus suddenly and formally integrated with Paraguayan identity, though the actual integration process began after the Paraguayan War (1870). The ancient inhabitants of the Indian village became Paraguayan peasants and were forced to Christianize their names and disappear from national censuses, as well as the national consciousness. They were even forced to deny their own ethnic identity.

Thereafter, the only natives called "Indians" have been the non-integrated *indios monteses*, who are in no way considered Paraguayan citizens, and who frequently suffer from violent attempts to reduce them by blood and fire. As Jorge Servin indicates, the current indigenous peoples in Paraguay are descendants of those indomitable "wild Indians", and have always kept an enormous distance from mestizo society to the extent that they do not identify therewith:

> … It is very likely that indigenous peoples and communities we know today are those people who managed to remain isolated from these events, namely those 'naturals' living in the vast and ancient forests of the eastern region and the Chaco region, who remained 'independent' and away from the events that occurred in the country (Servin 9).

"Wild Indians" were thus excluded by 19th century Paraguayan society as a result of their own reluctance to integrate. In time, the ethnic question became subject to the liberal approach of positivist social Darwinism, which condemned indigenous

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[2] Until 1981, it did not legally recognize the existence of indigenous people in Paraguay.

[3] Original: Art. 1: "Se declaran ciudadanos de la República a los indígenas de los veintiún pueblos"; Art. 11: "Se declaran propiedades del Estado los bienes, derechos y acciones de los mencionados veinte y un pueblos de naturales de la República."

peoples to inevitable demise for lack of progress and development. For governments, regardless of the party in power, the Indians were uncivilized and pagan beings that threatened national borders and therefore were closer to being enemies of the country than citizens. In fact, the liberal Constitution of 1870 denied natives Paraguayan citizenship, while paradoxically forcing them to abide by national laws under punishment in case of insubordination. According to the Constitution, policies aimed at this population assumed that it could be Christianized and civilized. Indeed, the government was required to "provide border security, maintain peaceful relations with the Indians, and promote their conversion to Christianity and civilization" (Art. 72).

In the 20th century, policies aimed at reducing, Christianizing, and civilizing the "savage" Indians would continue. This task was left to religious organizations. The *Ley de Colonización y del Hogar* (Colonization and Household Act) of 1904 authorized the executive power to promote "indigenous tribes reduction, ensuring their establishment through missions and providing land and work items". These goals were reiterated in 1907 with the *Ley de Reducciones de Tribus Indígenas* (Reductions of Indian Tribes Act). At the time of nationalist governments (1936-1947), indigenous policies remained largely unchanged, and their main objective was to integrate Paraguayan society through religious indoctrination and further tribal reductions. For these purposes, President Rafael Franco created the Indigenous National Foundation in 1937. Also passed during his rule was the Agrarian Act of 1940, which regulated the formation of agricultural colonies with "tribes". Important here is the patronizing perception of the indigenous population as children who must learn the civilized life of their Paraguayan guardians.

The existence of natives as such gave rise to new problems during the Alfredo Stroessner dictatorship (1954-1989), when the expansion of the agricultural frontier and colonization of El Chaco, as well as the development of various infrastructural projects, including large dams, collided with Indian populations inhabiting heretofore un-coveted lands. It is no surprise that this "second conquest" finally decimated the indigenous population, both as a result of transmission of diseases to which the invaded populations had never before been exposed, as well as destruction of their habitat (Vázquez; Vysokolán; Gaska). These human rights violations, left unpunished to this day, were even easier to carry out if we take into account the specificity of the Stroessner authoritarian government. The territorial dispossession, facilitated by the lack of legal property titles and regulations, provoked ethnocide and genocide; slavery and the inhumane treatment of Indians 'hunted' were not only tolerated by the government, but also accepted by most of society, which considered it inevitable "collateral damage" resulting from development and modernization. A few priests and missionaries (including some anthropologists) concerned about the gravity of the situation decided to act in favor of the indigenous peoples and demanded legislative changes to recognize their existence and rights. The Stroessner Constitution of 1967 does not even consider the ethnic problem, and the few indigenous acts that were passed simply reinforced forced integration and enshrined state care for "survivor cores" of indigenous groups.[4]

[4] In 1958, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) was part of the Inter-American Indian Institute. In 1975, it was replaced by the Paraguayan Native Institute (INDI), which was under

One such act was the Agrarian Act of 1963, which provided assistance for "indigenous groups" *via* the distribution of land by a government agency, but without recognizing community ownership of these lands: "Survivor cores of indigenous parts that still exist in the country will be assisted by the Institute for Rural Welfare in organizing into colonies. To this end, it will allot the land necessary for settlement and work to the extent of its possibilities in cooperation with the relevant government agencies and private entities, and promote the progressive incorporation of these cores into the economic and social development of the country" (Ley No. 854/63).[5]

It was not until 1981, thanks to international pressure and the efforts of foreign and Paraguayan "Indianphiles", that for the first time since the Decree of 1848, the Statute of Indigenous Communities legally recognized the existence of indigenous peoples together with their customs. It would regulate their internal coexistence, and implicitly their right to communal land. The statute reads, "This law aims at the social and cultural preservation of the indigenous communities, the defense of their heritage and traditions, the improvement of their economic conditions, their effective participation in the national development process and their access to a legal system that guarantees them ownership of land and other productive resources with rights equal to those of other citizens" (Ley No. 904/81).[6] Unfortunately, at the time, neither this nor other laws could be enforced effectively due to a lack of political will and penalties.

The transition to democracy in the 1990s, preceded by an opposition democratization movement led in part by indigenous peoples, brought major legislative changes. In 1992, ethnic rights were granted constitutional status.[7] Indigenous people have since been recognized not only as citizens, but have been guaranteed the right to "preserve and develop their ethnic identity in their respective habitat". Their political, social, economic, cultural, and religious systems have been protected, and subject to the customary rules to organize communal life. Moreover, community ownership of land in "sufficient size and quality for the conservation and development of their particular ways of life" shall be provided by the state free of charge

supervision from the Ministry of Defense until 1996, and afterwards under that of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The INDI is responsible for coordinating the work of public and private organizations dedicated to natives, such as demarcation and land titling issues.

[5] Original: "Los núcleos sobrevivientes de las parcialidades indígenas que aún existen en el país serán asistidos por el Instituto de Bienestar Rural para su organización en colonias. Con este objetivo afectará las tierras necesarias para su asentamiento y colaborará en la medida de sus posibilidades con los organismos estatales y entidades privadas pertinentes para promover la progresiva incorporación de dichos núcleos al desarrollo económico y social del país".

[6] Original: "Esta ley tiene por objeto la preservación social y cultural de las comunidades indígenas, la defensa de su patrimonio y sus tradiciones, el mejoramiento de sus condiciones económicas, su efectiva participación en el proceso de desarrollo nacional y su acceso a un régimen jurídico que les garantice la propiedad de la tierra y otros recursos productivos en igualdad de derechos con los demás ciudadanos."

[7] See Article 62 on Indigenous peoples and ethnic groups; Article 63 on ethnic identity; Article 64 on community ownership; Art. 65 on the right to participate; and Art. 66 on education and assistance.

(Chapter V of the Constitution). As the *colorados* (Colorado Party) told deputies during the Constituent Assembly in 1991, "The Constitution will be the way to ensure effective participation of indigenous communities in our country, they gave us their language – Guarani – the main column of national cohesion and identity, which we are very proud of as a nation" (Harder Horst 77). As for Guarani heritage, bilingual education goals were established to develop and protect the use of the national majority mother tongue. A year later, an important international document to protect natives' rights was ratified; namely, Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO). The Convention reiterated their right to land, territory, and self-determination. All these legislative developments mark a new era and lay foundations for the current legal situation of indigenous peoples in Paraguay. However, as discussed below, the actual impact has been rather limited and noble intentions still stand in contrast with the deplorable situation of native peoples.

Dispensable Citizens? The Socio-economic Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Paraguay

The data from censuses indicates that the socio-economic situation of indigenous peoples in Paraguay, including the Guarani, is frightening. 45% of their communities do not have a legal, permanent land settlement, and those that do often do not enjoy quality of it, endangering their ability to subsist. 45% of Paraguayan children live in poverty, but among natives, this figure is 77% (with 63% in extreme poverty). This results in chronic malnutrition (UNICEF). Natives' access to basic services is also insufficient. Only 21% of households have electricity, and only six out of every 100 households have drinking water. Additionally, health services are poor and education is inefficient. In fact, while the national population receives an average of 7 years of education, this number is just 2.2 among natives. Another indicator that clearly reflects their disadvantage in terms of formal education is the illiteracy rate: 51% among those over 15 years of age, compared to 7% nationally (Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos).

Although the Guarani people are considered in nationalist discourse as a cultural and biological origin of the Paraguayan mestizo – a key element of the nation's composition, and above all the source of Paraguayan linguistic identity – their current situation indicates economic exclusion, accompanied by social and cultural ethnocide and genocide. The entire indigenous population has been victimized by brutal harassment from society, and the colonization and development projects that reduce their habitat every day. The pressure on their lands and territories has resulted in their expulsion, fragmentation of ethnic groups and communities, deculturation, and even death, despite the existence of pro-Indian constitutional guarantees. In fact, their legal rights have failed to protect them from the violence and dispossession which have been practiced with full support from Paraguay's successive governments, and which are part of the country's development model, justified by the concepts of progress and modernity. As anthropologist José Zanardini, Salesian Father says, "The Indians live in poverty, malnourished, on the fringe of Paraguayan society, which despises and treats them as inferior beings. […] But the risk of extinction of some indigenous peoples is more real and

closer than you think, despite the tenacious will to survive, able to awaken hidden energies" (Brachetti 194).

Government attempts to integrate Indians into "modern" society through policy have resulted in further impoverishment of thereof. The INDI, the State body theoretically responsible for land titling and conflict resolution in favor of native peoples, in practice focuses more on promotion of deforestation and support for large agribusiness.[8] Public services provided to the indigenous population such as education and healthcare are highly unsatisfactory in terms of coverage and quality. The loss of their lands and territories where to perpetuate their lifestyle and culture; deforestation, which prevents hunting and consequently self-sufficiency, leads to dependence on paid work outside the community; all that forces natives to migrate in search of a better place, but most never find one. Faced with marginalization and discrimination from society, many of them opt to abandon their devalued ethnic identity and acculturate. Natives are widely considered marginal and their plight is unimportant on a national scale. They are subject to many negative stereotypes, as well as "necessary and inevitable" civilizing action.

One of the main causes of this deplorable situation is the Paraguayan economic model, which requires huge amounts of fertile land for intensive cultivation of genetically modified soy, corn, and cotton, as well as industrial livestock breeding. In 2010, Paraguay experienced the greatest economic growth in Latin America, and the second greatest on a global scale, with an increase of 15%. A year later, however, growth fell to 3.8%; increased back to 13% by 2013; and fell again to 4.7% in 2014.[9] Paraguay's economy is primarily based on exports and is dependent on the fluctuations of commodity prices on the world market. It is also important to stress that positive economic growth rates do not actually translate into human development index growth. On the contrary, 82% of the Paraguayan population has no health insurance, and 38.2% live in poverty, of which 15.5% live in extreme poverty. The United Nations Economic and Social Council stated regarding Paraguay that "[it] is concerned that, despite economic growth of the State in recent years, the number of people living in extreme poverty has increased" (ECOSOC).

The economic model that assures Paraguay's growth is based largely on intensive agro-industrial production for export, along with the exploitation of large binational dams. This development model has a huge negative impact on Paraguay – not only on the indigenous rural population, but also on the precarious living conditions that eventually force emigration. Furthermore, Paraguay is one of the countries where *sensu stricto* agrarian reform has not been carried out, which explains the excessive accumulation of land by a small group of landowners (including transnational corporations), while the majority of the rural population runs poor smallholder farms, with only 2% of the country's arable land at its disposal. This clearly shows that the ethnic issue in Paraguay is strictly related to economic circumstances, and any attempt to analyze it without taking this into account would be frivolous.

[8] The INDI has no funds or possibility to fulfill its mission due to a lack of political will to solve the land problem. It is vertical, paternalistic, and corrupt. The amount and quality of land titled decreases each year.

[9] Data from the Central Bank of Paraguay (BCP).

We found multiple and poignant testimonies that denounce the ethnocide suffered by indigenous peoples. Missionary Alejo Obelar, for example, describes the indiscriminate theft of indigenous lands by landowners, justified by 21st-century social Darwinism: "the Indian is like a weed: he hinders and impedes progress" (Obelar 8). Thus, Paraguayan and foreign landowners (largely Brazilians and Mennonites) become, according to them, bearers of light and modernity who fertilize the land with their entrepreneurship and free it from indigenous weeds. The following testimony of a Mbyá man, recorded by René Harder Horst, is an apt illustration of this 'civilizing' enterprise:

> Mennonites with their tractors began to crush my sugar cane plantations; not content with that, they proceeded to completely destroy the plantations and then burn them. This burning spread to orange crops, destroying about twenty plants; from these plants they took their fruits in bags, and their personnel set fire to sown fields. (98).

Pressure from landowners for access to indigenous lands is unofficially sanctioned by the government, leading to a rule of hypocrisy. First, natives' rights are legally secured, and institutions like the INDI are created to oversee land allocation and appointment. Then, the government turns a blind eye to infringements, and real solutions are avoided. As Carlino Nuñez, head of the Mbyá Ranchito community complained,

> We live in these mountains that belong to us, which the Creator gave us. Authorities also say the land we occupy belongs to us, but the owner wants to sell his land to Brazilians and Paraguayans, and they want us out of here because we are poor; we do not have money. Money is now the boss, and the poor can have land no longer. The poor only remain to die. […] [The INDI] assured me that the land issue was solved; they gave us hope, but we are still waiting. It's been two months and they have not appeared (Fogel 1989: 91).

The landlords' solution to the problem of indigenous poverty is charity, whose purpose is not to make poverty disappear, but rather to make the natives disappear. Indigenous children are therefore divided among wealthy families, which in theory should instill "civilized" manners in them, but in practice results in semi-slave labor. This type of "solution" is currently dominant in Paraguayan society, which considers Indians an obstacle to the development of economy and the nation (in Paraguay, non-mestizos do not fit in). The only moral and humane solution would involve an agrarian revolution – an important measure not only for Indians, but also for thousands of Paraguayan peasants suffering from similar calamities. This would be, as Alejo Obelar (17) indicated,

> So that Indians can regain their ethnic identity, so they can develop as people; for vices to stop and for them to regain their strength and health; so they can be men and Christians, they need land, good soil, abundant land, land that nobody can dispute, land where their pilgrim ethnicity can be realized and projected towards a definitive homeland" (17). As long as the lands remain in the hands of landlords, no law or government initiative can solve the "Indian problem." Until then, initiatives will be more to keep up appearances in the international arena than a real effort to ensure natives' rights.

As Melia alleged, the so-called Indian problem in Paraguay is actually a problem

of "civilized" mestizos who are responsible for all the damages suffered by the indigenous peoples:

> If the Indians have problems with the land, it is because we, 'civilized' people have taken away the lands; if they have health problems, it's because we've introduced diseases previously unknown to them; if they have alcohol problems, it is because we, 'civilized' people sell them the cane (expensive enough to ruin them); if they have problems with their socio-economic organization, it is because we, 'civilized' people have them marginalized and exploited. And now we 'civilized' people don't know how to fix the problem we have created for them (Durán 85).

In his complaint *Yo, indio guayakí, acuso a los hombres vestidos* ("I, Guayaki Indian, accuse dressed men"), Meliá evidences the bestial treatment of indigenous peoples in Paraguay, who are considered more "forest animals" than human; who can be hunted, cornered, killed, kidnapped and sold with total impunity before the law. "Dressed men" show utter disregard for nudity, which they interpret as a symbol of barbarism; and the existence of beings not connected with "civilization" bothers them, "because it is said that we are less than we are, which will facilitate elimination of us "rebels" who aren't taken to the prison of civilization" (Meliá, 'Yo, indio guayakí…' 174).

In fact, for natives, civilization means nothing more than the physical and symbolic destruction of their lives and their habitat. They are dispossessed of their lands, which mestizos steal with just a paper. Their flora and fauna are destroyed, as "everything is taken from the jungle because it is un-owned, but we are not allowed to eat their cows because they are private property". This results in natives being hungry, sick, and either enclosed in reservations or lying on the streets of big cities. They subsequently become the object of charitable actions and indigenous policies that aim to solve the "Indian problem" as if they themselves are at fault. As Meliá says, "They have canceled my normal livelihood, and now they give me charity like a pauper…they try to make me come into civilization, but through the door of servitude and peonage" (ibid).

The urgent need to find new lands after eviction or after habitat destruction is linked with indigenous efforts to land titling. Indeed, to this end, the Guarani temporarily migrate to the capital, where they protest and apply pressure on the government. The urban mestizo population reacts negatively to the arrival of natives in the city, especially if they come to visible or central spaces such as the streets and town squares, violate traffic laws, beg, or "spoil" the parks with makeshift cardboard houses. Therefore, indigenous settlements are uprooted by force, the people are transported to the periphery of the city, and parks and squares are closed with fences and padlocks. The Paraguayan newspaper *ABC Color* denounces these practices: "How sad to see that our indigenous brothers and sisters return to the capital! Again they return with their children, victims of tricks, with their dreams, and they are again faced with general contempt. […] The issue seems to be that we do not see. Because they make the city ugly" (Sanabria). Once evicted from the capital, they again begin their pilgrimage in search of justice and land to settle as a community. Often, this dream never comes true. Instead, the community is dispersed, and its members choose to migrate individually to the cities, where they join the extremely poor, neglected, and marginalized urban population. In

fact, in most cases, migrants do not find work, housing, or even basic services. Many, including children, live on the streets in danger of alcoholism, drug addiction, disease, and abuse.

Besides the economic and political implications, the phenomenon of indigenous migration to cities also has a cultural, psychological, and linguistic impact on individuals and communities. In terms of psychology, Indian immigrants have feelings of rootlessness, injustice caused by forced migration, longing for their homeland, and depression stemming therefrom. The loss of their territories, beyond material loss, means deprivation of their ritual and symbolic world, and the destruction of their roots as an ethnic group. Forced migration also involves violent changes related to cultural practices, relationship with the environment, leadership models, gender roles, food, health, etc. Aside from common problems related to their status as migrants, natives suffer discrimination and racist rejection from society. Their cultures, beliefs, and worldviews do not coincide with the national culture, and they can hardly identify with the nation-state and mestizo society. National culture, meanwhile, is nominally proud of its Guarani roots, but in practice rejects the current Indian, considered 'pre-modern', 'uncivilized', 'lazy' and 'dirty', hence 'dispensable' for modern society. It is symbolic that one of the largest indigenous settlements is in proximity to an urban waste dump,[10] because Paraguayan society thinks of natives as disposable human waste, whose place is outside, where they are not seen. They obstruct the country because they "hinder progress" and they are not welcome in cities because they transgress the order and urban aesthetics. The Indians often begin to believe this about themselves. They feel like trash and sink into self-denigration and dejection. As Toba Maskoy said, "We are trash." That is to say, they are treated like trash (Obelar 12).

The racist nature of Paraguayan society is reflected in the ethnic prejudices that plague all social classes, although to different degrees and effects. Discriminatory stereotypes are naturalized and disseminated as objective truths that justify ethnic discrimination, the privileged position of the elite, and their economic project of territorial expansion and exploitation of Indians. In a survey conducted by Schvartzman as part of the Marandú Project, a high percentage of respondents attributed negative qualities to natives, such as dirtiness, inferiority, ineptitude and danger. Only 18% declared they would accept an Indian in their family environment (See Table 2 and 3).

This means that the vast majority of the Paraguayans would not accept natives in their personal spheres. Moreover, only 19% would consider them compatriots, and 5% would not tolerate any contact. These percentages vary depending on the area and the level of education of respondents, with more tolerance corresponding to higher education and social class. For example, in Caaguazú, 100% of the respondents rejected the idea of having an Indian in the family; in Asunción, 100% would accept some relationship, at least as a compatriot; and up to 13% in Villarrica would not accept any kind of relationship. The departments with the highest percentage of discrimination, according to the survey, are Estigarribia, Caballero, and Caaguazú, where more than 85% of the population expressed negative opinions about natives.

[10] This location is also justified by the main occupation of the population being the collection and recycling of waste.

Prejudice can be covert, naturalized and unconscious, in this situation interviewees did not consider themselves in any way racist (58% of all prejudices), or consciously manifested and declared that it can even lead to violence (24%). Only 18% of respondents reported no such prejudice against Indians.

Table 2. Opinions about natives (Schvartzman 211-212; 217)

Opinion	**National average**	**Dep. Caaguazú**
They are dirty	30%	4.5%
They rob and kill	37%	59%
They can't lead	35%	49%
They are inferior	19%	25%
They are dangerous because of their contagious diseases	19%	21%
They are like animals	10%	21%
It's a shame they exist	8%	15%

Table 3. The closeness that one would have with a native (Schvartzman 233)

Closeness	**National average**
Spouse	5%
Godfather	13%
Friend	19%
Neighbor	13%
Coworker	26%
Compatriot	19%
Would not tolerate any contact	5%

Also, a survey conducted by the author in Asunción in September 2012 (Makaran 198), revealed open discrimination (albeit in a minority of the respondents), describing natives as "primitive inhabitants of the country" who "lack culture;" or as "pigs and unhygienic, a fact that can't be justified by poverty." Most respondents did not openly express negative opinions, but instead simply distanced themselves from native peoples on account of them being "human beings with different customs" who "live apart." They did stress the historic role of natives in the past, but not in the present, referring to them as "our ancestors" or "precursors of our culture." The few that focused on the Indians of today or denounced their deplorable situation said things like "they are forgotten by the government and abandoned", or that they are "discriminated against" and a "long-suffering people". Only one person mentioned the positive potential of the indigenous population: "they can teach us a lot about nature". Distance was evident in the more detailed interviews about natives, who were seen as the incomprehensible Other, hardly considered a compatriot or a Paraguayan like everyone else. Even in conversations with public officials, this trend was visible, as evidenced by the words of Aida Torres Romero of the National Commission on Bilingualism: "Here there's no need to go further than the Paraguayan Chaco, there is a city called Filadelfia. […] Specifically it was a Mennonite colony, and it's a city where there are

Mennonites and natives; Paraguayans, very few"[11] (Makaran 198-199). We come here to the paradox whereby a society which perceives itself as a descendant of the glorious Guarani disowns and rejects the current Guarani as alien. Thus, the only ones entitled to be called Guarani would be mestizo Paraguayans, but not authentic Guarani peoples, who are reduced to simply being "indigenous", one would say, "alien-digenous".

It is not surprising that indigenous peoples also do not want to be recognized as Paraguayan citizens, and that they oppose ethnocide integration. But they are increasingly forced to interact with the national society in order to defend their rights and denounce abuses, or due to forced migration, even though they are far from being part of the Paraguayan nation. They also do not assume the role of "ancestors" imposed by the mestizos. Hence, the attitude of indigenous leaders at the II Meeting of the Guarani Nation[12] in Jaguatí, Amambay department, in March 2011, is understandable. They decided "not to consider the Bicentenary of Paraguay's independence an anniversary to celebrate, because for them it has been only 200 years of dispossession, discrimination, humiliation, enslavement, persecution, plunder, and death" (Gaska 26).

Conclusions

Indigenous minorities in Paraguay today do not only suffer from widespread discrimination against their culture, language, and worldview, but first and foremost from economic exploitation related to systematic destruction of the physical means necessary for their subsistence and reproduction. With no land, territory, or basic means of survival, indigenous peoples as such are disappearing, becoming dispensable individuals in a hostile urban environment with disrupted community structures.

Paraguay is a prime example of an almost exclusively agribusiness-based economy. This model precludes the exercise of indigenous rights guaranteed by the Constitution; and not only does it make it impossible to satisfy the territorial claims of indigenous peoples, but it even jeopardizes their right to life itself. Political creeds and grandiloquent speeches in defense of the Indians do not matter if modernization and development lead to the ethnocide and genocide of these populations. I believe that the current economic policies, lethal to both natives and the rural population in general, are closely linked to the cultural policy of successive governments that perpetuate a racist, conservative, and exclusive view of the nation. All of the above indicates an urgent need to rethink the economic and political models in Paraguay and other Latin American countries, a task in which indigenous peoples must be the lead actors.

[11] Interview with Aida Torres conducted by the author in Asunción on September 26th, 2012.

[12] These meetings take place regularly. The last was the IV Continental Meeting of the Guarani Nation, held in Tekoa Ka'a Kupe (Ruiz de Montoya, Misiones, Argentina) between September 21st and 25th, 2015. The meetings are proof of the vitality, self-organization, and political action of the Guarani peoples beyond national borders.

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