University of Birmingham

From the Selected Works of Robert Andrew Nickson

Spring January, 2013

The Paraguay Reader

Robert Andrew Nickson, *University of Birmingham*

Peter Lambert, *University of Bath*

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/andrew_nickson/24/
THE PARAGUAY READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

Edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson
THE LATIN AMERICA READERS
Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

THE ARGENTINA READER
Edited by Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo

THE BRAZIL READER
Edited by Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti

THE COSTA RICA READER
Edited by Steven Palmer and Iván Molina

THE CUBA READER
Edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff

THE ECUADOR READER
Edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler

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

THE MEXICO READER
Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson

THE PARAGUAY READER
Edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson

THE PERU READER, 2ND EDITION
Edited by Orin Starn, Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk

THE WORLD READERS
Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

THE ALASKA NATIVE READER
Edited by Maria Shaa Tlåa Williams

THE CZECH READER
Edited by Jan Bažant, Nina Bažantová, and Frances Starn

THE INDONESIA READER
Edited by Tineke Hellwig and Eric Tagliacozzo

THE RUSSIA READER
Edited by Adele Barker and Bruce Grant

THE SRI LANKA READER
Edited by John Clifford Holt
Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Acknowledgments xi
Introduction 1

I The Birth of Paraguay 11
The Foundation of Human Speech, León Cadogan 15
Contact, Servitude, and Resistance, Branislava Susnik 21
Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay,
Elman R. Service 28
The Land-without-Evil, Hélène Clastres 32
The Republic of Plato and the Guarani, José Manuel Peramás 37
A Vanished Arcadia, R. B. Cunninghame Graham 41
The Revolt of the Comuneros, Adalberto López 46

II The Nationalist Experiment 53
A Nation Held Hostage, Justo Prieto 60
In Defense of Doctor Francia, Richard Alan White 65
Autonomy, Authoritarianism, and Development, Thomas Whigham 70
The Treaty of the Triple Alliance 75
“I Die with My Country!,” Thomas Whigham 82
A Chronicle of War, Leandro Pineda 90
The Lomas Valentinas Note, Francisco Solano López 96
Memoirs of the Paraguayan War, Gaspar Centurión 99
The Women of Piribebuy, Juan O’Leary 104
The Death of López at Cerro Corá, Silvestre Aveiro 108
Sufferings of a French Lady in Paraguay, Dorotea Duprat de Lasserre 113
Declaration and Protest, Eliza Lynch 118
The Psychology of López, William Stewart 125
Contents

III  A Slow Recovery  129
Paraguayan Society in the Postwar Decade, Harris Gaylord Warren  131
The "Lincolnshire Farmers" in Paraguay, Annie Elizabeth Kennett  138
My Pilgrimage to Caacupé, Norman O. Brown  143
What It Is Like to Work in the Yerba Plantations, Rafael Barrett  146
The Treatment of Tree Fellers and Timber Workers,
Reinaldo López Fretes  153
The Causes of Poverty in Paraguay, Teodosio González  163
The Paraguayan Character, Juan Sinforiano Bogarín  172
The Paraguayan People and Their Natural Tendencies,
Natalicio González  178
Cultural Exile, Agustín Barrios  184
Profession of Faith, Agustín Barrios  186
A New National Ideology, Oscar Creydt, Obdulio Barthe, Aníbal Codas,
and others  188

IV  From the Chaco War to the Civil War  193
Capturing Volunteers, Carlos Federico Reyes  195
The Battle of Boquerón, Alfredo Seiferheld  198
Memoirs of a Man from Concepción, Carlos María Sienra Bonzi,
as told to Roberto Sienra Zavala  203
A Visit to Villa Hayes Military Hospital Number 16,
Reginald Thompson  208
Scenes of Thirst, Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá  211
A Handful of Earth, Hérib Campos Cervera  213
Proclamation of the Febrerista Revolution, F. W. Smith
and Camilo Recalde  216
How Beautiful Is Your Voice, Ernesto Unruh and Hannes Kalisch  220
The Revolution of 1947, Carlos María Sienra Bonzi, as told
to Roberto Sienra Zavala  228
A Half Hour in My Childhood, Eva Bichsel  232

V  Dictatorship and Resistance  235
Toward a Weberian Characterization of the Stroessner Regime,
Marcial Riquelme  239
The Revolutionary Spirit of the Colorado Party, Luis María Argaña 244
The Tragedy of Fram, Jorge Rubiani 248
Be Careful, Dictator, Elvio Romero 253
The Worm inside the Lotus Blossom, Graham Greene 255
A Short History of the Northern Ache People, Kim Hill 261
The Testimony of Saturnina Almada 270
An Interview with Corsino Coronel 275
Apocalypse, Alfredo Boccia 281
My Farewell Speech, Carmen de Lara Castro 290
The Death of Somoza, Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll 294
My Vote Is for the People, Alcibiades González Delvalle 298
Paraguay’s Terror Archive, Andrew Nickson 300
“A Hundred and Eight” and a Burned Body, Anselmo Ramos 305
The Final Report of the Truth and Justice Commission, Andrés D. Ramírez 309
Alfredo Stroessner: Revisiting the General, Isabel Hilton 314

VI  A Transition in Search of Democracy 321

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

### VII  What Does It Mean to Be Paraguayan?  383

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History, Identity, and Paraguayidad, Peter Lambert</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change and Continuity in Paraguayan History—1811, 1911, 2011,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Nickson</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arcadian Tragedy, George Pendle</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bicentenary of Paraguayan Independence and the Guaraní Language,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Ángel Verón Gómez</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of African Descent in Paraguay, Ignacio Telesca</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Ideology: Final Comments, Guido Rodríguez Alcalá</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the Help of Doña Petrona We Make an Incursion into Folk Cuisine,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helio Vera</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough of the Triple Alliance!, Jorge Rubiani</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tereré as a Social Bond, Derlis Benítez Alvarenga</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Status of Women, Riordan Roett and Richard Scott Sacks</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Portrait, Bernarda</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria and the Serpent, Pepa Kostianovsky</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica, Jorge Barraza</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipe for Chipa Guazú, Doña Aída</td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Anthem in Guaraní, Félix de Guarania</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: The Impeachment of President Fernando Lugo</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Further Reading</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment of Copyright and Sources</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is also a land of contrasts. The Itaipú hydroelectric plant, jointly owned by Paraguay and Brazil, is the world’s largest, with an installed capacity of
4,000 megawatts, generating around 90 million megawatt hours of electricity, yet Paraguay still has no heavy industry to speak of. The shopping malls and mansions of parts of Asunción would not be out of place in the richest suburbs of the developed world, but are often just a few blocks away from shacks, reflecting Paraguay’s huge inequality in wealth, land, and power. Authoritarianism has been the political norm since independence, yet Paraguay has a rich history of people’s struggle for social justice. It is the fourth largest exporter of soy (and home to infamous “green deserts” of agroindustrial, highly mechanized production), yet the majority of farmers use traditional subsistence techniques on tiny plots of land. In many towns gleaming
Introduction

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

However, this long, historical isolation (geographical, cultural, and political) has meant that Paraguay has been largely neglected by historians, journalists, and travel writers, leading to a dearth of serious writing on its history, politics, society, and culture. This has led to considerable misunderstanding of the country based on lack of knowledge. Ignorance has allowed Paraguay to become a perfect blank space for others’ writing and imaginings, where nothing seems too far-fetched, where exaggeration and imagination may go unchallenged. For centuries Paraguay has been exploited by writers of popular history, fiction, travel, and lifestyle—writers who have fallen into the trap of merely applying or repeating stereotypical images, ideas, and perceptions. Viewing Paraguay with a mix of suspicion, humor, fondness, and disdain, they have too often glided over complex issues of culture and politics, replacing them with tired references to either crazy wars, endemic corruption, Nazi war criminals, and savage natives or tin-pot dictators and brutal tyrants. In Graham Greene’s Travels with My Aunt, Paraguay
is the moral end of the line, the orange-blossom-scented paradise where the opposition is routinely “disappeared,” where smuggling is a national industry, where corruption is rife, and where generals rule with an iron fist. Paul Mazorsky’s film Moon over Parador perpetuated the myth of the nation defined by corruption and dictatorship, as did Robert Carver’s recent foray into cliché and myth in Paradise with Serpents. Paraguay becomes a dystopia, a land corrupted by man’s most base instincts.

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

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

It is true that some of these stereotypes are rooted in history. Paraguay does have a history of authoritarian rule, from the nineteenth-century nationalist dictators to the infamous General Alfredo Stroessner, who, when he was overthrown in 1989, was the longest-ruling tyrant in Latin America (and almost the world). When Fernando Lugo won the presidential elections in 2008, it was the first time that power had peacefully changed hands between parties in Paraguayan history. Levels of corruption have indeed been significant, from the days of General Stroessner, who defined it as the “price of peace,” to 2002, when Paraguay came 129th out of 132 coun-
tries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index and the then president (Luís González Macchi) was found to possess a stolen BMW. Paraguay has indeed provided refuge for an array of dictators (Nicaragua’s Anastasio Somoza, for example), Nazi war criminals (Josef Mengele, the “Doctor of Death” at Auschwitz, and Eduard Roschmann, the “Butcher of Riga”), and international fraudsters. These factors are undeniable elements of Paraguayan history, but a historian could easily focus on such elements to categorize or ridicule any other country; reality is more complex and less damning.

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

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

Isolation has also led the country to suffer a number of unique experiments throughout its history. The Spanish soon realized that Paraguay was not El Dorado, nor did it provide a viable route to the riches of the Andes; rather, it offered a relatively safe and comfortable location for settlement. The Spanish settlers took advantage of less hostile, friendly (or simply terrified) local indigenous peoples to create a colony based initially on the con-
cept of family ties (haremsexchange for peace) rather than genocide, giving rise to an allegedly more cohesive population. The Jesuits created an empire within an empire through their *reducciones* or settlements, in which Guaraníes were organized into productive communities, indoctrinated into Catholicism, but protected from marauding Brazilian slave traders. When independence came in 1811, Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia sought to avoid the anarchy and chaos of other newly independent Latin American states by establishing a dictatorship that destroyed the power of the Spanish elites (he forbade marriage between whites), the church, and the landowning class. This experiment was developed by his successor Carlos Antonio López (1840–62), the “Great Builder of the Nation” who oversaw Paraguay’s emergence as an important regional power, complete with railway, telegraph lines, a shipyard, and an iron foundry. And throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thousands of migrants ventured into the interior of the country, seeking to create their own experiments in taming the land and establishing new communities, based on nationality, religion, ideology, or simply to begin anew.

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

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

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

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

Our aim in writing The Paraguay Reader has been to produce an enjoyable, informative, and well-structured anthology of writings on the politics, society, and culture of the country. We have sought to include texts that will be accessible to a wide and varied readership but that are analytical and significant in their own right. Throughout we have contextualized the extracts, many of which are abridged, by using explanatory (and hopefully engaging) introductions. In the broader sense, we have striven to produce a body of work that would include the best writing on what we feel are the key issues, events, and trends in Paraguayan history. Over the course of nearly two years we consulted, debated, argued, and agonized over what texts to
include and what not to include—whether we should prioritize depth or breadth of coverage, the aesthetic or the practical, complexity or simplicity of analysis. We would not claim to have always reached the right decision and accept the inevitable criticisms of aspects that we have left out or overlooked. However, we have painstakingly gone through every source that we have found or been guided toward in order to judge whether or not we should include it. The result is a final book that fulfills our initial aims and that we feel is a worthy tribute to the wealth of writing on Paraguay.

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

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

Related to and partly as a consequence of the above, the most revealing, interesting, and engaging observations are often found in the writings of foreign travelers and residents. We have therefore included a number of pieces written by foreigners, but in all cases the criterion used for their selection is that they are the best piece of writing available on a specific theme.
Wherever possible we have also tried to use voices from the period under consideration. However, again, suitable extracts have often been difficult to find, and thus in some cases we have opted for more recent analyses, by outstanding historians, who we feel deserve a place in the book. Thus, we have included writings by, for example, Branislava Susnik, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, Harris Gaylord Warren, Ignacio Telesca, and Thomas Whigham because we felt they were the clearest, most analytical, and objective writings available. However, in general, we opted against most of the (dozens of) academic books that we ploughed through on the grounds that they were not sufficiently accessible, or that they lacked the concise analysis we required, or because we found an alternative piece that was more from the period itself or “from below.”

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

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

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

We have tried to be as eclectic as possible in terms of the tone, style, and nature of the extracts we have chosen. Hence we have included examples
of testimonies, light-hearted journalistic pieces, academic analyses, political tracts, poetry and song, literature, and even a recipe. At the same time we have also tried to cover all major historical events, sectors, and issues—although we are painfully aware that there will be some inevitable gaps.

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

As we noted at the beginning of this introduction, Paraguay has long been represented as a blank canvas or as a backdrop for the location of utopias, dreams, and even dystopias. This has necessarily led to an ignoring of Paraguayan history and the silencing of Paraguayan voices. Given this, we hope that The Paraguay Reader will make a small contribution to our collective knowledge and understanding of this fascinating country, its people, and culture. We hope that, in so doing, it will help dispel the many myths about the country, and that it will strike a small blow for people’s history over fantasy, cliché, and stereotype.
Peter Lambert is a senior lecturer in Spanish and Latin American studies in the Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies at the University of Bath. He is the editor (with Gian Luca Gardini) of Latin American Foreign Policies: Between Ideology and Pragmatism (2011); (with Will Fowler) of Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Latin America (2006); and (with Andrew Nickson) of Transition to Democracy in Paraguay (1997).

Andrew Nickson is the honorary reader in public management and Latin American studies at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of Local Government in Latin America (1995); the Historical Dictionary of Paraguay (1993); and Paraguay (1987). He is the editor (with Peter Lambert) of The Transition to Democracy in Paraguay (1997).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The Paraguay reader : history, culture, politics / Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson, eds.
p. cm.—(The Latin America readers) (The world readers)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
P2668.P255 2013
989.2—dc23
2012034780