

PETER LAMBERT AND ANDREW NICKSON (EDS.): *The Paraguay Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013.

The editors of this volume, part of the Latin American Readers series, have made another mighty contribution to scholarship about Paraguay available in English. Along with their own considerable list of publications about Paraguay, Lambert and Nickson previously edited the important *Transition to Democracy in Paraguay* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1997), and Nickson prepared the essential *Historical Dictionary of Paraguay* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993) and *Paraguay in the World Bibliographical Series* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1999). The editors have been successful in their goal “to produce an enjoyable, informative, and well-structured anthology” (p. 7).

The book is organized into six historical sections and a seventh section entitled “What Does It Mean to Be Paraguayan?” Students of Paraguay will find the arrangement of the historical sections to be appropriate, tracking the country’s dramatic and often traumatic experiences of war, revolution, and dictatorship. The question of Paraguayan identity fascinates Paraguayans and foreigners alike, so the concluding focus here is also well considered. The quality of the translations to English is excellent throughout, expertly capturing the sensibility of words spoken or written originally in Spanish or Guaraní.

While scholars of Paraguay will find much that is familiar, the real pleasure in this volume lies in the number of articles that were previously unknown or that were prepared specifically for publication in the *Reader*. The first selection, the beautiful “The Foundation of Human Speech,” is from the sacred chant of the Mbya-Guaraní indigenous group, and was published in Spanish by anthropologist León Cadogan, himself the son of Australian colonists in Paraguay. Cadogan’s translation of the chant into English for a cousin in Australia is published for the first time here. Also published for the first time is “The Psychology of López,” written by William Stewart, who served as personal physician to Marshal Francisco Solano López through to López’s death in the concluding battle of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870 (Stewart’s diagnosis – “neurosis”). A more contemporary analysis never before

published comes from Milda Rivarola's study of the political popularity of General Lino Oviedo in the 1990s in "The Characteristics of Oviedismo."

Other gems include "A Report on Paraguay in the London Press of 1824," a rare mention of Paraguay in Britain at that time, that came briefly to light in 1978 through the work of Soviet historian Moisei Al'perovich, who argued that the piece was likely written by Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the Supreme Dictator of Paraguay from 1814 to 1840; illustrations from the broadsheet *Cabichuí* produced for the troops in the War of the Triple Alliance; and several moving essays by indigenous people, such as the forthcoming "How Beautiful Is Your Voice: Accounts of the History of the Enlhet of Ya'alve-Saange," by Ernest Unruh and Hannes Kalisch; "The Ayoreo People," by Mateo Sobode Chiquenoi; and an interview with Aché leader Margarita Mbywangi. Historian Thomas Whigham, anthropologist Kim Hill, and environmentalist Alberto Yanosky prepared original essays for the *Reader*.

The question of Paraguay's intense and early nationalism is considered in pieces by American anthropologist Elman Service, by Whigham, and by two Paraguayan revisionist historians from the first half of the twentieth century, Juan E. O'Leary and Natalicio González. Paraguay's contemporary politics are still marked by strident arguments about Marshal López and the war, as can be seen in Miguel Ángel Verón Gómez's "The Bicentenary of Paraguayan Independence and the Guaraní Language," Jorge Rubiani's "Enough of the Triple Alliance!," and Lambert and Nickson's Epilogue on the fall of the government of President Fernando Lugo in 2012.

Probably no topic engages Paraguayans more than that of their "character." Included in the *Reader* are efforts to describe the character of Paraguayans by early 20th-century figures such as lawyer and administrator Teodosio González (who found character "defects" rooted in mixed-race origins) and Archbishop Juan Sinforiano Bogarín (who argued that Paraguayans are docile when governed wisely, but that they seldom are so governed). An interesting series of entries written between 1929 and 1935 from quite different perspectives – by nationalist politician Natalicio González, classical guitar legend Agustín Barrios, and Communists Oscar Creydt and Obdulio Barthe – arrive at similar conclusions, typical for the era, about Paraguayans' racial and thus psychological

characteristics. Other essays explore aspects of Paraguayan culture, including Derlis Benítez Alvarenga's delightful explanation that drinking *tereré* is an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist act!

I read the entire volume in one weekend, which heightened my sensation of the long night that was the regime of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989), with ever darker corners of that period still to be exposed. Lambert and Nickson include reports of a little-known repression of Ukrainian colonists in the town of Fram; they also include reports of human rights violations against gay men, whose victims allege were not even reported by the Truth and Justice Commission whose members chose to ignore these human rights violations in their 2008 Final Report.

The volume inevitably leaves things out, and one is loath to criticize omissions. Relatively little appears about the wide variety of immigrant communities, although this is understandable given the large number of publications in English on this topic. Paraguay's most famous literary figure, Augusto Roa Bastos, is cited repeatedly for his description of Paraguay as "an island surrounded by land," but no essay by or about him appears. One topic that could have been better covered is the status of women in Paraguay. The interview with "Bernarda," from the 1984 book *Self Portraits*, is excellent, as is Clyde Soto's analysis of the paternity suits served on President Lugo; however, several of the other essays about women in society do not do much to enlighten the reader about this important topic.

Lambert and Nickson's Epilogue argues that the impeachment of President Lugo "sent a clear message that the elite would simply not tolerate a challenge to Paraguay's exclusionary and corrupt pattern of landownership" (p. 454). This essay, and the entire volume, is a work of engaged scholarship, seeking to "strike a small blow for people's history over fantasy, cliché, and stereotype" (p. 10) with an insightful and highly readable volume.

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