

Shaping the Guaraní Territory

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THE STRETCH OF LAND IN ARGENTINA, BRAZIL and Paraguay originally occupied by the Guaraní is an extended region in the hearth of the River Plate basin, whose environmental characteristics—jungles, impetuous rivers, tropical weather—suffered profound transformations in the last two centuries. Moreover, it is seldom recognized as a unity, traversed as it is by national or provincial borders. As architects, we asked ourselves how one could define this fragment of land as a “territorio.” was the first problem we confronted. To find the answers, we organized a DRCLAS-sponsored international and multidisciplinary workshop, “Territorio Guaraní: Culture, Infrastructure and Natural Resources in the *longue durée*” in April 2014.

Many diverse factors contribute to the recognition of an area *as a territory*; the way in which they all mix, crisscross and overlap defines its character. Such a realm resembles more a flexible and open fabric than a geometric figure defined by its contours; the threads that weave this fabric are not only those of current events, but those of history, memory, myth and interpretations, all which leave persistent traces. A territory thus is not a collection of data but a constructed tissue: it matters what pressure we would apply to one thread or another; which inquiry we would follow over others to bring out a certain picture, one which would not be the only possible one.

We began by building thematic maps based on physical cartography, vegetation and hydrographic extensions; historical-political domains such as the old Jesuit *pueblos*; the successive frontiers of the two Iberian powers; social formations such as the extension of the Guaraní language and the continuous migratory

flows of peoples; technical issues such as the impact of the hydroelectric dams and the advance of new crops. This territorial drawing imagines a desired future by articulating geopolitical initiatives of infrastructure and market integration. Thus in the course of our inquiry historical paths and present hopes became interwoven with material marks.

Within this perspective, Carlos Rebo-ratti’s article presents the multiple figures that we allude to when we speak of the *territorio Guaraní*: the virtual territory of original groups; the “territory within a territory of the Jesuit experience; the accelerated fragmentation of the new independent nations’ constitution’s era; the growth of cities; the territories of savage agro-industrial exploitation, or the new infrastructures that reunite the territory beyond the political formal borders . . . a true palimpsest of traces constructed in the *longue durée*.”

What characterizes this ever-changing spatial system, product of such diverse processes? In principle, the rivers are the most visible manifestation of a quality of a territory that we defined, literally and metaphorically, as “aquatic.” Powerful and dominant currents such as the Paraguay, the Paraná, the Uruguay and their multiple tributaries tie up the regional history: before the European arrival, they were the migration path of native expansion; they became the ways in which foreign powers penetrated and communicated; today, the rapids and falls of the Paraná and the Uruguay are the sources of shared hydroelectric energy. The theme of “the river” is recurrent in the arts, literature and music of the region. Even more, it is the principal character of the “territories” of the imagination:

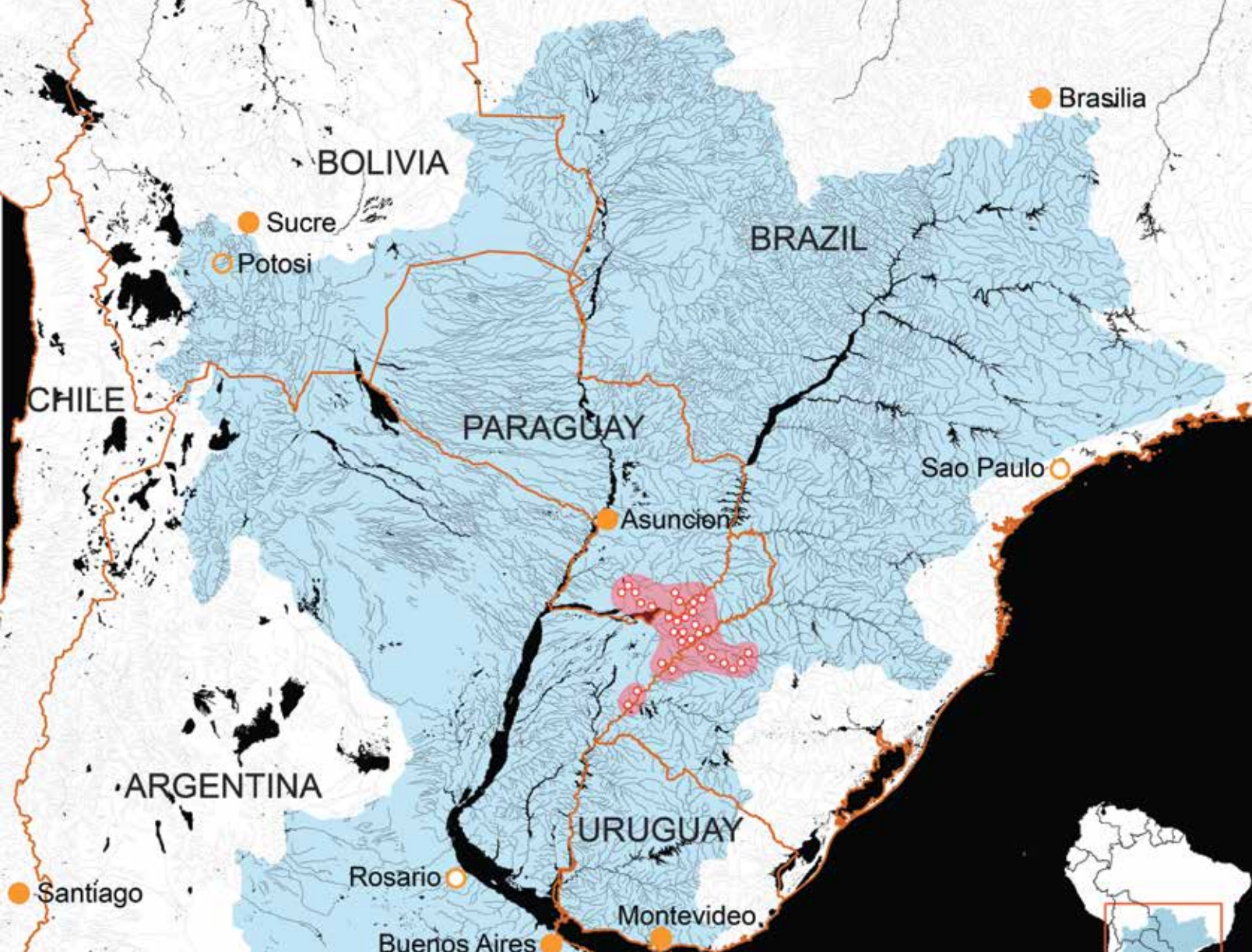
“Some say that the Paraná divides the

coasts of the three countries. But in reality, it is a liquid thread that unites them, transforming them in a legendary fourth country” (A. Varela, *El río oscuro*).

Beyond rivers, diverse “forms of water” have been and are utilized, dominated, suffered or enjoyed in the region. Hydrogeologists have recently confirmed the hypothesis of the existence of a huge reservoir of subterranean water, the *acuifero Guaraní*. The idea of a major and interconnected aquatic system, as Martin Walter writes, only emerges within a climate of ideas in which varied actors—scientific, political and social—began to focus on the territory as a whole, breaching the fierce national boundaries. For Walter, the idea of the *acuifero* as an unified system is a sub product of regional democratization and of the autonomy hard-fought by the local academic institutions, reminding us that “natural” events are also political events promoted by many actors. On special occasions they assume symbolic significance: Bartomeu Meliá’s article, starting from the central role that water has in the current ecological discourse, approaches the *acuifero Guaraní* as the “genuine water,” the *tierra sin mal*, the Guaraní paradise. It is too a political text in defense of native communities being pushed to abandon their lands.

Yet, despite all the importance of the “water” element, to label our study “aquatic” could have suggested a geographic determinism that we explicitly wished to avoid. Thus we decided to qualify “territory” with a trait that is predominantly cultural: and beyond the multiple characteristics we chose “*Guaraní*.”

In principle, *Guaraní* refers to a language. Benjamin Fernández tells us that the Paraguayan Guaraní (*joporá*) is spoken by 90% of the population of an



Photos of the Guaraní camp inside the Iguazu National Park in November 2013 by Marcela Kropf.

effectively bilingual country, unifying it with its identity and its history. The language is not only official in Paraguay but also in the province of Corrientes (Argentina) extending beyond national frontiers. Around eight million people (or 87% of the area's inhabitants) speak the language, now one of the three official languages of Mercosur (the regional multination common market). It possesses a distinctive particularity among American native languages: it is not only spoken by indigenous communities but by all groups and social classes: it is the only pre-Columbian language spoken by a large non-indigenous community. Moreover, it colors the Castilian inflexions spoken in the region (for example, the word *che*, of widespread use in Argentina and known all over the world as the nick-

name of the hero of the Latin-American left, derives from the Guaraní expression "my lord"). Old Guaraní words continue to name geographic accidents, regions and cities.

Indigenous Guaraní had not been a written language: it was the Jesuits who gave it a grammar and a syntax and made it into one of the *linguas generales* used for the evangelization of the natives. The Jesuits made their alliances with groups that were already hegemonic in the region and whose tongue – according to the Jesuit Montoya, who so beautifully translated it to legible characters – possessed a richness and variability that made him affirm that it was "dressed of nature" (*vestida de naturaleza*). Its idiomatic plasticity, its oral transmission (mainly via women), and also the appro-

priation of the Paraguayan Guaraní as a mark of "national identity" present a paradoxical and complex history as a constant element in the many phases of the formation of the nation-states and societies of the region.

Yet the definition of the territory as *Guaraní* was one of the principal and controversial topics of the workshop. Many feared that such a denomination would hide the fact that diverse communities preceded the arrival of the *guaraníes*; or sidestep the fact that for five centuries the territory has also been populated and inhabited by creole families, immigrants and slave descendants.

What is meant beyond language when we say "Guaraní"? The Spaniards used the name for all the diverse groups in the region, no matter what they called them-



Photos of the Guarani camp inside the Iguazu National Park in November 2013 by Marcela Kropf.

selves. The conquerors' *guaranies* also absorbed non-Guarani peoples (as slaves or allies), always responding to their particular ethos, or "way of being" (*ñande reko*). Under this cultural and linguistic unity, the *guaranies* operated as a system of relatively autonomous communities.

Many of the traits of such "Guarani way of being" have remained in present day communities: as Maria Ines Ladeira explains, the spatial disposition of the villages is directly associated to a continuing social fabric, integrating its past while modifying its experiences and relationships beyond the national borders and administrative boundaries. Certainly life was not the same when the Guarani groups added up to more than two million people moving around a vast territory, as compared to today's drastically reduced population of around 180,000 souls.

Here, Tamar Herzog exposes a hypothesis of special interest: the Spanish and Portuguese threats and their evangelization practices made all these diverse communities to identify themselves as one, the *Guarani*. Herzog dwells perceptively on the successive fragmentation of the territory from the beginnings of the conquest—when the Spanish and Portuguese crowns established the first state boundaries in a world where the European concept of private property did not exist—recognizing a moment of particular intensity during the establishment of the Jesuit foundations, the "territory within another territory" as referred to by Reboratti.

The Jesuits initiated their evangelization in the northern frontier, today's São Paulo in Brazil. But the consolidation of events moved southwest to the area that we identify as the heart of the *territorio*, the 30 *pueblos* that towards the end of the 17th century hosted around 100,000 inhabitants, controlling a geographic realm that Herzog compares to the size of California. While many indigenous reservations and missionary communities ruled by Jesuits and other religious orders existed in the Americas, the Paraguayan missions continue to fascinate those that visit their extant ruins.

Here Ana Hosne situates the Jesuit order within world history, considering its actions as one of the first and most efficient global expansions of European culture. From their recent Chinese experience the Jesuits learned an adaptive posture toward evangelization that became their advantage when compared with the more dogmatic demeanors of other religious orders.

But if, as Hosne demonstrates, the Jesuit desire to establish the ideal *platonian city* gave impulse to their undertakings – and the quasi-identical urban plans of all the missions suggest such sought after perfection – the reality of the *pueblos* suggests complex forms of spatial occupation and an active relationship with the immediate natural environment. Recent conservation work allowed us to value the numerous faint traces of drainage, watering, quarries, orchards and fields of pasture—a complete sanitary and productive system unusual for

its times even in Europe.

Newstudies have also shed light on the architecture of these *pueblos*—from the adaptation of the indigenous typologies of inhabitation to the magnificent churches and *colegios* that even today leave visitors in awe. This *arquitectura mestiza* and the rich artistic output that emerged from the Jesuit workshops constitute a continuous subject of debate.

The Jesuit experience affected the contemporary imagination even after the expulsion of the order. Guillermo Wilde discusses the different views about the nature of the missions, polarized between those that are apologetic or anti-Jesuit—a division still in use today. Wilde reminds us of the Hollywood version, but also of Michel Foucault's suggestive concept of the Jesuit state as heterotopy. The Jesuit adventure also inspired those in the following centuries who imagined this region as places to "begin from zero": central Europeans, political fugitives of all types, writers and poets. .

According to Wilde, such simplifications of the narrative about the Jesuits left in the shadows the active participation of the indigenous people. In the same vein, Artur Barcelos underlines the active role of the Guaranis – real actors barely seen both in the Jesuitic historiography and in its adversarial narratives, where they are presented as passive recipients or as infantile victims. Barcelos offers a panoramic history of how the Jesuits, confronted with the *bandeirantes'* attacks, decided to concentrate their settlements in the broad swath that transverses the

Paraná and Uruguay rivers with its epicenter close to what today is the location of the bi-national entity of Yacyretá – the land where the moon shines, in Guaraní.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the subsequent period of modern national formation is the key to understand the fortunes of the territory in the last two centuries. A successive fragmentation of the Hispanic area, in spite of efforts to maintain the unity of former colonial territories, contrasts with the Portuguese ability to maintain and expand its sovereign domains over broad areas that could only be virtually claimed. Local wars between neighboring provinces or recently invented nations desolated South America. The most brutal had its stage in the *territorio Guaraní*: the so-called *Guerra de la Triple Alianza* (War of the Triple Alliance) from 1864 to 1870, with Paraguay on one side and Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay as allies on the other.

About 90 % of the male population of Paraguay was annihilated in this war. Milda Rivarola qualifies it as the first “total war,” in which the only alternative was the extermination of the enemy: a ferocious overture to the modern wars to come. For Rivarola, the responsibility for human extermination lies with both the allied and Paraguayan governments; the true victims were those who, without taking any belligerent initiative, were sent to the massacre: the *indios*. War and its consequences also swept clean the very sources of life of all these native groups: the land. The new order emerging from the war would also systematically deny land to indigenous and rural communities.

It’s not surprising, then, that one of the central issues of the workshop was the relationship between environmental justice, the sustainability of infrastructural development vis a vis natural resources, and the historical and present choices of contemporary nations that share the region.

The new environmentalist discourse gives prominence to social conflicts arising from deforestation, soil exhaustion

resulting from extensive “monocultivos” such as soybean crops or the large holdings of productive areas in the hands of international groups (see the recent debates about holdings owned by Harvard University in Iberá, in the Argentine province of Corrientes). This is particularly sensitive in the region we are focusing on, where large areas have been set aside for provincial and national conservation. Federico Freitas illustrates these new conflicts with the history of the emblematic Iguazú National Park: the park’s creation, stimulated by the Iguazú Falls magnificent natural wonder straddling the Argentine-Brazilian frontier, took place during the early decades of the 20th century, responding to a Rooseveltian vision based on “soft management” of natural resources and, eventually, the impulse of tourism—an important source of regional income.

Today, the conflict is focused instead on the rights of indigenous communities, Guaraní in their majority. Yet the socio-environmental problems exceed the traditional communities’ claims. While these people are the most severely punished, the technical and productive transformation directly affects much vaster sectors of the rural and even urban populations. Many of these contested infrastructural transformations also constitute the basis for development for the countries that share this territory—particularly the hydroelectric plants. Without energy sources to sustain industry and communications, the very policies that aim to attend to the general social welfare are unachievable.

During the second half of the 20th century, the generalized idea of progress was often represented by large engineering works. Yet we must remember that the brutal dictatorships of the countries of the Southern Cone did not hesitate to raze entire communities and natural resources to achieve their objectives: the case of Itapú is one of the best known examples, where the destruction of the *Sete quedas* and the expulsion of its population—still ongoing—could have been avoided.

The history of the dams mirrors the history of their countries. The Argentine-Paraguayan dam of Yacyretá-Apipé, proposed in the early 1920s and signed into being with an initial 1973 binational treaty, was only fully implemented in 2011. By then, reestablished democracies made room for a broader cast of actors and the proliferation of debates. Current managers in charge of operations try to heed ecological damages through environmental, urban and social reparation and compensation, as Oscar Thomas, director of the Binational Entity of Yacyretá, and Alfredo Garay recount in this issue. Yet discussions about future new hydroelectric plants remain controversial because no other viable alternatives exist for the production of reliable and sufficient energy.

To just imagine forests, marshes, waterfalls and communities all coexisting in harmony with the earth is to ignore the territory’s inclusion of modern large cities: the extension of São Paulo (the largest metropolis in South America); Asunción (the Paraguayan capital); Corrientes and Resistencia (both provincial capitals on the Paraguay river); Posadas and Encarnacion (facing each other on the Argentinian and Paraguayan sides of the upper Paraná). In the so-called *triple frontera* (triple frontier) almost 700,000 permanent inhabitants spread themselves between Foz de Iguazú (Brazil), Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) and Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), without counting the 50,000 transient laborers and the nearby rural communities. Tourism also adds important numbers to the burgeoning population.

Many cities were established during early colonial times; others grew from Jesuit missions’ sites; others, such as Resistencia and Formosa, are recent, created after the *Guerra Guazú* and populated by European immigrants. The Spanish cities were conceived as “civilized islands” amidst a menacing territory which was only worthy of extractive exploitation, while the Portuguese foundations were more akin to factories. These legal-territorial structures were

modified during the last centuries to become part of the new nation-states: cities which were once united by a river (such as Formosa and Clorinda or Resistencia and Alberdi) became separated by these water streams.

The nation-state is a late European creation. We all learned early on the virtues of the nation-state: in addition to the ideals of independence, equality and freedom, the Americas added with enthusiasm the opening of their borders to “all the men in the world who wish to inhabit this land” (as the original Argentinian Constitution still announces), even if such integration is still far from idyllic. Particularly in Argentina and Uruguay, free mandatory education and health services encouraged whole communities to move towards the urban centers where all the benefits of civilization were readily available. The price was not only the homogenization of customs and traditions and an imbalance between urban and rural life—a major topic of the region’s literature—but also the emergence of a culture that accentuates the traits of openness, mobility and fusion.

The articles addressing the arts emphasize this aspect. Lia Colombino presents the history of the Museo del Barro, one of the principal artistic centers of Asunción, which put “erudite” art on an equal footing with popular and indigenous art—a proposal that explicitly breaks down the internal boundaries between cultural expressions.

Such convergences also emerge in the Lizza Bogado and Eugenio Montjeau’s articles about music. The first, written by one of the most appreciated Paraguayan singers, makes a much-felt mention of Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa, underlying the transnational sources of popular songs. Montjeau focuses on a characteristic genre of this territory: *el chamamé*. Disregarded in its early days, the *chamamé* appears today as one of a highly and original sophisticated musical construction: *Guarani* in its voice, Spanish-central-European in its rhythm, “immigrant” in its instruments, its brief history is a vibrant testimony to how

novelty emerges from the contact and fusion of diverse cultural manifestations.

Finally, with an unexpected potency, current cinema in the region gives testimony of this complex world. Damián Cabrera points to the elusive *Guarani* element of this territory’s culture, in order to underline the originality of the latest cinema productions. While the physical territory under study had been the stage of many film productions—all *rioplatenses* recall Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli’s films of the 60s and 70s—the actual *Guarani* voice is heard for the first time in recent productions: the indigenous voice in *Terra vermelha*, of Marcos Bechis, the rural voice in *Hamaca paraguaya*, by Paz Encina, the urban *Guarani* of *7 cajas*, by Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schembori.

In this overview we have attempted to stress the aspects that transform the *Guarani* space into a changing territory, mixed and fluid as water, multi-ethnic and informal—where the national frontiers, more than lines of breakage are spaces of active exchange. Julia Sarreal describes it with her account on the ineffable and ubiquitous presence of the yerba *mate*, *Guarani* territory’s defining crop and today the shared “national” infusion-drink of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Southern Brazil.

In spite of the shared features that characterize this area as a common territory, most of the studies have emphasized a larger frontier: that which separates Brazil from the countries of Spanish language. These two parts of South America have established firm cultural bridges only in recent decades, and we want to emphasize this line of enquiries –we can not understand this “aquatic” place establishing rigid cultural or political frontiers

That’s why we decided to conclude with a brief text from one of the most creative aesthetic experiences of the previous century—the Paulist artistic avant-garde’s association with the indigenous world— by underlining one of the most controversial aspects that all *tupí-guaraní* peoples shared: ritual anthropoph-

agy. Oswald de Andrade and Tarsilia do Amaral rendered this “scandal” into a metaphor for a key mode of being which seems to be shared by the people of the River Plate basin, past and present: to “consume” the enemy meant to assimilate him, as described in their “manifesto antropófago.” To properly allude to this foundational episode of the South American avant-gardes, re-read today enthusiastically in the River Plate, we included a fragment of *Orfeu estatico en la metrópoli*, by Brazilian author Nicolau Sevcenko, who passed away in August 2014—as our homage to those that have disseminated the richness of this multitudinous and paradoxical land.

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