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John Howard White
Candidate

Department of History
Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

[Signatures]

Chairperson
ITAIPU:
GENDER, COMMUNITY, AND WORK
IN THE ALTO PARANA BORDERLANDS,
BRAZIL AND PARAGUAY, 1954-1989

BY

JOHN HOWARD WHITE

B.A., History, North Carolina State University, 1995
M.A., Latin American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2001

DISSERTATION
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
History

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2010
DEDICATION

For my mother;
In memory of my grandmother
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Albuquerque, NM
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GENDER, COMMUNITY, AND WORK
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John Howard White

B.A., History, Spanish Minor, North Carolina State University, 1995
M.A., Latin American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2001
Ph.D., History, University of New Mexico, 2010

ABSTRACT

In 1975 workers on massive earth-moving machines began excavations in the middle of the Paraná River for what later would become the site of the world’s largest hydroelectric dam, Itaipú Binacional. During the period 1974-1991, the dam was constructed as a joint venture between the military regimes of Brazil and Paraguay and thousands of workers and their families migrated to the borderlands in search of employment. My study uses the conceptual framework of gender and sexuality in order to produce a comparative social history of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project and the worker communities that it created in the Alto Paraná borderlands. This dissertation incorporates the story of dam workers, including their struggles and their lived experience in the “company town” and in so-called “peripheral communities,” into the grand narrative of technological advancement and “order and progress” embodied by the “Project of the Century.”

Rather than being tangential to the story of “Itaipú,” these protagonists—militant dam workers, housewives, shantytown residents, and sex workers, among others—form an essential piece of our understanding of the impact of infrastructure projects and national development on local communities and identities. The dissertation reconstructs the Alto Paraná as a historical place, shows how the borderlands became the locus of nation building for two Latin American countries, discusses the migration of single male workers and constructions of masculinity, analyzes corporate programs to “remake” married dam workers into family men and their female partners into housewives, reconstitutes dystopian sexual communities and maps the changing itineraries of male sexual consumption, and concludes by narrating working class political struggles and labor conflict in the context of democratic transitions in both Brazil and Paraguay.
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NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The sources for this dissertation mostly are written in two languages—Spanish and Portuguese—which present special challenges. To simplify matters as much as possible, for place names and proper nouns one spelling has been decided upon and consistently used throughout. Where pertinent, further explanations are provided in a corresponding footnote.
INTRODUCTION

To the more than 35,000 Brazilian and Paraguayan unknown heroes that, with their hard work and camaraderie, built the largest hydroelectric dam in the world.¹

In the Guarani language, Itaipú means “singing stones,” referring to a small, rocky island that used to exist in the middle of the Paraná River. In 1975, workers on massive earth-moving machines destroyed the island, as part of the initial excavations for what later would become the site of the world’s largest hydroelectric dam. The dam was constructed as a joint venture between the military regimes of Brazil and Paraguay during the period 1974-1991. The more industrially developed Brazil fabricated much of the heavy machinery, iron and steel, turbines, and provided much of the technical “know-how” for the massive project. The final cost of the hydroelectric dam when paid for in 2023 and including accumulated interest is estimated to be US$ 25 billion and will make Itaipú Binacional one of the largest and costliest single development projects in the history of Latin America.² Until the recent completion of the Three Rivers Gorge project in China, Itaipú Binacional held the title of the largest hydroelectric dam in the world.³ By 2009, Itaipú Binacional supplied approximately 90 percent of the electricity consumed in Paraguay and 20 percent of the electricity consumed in southern Brazil.

This dissertation is not an institutional history of that development project. Rather it reconstructs “Itaipú” as a borderlands and seeks to retell the history of the people who inhabited it from the late-nineteenth century onward, and the communities they formed. Thus, the dissertation strives, first and foremost, to be a social history and to include the “voices” of people, their struggles, and their lived experience. Rather than being tangential to the story of “Itaipú,” these voices form an essential piece of our

¹ From the dedication page, by Juan Carlos Wasmosy Monti in his publication, Archivo ITAIPU: memorias y documentos inéditos (Asunción: Colorshop Estación Gráfica, 2008), 3. The Spanish reads: “A los más de 35.000 trabajadores paraguayos y brasileños, héroes anónimos que, con su laboriosidad y armonía, construyeron la mayor represa del mundo.”
² In 1996, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) named Itaipú one of the “Seven Wonders of the Modern World” due to its immense size and capacity.
³ The statistics on the dam are impressive; it is nearly five miles across, as tall as a sixty-story building, and contains enough iron and steel to build three hundred and eighty Eiffel Towers.
understanding of the impact of development projects and national development on local communities and identities.

**Borderlands of Gender and Sexuality**

In looking at recent trends in the historiography of the nation, the Argentine historian Guillermo Wilde has pointed out that “place as object of identity formation particularly has been expressed in the discourse about nations and their territorial limits.” In their edited volume *Contested Ground*, historians Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan echo that, “with the exceptions of Brazilians and Argentines, Latin American intellectuals have seldom considered their own frontiers central to the formation of national identities or of national institutions,” a list to which Paraguay should be added as well.

The story of the “frontier” is usually told from the perspective of the political and social center. As historians David Weber and Jane Rausch have argued, in “both Latin American historiography and popular culture, the frontier was a place to be feared, a spawning ground of barbarism and despotism rather than democracy.” In this case, the characterization of the frontier—as demographic, political, or economic expansion into “empty” territory—is vastly oversimplified for the cases of Argentina, Brazil, or Paraguay. Although often defined as a frontier region, this classification only tells part of the story of the Alto Paraná region. For the purposes of this study, the Alto Paraná region will be further defined as a borderland, which opens the possibility of telling the story in a different way and asking different questions.

The dissertation privileges the construction of hydroelectric dams in Brazil and Paraguay and, subsequently, the category of “dam worker” in the narrative. In his preface to Wilson Quintella’s *Memórias do Brasil Grande: a história das maiores obras do país*

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4 Guillermo Wilde, “Imaginarios contrapuestos de la selva misionera: una exploración por el relato oficial y las representaciones indígenas sobre el ambiente,” in *Gestión ambiental y conflicto social en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2008), 193. The Spanish reads: “el paisaje como objeto de construcciones identitarias se ha expresado particularmente en el discurso sobre las naciones y sus límites territoriales.”


6 This position contrasts with the portrayal by Frederick Jackson Turner of the North American frontier. Quoted in Guy and Sheridan, *Contested Ground*, 8.
e dos homens que as fizeram, published in 2008, Antonio Delfim Netto argues that all Brazilians owe a measure of gratitude to the figure of the barrageiro (dam worker), “so little known and...until now little compensated. Ultimately encompassing thousands of men and women, from laborers to engineers, from foremen to cooks, that, in the manner of ancient armies, moved from dam to dam along the rivers of Brazil during a half-century, constructing the works that kept the country alight with clean energy.”7 Despite Netto’s remarks, the problem with Quintella’s memoirs is that it mostly focuses on company administrators and engineers—one finds few if any laborers or women in the narrative.

While highlighting the importance of this figure in the recent history of the country, Netto’s preface to this work calls our attention to the dearth of published sources and a general lack of information regarding the dam worker. Importantly, he includes in the category of “dam worker” both men and women, recognizing the vital importance of the latter in the construction of hydroelectric dam projects throughout Brazil. However, it must be noted that each of the positions that he mentions, in this case laborers, engineers, foremen, and cooks, were jobs almost exclusively performed by men. Regardless, Netto is correct in his statement that women should be counted among the small armies of dam workers. Banned from construction jobs, women workers found employment as social workers, secretaries, nurses, and cleaning personnel with Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms. Additionally, large numbers of women stayed at home and devoted themselves to the reproductive labor of household responsibilities and childcare. Furthermore, women were employed in the sexual commerce that boomed as a result of the dam project. Indeed, without the barrageira (female dam worker), broadly constituted, such infrastructure projects could not have been built.

Company officials sought to create the “female dam worker” as a complement to the male dam worker and located her “work site” in the dam worker communities. Although the surrounding environs were sparsely populated when the Itaipú Binacional

7 Wilson Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande: a história das maiores obras do país e dos homens que as fizeram (São Paulo: Saraiva, 2008), 14. The Portuguese reads: “...que todos nós, brasileiros, temos uma antiga dívida de gratidão para com essa figura do ‘barrageiro,’ tão pouco conhecida e, creio, até, muito pouco recompensada. Afinal, trata-se de alguns milhares de homens e mulheres, de peões a engenheiros, de mestres-de-obras a cozinheiros, que, à maneira dos antigos exércitos, se deslocaram de barragem em barragem ao longo dos rios brasileiros, construindo as usinas que mantiveram o país aceso, com energia limpa, durante meio século.”
project commenced, entire worker communities were built from the ground up on both sides of the border when companies constructed roads, housing, medical clinics, schools, churches, and recreational facilities, and when thousands of workers and their families migrated in search of employment. In addition, so-called “peripheral communities,” including zones of prostitution and shantytowns, sprang up alongside the company housing developments. This study includes sex workers and shantytown residents who were not directly employed by Itaipú Binacional or its subcontracted firms.

Taking these larger communities and their diverse composition into account, my study uses the conceptual framework of gender and sexuality in order to produce a comparative social history of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project and its worker communities in the Alto Paraná borderlands. As Joan W. Scott argues in Gender and the Politics of History (1988), gender is knowledge about sexual difference, of whose use and meaning are contested politically, and is the means by which relationships of power are constructed. For Scott, gender is a fundamental aspect of social organization and “can be found in many places, for the meanings of sexual difference are invoked and contested as part of many kinds of struggles for power.”

Along these lines, I argue that military regimes espouse explicit ideologies of gender and sexuality and that, in the case study of Itaipú Binacional (and its antecedents), such ideologies are made manifest and articulated through a variety of organizations, including corporate programs that seek to form model workers and communities, regulate acceptable social relations between men, men and women, and the home and the workplace. According to an official publication of Itaipú Binacional, all policies and programs followed the “guidelines, standards, and principles” set forth by the military regimes in Asunción and Brasília respectively. In addition, the military regimes of both Brazil and Paraguay appointed representatives, usually high-ranking generals, to oversee the construction of the dam and to report back to the high command. Such extensive top-

9 Itaipú Binacional, El proyecto del siglo (Ciudad del Este, Paraguay: Asesoría de Comunicación Social, Dirección General Paraguay, 1999), 40.
down monitoring, the company argued, was necessary to maintain high work standards, safe working conditions, and “harmonious social relationships” among workers.\(^\text{10}\)

While certainly more obvious in the examples of labor and repression, where military regimes took drastic steps to discipline workers, it can also be seen in the military regimes’ stance toward sexual commerce and sexual subcultures. State projects and ideologies have impacted communities at the local level, affected the ways in which workers mobilize, and even transformed relationships between men and women, and among men. My study explores these connections between state ideology and local, corporate practice, analyzing how the military regimes and companies constructing the project envision, create, and discipline both worker communities and the borderlands in which they exist. Indeed, the dissertation casts worker activities and conflicts as central to this process.

Both historical and ethnographic approaches to sexuality are useful to my study. Following Michel Foucault’s work, sexuality is understood here to be a product of discourse that undergoes a process of transformation and reconstruction that is historically and culturally specific.\(^\text{11}\) Anthropological approaches are helpful in understanding the meanings of sex according to the people involved, the contexts in which it occurs, the structure and “scripting” of sexual encounters, and the sexual cultures and subcultures of particular societies.\(^\text{12}\) The focus has turned to examine the ways in which “different communities structure the possibilities of sexual interaction” while illuminating “socially and culturally sanctioned differentials in power—particularly between men and women.” Such insights can also be used to examine relations, including sexual relations, between Latin American men as well.\(^\text{13}\)

For my study, an understanding of how sexuality is constructed and its meanings to Itaipú dam workers helps to illuminate gender power differentials and offer insights into the contexts and meanings in which sex occurs, for instance within the home, the brothel, or even the respective borders of Brazil and Paraguay. I argue that borders

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\(^\text{10}\) Itaipú Binacional, *El proyecto del siglo*, 41.


matter to sex and sexuality because how they are conceptualized helps to define, locate, and discipline both acceptable and deviant sexual encounters within or outside national boundaries. Furthermore, constructions of sexuality in the borderlands provide an opportunity to explore how the state, the corporation, and the Catholic Church impact the social and moral regulation of sexuality.

**Historiographies of Power**

The dissertation engages with existing bodies of scholarly work related to gender, sexuality, community, labor, the nature of military regimes and transitions to democracy, and borderlands. To date, no source explores the social and cultural impacts of the hydroelectric dam project, the role of labor more broadly and dam workers specifically, or the variety of communities and subjects in a borderlands setting. As a social history of the communities of the borderlands and of Itaipú Binacional, my dissertation develops a broader historical periodization that allows for the incorporation of both sides of the border zone, the role of labor, the social impact of the dam project, and the development of a wide range of communities and protagonists.

Within the existing historiography, the economic, legal, and political impacts of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project have been fully addressed. Efraim Enriquez Gamón (1975), Laercio Beitol (1983), and Enzo Debernardi (1996) explore the economic and diplomatic significance of the project between Brazil and Paraguay in a regional context. Ricardo Canese and Alberto Nicanor Duarte (1999), among other critical voices, show how the project has affected recent politics within Paraguay in a negative way. However, the journal article by R. Andrew Nickson (1982) is the lone English

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15 There are numerous works that take a critical view of the project and its impact. See Ricardo Canese and Alberto Nicanor Duarte, *Itaipú: el miedo a la verdad* (Asunción: Generación, 1999); Ricardo Canese, *Deuda ilícita, Itaipú: el más nefasto negociado contra el Paraguay* (Asunción: Generación, 1999);
language work published on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. In this early and insightful work, Nickson argues that the Itaipú project held enormous historical importance to Paraguay, containing the potential to transform most aspects of contemporary life. However, Nickson describes the basic contours of dam construction and worker migration in order to examine the political and economic impact of the project in a distinctly Paraguayan context.

In addition to Quintella’s 2008 publication mentioned previously, scholars have produced recent studies on the topic of Itaipú Binacional and its workers. Maria de Fátima Bento Ribeiro’s doctoral dissertation, *Itaipu, a dança das águas* (2006) takes as its focus the period 1966 to 1984 and explores the project using the analytical lenses of historical memory and discursive analysis. Importantly, Ribeiro shows how the idea of Itaipú Binacional came to represent the embodiment of progress, while also pointing to the human costs and the impact on the environment. Ribeiro’s final chapter addresses dam workers, mostly providing an overview of the various jobs performed, in the discursive context of the “space and time” of the construction site. However, few actual workers appear in Ribeiro’s mostly conceptual study.

Jorge Coronel Prosman’s *Itaipú y la lucha de los trabajadores* (2009) is the first publication to address the labor organization of Paraguayan dam workers related to the Itaipú Binacional project. However, the work mostly provides an overview of labor organization during the period 1991-2007. Prosman only briefly mentions the 1989 strike of Paraguayan workers, a topic that is developed more fully in this dissertation. This dissertation, furthermore, places the 1987 strikes on the Brazilian side of the project in the same narrative as the 1989 strikes in Paraguay, thus formulating a clearer picture of

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comparative labor organization, militancy, and democratic transitions currently lacking from the historiography.

Political scientists, for their part, have been interested for some time in the nature of the military regimes during this period as well as the historical context behind their development. For Brazil, Alfred Stepan (1971) argued for the importance of the Cold-War era national security doctrine to define the military’s new role in society, Guillermo O’Donnell (1986) developed a typology for these regimes that he called “bureaucratic-authoritarian” in which the military works closely with foreign capital in order to industrialize, and Thomas Bruneau and Philippe Faucher (1981) highlighted a particular brand of “authoritarian-capitalism” that depended on economic growth for its continuation.19 For Paraguay, Paul H. Lewis viewed the Stroessner military dictatorship as a continuation of strongman rule in that country, while Carlos R. Miranda argued that military rule in Paraguay defies easy categorization as purely institutional authoritarianism, caudillismo, or a personalistic power regime.20 While such questions are not central to my study, an examination of Itaipú dam workers and their communities sheds light on the nature of the military regimes by exploring how such regimes managed workers and responded to worker militancy and resurgent labor organization.

Scholars of Latin America have been interested in the role of organized labor, particularly (but not exclusively) as nations began the process of industrialization in the early decades of the twentieth-century. These institutional histories gave way to “new” labor studies emerging within the Latin American field in the 1980s, including early and important work by Peter Winn and John D. French that explored worker politics from the

A wave of new monographs published in the late-1990s and early-2000s analyze workers in such diverse settings as Brazilian factories, Colombian textile mills, and Chilean urban women workers, agrarian workers, state welfare workers, and copper miners. Following Scott’s insights, the conceptual lens of gender is employed in these monographs as an analytical category that incorporates both men and women, while demonstrating how gender and sexuality are fundamental to understanding historical experience and power relations. Broadly, these studies define gender as a set of cultural beliefs about how men and women are or should be different while framing societal concepts of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, divisions of labor, and sexuality.

In the works mentioned above, gender and sexuality are important analytical categories that explored social and cultural structures that shaped and informed everyday experience. Like the textile workers of Medellín, work categories at Itaipú Binacional were defined as either male or female and were based upon cultural and sexual ideals that underpinned such divisions. I argue that women workers and their essentially reproductive work were seen as necessary to the successful completion of the dam project, provided that women remained within certain parameters and avoided transgressing appropriate gender roles.

Barbara Weinstein’s *For Social Peace in Brazil* (1996) historicizes industrial training and management in relation to state-building and economic development in

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21 In *Weavers of Revolution*, Winn uses oral history interviews in order to tell the story of Chile’s democratic road to socialism under the Salvador Allende government (1970-73) from the “bottom-up,” arguing that male Yarur textile workers and their struggles against factory owners are central to understanding working-class formation, consciousness, and labor relations. In *The Brazilian Workers’ ABC*, French shows how Brazilian industrial workers in São Paulo played an active political role in the first half of the twentieth century, thus revising the then current consensus among scholars that argued workers had been dominated and co-opted by Brazilian populism and national politics. See Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile’s Road to Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers’ ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Brazil. She examines how leading industrialists and the quasi-governmental agencies that they led during the period of the 1920s through the 1960s sought to remake Brazilian workers and create social harmony. Similar to the Brazilian industrialists of São Paulo, the Itaipú Binational Corporation and its subcontracted firms employed a staff of professionals that formulated programs targeted to improve the lives of dam workers and their families. Specifically, these corporate professionals in worker safety, education, and nutrition/medicine joined with the outreach programs of the Catholic Church in order to promote worker health, safety, and foster harmonious relationships between workers, workers and the state, and workers and the corporation. These “welfare professionals,” much like those examined by Weinstein and Thomas M. Klubock in his monograph *Contested Communities* (1998), sought to instill similar ideas of worker respectability, cleanliness, temperance, hard work, sexual morality, and love of family. In conjunction with the policies and ideologies of state and military officials, a discussion of these professionals illuminates some of the characteristics of everyday life within workers’ communities, specifically as they relate to gender relations and programs for the working class family.

Despite company programs to shape model workers, Itaipú Binacional dam workers developed a distinct working-class culture that became increasingly oppositional to corporate, state, and Church-sanctioned meanings of work and domestic life for men and women. Itaipú Binacional dam workers and their families occupied a space that I constitute as a borderlands. Therefore, my study occupies a much different “field of power” than the Klubock study, one that takes into consideration how the bi-national setting of the project expands our understanding of how corporations and states seek to alter or remake citizens and workers and responses to such programs. For this reason, the literature on borderlands is relevant to my study.

As Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel argue, the term border reflects the political divides resulting from state building that started in the eighteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. Borders became important to “modern states” as a way to make concrete or to fix territorial expansion. This is particularly salient in the case

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of Brazil and Paraguay, whose exact territorial dimensions had not been determined as late as the mid-twentieth century. As Baud and Van Schendel point out, the “sharper lines” that states sought to draw also divided citizens from “aliens” and “foreigners” and allowed them to prohibit certain goods, animals, and people from entering the country. Thus, the mapping of modern borders represented “a collective attempt by state elites to establish a worldwide system of clear-cut territorial jurisdictions and to have their legal and political sovereignty confirmed cartographically.”

While government and military officials concerned themselves with fixing the exact borders of the national territory, historians of the region also have worked to reify those boundaries. For example, the Brazilian historian Ruy Christovam Wachowicz, whose monograph _Obrageros, mensus e colonos_ (1982) is the most comprehensive study of the western portion of Paraná State, argues that the creation of a history of a “micro-region” presented specific methodological problems. How does one tell the history of a micro-region, itself part of a larger territory defined as a state, which in turn is part of the national territory of Brazil? For Wachowicz, such a history must be told from point of view of an “imagined” national community.

While both the “micro-region” and the state each possessed “their own internal history” (*uma história interna própria*), Wachowicz argues that any such local histories had been driven by the overarching “history of the nation,” or *história nacional*. As such, he argues that the State of Paraná, and by extension its constituent parts, could not be viewed “simply as a geographical fragment of the Brazilian national society,” but as a whole. Moreover, the historical entity of “western Paraná,” which Wachowicz constructs, was not simply a piece of the larger “Brazil,” nor could it be divorced or removed from the larger national narrative and history. In short, Wachowicz seeks to write a regional (“micro”) history from the point of view of the political and economic centers, in this case Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba.

Such “national histories” act to incorporate once marginal regions into the larger narrative of the history of Brazil, Paraguay, or Argentina. Once constituted, the region of “western Paraná,” “Alto Paraná,” or “Misiones,” could be separated more easily from the

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history of other nations, in this case Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, and in turn, Brazilian, Paraguayan and Argentine historians have constituted their own historical narratives. In the process, they constituted the respective “micro-regions” outside and exclusive of Brazil. Historiographically speaking, over the course of the twentieth century, the region of the Alto Paraná ceased to be one entity (shared by three republics), but rather split between three emerging nations and three subsequent national histories, all told from the point of view of the elites in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, or Asunción. Importantly, this dissertation seeks to reconstitute the Alto Paraná through approaching the region as a borderland, as an entity that complicates “national” histories, but does not do away with them entirely. It is exactly this type of history that this dissertation seeks to deconstruct and retell, in the process “re-imagining” a history of a place that only recently became controlled (albeit loosely) by the state.

Given the complexity of the dissertation, no one conceptual framework (gender, borderlands, etc.) can be employed seamlessly throughout the entire work. The challenge in my study is to give the reader a clearer sense of how the fact of an international frontier and two states affected the communities formed there. The dissertation addresses the borderlands of the Alto Paraná as (re)imagined, then occupied by states, constructs Itaipú as a bi-national expression of that vision and territorial incorporation, and goes on to discuss workers in their communities, forming families, having sex, shaping their own identities, and formulating cultures of resistance.

A central argument of this study is that borders matter, particularly to military regimes, which utilize the state’s ability (or desire) to control its territory, police its borders, and include, exclude, or locate certain persons, goods, ideologies, or activities. In particular, borders are important in a bi-national context. As will be seen, the setting of the borderlands and the nature of military regimes shape peoples’ understanding of gender, community, and work on the ground and on the local level—persons are always defined as Brazilian or Paraguayan, not transnationals or extra-nationals, regardless of what side of the border they are on. Thus, nationalism and nation building often divide populations rather than join them together, despite the rhetoric of politicians and corporate officials. Moreover, the proximity of the border, particularly in the examples of
sexual commerce and labor militancy, in turn delineates and shapes the manifestations of
sex, power, consumption, democracy, and agency, among others.

The Pharaoh’s Archives

Today, the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam constitutes one piece in the larger “tourist complex” of the Alto Paraná borderlands, alongside shopping in Ciudad del Este and a visit to the Iguazu Falls, among other destinations. A visit to the dam unfolds in the following manner: first, if on a visit to the site during daylight hours, tourists view a film at the welcome center, which mostly focuses on the technological and engineering aspects of the project and delivers a heavy handed narrative of corporate responsibility and stewardship of the natural environment. Second, tourists are loaded onto buses and driven to the viewing platform on their respective sides of the border and subsequently given a guided tour of the powerhouse of the main dam complex, including the turbines. Little or no mention is made of dam workers and no tour is provided of the ruins of the on site worker’s communities. The omission is intentional: if workers mattered more to company officials, then this aspect of the history of the project would be included in the tour as a central aspect of the history of the project.27

A recent addition, however, is the “monumental” lighting display of the entire dam, offered at night, as a type of public spectacle. In this case, tourists are bused to the Brazilian side of the project where they gather at the outdoor viewing platform. A short video provides historical background to the project, again mostly touting the technological abilities of engineers and the foresight of government officials, while giving only the briefest of mention to the “thousands of anonymous men” who built the dam.28 At the conclusion of the video, a soundtrack commences which is intended to invoke ancient Egypt and the building of the great pyramids, as the lights on the dam are slowly raised to reveal the glory of one of the world’s “modern wonders.”

27 To be fair, the Ecomuseu—essentially a museum dedicated to the history of the region of far western Paraná—located on the Brazilian side of the project does a much better job including the workers of Itaipú Binacional. There, one can view artifacts of workers, such as helmets, food trays, and equipment.
28 For biographical information on the mostly Brazilian “pharaohs,” see Solange Balbi and Maria Leticia Corrêa, eds., Dicionário Biográfico de Setor de Energia Elétrica Brasileiro, Volume I (Rio de Janeiro: Centro da Memória de Eletricidade no Brasil, 2002)
In the linear narrative of material and technological progress brought by the guiding hand of “Brazilian pharaohs,” the workers who actually built the dam have been left out. This dissertation writes those “anonymous” workers back into the story as central protagonists, while also including women, in their roles as housewives, sex workers, or landless squatters. Moreover, the overarching and established narrative of the construction of the dam also, to a large degree, marginalizes Paraguay and Paraguayans and their important role and contribution. Taken as a whole, this near exclusion is only possible if the categories of worker (and by extension labor), women, and Paraguayans are eliminated. Thus, the dissertation takes as one of its central tasks the reintroduction of these categories and, in particular, the historical reincorporation of Paraguay as a full partner. As such, this dissertation does not take one subject—the triumphant Brazilian narrative of technical achievement without workers as its central concern—but rather seeks to fundamentally alter the story of the dam project.

Where does the researcher find information regarding workers, women, and Paraguayans, not to mention Brazilians, often loosely connected to the construction of a hydroelectric dam? Unfortunately, the corporate archives and records of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms, the most obvious places to look, are either closed to researchers or have been lost. In the case of the subcontracted firm Conempa, S.R.L, which also continues to exist, the documents related to the construction of the dam project have been “misplaced.” In the meantime, such are the limitations of research and the frustrations of historians. Much documentary material still can be found in the “Pharaoh’s archives,” if one looks for them. For this project, I have included additional sources, such as traveler accounts, novels, investigative reports, secret police and military records, census reports, Catholic Church documents, company publications, state and regional planning reports, interviews, and a variety of media sources, photographic documentation, and maps.

In the example of labor organizing at Itaipú Binacional some of the sources utilized were found among the confidential files, dossiers, and surveillance reports of the Paraguayan Departamento de Investigaciones (D.I) and the Brazilian Departamento de

29 It is important to remember that Itaipú Binacional continues to exist as an administrative and legal entity, thus it has the duty to protect its workers, both past and present. Therefore, it is not possible to write an institutional or corporate history at this time.
Ordem Política e Social (D.O.P.S), the police forces that gathered intelligence on students, intellectuals, workers, and “subversives” of all stripes.\(^\text{30}\) In both Brazil and Paraguay, much of the “hidden history” of labor at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project remains in such inaccessible corporate, government, or police and military archives. Fragments of evidence gathered, however, suggests that Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors worked with the government and secret police on both sides of the border to gather intelligence that they then used to limit the potential for all types of labor organizing and protest.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, traveler’s accounts, investigative reports, anthropological studies, and some insights from novels provide a basis for the recreation of the Alto Paraná borderlands. This part of the dissertation reconstructs the region from several perspectives, in the process both deconstructing “national history” and the national histories themselves for my purposes. The second chapter, building upon the first, utilizes memoirs, census reports, state economic planning reports, and industry publications to discuss national aspirations and goals, which played out in the Alto Paraná region.

Chapters Three and Four draw upon company newspapers, primarily of the subcontracted firms of Conempa and Unicon, found in the libraries of Itaipú Binacional. These sources provide a rich vein of documentary material that has not been utilized previously. However, company publications typically focus more on corporate initiatives and agendas than about the daily lives of workers. Even with this limitation, and for this very reason, these sources reveal a great deal about these companies, labor recruitment and relations, and their aspirations to social engineering. Further, they show how such objectives changed over time and why.

Popular press reports, including investigative reporting, provide an important category of documentary material, as well as a source for understanding views on national development and identity. In both Brazil and Paraguay, the press was one of the few sectors of criticism and opposition to the military regimes. Though often censored (Brazil) and eventually shut down (Paraguay), editors and reporters often attacked those

\(^{30}\) After the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship, this cache of documents was discovered in the basement of a police substation and is now housed in the Documentation and Archive Center for the Defense of Human Rights, dubbed the “Archive of Terror,” located in the Palace of Justice in Asunción.
interests and institutions related to the military regimes, their projects, or the “social ills” believed to be engendered by their policies and actions. As will be seen, sex and sexual commerce, and by extension disease, immorality, and social decay, were often the topic of articles and investigative reporting. Indeed, these themes stood in as proxies for discussions of repression, lack of democracy, and corruption on the part of military governments and their political supporters. However, these sources also have methodological problems: unlike housewifery or other forms of women’s work, prostitution usually commanded an unusual amount of attention in the press.

In the absence of access to official corporate archives, the “Archive of Terror” in Asunción and the Arquivo Público do Paraná in Curitiba provided information on the “secret” inner workings of Itaipú Binacional related to company attempts to limit labor militancy, organization, and mobilization during the years of dam construction. These documents provide glimpses into the actions of workers when they became relevant and troublesome to the companies and military regimes and subject to surveillance and punishment at the hands of the secret police forces of Brazil and Paraguay. As will be seen in Chapter Six, these sources are particularly useful when contextualizing and discussing labor organization, which exploded during the period of democratic transition in both Brazil and Paraguay.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of thematic chapters that follow a rough chronology. This structure also responds to the need to examine both national context and the specificities of the borderlands and reflects both comparative and borderlands framings. As such, the research conducted for the dissertation is divided into four parts: the first part examines the development of the Alto Paraná borderlands and the implementation of infrastructure projects in the region, as states consolidated their national territory and reached out to incorporate once marginal areas and the natural resources to be found there. The second part analyzes workers’ communities planned and built by the bi-national corporation and its subcontracted firms, for both single male workers housed on-site and for married workers with families housed in specially built communities. This part outlines the formation of a distinct working class community. The third part discusses communities
both directly and indirectly formed as a result of construction of the dam project, including zones of sexual commerce and shantytowns, which complicated larger national narratives of “order and progress.” The last part examines the rise of worker militancy and labor agitation in the context of the collapse of the military regimes and subsequent transitions to democratic rule in both Brazil and Paraguay.

Chapter One begins with the formation of the “triple frontier” at the close of the Paraguayan War (1865-70), which set the borders between the nations of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. This section formulates a historical narrative that is concerned with the political, economic, and social history of the borderlands. As an economically marginal region, the collection of wild yerba mate and extraction of timber dominated the local economy during the first half of the twentieth century, but failed to generate extensive colonization and settlement, particularly in the portions under the flags of Brazil and Paraguay. With the exception of a small number of river ports such as Hernandarias (Paraguay) and Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), few large settlements existed in the border zone during this period. This chapter develops a profile of these communities’ ethnic and cultural composition, family/kinship structures, economic activities, migration, and land use in order to explain the transformation and development explored in later chapters.

Chapter Two begins with the 1957 founding of Puerto Presidente Stroessner and ends with the formal constitution of the Itaipú Binacional entity in May 1974 and the subsequent completion of the dam’s project planning studies in 1975, the year that full-blown construction on the hydroelectric dam began. The ambitions of Brazil and Paraguay met in the Alto Paraná borderlands. For Brazil, the region signified a central component in its drive to world power status, continued industrialization, and energy independence. For Paraguay, stronger connections to Brazil and a land route to the sea enabled the land-locked nation to bypass Argentina and its dominant port of Buenos Aires. Stronger ties with Paraguay also allowed Brazil to marginalize Argentina in the growing contest for regional power. Moreover, plans for the Itaipú hydroelectric dam also made manifest new goals for the two nations and amplified these objectives.

Chapters Three and Four examine the phase of intensive construction, which witnessed the employment of approximately forty thousand unskilled and semi-skilled
workers, in addition to administrators and engineers. Chapter Three analyzes how company officials sought to shape low-skilled Paraguayan laborers into productive, safe, and healthy citizens of a “New Paraguay,” and how these men’s understanding of their own brand of masculinity complicated these attempts. Chapter Four focuses on the nuclear family and the dam worker’s home, which became increasingly important after 1979, as the project began the shift to a more skilled workforce. The chapter analyzes how corporate officials and “welfare professionals” sought to mold the spouses of dam workers into good housewives and mothers through education in the scientific principles of home management and childcare and how best for her to fill her “free time” with suitable activities that did not violate appropriate gender roles. In this formulation, “men’s work” on the construction site was discursively tied to “women’s work” in the home.

The demand for workers at Itaipú Binacional intensified the process of migration to the borderlands. Chapter Five utilizes the lens of sex and sexual commerce in order to analyze the themes of urban growth, corruption, and morality in the communities of prostitutes, sex workers, evangelicals, and shantytown residents. Chapter Five explores the impact that migration had on the urban landscape of Foz do Iguaçu, including the development of shantytowns, zones of tolerance, and the changing nature of sexual commerce in the borderlands and how this related to democratic transitions in Brazil.

In Brazil, a military junta seized power in 1964 and returned the country to civilian rule in 1985, while in Paraguay, General Alfredo Stroessner ruled for thirty-five years, constituting Latin America’s longest military dictatorship (1954-1989). Chapter Six extends from the end of intensive construction on the dam project in 1982 through the return to civilian rule in 1985 (Brazil) and 1989 (Paraguay). Building upon the previous chapters’ emphasis on workers’ communities and identity, this comparative chapter examines how workers formed a militant labor movement within these borderland communities during periods of democratic transition. In Brazil, the continued functioning of the corporatist state system of labor relations quickly mediated the worker’s strike. However, a much different scene unfolded in Paraguay, as an independently minded and charismatic labor leader challenged the status quo and the remnants of a military regime attempting to transition to civilian rule.
Itaipú: More than a Modern Marvel

While the archival emphasis of the research conducted has driven the structure and focus of the dissertation, it also shows what is “new” about the story of “Itaipú.” First, the dissertation utilizes a broader definition of the subject of “work” and “worker,” which has been expanded to include other forms of paid and unpaid labor, for example, sex work and housework and, in doing so, encompasses both productive and reproductive activities. Second, the dissertation incorporates other communities, such as dam workers and their families who resided in “peripheral” housing developments, zones of prostitution, and shantytowns. Third, the dissertation brings in Paraguay as a full partner, even at times privileging the country in the narrative. As has been mentioned, Paraguay was mostly written out of the story of “Brazilian greatness” and its aspiration to world power status. However, as will be seen, in the case of Itaipú Binacional and the rise of labor militancy during transitions to democratic rule, Paraguayan dam workers were the most important and compelling part of the story.

Returning to Joan Scott’s valuable insights, she argues that much of the social history produced until the late-1980s relegated sex and gender to the institution of the family, associated class with the workplace and community, and allocated war and constitutional matters to governments and states.31 Rather than compartmentalizing history, my dissertation brings the themes of borderlands, nation building, community, sexual commerce, labor organization, militancy, and democratic transitions together as one project. As such, my research contributes to the growing field of gender and labor history in Latin America and to scholarship on Latin American working class communities, sexuality, ethnic relations, transnational migration and borderlands studies, and to the broader literature on the nature and social impact of the Brazilian and Paraguayan authoritarian military regimes and subsequent transitions to democratic rule. Overall, the dissertation elaborates a new understanding of “Itaipú” as a window into understanding nation building, state-society relations, and labor history.

CHAPTER ONE

“We All Belong to the River”: Place, History, and Myth in the Formation of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, Alto Paraná, 1870-1950

Popularly known by the name of Alto Paraná, the extensive subtropical zone begins in Corrientes and takes in both banks of the Paraná River and its tributaries to the Guairá Falls. More than a region, it’s a whole country, covered in its totality by an impenetrable forest …subject to the three laws of the nations that converge at the confluence of the Iguazú and the Paraná [Rivers].

This introductory chapter focuses on a region that, at the close of the nineteenth century, became known as the “Triple Frontier” between the South American republics of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. However, the “frontier” meant very different things to each emerging republic, and garnered varying degrees of attention and importance during different historical periods. Over the centuries, the region of the Alto Paraná was defined, at varying times, as a “forgotten backwater” of little significance, a “savage wilderness” resistant to civilization, a “contested ground” that placed the region in the center of international politics and conflict, a “bi-national entity” signifying harmony and cooperation between the “brotherly nations” of Brazil and Paraguay (but not Argentina), and, most recently, as a “transnational tri-border” hotbed of crime, drug smuggling, terrorism, and Muslim extremism against the United States.

According to Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, the term borderland signifies “the region in one nation that is significantly affected by an international

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1 W. Jaime Molins, *Paraguay: crónicas americanas* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta A. Molinari, 1915), 86-87. The Spanish reads: “La extensa zona subtropical vulgarizada con el nombre de Alto Paraná, comienza en Corrientes y abarca ambas márgenes del río Paraná y sus afluentes hasta el Salto de Guairá. Es más que una comarca, es todo un país, ocupado en su totalidad por la selva impenetrable…sometido a la triple legislación de las naciones que convergen en la confluencia del Iguazú con el Paraná.”

2 The latter construction lies outside of the confines of this dissertation, which ends in 1989. For a discussion of the region from the lens of recent international developments, see Daniel K. Lewis, *A South American Frontier: The Tri-Border Region* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006). In addition, the tri-border area has also sparked the interest of Hollywood, being featured prominently in *Miami Vice* (2006) and more recently, as the site of Academy Award winning director Kathryn Bigelow’s follow-up to *The Hurt Locker* (2008), titled *The Triple Frontier*, slated to begin filming in 2011.
border.” However, the authors argue for what they term a “cross-border perspective” that takes into account the regions on each side of the international border, as a single unit of analysis, an approach that allows for a discussion of the various interactions and social networks that reach across them. As this introduction to the region demonstrates, the development of the Alto Paraná borderland, particularly in the twentieth century, followed the pattern of establishment, demarcation, and control, as defined by Baud and Van Schendel. Until quite recently, however, the understanding of the region as segmented into the political entities of “Brazil,” “Argentina,” and “Paraguay” had little actual significance to the borderlands inhabitants, who understood the Alto Paraná to be more of a place, constituted and shaped by the Paraná River, and only secondarily as a geopolitical dividing line between nations. [Map 1]

The following chapter outlines the factors that have shaped the Alto Paraná region historically, including exploration, emigration, and permanent colonization beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this chapter explores how the region developed politically and demographically as a result of commercial, economic, and military interests by individuals, corporations, and other elites, while introducing additional themes such as labor relations, race/ethnicity, and gender. As the region developed politically and cartographically into a “triple border,” it became a prime concern of modernizing and nationalist governments located in faraway capital cities, who sought to incorporate the region into the body politic as the locus of republican progress and civilization.

Although admittedly relying upon “national history” and its historians, nonetheless, the purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the particular brand of development of the Alto Paraná region that began in the 1950s. The chapter discusses the transformations—from frontier to borderlands to bi-national space—brought about by both democratic and military regimes in the name of national development and “progress,” later epitomized by the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam (1975-1985), the world’s largest such project.

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3 Baud and Van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” 215. Emphasis is in the original.
Map 1: The Alto Paraná Borderlands

Source: Courtesy of the Map and Geographical Information Center (MAGIC), University of New Mexico.
The Triple Frontier, 1870-1889

The Treaty of San Idelfonso (1777), signed between Spain and Portugal, established the border between the respective empires at the Río Paraná and the Río Iguaçu. After 1870, this became the border between the republics of Argentina and Paraguay and the empire (later Republic) of Brazil. The treaty ending the Paraguayan War (1865-70) redefined the respective national boundaries as a “triple frontier” with its center in the Alto Paraná. After the devastation of the war, however, the region north and east of Corrientes province was practically abandoned. As such, the area became a safe haven for bandits and runaway slaves, who intermixed with the native Guaraní, thereby creating a distinct ethnic and cultural hybrid and unique identity among the region’s inhabitants. Though mostly mestizo (European and Indian racial mixture) in composition, over time the borderlands became reified as culturally and ethnically “Paraguayan.”

In addition to mixed-race bandits and fugitives, the region surrounding the newly constituted “triple frontier” also contained numerous bands of hostile Indians, who resisted attempts by Argentine companies to push inland from the river in order to exploit the stands of wild yerba mate trees of the Alto Paraná. To resolve the issue, yerbateros (extractors of yerba mate, or Paraguayan tea) and residents of Trinchera de San José (present-day Posadas) in 1874 outfitted an armed expedition. After a brief skirmish near present-day Puerto Segundo, in which armed men abducted the cacique of the hostile tribe, the Corrientinos forced a peace treaty, the “Pacto de la Selva” (Jungle Treaty), which ended hostilities and allowed for permanent settlement and the uncontested extraction of yerba mate in the Argentine territory of the Alto Paraná. For Argentina, which historically has pursued a policy of extermination of indigenous populations, the “Jungle Pact” has been viewed as a defining moment, as the commencement of a phase of national incorporation of its northernmost frontier. Afterward, the “problem” of the frontier had less to do with Indians and their pacification, and more to do with

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4 Robert Wilcox discusses this hybridization, in particular as it relates to language, in Mato Grosso from among immigrant populations. He argues that mixed ethnic identity especially was apparent “in Portuguese-speaking Brazil, where the Paraguayan vernacular of mixed Spanish-Guaraní helped to preserve a distinct culture.” Thus, in this example, language marked one as “Paraguayan” or “Brazilian.” Robert Wilcox, “Paraguayans and the Making of the Brazilian Far West, 1870-1935,” The Americas 49:4 (1993):487.

colonization and growing anxiety over the troublesome interests and presence of Brazil in the region.

In 1881, Brazilian officials from the Ministério da Guerra in Rio de Janeiro decided to found a military outpost in the vicinity of the Rio Iguaçu, on the triple frontier. One year later, Brazil established the military outposts of Chapecó and Chopim along the southern border with Argentina, and made final plans to found a military outpost near the Iguaçu Falls. To highlight the urgency of the situation, in 1882, military officials discovered Argentines in Brazilian territory, searching for stands of wild yerba mate trees north of the Rio Iguaçu. However, given the vast territory and the small number of mostly absent owners, the presence of groups of men extracting wild yerba mate and “trespassing” on land owned by others is not surprising. In addition, the incident underscores the fact that rivers or borders had little physical power to limit or restrict commercial exploration of yerba trees and timber for profit.

Brazil’s growing interest in the region soon attracted the concern of Buenos Aires. In light of the diminishing threat of native attacks, the national territory of Misiones had been established in 1881 to further facilitate European settlement and the extraction of its vegetable resources. However, in the area of the Iguaçu Falls, the first settlers to arrive were the Brazilian Pedro Martins da Silva and the Spaniard Manuel González, who established homesteads there. Thus, the region emerged as a contested space, both economically and militarily, between the regional powers of Argentina and imperial Brazil.

With its new capital in Curityba (present-day Curitiba), the political entity of Paraná had been established in 1853, when the Brazilian emperor carved it out of the vast province of São Paulo. The newly constituted territory extended from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Paraná River in the west. A decade later in 1862, H.P. Vereker, the British royal consul for Rio Grande do Sul, reported his personal observations of the Alto

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6 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 21.
7 Juan B. Ambrosetti, speaking of Misiones province, believed that progress had been slow there due to the large amount of land held by a few proprietors, who had little interest in or had not even seen their holdings. See Juan B. Ambrosetti, *Dos estudios sobre Misiones: viaje a las Misiones argentinas y brasileiras* (Resistencia, Argentina: Instituto de Investigaciones Geohistoricas, 1983), 130.
8 The Portuguese spelling of these falls, Foz do Iguaçu, is used throughout. The Spanish spelling is Saltos de Iguazú. Previously, to the Spanish the falls also were known as the Saltos de Santa María.
Paraná region, at least that part which belonged to Brazil, to his fellows at the Royal Geographical Society of London:

[The western portion of Paraná state] is unexplored and almost unknown; but there is no doubt that at a future time an interior commerce will take place, because, as the Paraná [River] touches on Paraguay and the Argentine Provinces, goods will probably be conveyed through the different water-communications more cheaply to the western parts than by the present expensive and tedious land- carriage.10

Moreover, of the state in general, Consul Vereker stated that the “parts unexplored, comprising nearly two-thirds of the whole province, are understood to be peopled by native Indians, and to be thickly wooded with valuable timber. The banks of the rivers are almost the only portions examined, and those very imperfectly.”11 Overall, Consul Vereker thought the new province to be “thinly peopled and has been much neglected.”12

Brazil had gained access to the upper reaches of the Paraná River in the early 1850s through a series of accords signed with Paraguay and Argentina granting free navigation.13 In return, Argentina gained access to the markets in Mato Grosso, a vast and land-locked territory in central-west Brazil. For Brazilian authorities, access to the Paraná and Paraguai Rivers enabled continued commerce and communication with the isolated, though growing populations of the interior portions of the provinces of Mato Grosso, São Paulo, and Paraná. In 1859, the imperial government in Rio de Janeiro dispatched the warship Mearim to the region in order to explore the area for the eventual founding of a port near the confluence of the Iguaçu and the Paraná Rivers. Importantly, the expedition also proved that the Paraná River could be navigated by steamship all the way to the Saltos de Guiará. The founding of a Brazilian port on the Alto Paraná River had two purposes: first, to defend the Brazilian frontier by establishing a physical presence in the area and, second, to establish trade relationships and an outlet to the markets along the

11 Vereker, “Report on the Brazilian Province of the Parana,” 140.
The exploitation of the forests for timber and the yerbales (stands of wild yerba mate trees) that existed on the left bank of the Paraná River represented a third motive.

In Brazil, a formal plan to incorporate the region did not emerge until 1888, when the Brazilian Minister of War named a border commission, the Commissão Estratégica do Paraná, to carry out the various projects in the western portion of Paraná province. The plan included road construction, extending the communication infrastructure, and the founding of the long planned military outpost near the Iguaçu Falls. Instead of approaching the falls from the Paraná River, however, military officials chose to open a trail (picada) from Guarapuava, the westernmost settlement at that time. H.P. Vereker, in his aforementioned 1862 report to the Royal Geographical Society in London, referred to the Brazilian interior settlement of Guarapuava as the “limits to which civilization has reached.” After the completion of the trail leading to the banks of the Paraná River, an expedition departed from Guarapuava in September 1889. At roughly 100 kilometers east of the banks of the Paraná River, the party made a startling discovery: they encountered a group of Paraguayan men who were searching for wild yerba mate by utilizing the recently opened picada inland into the Brazilian forest. The captain of the expedition informed the “foreigners” that they were not permitted to explore in Brazilian territory without the prior permission of the imperial government in Rio de Janeiro. The expedition had departed Guarapuava under the flag of the monarchy, but arrived at the Paraná River as agents of the new Republic of Brazil, which had been declared in November 1889 while the party was in transit from Guarapuava to the Paraná River.

The expedition set up camp near the banks of the Paraná River, which became the seat of the proposed Colônia Militar and the nucleus of the new community of Foz do Iguaçu. In addition to protection, military officials also had the duty of distributing plots

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14 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 15.
15 Manuel Azevedo de Silveira Netto, Do Guayra aos Saltos do Iguazu; ilustrado com 30 photogravures comprehendo vistas, mappa e plantas das cachoeiras, Rio Paraná e outros pontos da fronteira (Coritiba, Typ. do "Diario official", 1914), 42.
16 Vereker, “Report on the Brazilian Province of the Parana,” 140.
17 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 23.
18 The spelling of the name of the community has changed over the years. In this case, the current spelling of the city, Foz do Iguaçu, is used throughout. For the history of Foz do Iguaçu, see José Maria de Brito, Descoberta de Foz do Iguaçu e fundação da colônia militar (Curitiba: Travessa dos Editores, 2005).
of land to would-be settlers. By 1905, the colony had approximately 1,000 inhabitants.\textsuperscript{19} According to Wachowicz, 33 families, mostly consisting of Paraguayans (of mixed Spanish-Guaraní descent) and some Argentines represented the majority of settlers, while the remainder was comprised of 20 Brazilian families.\textsuperscript{20} In contrast, Manuel Azevedo de Silveira Netto provides the following breakdown of the inhabitants of the area: “Between the Ocohy and the Iguassú Falls, can be found 35 hearths (fogos) inhabited by 324 persons, comprised of 188 Paraguayans, 93 Brazilians, 33 Argentines, 5 French, 2 Orientals, 2 Spaniards, and 1 Englishman. Of these, 220 are male and 104 are female.”\textsuperscript{21} Clearly, the demographic makeup of the region was predominately male and Paraguayan, regardless of the actual number of persons counted.

Each settler received a small grant of land, from which they extracted timber and yerba mate and grew corn, black beans, yucca, sugar cane, and tobacco for their subsistence. In the absence of sufficient capital for agricultural enterprises, colonists focused on extracting timber and yerba mate, in an attempt to make a profit as quickly as possible. Such tactics played into the hands of merchants and corporations, who purchased the goods directly from colonists but failed to pay the proper taxes, and led to a flourishing contraband trade.\textsuperscript{22} The establishment of the Mesa de Rendas (Customs House) in 1904 in Foz do Iguaçu did little to stop such activities.

Despite colonization efforts intended to foster the small family landholding, the economic engine of the region was based on the larger commercial “holding” or “exploration,” collectively known as the obraje or obrage (mill), which had been established in the first years of the 1880s. Beginning in 1881, individuals and Argentine corporations began their first explorations into the Alto Paraná, which at the time remained virtually uninhabited, particularly on the Brazilian portion of the river. The owner of the holding sought to extract yerba mate and timber from their property for

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[19]{This number is provided by Wachowicz, see Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 24. However, Manuel Azevedo de Silveira Netto reported the the number of residents at 2,000, but most likely he is referring to figures from 1915. See Do Guayra aos Saltos do Iguassú, 41.}
\footnotetext[20]{Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 24.}
\footnotetext[21]{Silveiro Netto, Do Guayra aos Saltos do Iguassú, 43. The Portuguese reads: “Entre a fôz do Ocohy e a do iguassú foram então encontrados 35 fogos habitados por 824 pessoas, sendo 188 paraguayos, 93 brasileiros, 33 argentinos, 5 francezes, 2 orientaes, 2 espanhues e um inglez. Destes 220 pertenciam ao sexo masculino e 104 ao feminino.”}
\footnotetext[22]{Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 25.}
\end{footnotes}
subsequent sale in Buenos Aires. Traditionally, owners from Argentina took advantage of their favorable access to the region by utilizing the navigable rivers of the Paraguay and the Paraná. The Argentines penetrated the Alto Paraná from their base of operations in Corrientes province and Misiones territory, eventually extending into territory in Paraguay and Brazil. The Argentines sought new supplies of yerba mate for their growing market in Buenos Aires.

The greatest concentration of naturally occurring yerba mate could be found in the western portions of the Brazilian provinces of Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Mato Grosso, and in eastern Paraguay. Argentines either bought the properties outright at extremely low cost or obtained a governmental concession in the form of a land grant. In the latter case, little if any documentation existed of these transactions. In Paraguay, as a result of a series of new land laws, almost all of the land held by the state (estimated at 50 percent of the total) was auctioned off from 1883 to 1885 in order to pay off loans or to finance reconstruction efforts. These policies led to rampant speculation by both foreign, usually Argentine, and domestic investors and encouraged the consolidation of large landholdings (*latifundia*).24

Upon purchase or receipt of the grant, the owner (either individual or corporation) organized an exploratory party in order to determine the quantity and quality of the yerba mate and timber existing on the property. Led by a proxy who protected the interests of the landowner, the party consisted of mostly single males, who labored to cut a *picada* into the jungle. [Figure 1.1] Such explorations into the interior lasted anywhere from thirty to forty days and could involve up to 200 men. After trails had been cleared into the forest, along the banks of the Paraná River a small “port” grew up at the beginning of the trailhead, eventually becoming a homestead or the company’s base of operations.25 In the latter, these “ports” were in essence small company outposts, in which the corporate director and the workers lived and which contained the smokehouses and warehouses to

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23 A large body of literature exists on the topic of yerba mate production in the region. For an example, see Antonio Bacilla, *O drama do mate* (Curitiba: Editora Guaíra Limitada, 1946).
24 Robert Wilcox reports that by 1925, 15 million hectares of land in Paraguay was in the hands of only 136 owners. Wilcox, “Paraguayans and the Making of the Brazilian Far West,” 489.
25 In 1920, seventeen such ports existed in Brazilian territory alone. Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 46.
store the yerba mate prior to shipment. Each day, workers left the camp to extract yerba mate and to fell timber from the surrounding countryside, returning each evening.

At first, the company outposts existed on the very margins of the river. Juan Bautista Ambrosetti, an Argentine naturalist and ethnographer who traveled to the region in 1893, remarked that after the men had cut trails into the forest and harvested the wild yerba mate, “nature recuperates her dominions [that had been only] momentarily invaded and the jaguars, wild boars, deer, etc. again walk peacefully where men left behind only their sweat, that in Misiones doesn’t enrich the land but rather the accounts of the big companies…” and further reported that “the Alto Paraná is unpopulated: one can navigate its length and, save one or other port for [shipping] yerba or a sawmill, not see anything but an occasional shed or shack, neither of which indicate the arrival of progress.”

Not entirely accurate, Ambrosetti’s “view from the river” belied his lack of familiarity of the interior or its communities.

During this period, the vast stretches of forests and yerba mate trees of the Alto Paraná transferred to the control of corporations owned by prominent families. From their base in Posadas, the new capital of the Misiones territory, several companies purchased holdings in the upper reaches of the Paraná River and established regular steamship service as far as the Guairá Falls. The steamships, in turn, transported the products of the region south to Buenos Aires for local consumption or for export to Europe and the United States. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, three vapores plied the route from Posadas to Tacurú Pucú (present-day Hernandarias), in addition to several freighters (buques de cabotaje), and numerous small canoes. Several Argentine companies—for example, Compañía Mercantil y Transporte Domingos Barthe, Nuñes Gibaja y Co., and Juan B. Molla, among others—operated a half-dozen vapores (steamships) on the river, moving passengers and goods upstream. [Figure 1.2] Highlighting the multinational

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26 Ambrosetti, *Dos studios sobre Misiones*, 130-131. The Spanish reads: “…la naturaleza recupera sus dominios momentáneamente invadidos y los tigres, tatetos, venados, etc., se pasean tranquilamente donde el hombre derramó su sudor, que en Misiones no fecunda la tierra sino los bolsillos de las grandes empresas…Alto Paraná se hallan despobladas: uno puede navegarlas todas y salvo uno que otro puerto de yerbateros u obraje de Madera, donde no se ven sino algún galpón o rancho provisorio, nada indica un principio de progreso.”

27 Ambrosetti, *Dos studios sobre Misiones*, 131.
dimensions of the trade, the ships of the Domingos Barthe Co. sailed under both the flags of Argentina and Paraguay.²⁸

The French-Basque Domingo Barthe owned some 400 leagues of land in Paraguay, with some 200 leagues of land in Brazil and Argentina, and employed approximately 2,500 workers on his collection of estates.²⁹ In the case of Compañía Mercantil y Transporte Domingos Barthe Co., extraction of timber and yerba mate constituted an extension of their business in lodging and in the provision of transportation on the river. These vast landholdings extended from the bank of the river, where the cleared patch of land at the river’s edge acted as an improvised port and contained the lodgings of company officials and the humble dwellings of the workers and their families. The larger settlements of Puerto Esperanza, Puerto Mendes, and Puerto Embalse, included additional infrastructure and a larger population. Following a regular schedule, the company steamships made frequent stops, ferrying company officials, laborers, and merchandise up and down the river.

Most of the inhabitants of the region were of mestizo origins. Although nominally “hispanicized,” they had intermixed racially and culturally with the indigenous population of the borderlands.³⁰ According to the historian of western Paraná state, Ruy Wachowicz, the modern “native” population spoke Guaraní, were considered “civilized,” and lived peaceably side-by-side with the “white races” (as populações brancas). Moreover, they retained many of their native traditions, but no longer lived as a tribe. Juan B. Ambrosetti argued that the “great majority of the inhabitants of these regions are Guaraní-speaking…and, naturally, many beliefs and superstitions arise from their unique character, history, and ethnic elements.”³¹ Although occupying the lowest rung on the social ladder, the “modern Guaraní” were fully integrated into the regional economy as

²⁸ Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 20. Wachowicz’ figure is for 1919.
²⁹ Molins, Paraguay, 89. In his interview with Molins, Barthe did not know the exact amount of land that he owned. See also, Jan M.G. Kleiopenning, Rural Paraguay, 1870-1932 (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1992), 225-27, for a brief history of the Barthe Company, among others.
³⁰ These so-called “Guaraní moderno” (“modern Guaraní Indians”), a term coined by the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro in 1970, has been embraced by contemporary writers of the history of the region, including Ynsfrán and Wachowicz.
³¹ Juan B. Ambrosetti takes a somewhat negative view of these traditions, rendering them as folklore and nothing more than “superstitions and legends.” Juan B. Ambrosetti, Supersticiones y leyendas: región misionera, valles calchaquíes, las pampas (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1953), 14.
both producers and consumers.\textsuperscript{32} In addition to being considered cheap to employ and exceedingly docile, many considered them to be an especially attractive workforce given their “natural” knowledge of the forest, its plants and animals, and their ability to survive the harsh conditions, heat, and diseases.

Defined as culturally and ethnically “Paraguayan,” the mixed race population comprised the workforce of the holdings. According to the before mentioned landowner Domingo Barthe, the workers and ranch hands on his estates consisted of a few Argentines from Corrientes and Paraguayans. The former he characterized favorably as hard workers, agile with a machete, and good horsemen. The latter, representing the majority of laborers, he considered to be patient and docile, but lacking in initiative. Simply put, Barthe characterized the Paraguayans as “brute laborers, nothing more.”\textsuperscript{33}

Ethnically and culturally speaking, little differentiation could be made between those men from Corrientes province in Argentina and those men who hailed from Paraguay. Although Barthe may not have been the first to voice such views, his prejudices against Paraguayans, particularly men—seen as lazy, superstitious, and prone to vice—carried on into the twentieth century.

At the time, common laborers on the holdings were known as mensú (laborers paid monthly), a term that referred to the monthly contract and pay received by these men. [Figure 1.3] The mensú, the corporations, and the worker communities became a prototype for labor relations in the borderlands. Usually contracted in the respective corporate personnel offices in Corrientes, Posadas, or Encarnación, the laborers signed contracts that lasted for a period of 6 to 9 months. In many cases, however, a comisionista (labor procurer), who received a set price for each laborer recruited and who operated in tandem with local authorities in the countryside, conscripted workers. As an incentive, companies offered a portion of the salary up front, known as an antecipo (cash advance), usually representing two or three months of pay in order to ensure a steady supply of workers. Considered the general custom, laborers refused to work in the holdings without the pay advance.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 47.
\textsuperscript{33} Molins, Paraguay, 89. The Spanish reads: “elementos de labor y de fuerza, nada más.”
\textsuperscript{34} Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 48.
Before receiving the cash advance, laborers had to present themselves to company officials for inspection. As the Spanish writer and ex-patriot Rafael Barrett stated about the tactics of the Compañía Industrial Paraguaya, the “raccoleur de la Industrial examines his prey, looks it over and inspects it, calculating the strength of its muscles and the amount of time it can last. He misleads, so easily, he seduces. He paints hell on earth with the colors of El Dorado.”

In addition, the prospect had to present their work card (libreta de trabajo) that listed all prior working history, dates of employment, prior positions held, and which later also included an ink thumbprint. Based on qualifications and skill, the unskilled mensú received 150-300 Argentine pesos, while higher skilled workers received up to 500 pesos, per month in pay.

If contracted downriver in Corrientes, Posadas, or Encarnación, the mensú often had to wait several days for steamship transport upriver and to their port of employment. In the meantime, male laborers often spent their entire cash advances on lodging, food, alcohol, prostitutes, gambling, and other entertainment. Posadas, in particular, was renowned for its lodges, bars, and bordellos, all catering to the mensú and his pocket full of Argentine pesos. According to Cezar Prieto Martínez, the Secretary of Public Education in Paraná who visited the bustling provincial town in 1924, the prostitutes of Posadas took advantage of the naiveté of the young, attractive Paraguayan male, pockets flush with the cash of the antecipo, which he quickly spent on drink and women in the cafes, bars, and dancehalls.

In most cases, the mensú arrived to the holding without capital or personal property. Before embarking on the company transport, the company representative relieved the mensú of their personal weapons, usually consisting of a small knife. Given their isolation, the laborers thereafter relied entirely on the company and its network of

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35 Rafael Barrett, *Lo que son los yerbales paraguayos* (Montevideo: La bolsa de los libros, 1926), 39. The Spanish reads: “raccoleur de la Industrial examina la presa, la mide y la cata, calculando el vigor de sus músculos y el tiempo que resistirá. La engaña, cosa fácil, la seduce. Pinta el infierno con colores de El Dorado.”

36 Molins, *Paraguay*, 90. For a brief discussion of the situation of the mensú, see pages 89-92 and 133-42. Molins visited the operations of the Industrial Paraguaya in 1915, from which he drew a favorable impression.

37 Barrett stated that the unskilled mensú received 150-250 Argentine pesos, while higher skilled workers received up to 400 pesos, per month. See Barrett, *Lo que son los yerbales paraguayos*; Juan Ambrosetti placed the amount at 200-300 pesos for unskilled workers, and up to 500 pesos for more skilled workers. See Ambrosetti, *Dos estudios sobre Misiones*, 132.

38 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colones*, 56-57.
steamships for their survival, including their supply of food, clothing, and tools, the cost of which officials added to a running account. All of these items had to be purchased from the company store. In essence, the *mensú* became dependents of the owner of the holding: they received low wages, had to shop in the company store, and could not leave the camps without permission. The company transports constituted the only way in or out. In addition, special armed guards under the employ of the owner rounded up workers who fled the camps overland.\(^{39}\)

In 1909, Rafael Barrett denounced the working conditions in the *yerbales* in a series of articles first published simultaneously in newspapers in Asunción and in Buenos Aires. Barrett argued that slavery had been re-established in the *yerbales* of the Alto Paraná, with the clear support of the Paraguayan state.\(^{40}\) Barrett cited the Presidential Decree of 1871, which decried the fact that the “national industry” (*la industria nacional*) of Paraguay suffered when *yerbales* workers abandoned their jobs before completing the terms of their employment and paying off their accounts. The decree, among other things, required workers to ask for permission in writing from bosses to leave the camps and mandated that they pay any outstanding debt to the companies. Workers could not change companies without permission from owners. For Barrett, this represented the underlying “mechanism of slavery” (*mecanismo de la esclavitud*), supported by the government, which acted to keep workers in the camps in conditions that he compared with the Congo in Africa.\(^{41}\) As a result of his writings, Barrett alleged that company officials forced publishers to reject his further submissions, mainly because the elite of Asunción held stock in the company.

Moreover, a form of debt peonage further operated to keep the *mensú* permanently attached to the holding. For example, the company forbade the keeping of chickens or the planting of vegetable gardens, even by spouses or female partners and, to maximize profits, all food and supplies had to be purchased in the company store. However, the cost of these goods, which cost up to ten times their normal value,

\(^{39}\) For an excellent synthesis of material regarding the horrendous working conditions, see Kleinpenning, *Rural Paraguay*, 228-36.

\(^{40}\) Slavery had been abolished officially in Argentina in 1853 and in Paraguay in 1869.

\(^{41}\) Barrett, *Lo que son los yerbales paraguayos*, 35-36.
exceeded the monthly salary of workers. Thus, the debt owed the company always surpassed the pay of the worker and the *mensú* rarely received any actual pay at all. Currency that circulated within the camps existed in the form of “company money” (*boleto*), only good within the confines of the holding and for exclusive use in the company store.

In the *verbales* of Tacarú Pucú (Hernandarias), the Compañía Industrial Paraguaya employed approximately 900 workers, although that number increased to 2,000-5,000 during the harvesting season. As an object of scorn, Barrett had singled out La Industrial Paraguaya, whose first base of operations was in Tacurú Pucú, though the locus of administration later moved inland to the better-situated Itakyry and its port of Puerto Embalse on the Río Acaray (a tributary of the Río Paraná). Founded in 1886, the company held vast reserves of land, approximately 8,000 leagues, in the Paraguayan provinces of Alto Paraná and Canindeyú or approximately 13.4 percent of eastern Paraguay. Eventually, the company owned over 2 million hectares of land, roughly half the size of Switzerland.

W. Jaime Molins visited both Tacarú Pucú and Itakyry in 1915 and, in his subsequent book, viewed life on the plantation favorably, citing the fact that the community had plenty of food, decent housing, a school, and workshops. Furthermore, the company engineer Sidney Wilson had plans to construct a basic hydroelectric station in order to provide electricity, which would enable the company to construct a flour-mill and a saw-mill. At the time, Reinaldo Bibolini, a graduate of the Wharton business school, ran the corporate office in Tacurú Pucú. Bibolini later became the general administrator for Industrial Paraguaya. Itakyry, however, was the exception. Most outposts lacked schools, medical facilities, or decent housing. Workers and their families suffered from malnutrition and disease.

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43 Molins, *Paraguay*, 135. The low number, 900, is derived from Molins, who interviewed company officials in Tacarú Pucú. The estimate of the workforce during the harvest is taken from material cited in Kleipenning, *Rural Paraguay*, 221.
44 Molins, *Paraguay*, 139-42.
Officials of the various companies did not prohibit the presence of women in the camps, but rather viewed them as favorable to the retention of the male work force. On his travels, Juan B. Ambrosetti reported that the river transports also carried some “Paraguayan women, as tough as the men, who took advantage of these trips in order to accompany their legal or temporary spouses with whom they shared the hardships of work and of the jungle…she is stronger than the man when she wants to be.” While allowed to reside in the worker community, female spouses of the mensú were denied employment with the companies. Therefore, company officials understood women and children to be the dependents of the mensú. Since the family wholly relied on the company store, the cost of their subsistence ultimately added to the amount owed to the company by the male worker.

In addition, prostitution existed in the camps. According to one informant interviewed by Wachowicz for his study, the practice of prostitution grew out of the system of debt peonage: reportedly as a last resort, male workers routinely “sold” their spouses or partners to the company foreman in order to pay out their account. Wachowicz further implies that foreman then acted as handlers for women who had been sold into prostitution. Supposedly, such “trade in women” (troca de mulheres) occurred less frequently in Argentina than in Brazil or Paraguay. In any case, the camps divided spatially based on occupation and marital status: one side for workers with families and another side for single men and prostitutes.

Disciplining of workers, control of access to and from the holdings, and maintenance of the overall status quo remained a vital preoccupation of owners and company officials. Companies employed a sereno, a type of mole, who acted as the eyes and ears of the company, and reported any gossip or information back to the boss. The company mole fostered division among the workers and their families, in order to better

48 Ambrosetti, *Dos estudios sobre Misiones*, 132. The Spanish reads: “…mujeres paraguayas, tan guapas como los hombres y que aprovechan de esos viajes para acompañar a sus maridos legítimos o provisorios con quienes comparten las fatigas del trabajo y del monte…cuando quiere la mujer es más fuerte que el hombre.”

49 The source for this information is Clemente Silva, a former worker on the plantations. See Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 50-51. Outside of fictional portrayals, very little historical information exists on the spouses and partners of the male laborers. Wachowicz remains the only source on women in the yerbales, although this topic receives little attention in his study.

50 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 56.
control and discipline workers. Known as the *cagueta*, informants of the mole and his collaborators received monetary reward for providing useful intelligence. However, the linchpin of the system of control centered upon the *capataz* (foreman), who represented the middleman between workers and company officials. Furthermore, the foreman had the power of life and death. According to the eyewitness testimony of tenente João Cabanas, who traveled through the region during the Revolution of 1924, the foreman was always of Argentine nationality and felt nothing but contempt for Brazilians and especially hated Paraguayans. Adding to his sinister reputation, workers accused the Argentine foreman of preying upon the female partners and daughters of the laborers, which included allegations of rape. In one case of a murder of a laborer, company officials sent the accused foreman to Buenos Aires on the company steamship in order to avoid charges. Most likely, however, such depictions revealed not historical fact, but rather deep-seated cultural biases against Argentines.

Corporations stymied efforts to construct any year-round overland route to the Paraná River from either Paraguay or Brazil. If the *mensú* had the ability to flee, then the holdings would have trouble retaining a sufficient number of laborers or would have been forced to offer higher wages and better conditions at the expense of profit. Owners resisted expansion of the transportation infrastructure and campaigns for further settlement of the region. As a result, the holdings were deemed as obstacles to progress in the region. The Colônia Militar (established in Foz do Iguaçu in 1889) could not govern without the support of the owners, who feared “foreign” control and interference. In turn, residents and commercial interests of the region depended on the companies, not to mention their transportation networks, and a lack of effective administration in order to carry out their extra-economic activities, including smuggling and contraband running. As such, the holdings and their owners operated as “states within states” or as company “empires” and personal fiefdoms, free of control or supervision by national or local authorities, and where bosses had the power of life and death over their workers.

51 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 54.
53 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 56.
54 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 52.
If the reports of Rafael Barrett are to be believed, the Alto Paraná represented a “green hell” (*infierno verde*) for laborers and their families. In theory, the company returned the *mensú* to their port of disembarkation after completing their work contracts and clearing their accounts. However, in practice, few of the men or their families ever returned to their native villages. Reportedly, 30,000 to 40,000 Paraguayan men died on the yerba mate plantations from 1870 to 1910 and the Alto Paraná was covered in crosses marking graves of the laborers.\(^5^5\) In the words of Barrett regarding the *mensú* and his fate in the *yerbales*: “the slave is converted quickly into a corpse or a ghost. The supply of fresh meat must be provided for constantly, so that the work doesn’t stop. Paraguay has always been the great provider of the flesh that sweats gold.”\(^5^6\) Thus, the Paraguayan provided the labor from which foreigners profited, in a faraway region, which remained isolated from the rest of Paraguay. In comparison, during the same period, Argentina and then Brazil each made strides to incorporate the Alto Paraná into the republican nation.

**Republican Borderlands, 1889-1950**

The creation of the national territory of Misiones by Argentina in 1881 and the official demarcation of its borders in 1882 sparked conflict with Brazil. Argentina claimed territory that Brazil argued lay within its jurisdiction. Each party sent survey expeditions to the disputed region, while diplomats exchanged documents and Brazilian officials filed formal protests. Unable to resolve the conflict on their own, the governments of Brazil and Argentina agreed to outside arbitration by the president of the United States, Grover Cleveland. After reviewing the documentation presented, President Cleveland awarded to Brazil the portion of territory under dispute. Thus, the settlement clarified the border between Brazil and Argentina.\(^5^7\) As a result, a slow process commenced by which Argentina consolidated its national territory in the Alto Paraná.

In 1902, Victoria Aguirre donated land to build a “port” (that is to say a clearing) from which tourists could disembark safely from the steamships. The Nuñez y Gibaja Co. donated funds for the construction of a trailhead to the falls carried out by soldiers from

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\(^5^5\) Quoted in Kleinpenning, *Rural Paraguay*, 232.

\(^5^6\) Barrett, *Lo que son los yerbales paraguayos*, 38. The Spanish reads: “Pero el esclavo se convierte pronto en un cadáver o en un espectro. Hay que renovar constantemente la pulpa fresca en el lugar para que no falte el jugo. El Paraguay fué siempre el gran proveedor de la carne que suda oro.”

\(^5^7\) Ziman and Scherer, *La selva vencida*, 31.
the Infantry Battalion of Posadas. Located near the mouth of the Iguaçu River, the clearing, which became known as Puerto Aguirre (present-day Puerto Iguazú), represented the last Argentine settlement on the Alto Paraná River. Puerto Aguirre later became the seat of the Iguazú Department, an administrative subdivision within the province of Misiones, and the center of tourism to the Iguaçu Falls. However, for the first decade, the site offered few if any amenities to the traveler. For example, the traveler Jaime Molins arrived to Puerto Aguirre in 1915, but had to travel to the falls on muleback. According to his account, only a small homestead existed on the trail about halfway to the falls, in which two Brazilian men and one woman lived in a “promiscuous shack” (rancho promiscuo), along with a Paraguayan boy. While Puerto Aguirre soon had a smattering of small guesthouses (hospedajes), many visitors to the falls remained on board the better-appointed steamships, which acted as floating hotels. Shortly thereafter, a much more comfortable lodging, the Hotel Cataratas, with 50 beds, was constructed on the Argentine side near the falls. The hotel complemented the smaller pension and restaurant constructed in Puerto Aguirre. In 1909, the national government began the process of purchasing land around the falls from private owners.

Given that the best view of the falls existed on the Brazilian side, more adventurous tourists crossed over the Iguaçu River, and then visited the hamlet of Foz do Iguaçu. Though small, Foz do Iguaçu continued to be the only settlement of decent size on the Alto Paraná River. There, the Argentine “caravan of tourists” refreshed themselves in the restaurants of the small hotels, while the “verdant jungle, blood red oranges, and wild animals in the streets” and the locals who spoke not Portuguese, but rather “Castilian mixed with English, French, and German” constituted the main attractions

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58 Ziman and Scherer, *La selva vencida*, 292-93. Although in error, Wachowicz states that in 1921, Vitorio Aguirre, an Argentine agent of the Nuñez y Gibaja Co., built a port from which tourists could disembark safely from the steamships.
59 Ziman and Scherer, *La selva vencida*, 34.
62 Ziman and Scherer, *La selva vencida*, 293.
63 Ziman and Scherer, *La selva vencida*, 293. The government concluded its land purchases in 1934 and the Parque Nacional Iguazú was founded in 1937.
there.\textsuperscript{64} In 1915, the town had one amenity that the other settlements did not, namely the only telegraph line in the region, which linked Foz do Iguaçu to Rio de Janeiro, and from there to Buenos Aires and Europe.\textsuperscript{65}

In 1915, German immigrant Federico Engel constructed the first small hotel, known as the Hotel Brasil, located nearer to the Brazilian side of the falls. However, few tourists stayed at the property due to its inaccessibility. To make matters worse, the falls themselves and the surrounding land (in both Brazil and Argentina) comprised part of the private property of the Argentine (or possibly Uruguayan) Jesús Val, who refused access through his property from the Brazilian side. Val had received the property designated as Lote 9 from the Ministro da Guerra during the earlier period of administration by the Colônia Militar in Foz do Iguaçu. Val not only “owned” the falls, but also controlled access to the waterfalls, which inhibited the development of tourism on the Brazilian side. In July of 1916, the state governor of Paraná issued Decreto #653, which declared the “public utility” (utilidade pública) of Lot 9 and expropriated it from its Argentine owner. The decree placed the land, totaling some 1,000 hectares, temporarily into a state reserve and mandated the eventual establishment of a state park.\textsuperscript{66}

Despite the existence of the picada from Guarapuava, Foz do Iguaçu was better connected via the Paraná River to Buenos Aires. Indeed, all trade and communication with the rest of Brazil had to pass through the La Plata basin. The state of Paraná, however, made strides to link Foz do Iguaçu and western Paraná state with the rest of Brazil by granting concessions to yerba mate companies for the construction of private railroad networks. For example, in 1917, the Companhia Mate Laranjeira constructed a 60-kilometer railway on its landholdings, located just above the Guairá Falls and adjacent to the Paraná River, that eventually linked the region all the way to São Paulo state. However, the route remained a long and tortuous prospect: to travel from the city of São

\textsuperscript{64} Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensur e colonos, 34. The Portuguese reads: “…das verdejantes matas, do colorido vivo das laranjeiras carregadas de fruto, dos animais soltos, pastando ou estacionados na via pública.”

\textsuperscript{65} Emilio B. Morales, Hacia el Iguazú, cataratas y ruinas; descripciones y apuntes ([Buenos Aires]: J. Peuser, 1914), 49. As one of the first guidebooks for tourists to the falls, this work also provides a wonderful description of the various “attractions,” excursions, costs for lodging and transportation, and schedules for steamships from Posadas to Puerto Aguirre.

\textsuperscript{66} Wachowicz, Obrageros, Mensus e Colonos, 37-38. The reserve was added to over the years, eventually transferring to the control of the Brazilian government. Getúlio Vargas declared the state reserve a national park, the Parque Nacional do Iguaçu, in 1939.
Paulo to Foz do Iguaçu required several arduous legs encompassing passage on two steamships and one company railroad. Following the old *picada*, a dirt road from Guarapuava to Foz do Iguaçu opened to automobile traffic in 1919, but that journey took some 72 hours, even in good weather. According to one recorded trip that occurred in 1923, to travel from the state capital in Curitiba to Foz do Iguaçu required one and a half months to complete. Moreover, only in the early 1920s did Coronel Jorge Schimelpfeng, the founder, leading citizen, and first mayor of Foz do Iguaçu, construct a tourist hotel and casino that catered to tourists visiting the falls.

Given their advantageous access, Argentine corporations took the lead on encouraging the economic development of the region into a new arena—colonization and tourism. As way of explanation for the change in policy, this development also coincided with the shift from extraction of wild yerba mate in favor of *yerba de cultivo*, or managed plantations. For example, the Nuñez y Gibaja Company inaugurated an information campaign in Europe that touted the natural wonder of Iguaçu Falls and the wild splendor of the area. The Nuñez y Gibaja Company had been granted large concessions of land in northern Misiones in the first years of the twentieth century. Argentine government officials viewed tourism as a potential engine for the colonization by European farmers and the development of the region of Alto Paraná. For example, the early tourism campaign of the Nuñez y Gibaja Co., conducted in Europe, dovetailed with governmental national colonization efforts. Together, these programs enticed settlers, mostly from Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, and Poland, to found agricultural colonies along the Alto Paraná River in Misiones territory.

In comparison to either Brazil or Paraguay, the Argentines had rapidly opened up Misiones province to settlement, with agricultural colonies extending north to the “triple

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67 First, a would-be passenger traveled west on the Sorocabana River to its entry into to the Paraná River at the town of Presidente Epitácio. Second, at Presidente Epitácio the traveler boarded a steamship going south to Guairá. In Guairá, one boarded the railroad of the Companhia Mate Laranjeira and traveled to Puerto Mendes, located south of the falls. Lastly, yet another steamship was required to travel further south to Foz do Iguaçu.


As “chroniclers” of the region Ladislao Ziman and Alfonso Scherer argue, the period the 1920s and 1930s witnessed:

large scale colonization in every part and the actual conquest of the Iguazú territory and all of the Alto Paraná. A veritable wave of immigrants arrived, mostly from Europe...around 30 distinct nationalities that, with hatchet and machete, like true pioneers transformed the riverside jungle into flourishing plantations and colonies, thus giving new life, impulse, development, and extraordinary wealth to Misiones.71

Such views of the history of immigration to the region, however, exposed racist ideologies that celebrated the white male European farmer as the “base of the progress” (base del progreso) and his spouse as the “soul, helper, and heroine of labor and of progress” (alma, sostén y heroína del trabajo y del progreso). In comparison, the peón criollo, or mixed race peasant, drank yerba mate after a day of hard labor while his spouse, the mujer de peón (peasant’s wife) stayed busy with her domestic chores.72

[Figure 1.5] By the early-1920s, a small but constant stream of tourists visited the falls, despite the limitations in infrastructure, so much so that one could speak of a developing tourist “season.” In the early 1920s, the American Frank G. Carpenter embarked upon his series of “world travels” that included a visit to the Alto Paraná and the Iguazu Falls. After departing Posadas, Carpenter writes that, “our boat is about seventy hours in making the two hundred and ten miles to Puerto Aguirre, the port on the Iguazu nearest the falls. Here there is a little hotel that lodges forty persons in two sleeping rooms, one of the rooms is set aside for women and the other for men.” Of the falls, Carpenter remarks that, “they lie in an exquisite tropical setting, with no sign of industry or commercialism

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71 Ziman and Scherer, La selva vencida, 34. The Spanish reads: “…culminó la conquista real del Departamento Iguazú y de todo el Alto Paraná y se inició en todas partes una colonización en gran escala. Llegó una verdadera ola de inmigrantes, principalmente de los estados europeos…alrededor de 30 distintas nacionalidades, que con hacha y machete, como verdaderos pioneros, convirtieron la selva misionera de la zona ribereña, en florecientes plantaciones y colonias, dando una nueva vida, impulso y excepcional desarrollo y riqueza a Misiones.”

72 Ziman and Scherer, La selva vencida, 25.
to mar their natural surroundings. Until 1922 there were not even comfortable accommodations here for travelers…” However, Carpenter also remarked of the newly constructed fifty-room hotel that, due to its amenities of bathrooms, running water, and comfortable lounges, made it the “height of comfort.”

While Carpenter further mentioned the plans of the Argentine government—including the construction of a railroad, creation of a national park, and the founding of a new town and a military post—to increase tourist traffic to the falls, he also believed that the “day is no doubt far distant when the potential water-power of Iguazu, like that of Niagara, will be exploited for commercial purposes.” In addition to the Iguazu River, Carpenter mentioned other potential sources for hydropower production, stating “farther up the Alto-Paraná…are the great falls of La Guayra…said to be the greatest and finest on earth.” Thus, increased tourism and better access to the region, particularly for progress-minded Americans helped to advertise the hydropower potential of the region.

Yet, neither Brazil nor Argentina could take advantage of the draw of the Iguazu Falls or the Guairá Falls without infrastructure and services for residents and tourists alike. The approach from the Paraná River inland and to the cataracts remained difficult and nearly impossible after a heavy rain, which swelled the river, washed away the bank, and made dirt roads impassable. In addition, there were no bridges crossing the various streams. At the time, only two automobiles existed in Foz do Iguazu, which had received official status as a municipality in 1914. A visitor to the city related the following:

[Foz do Iguazu] appears to be a ‘dark city.’ Public lighting exists in name only. The old hydroelectric power plant (usina) furnishes electricity for a few houses and streets. In the majority of the city the power has been cut and it exists only in the commercial center…The roads of the city are not maintained…it’s necessary to reshape the plan of the city…and to transform it into a modern city.

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74 Carpenter, *Along the Paraná and the Amazon*, 83. Additionally, Dr. Manuel Carrão also spoke of the hydropower potential of the two falls, but specifically mentioned the efforts already made by Argentina to conduct engineering studies. Dr. Carrão argued that Brazil should do the same, see Carrão, *Impressões de viajem a Foz do Iguaçu*, 57.
75 The name, Foz do Iguaçu, was officially adopted by the town council in 1918.
76 Wachowicz, *Obrageros, Mensus e Colonos*, 36. The old usina was located near the Iguazu Falls. The Portuguese reads: “A cidade mesma parece ser a ‘cidade do esouro.’ Iluminação pública só existe de nome. A velha usina fornece luz unicamente para poucas casas e ruas. Na maior parte da cidade a luz foi
In addition to its wildness and lack of electricity, the town remained isolated and provincial. Lack of basic infrastructure, including communication and paved roads hindered the expansion of tourism and of agriculture.

The arrival of the steamships from Posadas to the various settlements occasioned a celebration in which half the population often went down to the banks of the Paraná River. The steamships carried a variety of merchandise for sale to residents, including ice, dried meats, magazines, newspapers, beer, candy, and clothing. In addition, merchant houses and department stores in Buenos Aires sent mail-order catalogues, from which the better off residents could select merchandise, and have it shipped upriver on the network of steamships.\(^\text{77}\)

For a variety of reasons, Foz do Iguaçu failed to attract additional Brazilian settlers. For one, the high cost of living and scarcity and high prices for food both discouraged growth. Furthermore, effective administration of the city simply did not exist. For example, the structures housing the Mesa de Rendas (Customs House) and the Bateria de Artilharia (Artillery Regiment) both had been abandoned and lied in ruins by 1912. The small boat once used to capture smugglers languished, unused, on the banks of the river. The Brazilian military had no forces stationed in Foz do Iguaçu, despite the proximity of the international borders. Indeed, little could be called “Brazilian”: Guaraní and Spanish constituted the most commonly spoken languages, and more residents originated from Paraguay or Argentina than from Brazil.

Moreover, the region of the Alto Paraná was considered an unhealthy locale in which to settle. The region suffered from a variety of tropical diseases, including malaria \((\text{maleita})\), or what the Guaraní called \textit{chuncho}. The disease reached epidemic proportions beginning in February of each year, with an estimated 80 percent of the population suffering with the affliction. Only the Guaraní Indians seemed to have any measure of resistance.\(^\text{78}\) According to W.S. Barclay, a member of the Royal Geographic Society in London who had traveled to the region, an Argentine doctor stationed near the Iguaçu Falls was reported to have told him, speaking in perfect Guaraní, that “Although I am 

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acting for an Argentine Commission in respect of Argentine territory only, I never ask
from which bank of the river our patients come, or whether they are upstream or
downstream. Here *we all belong to the river*, and as neighbors we all try to help each
other.”79 The Argentine doctor reported that in Misiones province alone approximately
15,000 persons had contracted the disease, which given the amount of rain and flooding,
he argued would be impossible to eradicate the disease-carrying mosquitoes.80

The first Brazilian medical doctor, Dirceu Lopes, arrived in Foz do Iguaçu in
1934 and established the first Posto de Saúde (Health Clinic). From his base in Brazil, Dr.
Lopes traveled the Paraná River via steamship to each “port” and into the interior on
horseback, administering doses of quinine, the only remedy available to patients. The
region lacked hospitals, not to mention qualified doctors and nurses. Eventually, church
officials constructed a Santa Casa to complement the Posto de Saúde and the small
hospital located at the military outpost. In addition to malaria, Dr. Lopes identified a lack
of services for pregnant women and for the delivery of babies. According to the doctor,
women of the region utilized the so-called “Guaraní method”: at the hour of birth, the
woman “hides herself in the forest and gives birth, squatting, without any assistance.”81
The only formally trained midwife in Foz do Iguaçu complained that residents often did
not have a clean pot in which for her to wash her hands.

Owing to its remoteness, the smallness of Foz do Iguaçu fostered social inclusion.
Unlike in other parts of Brazil, less separation existed between the social classes in the
borderlands. According to Wachowicz’ interpretation of the testimony given by Jorge
Schimmelpfeng, the founder and first mayor of Foz do Iguaçu, a “democratic
environment” (*ambiente democrático*) existed as it related to socializing and
entertainment, partly due to the absence of large numbers of Brazilians.82 The few
Brazilian residents either worked for the government as public officials or owned
*yerbales*, while the majority of the workforce consisted of Paraguayans. Given the
demographics, the *bailarico* (public dance), where it was said that, “persons from all

80  W.S. Barclay, “The Basin of the River Parana: Continuation from the February Journal,” *The
81  Wachowicz, *Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 43.
82  Schimmelpfeng’s stated that “As such, there weren’t these kinds of social divisions,” which
Wachowicz interpreted as a “democratic environment” (*ambiente democrático*). See Wachowicz,
*Obrageros, mensus e colonos*, 39-40.
castes danced promiscuously” (onde em promiscuidade dançam pessoas de todas as castes) represented the most popular entertainment. In these events, the rich danced with the poor and the bosses with their employees. In short, the wealthy Brazilians could be found socializing with their poor Paraguayan workers. Residents also enjoyed the observance of the velório (wake), in which the sadness of the funeral gave way to a festive occasion for eating, drinking, and dancing. Both social events were seen as indicators of the dominant Paraguayan influence on the culture of the borderlands.83

Moreover, Brazilians who visited the borderlands remarked how “foreign” the place seemed. In 1928, a schoolteacher just arrived from Curitiba to her new post in Guiyra (the administrative center for Matte Larenjeiras Co.) was asked by a young student the following question: “Madame is it beautiful in Brazil?” (¿Señora, és linda Brasil?). The question confounded the professor; not only had the child spoken in perfect Spanish, but even more troubling, Guaíra was located in Brazil! As late as 1937, in Foz do Iguaçu only public officials routinely spoke Portuguese. For example, church services were offered in Portuguese, Guaraní, Spanish, German, and Polish. The primary languages spoken in the region, however, remained Spanish and Guaraní. Furthermore, the Argentine peso and, in some areas, the company-issued money of the holdings, constituted the main currency utilized in the region. Brazilian public officials received their pay and residents paid their taxes in Argentine pesos, not Brazilian réis, which the populace did not trust.84

Dr. Manuel Carrão, who visited the Alto Paraná in 1928 as part of a mission to assess the persistent crisis of public health, explained that better access to the region “would resolve, for the Republic, the grave problem of securing an important frontier.” Dr. Carrão further stated the “defense and economic development of the Republic will be subordinated entirely to the great problem of transportation” and, in the specific case of western Paraná, access to the region would put the state of Paraná “on the path to progress.”85 Despite being within the national borders of Brazil, no direct communication

83 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 40.
84 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 130. Supposedly, the currency often changed design and amounts, leading to confusion and opportunities for counterfeit, which undermined its legitimacy in the eyes of borderlands residents.
85 Carrão, Impressões de viagem a Foz do Iguaçú, 47. The Portuguese reads: “defesa e o desenvolvimento economico da Republica estão inteiramente subordinados ao grande problema dos
or contact existed between government officials in the capital and officials in Foz do Iguaçu. Beginning in the 1920s, however, mail service was established between Catanduvas and Foz do Iguaçu, arriving two times per month via horseback. Only in the 1930s did minimal road improvements allow for overland transport, utilizing a “jardineira” (minibus), to Curitiba. In 1936, through the Correio Aéreo Nacional, the Brazilian government established regular airmail service between Curitiba and Foz do Iguaçu.

From the point of view of Dr. Carrão, cultural and social reasons explained the “sickness” of the region. Dr. Carrão based his comments on observations of the community of Guayra, with a population of 1,500, where only Spanish and Guaraní were spoken. More troubling, Dr. Carrão counted only 12 residents that he identified clearly as “Brazilian.” However, the problem he witnessed in the Alto Paraná was symptomatic of the larger national disease of Brazil. As Dr. Carrão argued, only 30 million people, of all races, occupied the political boundaries of Brazil, which given its immensity had been sparsely settled and, in the case of the border regions, wholly ignored. The remedy, Dr. Carrão believed, lay in “national integration,” which entailed the construction of roads and military outposts, which in turn would foster colonization and encourage tourism to the region. In addition, the national government would have to do a better job of instilling Brazilian culture (particularly the Portuguese language and a sense of shared history) in border residents through better education and to improve the public health of residents through improved sanitation and disease eradication campaigns.

The region had other problems. At least from the first years of the twentieth century, contraband emerged as a central fact of the commercial life of the borderlands. In this context, contraband denoted any good or produce bought or sold without paying the appropriate national taxes. On the Paraná River, Argentine merchants had a virtual monopoly on trade and transport and, thus, controlled the flow of contraband goods. Foz do Iguaçu continued to be the primary market for contraband, as residents there preferred the cheaper products from Buenos Aires, rather the high cost goods brought in by ship.
from faraway ports of Rio de Janeiro or Santos. Referred to as crisma (blessing), the system of contraband smuggling consisted of the following: loaded with merchandise, Argentine ships traveled upriver from Posadas to the Guiará Falls without making any stops in port along the way. Calling in Porto Mendes, the most northern port in Brazil accessible by steamship, the captain of the vessels pretended to load their ship’s cargo holds with “national,” that is to say Brazilian goods; after disembarking from Porto Mendes, traveling south and downriver, these Argentine merchants sold their “national merchandise” in Brazilian ports, thus avoiding the need to pay import fees and taxes. Corrupt public officials in Brazil simply looked the other way.89

In addition, the contraband trade impacted exports of Brazilian goods as well. For example, Argentines exported much of the yerba mate and timber extracted from the far western Paraná state. Argentines controlled access to the river transport, and neither the owners nor the transport companies paid taxes to the Casa das Rendas in Foz do Iguacu. As such, the Brazilian government failed to capture this lucrative source of revenue.90 On the other hand, Buenos Aires merchants and businessmen enjoyed a handsome profit. In an effort to capture their fair share, however, the state government of Paraná posted six tax collectors in the Brazilian ports located on the Paraná River. However, the tax collectors received little pay and depended upon the owners for their food and lodging, leading to a case of mixed allegiances and diminished revenues. In 1933, an estimated 40,000 tons of yerba mate entered Argentina as contraband.91 In order to boost revenues, control of the region would have to be wrested from Argentine merchants who monopolized the trade on the Alto Paraná River.

Political turmoil and armed conflict in Brazil in the 1920s shed light onto the isolated region as never before, as the advance of the rebel Prestes Column into western Paraná state in 1924 and the resulting battles between rebel forces and the national government put the region in front of the eyes of the nation.92 Later, many of the members of the military, who partook in the campaigns in western Paraná, participated in

89 Wachowicz, Obragers, mensus e colonos, 132.
90 Wachowicz, Obragers, mensus e colonos, 133.
91 Wachowicz, Obragers, mensus e colonos, 134.
92 The Prestes Column was a group of rebel military officers, who had revolted in 1924 against the central government, eventually making their way to Bolivia in 1927. See Neill Macaulay, The Prestes Column: Revolution in Brazil, 1922-1924 (New York: F. Watts, 1974).
the Revolution of 1930, led by the gaúcho Getúlio Vargas, who ruled Brazil during two periods, 1930-45 and 1951-54. Highly nationalistic in its orientation and agenda, both Vargas and the leadership of the new government in Rio de Janeiro looked with dismay at the lack of effective state control along its borders, particularly with Argentina and Paraguay, and a lack of dominance or even presence of “Brazilian” culture or identity there. Derisively, Vargas and his military officials referred to the region along the border with Paraguay and Argentina as the “fronteira guarani” (“Guaraní frontier”). According to historian Robert Wilcox, the nationalistic Vargas administration was the first to officially object to the Paraguayan presence in the borderlands. As such, Vargas had the greatest impact on the creation of the border as a dividing line between the populations, cultures, and languages that previously existed without references to or restricted by the Alto Paraná River.

Vargas tasked his newly appointed interventor (military governor), General Mário Tourinho, in Paraná state with the incorporation of this “foreign” region into the national body. General Tourinho installed the engineer Otton Maeder as the new prefeito (mayor) of Foz do Iguaçu and gave him the job of “nationalizing” the region. Engineer Maeder issued a series of decrees that dealt broadly with the national language, currency, and culture. First, Maeder mandated the Portuguese language as the official language for all public correspondence and municipal business. In addition, all commercial advertisements, price lists, and commercial receipts had to be written in Portuguese. Second, prices for goods and merchandise had to be listed in reis, the Brazilian currency. Furthermore, taxes and fees had to be paid in national currency and any foreign currency then in the vaults of the municipality had to be converted immediately. Third, all public offices and social clubs should be sent free copies of daily newspapers from Curitiba, in order “that the population does not continue to be unaware of what’s happening in the political and social milieu of the state capital.” Such efforts were termed the “Brazilianization” (abrasileiracao) of the so-called “Guaraní frontier.”

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93 Wilcox, “Paraguayans and the Making of the Brazilian Far West,” 508. While Wilcox analyzes the case of southern Mato Grosso, his observations are paralleled in the case of western Paraná.
94 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 142. The Portuguese reads: “...a fim de que a população não desconhecesse o que se passava nos meios políticos e sociais da capital paranaense.”
A central concern of the Vargas regime was to bring conclusion to the long-simmering conflicts over the exact borders between Brazil and Paraguay. In 1930, a border commission finally hammered out an agreement over the portion of the border from the Rio Apa to the Bahia Negra, some sixty years after the conclusion of the Paraguayan War. In order to get a better understanding of the situation on the Alto Paraná border, the federal government formed another border commission, under the direction of Zeno Silva, in 1931. As part of its responsibilities, the group conducted a general census of the zone. According to the *Relatório de comissão federal* (Report of the Federal Commission) issued in June, officials estimated the population count of the border region, at least the part of it in Brazilian territory from Guiyra to Foz do Iguaçu, at approximately 10,000 inhabitants. Of those, Brazilians constituted only 500 residents. According to Silva and the members of the commission, the situation at the border placed the entire nation in jeopardy. From his point of view, foreign forces had invaded Brazil, at least as it appeared on the map. Silva blamed previous state governments in Curitiba for having taken little or no interest in the far western region, thus allowing for “foreigners,” that is to say Paraguayan and Argentines, to settle there at will.

More troubling, the commission argued that it was only a matter of time before Paraguay laid legal claim to the region; Silva feared the population imbalance had undermined Brazil’s fragile claim to the region, at least in terms of international law. Indeed, much of the border with Paraguay had not been conclusively demarcated, thus opening the door to possible dispute. Furthermore, the members of the commission worried that the Brazilian government could not prove that it had *uti possidetis*, or uninterrupted possession of the territory, a central requirement of establishing legal rights. Moreover, the federal government took its cue from the commission, some of whose members advocated for the creation of two new federal territories. As a result, Vargas proposed the creation of the Território Federal do Iguaçu, which would be carved out of the western portions of the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, and the Território Federal de Ponta Porã, to be created out of southern portion of the state of Mato Grosso.

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95 Wachowicz, *Obragers, mensus e colonos*, 144.
In this plan, these territories would eventually be admitted as new federal states.\textsuperscript{96} Not surprisingly, officials in the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Mato Grosso resisted any attempts to reduce the size of their territory. In the face of additional resistance from General Tourinho, whose home state would have been dissected in this process, Vargas retreated for a time from his proposal.

Vargas did take action in other fronts of his nationalist program that affected the borderlands. For example, in 1931, the federal government “nationalized” the labor force of the holdings; after 1931, the majority of workers were required to be of Brazilian nationality.\textsuperscript{97} Plantations operating in Brazil had to replace the majority of their labor force. In the case of the Brazilian-owned Companhia Mate Laranjeira, company officials launched a recruiting drive in the favelas (shantytowns) of Rio de Janeiro, in search of the “national worker.” In January of 1931, these workers began to arrive, via the long journey from São Paulo, to the company town of Guiára. During their journey, these workers had been informed of the harsh work conditions and the traditional customs and habits of the region. However, once there the carioca (natives of Rio de Janeiro) recruits failed to adapt to the work and the climate of the borderlands. According to the testimony of Miguel Ribeiro Camargo, a magistrate in Guaíra, Mate Laranjeira company officials labeled the men as “vagabundos” (bums) and “altamente perigosos” (highly dangerous).\textsuperscript{98} One can imagine that race might have played a role in the depictions. Over time, these men either migrated back to Rio de Janeiro or drifted on to other places in search of work.\textsuperscript{99}

In 1937, Vargas inaugurated a dictatorship, known as the Estado Novo (New State). Subsequently, he promulgated a new federal constitution in November. Article 165 of the Federal Constitution had repercussions in the Alto Paraná borderlands. The article stated that no grant of land or infrastructure concessions could occur within 150 kilometers of the national borders without prior approval of the Conselho Superior de

\textsuperscript{96} Wachowicz argues that, secretly, Vargas hoped that surplus capital and population would migrate from his home state of Rio Grande do Sul into the new territories and act as a counterbalance to the wealth and political power of São Paulo and Minas Gerais.

\textsuperscript{97} This act reflected legislation on the national level to provide a better balance between Brazilian and immigrant labor. Thus, “nationalization” of the workforce was not specific to Foz do Iguaçu.

\textsuperscript{98} This information on recruitment of “national workers” is derived by Wachowicz from his interviews, but unfortunately is not elaborated upon. See Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 148.

\textsuperscript{99} Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 148.
Segurança Nacional (National Security High Council). In addition, the article mandated that any and all companies and their workforce within the newly established faixa de fronteira (border corridor) must be of “national origin.”

The rule immediately suspended ongoing colonization programs in the area that had been implemented and directed, however ineptly, by the state officials of Paraná. The constitutional article mandated that all proprietors, both individuals and corporations, in the border corridor must present their documents attesting to their legal, titled possession of the land. Without proper documentation, which many did not have, owners could be divested of their holdings. Subsequently, the national Ministry of Agriculture took on the responsibility of directing the new efforts at colonization of the border, while a local Army or Navy official oversaw the whole operation. Overall, the regulations sought to reincorporate the border under Brazilian control and sovereignty and “to regulate the use [of the land] so that, in the border corridor, national workers and capital will dominate.” ¹⁰⁰ Thus, the program had both nationalistic and militaristic overtones.

Seeing the future, Argentine-based or owned companies, with financial support from merchants in Buenos Aires, began shifting their operations south to Misiones province. As a result, both the volume and value of the yerba mate exported out of Foz do Iguaçu declined steadily after 1929. ¹⁰¹ In addition, the major companies of the region often did not survive intact after the conclusion of World War II, due to government confiscation of their holdings, bankruptcy, and later, to growing pressures to break the vast landholdings into smaller parcels in order to be sold off as part of the colonization schemes of land speculators. ¹⁰²

Vargas sought to further remove the border zone from the control of state officials in Paraná and to augment his political power base. In 1940, Vargas requested that state officials in Curitiba carry out a census within the border corridor, in order to determine the exact nature of the landholdings and population of the zone. The area of the faixa comprised approximately 47,000 square kilometers. According to the report of Departamento de Terras e Colonização issued in 1941, some 3,600 families lived in the

¹⁰⁰ Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 151. The Portuguese reads: “...regulará a utilização para que nas faixas de fronteira predominem capitais e trabalhadores nacionais.” ¹⁰¹ Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 157. ¹⁰² Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 161.
corridor. Furthermore, a total of 440 properties existed in the corridor. As expected, the report exposed the large number of *latifúndia* holdings that belonged to foreigners. A third of the territory had been titled, while the remainder of the area remained covered with virgin forests and uncultivated.”

In September 1943, Vargas finally established the promised, though short-lived, federal territory—Território Federal do Iguaçu—by presidential decree. However, owing to political pressure from officials in Curitiba, the territory was abolished by the Constitution of 1946 and the *faixa de fronteira* reintegrated into the state of Paraná.

Also of importance, Vargas’ New State represented a shift in policy by Brazil toward Paraguay. In May 1941, Vargas himself arrived in Asunción via a Brazilian naval vessel, the first Brazilian head of state to do so. While in Paraguay, Vargas finalized a series of conventions and accords between the two nations, including plans for the construction of a railroad from Concepción to the Brazilian border, cultural and technical exchanges, and laid the foundation for future agreements for commerce, river navigation, and the establishment of a joint Brazil-Paraguay Merchant Fleet. Importantly, the visit marked a change in the geopolitics of the region, as Paraguay slowly began to shift its foreign policy to favor Brazil over Argentina.

Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the harsh life of the *mensú* and the work camps eventually entered into the national imagination of Paraguay and Argentina, just as he vanished altogether from the Alto Paraná. By mid-century, the *mensú* often appeared as central protagonists in the “literature of the jungle” (*literatura de la selva*), as a distinct genre of fiction, in which the action of the story unfolded in the wilderness of the Alto Paraná. Often the case, men and women were, at best, profoundly altered by their experiences in the jungle and, at worst, utterly destroyed by the brutality of the work, starvation, disease, isolation, and natural dangers of the Alto Paraná. Such

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portrayals fictionalized and popularized the earlier accounts of the harsh conditions reported on by Rafael Barrett in 1909. According to the historian Guillermo Wilde, during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, government officials in Buenos Aires considered the *selva paranaense* (Paraná jungle) as threatening, inhabitable, and resistant to civilization. In part, this view derived from the fact that indigenous tribes of the Mbyá-Guaraní continued to occupy the deep reaches of the forest. From this point of view, however, the location offered innumerous possibilities for “progress,” but only through European colonization and a more interventionist state.106

Moreover, the work of Barrett and later Quiroga, Ambrosetti, Rivarola Matto, among others, painted the Alto Paraná region as a wild, primitive, untamed, and savage place where nature not only controlled the destiny of men, but represented a hostile force bent on destruction of anyone intent on extending “civilization.”107 Quiroga wrote that the jungle “had lent itself as a backdrop to more than one story in which the recently arrived individual to the region has suffered and continues to suffer over his fate at the enchantments of the earth, the landscapes, and the climate… which penetrates into every person until it extinguishes any ability to make a last effort to escape the place.”108 Furthermore, Ambrosetti remarked of the daily existence of the inhabitant of the Alto Paraná, stating that each “moment of this ‘treacherous life’ (*vida jugada*), between the thousand deprivations and dangers of work in the virgin forest, the passage of man through the vines and bramble is transitory, which inevitably renders him superstitious, growing from the most stupendous ignorance, that has infiltrated all his actions, from his work to his vices.”109


107 For more on this theme, see Lesley Wiley, *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks: Rewriting the Tropics in the novela de la selva* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Christy Rodgers, “Quiroga, Kipling, and the Exotic Frontier: A Comparative Study,” *Portals: A Journal of Comparative Literature* 4 (Spring 2006); and Wilde, “Imaginarios contrapuestos de la selva misionera.”

108 Horacio Quiroga, *La vida en Misiones: tomo VI* (Montevideo: Arca, 1969), 97. The Spanish reads: “…han prestado su escena para el desarrollo de más de un relato que en el recién llegado a aquella región ha sufrido y continúa sufriendo sobre su destino el ensalmo que el suelo, el paisaje y el clima de Misiones infiltran en un individuo hasta abolir totalmente en su voluntad toda ulterior tentativa de abandonar el país.”

109 Ambrosetti, *Supersticiones y leyendas*, 14-15. The Spanish reads: “Esa vida jugada a cada instante, entre las mil penurias y peligros de los trabajos del bosque eternamente virgin, pues el pasaje del hombre por entre sus lianas y maraña es siempre transitorio, tiene que ser por fuerza supersticiosa: esta
By the early-1940s, a new era also had begun for the Alto Paraná region, as colonization efforts and land speculation combined to replace the holdings and their workforce of mensú, with the small landholding and its colono (settler) and his family. As Wachowicz points out, three advancing “agricultural frontiers” (frente de expansão agrícola), with corresponding human migrations, soon met in the west: the frontiers advancing from the north and from the east from within Paraná state itself and the frontier advancing from the south and the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. Expanding coffee production characterized the former, while the latter had a more “pastoral” (agro-pastoril) nature. In the borderlands, these Brazilian migrations met up with the European immigrant and farmer colonizing the northern portion of Misiones territory. As a result, the Paraguayan worker in the form of the mensú disappeared from the region and the small or medium rural landholder replaced the large landholder.110

Conclusion

Through the first decades of the twentieth century, the respective republics of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay viewed the “frontier problem” in different ways, but each perspective was colored by the perception of the Alto Paraná region. For Argentina, the wild and savage (“Indian”) Alto Paraná could only be tamed through colonization by European agriculturalists and through the encouragement of tourism centered upon the spectacular Iguaçu Falls. For Brazilian governmental and military officials, the “Guaraní frontier” represented a potential danger to the nation that only could be solved through efforts to “Brazilianize” the population of the Alto Paraná through education and colonization and to better connect it with highways to the rest of Brazil. For Paraguay, which continued to have little direct access to the region, the Alto Paraná had obtained almost mythical dimensions as the graveyard of the long-suffering and exploited Paraguayan laborer who had entered into the cultural imagination of a nation.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the collective migrations mentioned previously became an integral part of the larger Brazilian “March to the West,” the Argentine settlement of the far northern Misiones territory with European farmers, and Paraguayan attempts to

superstición, acrecentada por la más estupenda ignorancia, se ha infiltrado en todos sus actos, desde el trabajo hasta los vicios.”

110 Wachowicz, Obrageros, mensus e colonos, 165.
jumpstart their own stalled “March to the East” and to break Argentina’s stranglehold on its economy. As such, what once was a peripheral region now took on central importance for three nations. In addition, Brazil sought to strengthen ties to Paraguay, through the establishment of diplomatic, military, and trade missions as well as joint commissions to formulate the formal demarcation of the border and the overall regulation of border trade and commerce. The incorporation of Paraguay into the orb of influence of Brazil was based on plethora of infrastructure projects chained to the interests of Brazilian industrialization, national security, and, on a larger stage, Latin American geopolitics, which sought to marginalize Argentina. In particular, one infrastructure project, Itaipú Binacional, constructed by two “brotherly” nations ultimately embodied the ideas of national development and progress.
Figure 1.1: The Triple Border, c. 1900

Source: Archivo Historia Arqueología Marítima de Argentina.

Note: Point of confluence of the Paraná River and the Iguaçu River, looking south. Paraguay is in the background, Argentina to the left, and Brazil is in the foreground.
Figure 1.2: A Trail (*picada*) into the Jungle

Figure 1.3: The *Vapores* of the Domingos Barthe Company

*Source: Arsenio López Decoud, *Album gráfico de la República del Paraguay* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Compañía General de Fósforos, 1911).*
Figure 1.4: The Mensú at Work

Figure 1.5: The Vast Holdings of the La Industrial Paraguaya

Source: Arsenio López Decoud, *Album gráfico de la República del Paraguay* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Compañía General de Fosforos, 1911),

Note: The Alto Paraná River is located along the right side of the picture. The large rectangle in the lower right is the holdings in Tacurú Pucú, Paraguay.
Figure 1.6: European Colonists Compared to Mixed-Race Peasants

Note: Translation of the text as follows: upper left, “Wife of the typical European colonist, pulling water from the well. Soul, provider, and heroine of labor and of progress”; upper right, “Typical European colonist, foundation of the progress of Misiones”; lower left, “Wife of the typical peasant, that occupies herself with domestic chores”; and lower right, “Typical creole peasant, drinking mate after hard labor.”
CHAPTER TWO

The Project of the Century: Building Infrastructure and Hydroelectric Dams in the Alto Paraná Borderlands, 1957-1975

A mountain range makes a safe frontier; a plain makes an open frontier; but a river makes a friendly frontier.\(^1\)

We must, however, remember...that the power of nature is greater than the power of man, and that when the great floods come down with their rains and snows from the mountains, there is no present power of man that can check them.\(^2\)

For Paraguay, the Alto Paraná borderlands, as a place of ancient myth and lore, would be the location of the symbolic and later physical connection between two Latin American “brothers,” a transit point for goods on the way to market, and a new source of wealth and progress with the power to transform the nation and its people. For Brazil, the Alto Paraná borderlands represented the location of vital (and increasingly strategic) natural resources, in this case water harnessed to produce electricity, needed to fulfill its manifest destiny as a first-world industrial nation. While elite Paraguayans dreamed of economic liberty through a land route to the sea, elite Brazilians sought to realize their own dream of modernizing the Brazilian economy. At its core, “modernization” meant continued industrialization, intended to break the dependence of Brazil on the export of primary resources and agricultural products, and to end the resulting “boom and bust” cycles that plagued and hindered the growth of the economy. To do so, however, Brazil required the construction of a sufficient and modern physical infrastructure, often termed the “paraphernalia of development,” which included paved roads, ports, airports, a national electrical grid, and a state-of-the-art communications network. Within Brazil, the national development program and its projects revolved around the notion of grandeza, or national greatness, also known as Brasil Grande (Great Brazil).

The Road to Brazil

For many Paraguayans, the territory of the Alto Paraná, an isolated and sparsely settled region even in the mid-twentieth century, long had existed in the realm of legend and myth. The region held a special significance in the imaginations of the Paraguayan people and, unlike Brazil, a more central role in the history and identity of the nation. According to the oral history of the indigenous Tupí-Guaraní, the general area was thought to be the location of an imaginary earthly paradise, the legendary Yby-maraé-y (Land without Evil), where human suffering and even death did not exist. Yet, the exact location, if it existed at all, remained a mystery and part of indigenous folklore incorporated into the national mythology of Paraguay. Combined with the stories of the area contained in popular Paraguayan literature of the time, the Alto Paraná thus represented a complex mixture of both “heaven and hell” and “history and myth.”

In 1956, two years after his military coup that toppled the government, General Alfredo Stroessner (r. 1954-89) dispatched his Minister of the Interior, Edgar L. Ynsfrán, to the eastern borderlands to conduct an aerial reconnaissance of the extensive Alto Paraná frontier.3 Flying in a small single-engine aircraft in the service of the Paraguayan Air Force, Ynsfrán and his pilot departed from Asunción and followed the existing Ruta Internacional (Highway 7) eastward to its terminus in the town of Coronel Oviedo, and then onward to the Paraná River and the border with Brazil. Beyond Coronel Oviedo (then the terminus of the Ruta Internacional) an immensity of virgin forest stretched before them. After aerially surveying the small communities along the banks of the Paraná River, the small plane flew south to Encarnación to refuel before returning; the plane could not land in Alto Paraná proper because no landing strip existed at the time. For Ynsfrán, the extension of the Ruta Internacional beyond Coronel Oviedo to the Paraná River and the border with Brazil constituted the realization of the “old quimera (dream) of our generation and of generations before: to find for the nation another exit to the sea, with the purpose of finding an alternative, other than the only one that we had until then.”4

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3 Edgar L. Ynsfrán served as General Alfredo Stroessner’s Chief of Police from 1954-56 and then served as the Minister of the Interior from 1956-66.
4 Ynsfrán, Un giro geopolítico, 89-90.
The Paraguayan “March to the East”\(^5\) not only had nationalistic overtones, but also concrete commercial objectives. The unfavorable “alternative” of which Ynsfrán spoke, lay in Argentina and its regionally dominant port-city of Buenos Aires. While free navigation existed on the Paraná River within Argentine territory, Paraguayan trade had long suffered from the difficulties deriving from transshipment of its agricultural products downriver to Buenos Aires where they had to be unloaded and reloaded onto ocean-going vessels for export to foreign markets, including Europe and the United States. Once in Buenos Aires, however, Paraguayan merchants found themselves at the mercy of Argentine shipping companies and their agents, who charged up to three times the amount to ship goods from the port as compared to Argentine products.\(^6\)

On 28 January 1957, General Stroessner issued Decree #24634, an official proclamation that called for the founding of a new city at the future terminus of the Ruta Internacional in Department X of Alto Paraná. The city, to be located at the base of the future “Puente de Amistad” (Friendship Bridge), funded and built by neighboring Brazil, would be known “from today and forever” as Puerto Presidente Stroessner, in honor of the military president of the Republic of Paraguay.\(^7\) General Stroessner entrusted the establishment of the new city with the Ministry of the Interior and its overall direction with Minister Ynsfrán, who had been inspired by the example of the new Brazilian capital city of Brasília located in the interior of the continent.

Thus, the “road to Brazil” (\textit{el camino hacia Brasil}), both symbolic and actual, and the new city of Puerto Presidente Stroessner, founded on 3 February 1957, partly realized the old Paraguayan objective to break the stranglehold that Argentine merchants historically had held on Paraguay. The actual founding of the new city highlights the difficulties facing the Paraguayan nation and its relationship to the far eastern border.

\(^5\) Serious efforts to construct a paved roadway began in the 1930s. In 1938, the Paraguayan government fixed the eastern land route from Asunción to the Paraná River, based on maps for the proposed (but never built) trans-Paraguay railroad. By the early-1950s, only the portion from Coronel Oviedo to the Paraná River remained to be built. Ynsfrán, \textit{Un giro geopolítico}, 56.

\(^6\) Stroessner founded a national merchant marine fleet to facilitate this trade, along with improvements in the port facilities in Asunción. However, the problem remained that approximately 90 percent of Paraguayan exports were sent to Buenos Aires. For a discussion of the economic and political hegemony of Argentina, see Diego Abente, Constraints and Opportunities: Prospects for Democratization in Paraguay,” \textit{Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs} 30:1 (1988):73-104.

\(^7\) \textit{Ciudad Presidente Stroessner} (Ciudad Presidente Stroessner: Editorial Difusiones, 1977), 3. Despite Stroessner’s proclamation, the city changed its name to Ciudad del Este in 1989, immediately after the downfall of the Stroessner military regime.
Stroessner planned for the city bearing his name to be founded just north of the small river port of Puerto Franco and south of the river port of Hernandarias. Given the lack of roads, landmarks, and the dense jungle growth, the exact site proved to be difficult to determine. As a result, Minister Ynsfrán recruited Noel Lefebvre, the then governor of Alto Paraná and life-long resident of the area, thus using his knowledge of the old picadas (logging trails) to locate the predetermined spot. With the location determined, Ynsfrán decided upon the appropriate moment, eventually choosing the feast day of San Blas, the patron saint of Paraguay, as the most auspicious date.

On the morning of 2 February, Ynsfrán and his scouting party arrived at a place called Puerto Miseria (Port Misery) where a small stream flowed into the Paraná River. Despite its name, the “port” consisted of nothing more than a convenient place from which to collect logs, tied together into floating rafts (jangadas) for transport downriver. However, as Ynsfrán stated, the name Puerto Miseria “did not sit well with us, by which reason we decided to re-baptize the place with the poetic name of the arroyuelo from which we had disembarked: Flor de Lis.” Afterward, the men scrambled up the embankment just above the newly christened Flor de Lis. There, military conscripts made a small clearing in the brush to act as more expansive site for the ceremony of foundation of the new city to be held the following day.

Over the course of the night, a modest Paraguayan naval vessel arrived from Encarnación and sat idly in the Paraná River, lending an air of importance. Early the next day, 3 February, two passenger aircraft arrived at the Foz do Iguaçu airport just across the Paraná River in Brazil, carrying the Paraguayan delegation invited to witness and participate in the founding ceremony. The delegation boarded lanchas (canoes) and crossed the Paraná River to Puerto Franco, where Ynsfrán and the remainder of the party waited for them. In total, the delegation consisted of approximately 60 men. The group assembled included the Brazilian Ambassador João Luiz de Guimarães Gomes, the Nuncio Apostólico Monseñor Luis Púnzolo, the Salesian priests Padre Lévera y Padre

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Saldívar, and Colorado Party President Tomás Romero Pereira, among other notable dignitaries.

Ynsfrán did not know how to organize a formal agenda for such an event, as he nor any other member of the party had founded a new city. Despite his uncertainty, Ynsfrán sought to replicate “something of the style inspired in the old documents of the conquest, which required little alteration for our purpose.” Ynsfrán entrusted the details of the ritual to Oscar Bárcena Echeveste, one of the chief propagandists of the military regime. Ynsfrán carried two important documents: first, he carried the crucial presidential decree issued by General Stroessner and, second, a letter from the head of the Catholic Church in Asunción.

In his epistle, Monseñor Aníbal Mena Porta, bishop of the Cathedral in Asunción, proffered the Catholic Church’s “adhesion” to General Stroessner’s plan of action, calling the foundation “a transcendental event” (un acontecimiento transcendental) in the history of the nation. Mena also evoked the much earlier founding of another important commercial city on the Paraná River, Encarnación, established by the Catholic priest, martyr, and later saint, Roque González de Santa Cruz in 1615. For Monseñor Mena, therefore, the founders of new Paraguayan towns and cities, regardless of the century or political circumstance, brought not only Christian civilization, but also established effective national sovereignty. In essence, on that day Paraguay formally took “possession” of the Alto Paraná borderlands in the name of God and of the people of Paraguay. [Figure 2.1]

According to Ynsfrán, the event paralleled the much earlier colonial “ritual of the Castilian foundations” (ritual de las fundaciones españoles) and he used this as a template. Upon gathering at the chosen site, the participants formed themselves into a square, the military band played the National Anthem, soldiers unfurled the Paraguayan flag, and Benigno López Camperchioli, the Secretary of the Interior, read Presidential Decree #24634 aloud to the crowd, thus officially founding Presidente Stroessner.

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12 For an interesting discussion of the process by which European explorers and conquistadores took possession of territory in the Americas for Spain, see Patricia Seed, Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
Afterward, Ynsfrán offered his own words on the solemn occasion, which summed up the importance of the place and the new relationship with its eastern neighbor:

Promising is this founding, fitting the site of the new city; fertile the lands that encircle it; imposing the beauty of the landscape that surrounds it; and noble the American ideal that inspires it. It is like a hand of sincerity and affection, that extends from our sister Republic of Brazil, whose coasts beckon beyond the Paraná of Ancient Lore...a link that connects us to our brother nation; a place of repose along our passage to the sea; and emporium of progress and of riches for those who will come here to plant their labors.13

All those present signed the decree and the document was placed into a protective metal cylinder and sealed into a concrete memorial bearing a bronze plaque commemorating the events. As a “final act” of the ceremony, Monseñor Púnzolo and the Salesians padre Lévera and padre Saldívar blessed the land and consecrated a wooden cross, hewn from a felled tree, erected on the very spot of the founding of the new city.

As shown in the speech given that day by Ynsfrán, military, governmental, and church officials had high hopes, not only for the future of the new town, but also for the new relationship being forged with Brazil.14

**Brasil Grande**

Nascent in the industrialization efforts of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s and 1940s, the ideology of Brasil Grande gelled under the leadership of President Juscelino Kubitschek (r. 1956-60) during the late-1950s, whose campaign slogan promised fifty years of progress within a span of just five years.15 Importantly, during the Kubitschek administration, the heavy industrial base of Brazil, including steel, iron, aluminum, minerals, cement, paper, rubber, automobiles, machinery, and electromechanical

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13 Ynsfrán, *Un giro geopolítico*, 103-104. The Spanish reads: “Todo es promisor en esta fundación: apropiado el sitio de la nueva ciudad; ricas las tierras que la circundan; imponente la belleza del paisaje que la rodea; y noble el ideal americanista que la inspira. Es como una diestra plena de sinceridad y de afecto, que estrecha la mano de la hermana República del Brasil, cuyas costas se advierten allende el Paraná de las viejas leyendas.”

14 This optimism carried on in the next decade as the region developed. See Oficio del Presidente, *Alto Paraná: presente y futuro de una pujante y floreciente zona* (Asunción: Imprenta Militar, 1967).

equipment, all became firmly established.\textsuperscript{16} To a large degree, much of the transfer of “know-how” (technical ability) to Brazilian heavy industries occurred through the establishment of foreign multinational corporations and factories in Brazil.\textsuperscript{17}

The military regimes of the 1960s through the 1980s carried on many of the basic precepts of the ideology of Brasil Grande, particularly embodied by the First and Second National Development Plan of 1971 and 1979, respectively. Under the latter, many of the largest and most ambitious projects were realized during the years of military rule. Indeed, the adherence to a program public investment in the projects of private construction and engineering firms represents one of the common threads between these quite different types of regimes.\textsuperscript{18} Over the years, through their own homegrown efforts, Brazilian engineering and construction firms gained the necessary experience and “know-how” required to construct ever more impressive engineering projects, culminating in the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project of the 1970s.

As discussed earlier, Getúlio Vargas had cemented relations with Paraguay, seeking to limit Argentina’s influence in the region. In addition, Kubitschek reached out to Paraguay and sought to further tie its economy to Brazil. [Figure 2.2] Moreover, the Argentine frontier in the Alto Paraná had closed by the 1940s, with the establishment of agricultural colonies in northern Misiones and effective state control and administration from Buenos Aires. Taken as a whole, these events helped to place Brazil in the pivotal and central position in the Alto Paraná borderlands and acted to marginalize Argentina. Within this context, Paraguayans continued their own March to the East, while Brazilians proceeded with their March to the West. The two nation’s ambitions would meet in the Alto Paraná borderlands.

By the early 1950s, only the 150-kilometer portion of the highway from Asunción to Coronel Oviedo had been completed, mostly due to a lack of foreign funding. The United States provided loans for the first leg of the highway, but refused to extend further funds to complete the project. In any case, Getúlio Vargas had returned to power in


Kubitschek’s Plan de Metas (Goal’s Plan) focused on five sectors: energy, transportation, food production, heavy industry, and education and one specific project, the construction of a new capital, Brasília, in the interior.

\textsuperscript{17} Neto, \textit{A crise do planejamento}, 117.

Brazil in 1951 and implemented a new program of infrastructure development. Vargas had been instrumental in pioneering the strategy of “nationalistic development” (desenvolvimento nacionalista) and “national capitalism” (capitalismo nacional), dominant during the periods 1930-45, 1951-54, and 1961-64, which inaugurated the unprecedented direct role of Brazilian state in the planning of the economy.\textsuperscript{19} As a result, the industrial sector began to dominate and “little by little, planning became imbedded in the ideology and practice of the leaders of the country. In the same way the importance of the State grew, the need to know the reality in which it worked also grew. The technical apparatus was being built and the technical-scientific knowledge (o saber técnico-científico)…assumed an important role in the Executive Branch.”\textsuperscript{20}

The 1953 National Plan for Economic Reconstruction (better known as the Lafer Plan) was the final product of a joint US-Brazil Commission, in which the construction of highways, ports, railroads, and increased production of electricity held high priority.\textsuperscript{21} The 1953 National Plan for Economic Reconstruction grew out of a series of technical missions and exchanges between the United States and Brazil that began in the 1940s, which sought to foster the long-range economic development of Brazil. The commission argued that development had been impeded because Brazilian officials traditionally had resisted “outside” participation in the extraction of the mineral wealth and natural resources of the country. Furthermore, the commission blamed the government itself, which had failed to pursue economic policies based on long-term national interests, because it all too often succumbed to the pressure of “personal and group politics.”

From the economic point of view of the United States, the larger Brazilian “problem” centered on the obstacles to the flow of domestic and international investment needed to promote economic development and a failure to identify and conceive of

\textsuperscript{19} Nationalistic development and “National Capitalism” contrasted with periods of “Dependant Capitalism” and its corresponding “dependant development,” from 1946-50, 1955-60, and 1964-70, which recognized the interdependence of capitalist nations and the hegemony of the United States in the region. For a discussion of state planning in general and Brazil in particular, see Neto, A crise do planejamento, for the Brazilian experience specifically, 104-135.

\textsuperscript{20} Neto, A crise do planejamento, 105. The Portuguese reads: “Pouco a pouco, a planificação incorporou-se à ideologia e ‘a prática dos governantes do País. Na medida em que cresceu a importância do Estado, cresceu também sua necessidade de conhecer a realidade sobre a qual atuava. Um aparato técnico-científico, contraposto ao pensamento político, assumiu uma dimensão importante no Poder Executivo.”

“projects for investment in basic fields… technically adapted to the requirements of foreign financing institutions.” According to the commission, only “soundly conceived” development projects that could garner international capital, which in turn would assure an orderly and balanced growth of the Brazilian economy, could hope to solve the problem. In short, better planning and sound projects would overcome the “backward” political system that historically had hindered development.

Despite the plethora of soundly conceived projects, however, government officials never implemented the 1953 Lafer Plan, though it did influence the direction of future development in the country. Importantly, from the Lafer Plan emerged in 1953 the Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico (B.N.D.E), founded in order to finance economic growth and future development projects. The national bank, along with international development agencies and lending institutions, solved the problem of attracting sufficient international capital. According to the political scientist Wilber A. Chaffee, “the most significant outcome of the 1950s was the implementation of the macropolitics of desenvolvimentismo (developmentism) as a national ideology.”

Not surprising given the emphasis on road construction, in the early 1950s, a joint Paraguay-Brazil Commission was established to study the completion of the international highway between the two nations that would cross through the Alto Paraná borderlands. In 1956, Brazilian officials reallocated an unused loan to the completion of the Paraguayan highway, at that time planned to extend from Coronel Oviedo to Puerto Presidente Franco, then a small logging community located on the banks of the Paraná River immediately opposite the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu. Furthermore, the accompanying January Accord to the commission’s recommendations established

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22 The Development of Brazil, vi. In addition to the above, the Commission also identified a wide range of impediments to Brazilian development, which included geographical and climatic limits (tropical soils, erosion, lack of known petroleum deposits, etc.) and cultural and social attitudes (feudal agricultural practices, paternalistic relations, elitism, etc.).


24 1957, Paraguayan governmental officials also petitioned the United States for a package of aid, credits, and loans to complete a variety of infrastructure projects, including the Colonel Oviedo-Puerto Presidente Stroessner, which with its founding became the new terminus, and the Trans-Chaco highways (both components of the Ruta Internacional), but without success. See Frank O. Mora and Jerry Wilson Cooney, Paraguay and the United States: Distant Allies (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 138-39.
Paranaguá, on the Brazilian Atlantic coast, as a free port for Paraguayan exports. Thus, Paraguay finally had achieved its goal of attaining an Atlantic port other than Buenos Aires and, along with it, realized the old dream of economic sovereignty.

As the economist Melissa Birch highlights, however, the eastern highway in Paraguay added little value or stimulus to the economy unless connected to the Brazilian road network. As a result, Brazil decided to construct the all-weather highway (BR-277) from Curitiba, the capital of Paraná state, to Foz do Iguaçu. According to Birch, the road extensions had three important outcomes: first, the opening of the Alto Paraná region to direct and reliable over land travel for the first time; second, the highway necessitated the construction of an international bridge across the Paraná River; and third, the international highway and bridge gave Paraguay its own direct outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, finally bypassing Argentine ports altogether. In May 1956, the agreement was signed for the “Friendship Bridge.” Moreover, the 1956 January Accord called for Brazil to pay for and to carry out the technical studies and evaluations of the hydroelectric power generating potential of the Acaray and Monday Rivers in Paraguay, both tributaries of the Alto Paraná River.

As discussed earlier, the hydroelectric generating potential of the Alto Paraná River and its tributaries had been of interest since at least the early 1920s. At that time, the Guairá and the Iguaçu Falls received the most attention. During the period 1920-22, an Argentine commission led by two engineers had studied the possibility of harnessing the Iguaçu Falls for electricity production. However, of the two, the Guairá Falls on the Alto Paraná River held the most promise, due to high rainfall averages of 70 inches per year that upper basin received and due to its numerous tributaries. In any case, the main drawback of the Alto Paraná River remained its remote location, far from established population centers, which would have required extensive transmission networks. Still in its infancy in the 1920s, high voltage transmission technology limited the viability of large-scale hydroelectric dam projects located far from the established centers of population and of industry.

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In 1932, W.S. Barclay suggested that the hydropower potential of the Alto Paraná would be utilized in the future to stimulate settlement in the region. As an example, Barclay attributed the population growth of São Paulo, which nearly had doubled in size from 1920 to 1930, to the Parque Salesópolis hydroelectric dam project on the Tietê River. Completed in 1912, Salesópolis was one of the first hydroelectric dam projects constructed in Brazil. The power produced, he argued had led to the development of São Paulo as a major center of industry. By the 1950s, moreover, the harnessing of the hydroelectric potential of the Alto Paraná represented a strategic resource that would guarantee the continuation of population growth and industrialization of São Paulo. Furthermore, continued industrialization (particularly in the Center-South region) increasingly constituted the long-term strategic interest of Brazil.

**Building Dams**

In 1889, the first hydroelectric dam constructed in South America was inaugurated on the Paraibuna River, located in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, dozens of small power stations (usinas) existed throughout Brazil, which mostly provided electricity to illuminate only the commercial centers of towns and some small-scale industries such as textile mills and small workshops. In many cases, privately-owned companies or individual municipalities owned and operated the power stations themselves, but served few customers.

In 1899, the Canadian firm São Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company, in conjunction with the U.S. firm American and Foreign Power Co., began construction on the Parnaíba hydroelectric dam which, completed in 1902, provided electricity to São Paulo. In 1905, the Rio de Janeiro Tramway, Light and Power Company completed the construction of the Fontes hydroelectric dam, which supplied power to Rio de Janeiro. In 1924, the Ilha dos Pombos hydroelectric dam provided additional electricity to the capital. Such projects, though ranked as some of the largest dams in the world at that time, produced only modest amounts of electricity. For example, Parnaíba generated only

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28 Catullo Branco, Energia elétrica e capital estrangeiro no Brasil (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1975), 46.
2 megawatts (MW)\(^{29}\) of power, Fontes 12 MW, and Ilha dos Pombos 22 MW. The Parnaíba hydroelectric dam was the first power plant constructed for the growing consumer market in Brazil.\(^{30}\)

The period 1920-40, however, witnessed a boom in power station construction, electricity production, and consumer demand. In 1920, 343 power stations (of all types) existed in Brazil, producing a total of 349.6 MW of electricity; by 1930, the number of stations had increased to 1200, with an installed capacity of 778.8 MW; and in 1940, the total had reached 1900 power stations producing 1243 MW of electricity. In the capital of Rio de Janeiro and the industrial hub of São Paulo, the increased electricity supply allowed for an expansion in public lighting, public transportation, and large-scale industry.\(^{31}\) Furthermore, electricity also allowed for the use of elevators, which in turn made possible ever-taller buildings, the development of the skyscraper, and urban apartment towers. In the 1930s, the telephone, fan, radio, hot water heater, toaster and, in the 1940s, refrigerators, all entered into widespread use among the middle and upper classes in Brazil which, in turn, increased consumer demand for electricity.

Given Brazil’s extensive river system, Brazilian governmental officials gave precedence to the generation of electricity through harnessing hydropower. Although utilizing Brazilian labor, foreign companies had constructed all of the existing hydroelectric dams. However, an imminent energy crisis facing São Paulo, often referred to as the “locomotive” of the Brazilian economy, drove home the need for additional hydroelectric dams.\(^{32}\) Industry there had been crippled by blackouts and brownouts, which limited production, damaged equipment, raised costs, and discouraged expansion of both existing and new enterprises.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, lack of sufficient power also had an effect on agricultural frontier communities, which needed their products to be processed in order to reach market. Thus, a lack of electricity meant that forested land was not

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\(^{29}\) The megawatt (MW) is equivalent to 1 million watts. In comparison, a typical coal power plant produces approximately 600 megawatts and a modern nuclear power plant between 500-1300 megawatts.

\(^{30}\) Branco, *Energia elétrica e capital estrangeiro no Brasil*, 81.


\(^{32}\) For an excellent discussion of the economic reasons behind this shortage of power, see Chapter One of Judith Tendler, *Electric Power in Brazil: Entrepreneurship in the Public Sector* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 7-42.

\(^{33}\) *The Development of Brazil*, 157-58.
cleared and cultivated, because it was not economically sensible to do so. Moreover, as the U.S.-Brazil Joint Commission argued in 1953, “there can be little doubt that it is not easy to raise the level of education, productivity, and civic pride of a population living in towns with dimly-lit streets where even the semi-weekly movie show may be cancelled because of a power failure.” In short, progress required a sufficient supply of electricity, and increasingly that power came from hydroelectric dams.

At mid-twentieth century, most economic analysts agreed that Brazil had little known petroleum deposits and only modest coal resources of poor quality. It did have, however, one of the largest hydroelectric potentials on the globe, ranking it sixth in the world in this natural resource. In 1935, the Divisão de Aguas (Water Resources Board) issued a report in which it stated that:

We are, and will continue to be, a country that must import coal and petroleum...Water is the only source of energy that we can draw upon for massive industrial development. Our duty, therefore, is...to intensify its use in every way possible.

Thus, by the early 1950s, the construction of hydroelectric dams became the foundation upon which would be built the continued development and economic growth of Brazil. As the popular saying of the era stated, “São Paulo não pode parar” (“São Paulo can’t stop”), and the continued supply of electricity constituted a central guarantee of the continued expansion of industry. To this end, in 1954, Getúlio Vargas formulated the National Electrification Plan (Plano Nacional de Eletrificação) in which he outlined the goal of reaching 8 million megawatts of power production and laid the groundwork for the creation of a national electric company, Eletrobrás, which was founded in 1962.

In 1950, few Brazilian companies had the size and experience needed to construct large-scale infrastructure projects and, of those, most were based in São Paulo and Minas

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34 The Development of Brazil, 159.
35 For a discussion of Brazil’s geographic distribution of iron ore, coal, and other mineral deposits at that time, see Chapters 1 and 2 of Donald Edmund Rady, Volta Redonda: A Steel Mill Comes to a Brazilian Coffee Plantation (Albuquerque: Rio Grande Publishing, 1973), 1-60.
36 Quoted in Tendler, Electric Power in Brazil, 192-93.
37 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 204.
38 Branco, Energia elétrica e capital estrangeiro no Brasil, xxxvii. The goal of 8 million MW finally was reached in 1967. The national electric company, Eletrobrás, was founded in 1962 during the presidency of João Goulart.
Gerais, the most populous and industrially developed states of Brazil. Not surprisingly, a “developmentalist spirit” (*espírito desenvolvimentista*) and a “robust rivalry” first evolved in these states.\(^{39}\) Beginning in the 1950s, the respective governors of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, Adhemar de Barros and Juscelino Kubitschek, sought to expand the road network and electricity supply within their own borders. These plans fit into the desires of the governor of Mato Grosso at that time, Fernando Corrêa da Costa, whose land-locked and isolated state remained disconnected from its neighbors due to lack of transportation infrastructure.\(^{40}\)

The governors of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso all sought to implement their plans for regional development. However, Governor Corrêa da Costa was one of the first to understand fully the potential benefits of the Paraná River to each of the states mentioned and to the states of Paraná and Goiás. Governor Corrêa da Costa had the idea to establish the Paraná Basin Interstate Commission (Comissão Interestadual da Bacia do Paraná), which held its first meeting in September 1951.\(^{41}\) The commission identified three primary goals: to construct a rail link between São Paulo and Cuiabá (Mato Grosso), to transform the Paraná and Tietê Rivers into a commercial waterway transportation system, and to construct two hydroelectric dams, one at Urubupungá (eventually formed by a complex of three dams, Jupiá, Ilha Solteira, and Três Irmãos) and the other at Sete Quedas (eventually renamed Itaipú Binacional), on the Paraná River. Thus, from this meeting emerged the idea for the world’s largest hydroelectric dam project.

Beginning in the 1950s, Brazil entered into the business of hydroelectric dam construction. In 1950, three Brazilian state-owned entities were founded: the Companhia Hidroelétrica do São Francisco, Companhia Energética de Minas Gerais, and Companhia Estadual de Energia do Rio Grande do Sul. In addition, an early and important example of the private sector’s entry into the business is the Construções e Comércio Camargo Corrêa, S.A., a Brazilian construction company, founded in 1939 and based in São Paulo. Over the years, the company helped to construct some of the biggest projects in “Brazil

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\(^{39}\) Quintella, *Memórias do Brasil Grande*, 12.

\(^{40}\) In this sense, Mato Grosso had much in common with western Paraná state. Quintella, *Memórias do Brasil Grande*, 131-32.

Grande”—including the new capital city of Brasília, the Trans-Amazonian Highway, the São Paulo subway, the Rio-Niterói Bridge, and the Itaipú hydroelectric dam. In the early 1950s, however, the firm had constructed only the new airport in Campo Grande and had worked on the soil grading for the refinery at Capuava, neither of which provided sufficient experience. However, according to Wilson Quintella, a high-level administrator in the Camargo Corrêa Co., this early experience gave corporate officials reason to believe that they possessed the basic “know-how” needed to construct a hydroelectric dam project.

Subsequently, Camargo Corrêa placed a bid for the contract to construct three small dams (Euclides da Cunha, Limoeiro, and Graminha) on the Rio Pardo in São Paulo state. Awarded the contract, Camargo Corrêa represented the first Brazilian firm given a primary contract to construct a hydroelectric dam project within Brazil. In order to facilitate the project, however, Camargo Corrêa officials teamed up with Constructora Noreno do Brasil, a Norweigan engineering firm with offices in São Paulo. In addition, Camargo Corrêa officials contracted specialized engineers trained at the University of São Paulo, the primary source for trained technical personnel and engineers in Brazil. The company learned the basic process of hydroelectric dam construction: first, navigating the bureaucracy required for formal permission from the Brazilian government for the right to use the water of the river to produce energy; second, determine the overall zone of construction and the appropriation of land needed for the project; and third, how to raise the necessary funds and financing both within Brazil and abroad.

At least in theory, Brazilian construction firms had the technical ability to construct paved roads, railroads, and waterways. However, the realization of large hydroelectric dam projects constituted a more complex undertaking. According to Wilson Quintella, at that time the three stated goals of the before mentioned Paraná Basin Interstate Commission seemed to him to be more “science fiction” (ficção científica) than fact, given their complexity and magnitude. However, as Quintella further states, a climate of optimism existed alongside a firm belief that a combined effort could realize the dream of development. And, importantly, the idea emerged that the states themselves

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42 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 133.
could and would have to take on the major part of the responsibility, through their own state-level entities, for the construction of needed public infrastructure.

With each hydroelectric dam constructed, the construction firm gained valuable experience, technical ability, and confidence. Graminha, the last of the three dams constructed on the Rio Pardo, began in 1956 and reached completion in 1964. The Camargo Corrêa Company also stepped in to complete the Três Marias hydroelectric dam project, which had been abandoned by the British firm contracted for its construction. As a result, President Kubitschek prohibited foreign firms from working on public works projects in Brazil, mandating that only “national firms” could do so. Thus, with foreign competitors out of the picture, the “heavy construction” (construção pesada) industry in Brazil had been born. However, the Três Marias project comprised only a part of the longer historical development of the civil construction industry in Brazil, which had begun in the mid- to late-nineteenth century with railroad, port, road, sanitation, and urban infrastructure projects.

The successful completion of these dams became a source of national pride, but also a call to greatness. At the inaugural ceremony for the Três Marias dam, Kubitschek laid down the gauntlet, stating “I cast out a challenge to the Brazil that is negative, unproductive, and dragging its feet. To the Brazil that is incapable of believing in its own greatness, I make this challenge in the name of a Brazil that wants to grow, that wants to become great.”

Greatness, however, required more electricity for the industrial, commercial, and consumer sectors. In turn, the hydropower potential of the Alto Paraná, particularly the Guairá Falls, was seen as the most auspicious location.

Brothers-in-Arms: Conflict in the Borderlands

The unresolved boundary dispute with Paraguay hindered the harnessing of the hydropower of the Guairá Falls by Brazil. Under the initiative of Vargas, a large portion of the border between Brazil and Paraguay had been settled in the negotiations of 1930.

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43 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 12.
44 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 200.
45 For a discussion of the historical development of the technology and industrialization resulting from these projects, and also including hydroelectric dam construction, see Shozo Motoyama, ed. Tecnologia e industrialização no Brasil: uma perspectiva histórica (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade Estadual Paulista, CEETEPS, 1994).
46 Quoted in Tendler, Electric Power in Brazil, 191.
However, the portion of the border centering upon the Guairá Falls remained open to contestation, at least by Brazil. Brazilian officials referred to the Guairá Falls by the plural “Sete Quedas” (Seven Falls) instead of the more singular “Salto Grande de Sete Quedas,” perhaps hoping to lay claim, however dubious from the point of view of the Paraguayan government, to several of the upper cataracts, if not all of them. Exclusive control of the falls by Brazil would have facilitated plans to construct the Sete Quedas hydroelectric dam project.

Continuing in the spirit of friendly relations between the two countries, Brazilian and Paraguayan governmental officials established a mixed commission in 1961 in order to delineate the exact territorial boundaries. The commission, for its part, confirmed the boundary to be located in the Mbaracaryú hills, but discovered that the range contained two separate branches: the Brazilian delegates argued that the border followed the southern branch, while the Paraguayan delegates argued for the border that followed the northern branch. If the Brazilian position won the day, the designation would place all of the various falls in Brazil and would preclude any claim by Paraguay. Paraguayan officials argued that, at worst, the falls comprised part of the Paraná River, which represented the international border, thus the falls, and their hydroelectric potential, should be shared equally. In March 1962, the Paraguayan ambassador in Rio de Janeiro warned that neither Brazil nor Paraguay had unilateral rights to the falls until the border dispute had been resolved. Not surprisingly, both the Paraguayan and Brazilian press fomented calls to defend national territory and to protect sovereignty.

For a couple of years, the issue remained unresolved. However, in January 1964, General Stroessner and the Brazilian President João Goulart (r. 1961-64) met in Mato Grosso to discuss the matter. The Brazilian military coup of 1 April 1964 eclipsed the presidential talks and precluded any immediate solution, even if the respective heads of state had agreed upon one. Importantly, a military regime now existed on each side of border. On the occasion of the ceremonies of the completion of the “Friendship Bridge” in March 1965, military presidents General Stroessner and General Castello Branco (r.

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49 Ynsfrán, *Un giro geopolítico*, 62.
1964-67), the first president of the ruling military junta, met in Foz do Iguaçu to take up the matter again. The conflict had the explosive potential to derail two decades of friendly relations between Brazil and Paraguay and to interrupt the process of regional integration within Latin America, both of which had been central policies of the Stroessner regime and had been inherited by the military regime in Brazil. Ironically, at the very moment of the triumph of fraternalism, epitomized by the “Friendship Bridge,” relations between the two nations reached a crossroads.

In addition to the presidential meetings in Foz do Iguaçu, General Golbery do Couto e Silva, head of the Brazilian Army, and the Paraguayan minister of the interior met in Asunción. For his part, during the 1950s General Golbery do Couto e Silva had helped to develop the Doctrine of National Security, which tied together economic development and internal and external security within the context of Brazilian aspirations to greatness and world power status. Increasingly the Brazilian military believed that it had the necessary institutional abilities to bring about a successful program of economic planning, which some scholars argue had helped to justify the military coup of 1964.

For the purveyors of the doctrine, a distinction had been made between national defense, defined as protecting the nation against attack from an external threat, and the broader mandate of national security, defined as protecting national institutions and interests against all threats, either foreign or domestic. In this case, economic development became a legitimate national interest of the military. In light of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, both the Brazilian and Paraguayan governments took a renewed interest in the border zone as a potential site for the entry of foreign subversives as well as a potentially fertile ground for revolution among the poor inhabitants. Beginning in 1964, after the coup by which the Brazilian military assumed control of the national government, the new regime continued many of the development projects already started

under the previous democratic governments; programs such as road and port construction
now existed alongside new social welfare projects such as immunization among the poor,
particularly in the Amazon region. In Brazil, the new regime also fostered friendly ties
with the surrounding military regimes in order to monitor each other’s borders and share
information about potential security threats, a program better known as “Operation
Condor.” Thus, in the context of 1960s Brazil, safeguarding national security went hand
in hand with economic development.

In the conflict over the resources of the Alto Paraná River, Brazilian military
officials clearly viewed Paraguay as a potential (though admittedly minor) threat to their
overall national interests. In any case, from these high level meetings between military
officials emerged a new consensus; namely, the possibility of joint exploitation of the
hydroelectric potential of the Alto Paraná River on the shared portion of the border
between Brazil and Paraguay.\footnote{Ynsfrán, \textit{Un giro geopolítico}, 67.}

Despite pledges of cooperation between the nations, Paraguayan military officials
discovered a detachment of Brazilian troops in June 1965, reportedly constructing
fortifications within the disputed territory. General Castello Branco, as head of the ruling
junta, responded to Paraguayan objections by unleashing the raison d’être of military
regimes and argued that potential guerilla group activities and contraband smuggling
necessitated the military presence in the borderlands.\footnote{Ynsfrán, \textit{Un giro geopolítico}, 68.} In turn, Paraguayan officials
countered that Brazil had violated the peace treaty of 1872 ending the Paraguayan War,
specifically the provisions dealing with the recognition of territorial borders, by
dispatching troops into territory claimed by Paraguay. Although open war was never
declared, Paraguayan officials clearly believed that they had established “just cause” for
war against Brazil.

For the next year, the governments of Brazil and Paraguay became embroiled in a
de facto “war of words.” Meanwhile, the Minister of Foreign Relations of Uruguay
stepped in to mediate the conflict. In late-June 1966, government officials again met in
Foz do Iguaçu in order to hammer out an agreement and put an end to the conflict. The
final document, known as the 1966 \textit{Act of Foz do Iguaçu}, stipulated that the governments
would, among other things, jointly study the economic possibilities of the Guairá Falls and that both Brazil and Paraguay would share any hydropower produced by the Paraná River along the mutual border.\textsuperscript{55} However, officials again proposed a new joint commission with the question of territorial limits, to be resolved at a later date.

The 1966 Act of Foz do Iguaçu difused the conflict between Brazil and Paraguay and paved the way for the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Alto Paraná River. However, many questions remained as to the size and generating capacity of such a dam and, perhaps more importantly, whether or not Brazil had the required “know-how” to realize such an ambitious project from start to finish. As Brazil had industrialized from the late-nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, the ability to construct large engineering and construction projects, including hydroelectric dams, also developed. Moreover, the conflict over the Guiará Falls had been predicated on the fact that Brazil needed the electricity, that it could indeed construct a project of that magnitude and complexity, that it had the necessary skilled workforce and industrial base, and that it could obtain the required international financing.

\textbf{Jupiá: The Birthplace of the Brazilian Dam Worker}

Shortly after the completion of Três Marias, Camargo Corrêa Co., embarked upon its most ambitious project to date, the Jupiá (present-day Eng. Sousa Dias) hydroelectric dam,\textsuperscript{56} constructed between 1960 and 1974 on the upper portion of the Paraná River, which would supply electricity to the states of São Paulo and Mato Grosso. The Jupiá dam constituted one part of the larger Urubupungá hydroelectric dam complex. Taken as a whole, the Urubupungá complex of dams (Jupiá, Ilha Solteira, and Três Irmãos) constituted the world’s second largest dam project at the time.

At 1424 MW capacity, Jupiá would be the first hydroelectric dam in Brazil built entirely by Brazil, its engineers, and labor force. However, at the time, Brazilian firms alone did not have the ability to manufacture the electromechanical equipment (turbines) and transmission system (power lines). Thus, foreign multinational companies, primarily from Switzerland, Italy, and Germany, that had subsidiaries located in Brazil provided

\textsuperscript{55} Ynsfrán, \textit{Un giro geopolítico}, 75. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{56} The Jupiá (Eng. Sousa Dias) hydroelectric dam has an installed potential of 1,551 MW. It is the second largest dam in Brazil, behind only Itaipú Binacional.
these items.\textsuperscript{57} The financing for the project—roughly 670 billion cruzeiros or $US 166 million dollars—derived from three sources: the State of São Paulo (469 billion, or 70%), the national electric company, Eletrobrás (201 billion, or 30%), and a small sum from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Despite its importance, the Jupiá hydroelectric dam has garnered little attention from historians. Indeed, the memoirs of Wilson Quintella remain one of the only sources discussing the project. Quintella is correct when he attributes importance to the Jupiá project to the larger project of “Brasil Grande.” In many ways, the obstacles encountered at Jupiá would be found later at Itaipú Binacional, and the lessons learned would be implemented in the Alto Paraná. First, the Camargo Corrêa Co. had to recruit a sufficient labor force. Unlike Três Marias, which required roughly 500 workers, the Jupiá project employed some 5,000 workers for over a decade. In what would become a familiar pattern, company officials dispatched recruiters to nearby cities and placed advertisements on the radio and in the local newspapers. Once recruited, workers were then transported by bus to the work site. As Quintella remembered of the new arrivals, “not one had their work permits or their required health certificates and few had their military service cards.”\textsuperscript{58} Recruiting workers was so difficult, Camargo Corrêa even accepted applicants that had been set free from nearby prisons and told to go work on the hydroelectric dam. Thus, one lesson learned at Jupiá was that the problem of finding a sufficient labor force would be a major obstacle to large-scale construction projects.

Unlike previous projects, the scale of Jupiá required the firm to hone its planning strategy, requiring the construction of an entire community and the recruitment and training of workers who had never worked on that type or size of project or under those conditions. Clearly, the “hands-on” approach echoes the corporate paternalism prevalent in the past. Indeed, the “urban” worker’s villages, constructed and owned by companies for their workforce, had emerged in São Paulo and other industrial centers at the end of

\textsuperscript{57} “Urubupungá: segunda do mundo,” Banas Informa: Revista econômica e financeira (9 de maio de 1966), 8. The multinational companies were Brown-Boveri (Switzerland) and Siemens (Germany), with plants in industrial districts of Osasco and Lapa in São Paulo. Other multinationals had factories in Brazil, including the automobile and truck industry. For a recent study of this phenomenon, see Joel Wolfe, Autos and Progress: the Brazilian Search for Modernity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{58} Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 219.
the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the establishment of other national industries, including steel production, had necessitated the construction of residential communities for workers and their families. However, in terms of hydroelectric dam projects, Jupiá was unlike anything that had been constructed before in Brazil and, similar to other intensive industries, the workforce had to be created from scratch. At Jupiá, therefore, the Brazilian dam worker, or barregeiro, first emerged.

Second, the project also presented special challenges given its remote location. Located some 670 kilometers from the industrial and population center of São Paulo, the company town was called Vila Pilôto and housed approximately 13,500 residents. Company officials had to provide workers and their families with housing, electricity, running water, sewers, and built roads, commercial centers, hospitals, schools, and recreational facilities. Company officials implemented a policy that sought to provide for all the needs of the dam workers and their families. In addition to infrastructure, Quintella reports that officials of Camargo Corrêa were “required to be the mayor, the priest, and the judge, all at the same time.” Upon detecting some family problem—an “unhappy spouse” (esposa descontente), a child not performing well at school, or complaints against a neighbor—company officials, reportedly including the president of Camargo Corrêa himself, personally intervened to reach a solution.

Quintella believed that the complaints of housewives derived from the man’s “full occupation” (ocupação plena) at the canteiro (work site), while she remained at home and only partially occupied during the day. According to Quintella, “after the housework was completed, [the housewives] didn’t have anything to do and, lacking any other

59 In 1901, for example, the Votorantim stamp factory had on its premises 500 houses, a church, theater, sporting fields, and a health clinic. For the process of building company towns within the context of industrialization in São Paulo, see Eva Alterman Blay, *Eu não tenho onde morar: vilas operárias na cidade de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1985), 30-45; for Pelotas in Rio Grande do Sul, see Lorena Almeida Gill, “Labirintos ao redor da cidade: as vilas operárias em Pelotas (RS), 1890-1930,” *História Unisinos* 10:1 (Janeiro/Abril 2006):45-52.

60 For a discussion of the development of the communities, including corporate paternalism in the worker’s vilas, of the Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional, CSN, (National Steel Company) of Brazil at their main facility in Volta Redonda and facilities in Minas Gerais and Santa Catarina, see Rady, *Volta Redonda*, 152-258.

problems, created them out of anything.” Over the course of the project, however, Comargo Corrêa officials hired special personnel, known as “social assistants” (assistentes sociais) to resolve conflict in the home. Although not new, this represented a creative solution to the problems that company officials confronted on a daily basis. As will be seen, the lessons learned at Jupiá regarding the lives of workers, including in the domestic sphere, would be implemented in future projects, including the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project.

Camargo Corrêa officials touted Jupiá as a world-class project, which mandated that workers receive the same treatment and have the same competency as workers in the “most advanced countries,” which most likely referred to Europe and North America. While many of the Jupiá workers had worked on smaller projects and had experience working and living in a canteiro de obras (construction site), most had to adapt to the conditions of an “industrial installation” (instalação industrial). To that end, company officials implemented work schedules, and sought to instill discipline, civility, and notions of proper hygiene to its workers. In return, the company hoped that workers would be dedicated, efficient, and would take pride in their work. The company touted a list of benefits provided to workers and their families, including nutritious and hot meals on a regular schedule, housing, trash collection, running water, medical care, education, electric light, and a hospital, school, cinema, and a sports club. According to Quintella, such amenities provided for the well-being of workers and ensured high productivity.

Moreover, workers required proper training and education, including how best to live in the workers’ communities, the basics of home economics, and workplace safety. Quintella reports that the company had to implement an effective program of training to prevent accidents, teach the rules of safety, and bolster programs to care for recently arrived workers, particularly prone to accidents, when injured. Company officials, furthermore, implemented the company rules and enforced existing civil law to workers. For example, alcoholic beverages were prohibited in the worker’s vilas (villages) and

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62 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 223. The Portuguese reads: “Depois de se livrarem das suas obrigações domésticas, elas geralmente ficavam sem ter o que fazer e, na falta de problemas, qualquer coisa virava um.”

63 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 220.
noise ordinances were enforced at all hours, all in order to “guarantee the rest of workers between their shifts.” In both the villas and the canteiro, social assistants instructed workers and their spouses in the basics of home economics, intended to combat the tendency for workers to spend their entire paychecks on perfume, chocolates, and sweets bought in the company store.\(^{64}\)

Classification by level of education and skill determined housing assignments: category A for high-level professionals and administrators, category B for teachers, nurses, and technicians, and category C for unskilled laborers and general helpers. The design and amenities of the home corresponded to the category, “A” homes were spacious, single-family dwellings constructed of brick or cement block, “B” homes, though smaller, had a modest front garden, and “C” dwellings were multi-family “barracks” made of rough pine.\(^{65}\)

At the commencement of the project, approximately 70 percent of the workforce was comprised of mostly single men, who lived in barracks onsite. High level, married workers—such as engineers, electricians, and managers—lived in a specially constructed residential area. Over the course of the project, however, the percentage of single males declined to 30 percent of the total. The shift was mostly due to the fact that single male workers eventually “settled down” (se estabilizam), began to marry, and moved out of the canteiro. As a result, company officials constructed a special Villa de Operadores (Worker’s Village) consisting of 227 homes in four blocks to accommodate the high demand, although this small number of homes never satisfied the need. As a result, newly married workers found housing in the nearby community of Três Lagoas.

Quintella argues that Jupiá was no different than any other Brazilian town, with the exception that there was no unemployment there. The canteiro had been planned as a separate entity from the closest town of Três Lagoas, in order to avoid the “bad influences” (más influências) emanating from the city. Quickly, however, the company abandoned the idea of containment for the more realistic plan for integration of both populations.\(^{66}\) At Jupiá, company officials initially envisioned a strict two-tier-class-

\(^{64}\) Quintella, *Memórias do Brasil Grande*, 221.

\(^{65}\) Henrique Figueira, *Vila Pilôto de Jupiá (uma história de barrageiros)* (São Paulo: Biblioteca 24x7, 2009), 45–46.

structure, with unmarried male workers residing in the onsite barracks and married technical and engineering personnel and their families residing within a specially designated company housing development. However, despite Quintella’s assertions, Jupiá initially followed a spatial separation between classes characteristic of other Brazilian cities: engineers and high level employees resided in the company housing, while lower skilled, married workers lived in the Villa do Operadores or in town, and foreign engineers and the highest echelon of company officials resided in a special hotel located on site. “Foreigners” (mostly Italians) and corporate dignitaries, in addition, resided in a specially designed hotel, separate from the others.

In the short term, the power of Jupiá supplied electricity to the national industrial base. The power flowed through a series of transmission lines and sub-stations that linked the hydroelectric dam to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte and to the steel mills, chemical plants, petroleum refineries, and mining operations located there. Among the list of innovations at Jupiá, however, was the formulation of long-range planning studies intended to provide a blueprint for development of the entire region surrounding the dam project itself, or stated another way, as the “interiorization” (interiorização) of electricity production. Centrais Elétricas de Urubupungá, the entity responsible for construction and administration of the dam complex, in part formulated these long-range plans because they hoped to profit from the settlement schemes both through direct investment and the selling of electricity to consumers. A secondary motive was ideological: the company’s slogan promised its employees “work, progress, development, and a better life-for you, your children and grandchildren, and for all of Brazil in the years to come.”

The hydroelectric dam provided electricity for a variety of purposes, including industry, rural electrification, and tourism, among others. Thus, Jupiá represented a shift in national energy policy, which previously had favored construction of dams nearer to population centers, toward more marginal areas of the country. As one business magazine touted, under the old policy:

the so-called Brazilian backlands had remained marginalized by the old electric energy programs and condemned, as such, to the fatalism

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of an exclusively agricultural economy that produces… the phenomenon of migrating populations fleeing from exhausted soils and dead cities.\textsuperscript{68}

Jupiá represented the culmination of technology, industry, and corporate and governmental ideology that acted as a blueprint for future development projects in Brazil. Thus, remote infrastructure projects had the power to resolve the age-old conflict between the “two Brazils” of the interior (sertão) and the coast (litoral).

From then on, the fate of the rivers of the interior of the country would be harnessed to the needs of the “men of steel” in the industrial centers of Brazil. In turn, these industrial workers would produce the needed products, summed up by an array of corporate slogans, which intended “to make Brasil stronger. In order that other Brazilians, just like us, can live better lives.”\textsuperscript{69} [Figure 2.3] While Brazil achieved a high level of “know-how” during the critical decade of desenvolvimento of the 1950s and 1960s, and commenced an ambitious program of hydroelectric dam construction, its neighbor Paraguay also sought to embark upon its own path to progress. Again, the Alto Paraná borderlands would be the location on which a foundation of national greatness could be built, and hydroelectricity the power for economic growth.

The Gift of Light: Paraguay’s “Second Reconstruction”

In one of his first acts after taking power in a military coup, in May 1954, General Stroessner instructed the Paraguayan diplomatic mission in Rio de Janeiro to enter into discussions with the Brazilian government regarding a financial and technical joint development venture. As discussed earlier, in January 1956, Paraguay and Brazil signed a cooperative joint agreement, the Convenio de cooperación, to study the suitability and potential of the Monday and Acaray Rivers for hydroelectric dams. In addition, the governments laid the foundation for an agreement to construct the highway extension

\textsuperscript{68} “Urubupungá: segunda do mundo,” Banas Informa: Revista econômica e financeira (9 de maio de 1966), 6. The Portuguese reads: “os chamados sertões brasileiros ficaram marginalizados dos programas de energia elétrica e condenados, assim, ao fatalismo de uma economia exclusivamente agrícola, gerando…o fenômeno das populações intinerantes que vão deixando para trás terras cansadas e cidades mortas.”

\textsuperscript{69} Advertisements in industry publications, including annual business indexes, yearbooks, and reports, from the 1960s and 1970s from São Paulo, echo these sentiments. In particular, see the publications of Editóra Banas, which specialized in the dissemination of research on the national economy, industry, and agricultural production, to a national and international audience of businessmen.
from Coronel Oviedo eastward to the Paraná River and an international bridge, the “Friendship Bridge,” connecting Brazil and Paraguay. [Figure 2.4] Thus, early on in his rule, Stroessner took an active and direct interest in the Alto Paraná, stating that the region “overflowing with abundance [but] that for some time has been forgotten, in darkness and neglect.”

It is important here to distinguish between the development programs of Brazil as compared with Paraguay. Combined with the 1957 founding of Puerto Presidente Stroessner, the Coronel Oviedo-Río Paraná highway extension, the Puente de Amistad, and a potential dam on the Acaray or Monday Rivers, all represented a realization of Stroessner’s larger plan for national development, or as he termed it, the “Second Reconstruction” (Segunda Reconstrucción Nacional). The Second Reconstruction sought to emulate an imagined, glorious past and to rebuild the devastated national infrastructure, which had never been repaired in the aftermath of the Paraguayan War. To Stroessner, infrastructure projects would break the isolation of Paraguay and would allow for the economic exploitation of the eastern forests, both central economic goals of the Stroessner regime. Without them, Stroessner argued that any hydroelectric dam project located in the remote hinterland would not be possible.

By the 1960s, the burning of coal (térmicas a carbón, por leña) generated roughly 75 percent of Paraguay’s electricity, while the remaining 25 percent came from the burning of petroleum. The latter had to be imported in its entirety, as Paraguay had no confirmed oil reserves. Given this situation, many wealthier homes and industries relied on their own generator. Furthermore, the interior of the country either had no electricity whatsoever or relied on small private firms that provided limited service at high cost to customers. For its part, A.N.D.E (Administración Nacional de Electricidad) only

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70 Fulgencio Tomás Santos, *La obra del siglo: Ciudad Pdte. Stroessner* (Asunción: El Foro, 1983), 68. The Spanish reads: “...rebozante de fecundidad y que hace poco tiempo estaba en el olvido, en la oscuridad y en el abandono.”

71 The “First Reconstruction” was represented by the development efforts of the López family, including a foundry, docks, etc., which were destroyed during the Paraguayan War.


73 The Chaco, a region disputed by Paraguay and Bolivia, was believed to contain vast petroleum deposits. Paraguay and Bolivia entered into open warfare over control of this resource in the Chaco War (1930-32). While Paraguay nominally won the war, the petroleum resources had not been confirmed, nor exploited, by the 1960s.
provided 69 percent of the electricity used by residents and industry. Even in Asunción, the supply of electricity remained notoriously unpredictable, as the capital experienced regular brownouts. Thus, the augmentation of the nation’s electricity supply and power grid was the central goal of Paraguay’s Plan Nacional de Electrificación (National Electrification Plan), itself a component of the larger national development plan formulated by the military government.

In the end, the first hydroelectric dam constructed within Paraguay was the Acaray project, inaugurated in December 1968 and in full operation in 1973, on the Acaray River, a tributary of the Paraná River, between Hernandarias and Puerto Presidente Stroessner. Before the construction of the dam, the location was the site of the community of Puerto Embalse, a main port for the Industrial Paraguaya Company.

The idea for a hydroelectric dam project in the Alto Paraná borderlands emerged in the early-1950s. According to Enzo Debernardi, a young engineer trained in Italy and who worked for the Paraguayan Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Comunicaciones before becoming the director of A.N.D.E, the country had reached by 1951 its maximum ability to generate electricity with the burning of carbons. The upper management of the utility began to search for solutions, which lead them to consider hydroelectric power as a viable alternative. After surveying the few topographical maps of area available at the time, only the tributaries of the Alto Paraná, in particular the Saltos de Monday (Monday Falls) seemed suitable for dam construction. However, as Debernardi states, “...at that time [the Monday Falls] was a fabled thing because it had only been seen by the few travelers that had crossed over the area.”

In 1952, Debernardi organized a trip to the Alto Paraná to inspect the falls in person. Of Alto Paraná, he states, “...it was very difficult to access the area because it was a remote location, almost unknown to the majority of Paraguayans.” The engineer had to fly into a small clearing in Hernandarias and approach the falls from the logging trails that emanated from Puerto Embalse, a port of the Industrial Paraguaya Company. Upon inspection, Debernardi determined the unsuitability of the location of the Monday Falls for the proposed hydroelectric dam. However, the engineer did find other suitable

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75 Santos, La obra del siglo, 60.
sites nearby, the Acaray River, which eventually became the actual site of the new project.

Determining the suitability of the Alto Paraná for hydroelectric dam construction comprised but one piece of the puzzle. According to Debernardi, such an ambitious project could only be carried out under the best conditions, including a political and social climate of peace along with a stable government and monetary policy, all of which Paraguay lacked in 1952. In its absence, Paraguay could not hope to obtain the necessary international credit and investment for the project. However, others had voiced such opinions of the sad realities of the Paraguayan nation. As early as the 1870s, Leone Levi had argued that development and progress could only come to Paraguay under ideal circumstances, including “a steady and enlightened Government, with permanency of political institutions, with perfect civil and religious freedom, and with an honest and wise administration.”

While probably not what Levi had in mind, the 1954 military coup led by General Alfredo Stroessner provided the necessary political and economic conditions in Paraguay. Under the auspices of the Second National Reconstruction, in essence a nationalistic program of (re)development, Debernardi transformed A.N.D.E into a “first class electric company” (empresa eléctrica de primer clase) capable of both construction and administration of a large scale hydroelectric dam project. In turn, General Stroessner provided the social stability—albeit through a repressive military dictatorship—and Paraguay soon won the needed international funding.

To build the Acaray hydroelectric dam, the Paraguayan government received financing from a variety of sources: the Inter-American Development Bank (B.I.D), totaling approximately 20 million $US dollars, the Group of Italian Electrical Industries (G.I.E.I) supplied 12 million, and A.N.D.E, the state-owned utility company of Paraguay, the entity charged with directing the construction of the dam project. However, both Italian and Brazilian companies provided the necessary “technical assistance” (asistencia técnica), including the engineering, needed to realize its construction. Furthermore, the

77 ANDE was created in 1948 by the Paraguayan government and has a national monopoly on electrical power production, transmission, and distribution. For a discussion of the history of ANDE in Paraguay, see Birch, “Public Enterprise and Economic Development.”
Italian firm Torno and the Brazilian firm Companhia Brasileira de Projetos e Obras (C.B.P.O) provided the all-important electromechanical equipment, including the dam’s turbines. Meanwhile, the project employed approximately 2,000 Paraguayan male laborers for a period of 40 months. At full operation, the dam generated 117 MW of power. By 1973, the Acaray hydroelectric dam project supplied electricity to Asunción and some 55 interior communities.

At the ceremonies for the 1968 inauguration of the first operational turbine, General Stroessner highlighted the project as the “clearest expression of patriotism of the Paraguayan people,” and stated:

We have overcome obstacles of every order. We have overcome the skepticism of the timid, the cynicism of the weak, and the doubt of those that did not want to believe in the extraordinary creative capacity of the Paraguayan man who, thanks to his nerve, muscles, and heart, reawakened the soul of the nation and now is transforming the land.

These words became the basic blueprint for the speeches given by Stroessner at the opening of every subsequent development project, be it a school, hospital, or hydroelectric dam. According to Stroessner, the historic moment, moreover, linked the people to the nationalistic and militaristic glory of the past and its re-imagined heroes: José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the López family, and Bernardino Caballero, the founder of the Colorado Party. These renovated “great men” of the nation, Stroessner stated, looked down from their place in “immortality” and agreed that Paraguay deserved a spot in the “civilized world.”

Taken as a whole, the speech that General Stroessner gave that day is important because it outlined, in no uncertain terms, the early “developmentalist” ideology of the regime. In this, Stroessner echoed the presidents of Brazil, including Vargas, Kubitschek, and later the Brazilian military. Stroessner opened his remarks by stating, “In the history of the development of our nation, the Acaray hydroelectric dam represents to both current

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78 Unfortunately, no information exists as to the exact breakdown of the workforce, their origins, etc.

79 Santos, La obra del siglo, 64. The Spanish reads: “Hemos debido superar inconvenientes de todo orden. Hemos superado el escepticismo de los apocados, la depresión de los incapaces y la negación de los que no quisieron creer en la extraordinaria capacidad creadora del hombre paraguayo, que gracias a sus nervios, a sus músculos y a su corazón está transformando el suelo patrio y vivificado el alma de la patria.”
and future generations an important milestone in our rising march toward progress.” In this view, development projects, and hydroelectric dams in particular, equaled national progress.

For Stroessner, more than just his “gift of light” (presente de luz) to the Paraguayan people, sufficient electricity would allow for industry to flourish and, more importantly, the natural wealth of the country to be extracted. Furthermore, Acaray represented the “cry of liberty” (grito libertario) of the country’s economy because Paraguay would no longer rely on costly oil imports. Just as he had broken the hold that Argentina held on the economy through the construction of the international highway, the free port in Brazil, and the “Friendship Bridge,” now Stroessner lauded Paraguay’s coming energy independence. Thus, the hydroelectric dam project embodied the dizzying heights of progress that occurred when “the creative force of the Paraguayan man” (esfuerzo creador del hombre paraguayo), who in this case had provided only the required labor force, combined with the flow of much needed funds from foreign lending institutions, and Brazil’s technical “know-how.”

The President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, in the congratulatory letter sent to General Stroessner, lauded Acaray as an “important step on the development path for Paraguay and its neighbors” and a step toward the realization of the goals of the Alliance for Progress, formulated by John F. Kennedy in March 1961, which aimed to reduce poverty through land reform, increased literacy, more equitable income distribution, and through democracy and social and economic planning by the state. Johnson evoked the 1961 Punta del Este Conference, claiming that the Acaray hydroelectric dam helped to accelerate the process of bringing down the physical barriers to Latin American unity: after all, the hydropower of Paraguay would be utilized by the factories of both Brazil and Argentina.81 Implied in this document is the idea that the resources of Paraguay were best utilized, not by Paraguay itself, but by its more industrialized neighbors.

80 Santos, La obra del siglo, 67. The Spanish reads: “En la historia del desarrollo de nuestro país, la usina hidroeléctrica del Acaray representa par alas presents y futures generaciones un importante jalón en nuestra marcha hacia el progreso.”
81 Santos, La obra del siglo, 65.
President Johnson’s statements hint at other central ideologies of the Stroessner regime, namely its emphasis on “pan-Americanism,” or regional and international cooperation, and the implementation of social and economic planning at the state level, both of which comprised central tenets of the Alliance for Progress.\textsuperscript{82} Generally speaking, the Alliance for Progress sought to bring peaceful economic prosperity to the masses as a counterweight to violent social revolution, such as the one seen in Cuba. Importantly, pan-Americanism had two facets: first, cooperation and close ties between the United States and Latin America and second, between the individual Latin American nations. Given the Cold War climate, this often took the form of mutual assistance in efforts to root out and neutralize suspected Communist threats and terrorist cells and other internal enemies, particularly as much of the Southern Cone countries succumbed to military regimes in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{83}

Pan-Americanism also took the form of direct and indirect technical assistance from countries with higher levels of development, which would be utilized in the economic planning schemes of the state. In order to receive foreign aid and international funding through such agencies as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), participation in the Alliance for Progress program (as defined in its charter) required that Latin American nations formulate an overall development plan with concrete goals and establish a stable economic policy.\textsuperscript{84} International cooperation would be the vehicle in which such modern planning concepts could be transferred to Paraguay.\textsuperscript{85} State planning in Paraguay had its roots in the 1940s, with the Plan Trienal (1940) and the Plan Quinquenal (1943) and carried into the 1950s, with the creation of the Comisión de Planeamiento Económico (Economic Planning Commission) in 1952.\textsuperscript{86} However, the latter proved mostly ineffectual due to a lack of a national-level agency and administration able to carry out its recommendations.

\textsuperscript{83} However, on a more positive note, it also represented early efforts at regional economic integration as well, most notably the Mercosur trade block.
\textsuperscript{84} Daland, \textit{Brazilian Planning}, 172-73.
\textsuperscript{86} Secretaría Técnica de Planificación, \textit{20 años de planificación}, 2.
Only after the military coup of General Stroessner and his so-called “second greatness” after 1954 did any agency receive a mandate to implement state-level planning. Heeding the requirements of the Alliance for Progress, Stroessner decreed the creation of the Secretaría Técnica de Planificación (Technical Planning Secretariat, S.T.P), under the control of the Office of the President, in March 1962. In sharp contrast to socialist planning, the particular brand of planning in Paraguay maintained the fundamental liberties of private enterprise and capital, while the state did not seek to “substitute the decisions of private companies” for their own.  

State directives followed the dictates of the Secretaría Técnica de Planificación, supervised by the executive, which took the form of national development plans. The S.T.P issued the first plan for the period 1965/66 and a variety of regional plans and economic reports soon followed. Lastly, among other policies, the planning adopted by the S.T.P favored regional development, particularly in the east of the country. As the economist Melissa Birch has noted, the plans often lacked concrete guides as to how best implement its goals and insufficient state revenues limited their impact. Furthermore, the plans always reiterated the regime’s planning policy that defined the role of the state as that of promoting the private sector by providing infrastructure and public investment in health, education, and social services. However, in practice, public investment flowed mainly to transportation and communications infrastructure projects, not social programs.  

Importantly, national planning was the heart and soul of the famous catchphrase of the Stroessner regime—bienstar nacional, or wellbeing of the nation—informing the “idea that national development signifies, fundamentally, the continued improvement in the living conditions of the Paraguayan man, of all the inhabitants of the nation.” However, bienestar went hand-in-hand with the consolidation of paz social, or social

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87 Secretaría Técnica de Planificación, 20 años de planificación, 10.
88 One of the requirements for participation in the Alliance for Progress was the creation of National Development Plans, issued for 1965/66, 1967/68, 1971/75, 1977/81.
90 Birch, “Public Enterprise and Economic Development,” 20, Table 1.8. According to Birch, investment, as a percentage of total government investment, in social infrastructure increased to 21 percent in 1981, while education received less than 6 percent of the total for the period 1965-1981. In comparison, transportation and communications received 73 percent in 1961, 94 percent in 1967, and declined to 54 percent in 1981.
91 Secretaría Técnica de Planificación, 20 años de planificación, 20.
peace, which represented the other catchphrase of the regime. “Social peace” signified the cooperation between the business class and the government, the latter would provide social stability and control of workers and citizens needed by the former in order to expand, invest, and produce a profit. However, paz social often came at the expense of democracy, itself an inconvenient requirement of the Alliance for Progress, which failed to make it into the list of goals of the national development plans. In Paraguay, social peace transformed into the phrase el precio de la paz, the “price of the peace,” characterized by endemic corruption, authoritarianism, state terror, and mass emigrations abroad.

According to the logic of state planning, a small nation such as Paraguay could not develop without the assistance of its larger neighbors, markets, foreign companies and investment, not to mention the ideological and economic support from the United States. In the latter case, the United States often turned a blind eye to the lack of democracy. In any case, the technical “know-how” and funding needed to extract primary resources, now including Paraguay’s water resources, would be provided from abroad, while Paraguayans supplied the labor force. In the technical jargon of the day, the S.T.P argued that “in light of the importance that international cooperation offers the country and the need for a rational utilization of the existing, or possible, means within a list of priorities which allows for the adequate complementation of international resources with national resources, necessitates a system of coordination and administration of international technical cooperation.” That is to say, rather, that infrastructure projects would be financed with international capital and built by a national labor force. In short, Acaray set the precedent for future development projects in the region, of which the world’s largest hydroelectric dam project soon followed.

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92 For the view of the regime regarding how all of these themes combined, see Felipe Herreira, Aquí se está viviendo una democracia del trabajo (Asunción: Imprenta Nacional, 1964).
93 General Stroessner, for his part, claimed that Paraguay had a “representative democracy” that needed protection from the advance of Communism. For a discussion of the relationship between the U.S. and Paraguay, see Mora and Cooney, Paraguay and the United States, 141.
95 Secretaría Técnica de Planificación, 20 años de planificación, 9. The Spanish reads: “Vista la importancia que la cooperación internacional tiene para el país y la necesidad de un aprovechamiento racional de los medios existentes o posibles, dentro de un esquema de prioridades que permita una adecuada complementación de los recursos internacionales con los nacionales, se hizo indispensable contar con un sistema de coordinación y administración de la cooperación técnica internacional.”
The Project of the Century: Itaipú Binacional

Construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Alto Paraná itself, usually slated to be constructed at the Guiará Falls (Sete Quedas), had long been contemplated, but never built, mainly due to technical limitations. However, by the mid-twentieth century, both the technology required and the apparent necessity of the project had become increasingly clear to Brazil.

As the voice of industrialists of São Paulo put it, the desired Alto Paraná project represented a “century’s long dream” (o sonho de um século) which, if realized, would bring needed energy to Brazil, which they characterized as “a nation with human potential and abundant material resources,” in order finally to make real its ambitious development plans, and to its smaller neighbor Paraguay, characterized as “a nation of more modest prospects for growth,” but nonetheless hoping to raise the standard of living of its people. In this view, the project would benefit Brazil directly, and bring poor Paraguay along on the coattails. Importantly, one of the first studies commissioned by Eletrobrás after its founding in 1962 was the Sete Quedas hydroelectric dam project. Shortly thereafter, the Ministerio de Minas e Energia dispatched Engineer Mário Lopes Leão to Asunción to open a dialogue regarding the proposed project.

The location of the proposed Sete Quedas hydroelectric dam posed diplomatic problems. In the portion of the Paraná River best suited for the construction of the dam, the river constituted the border between Brazil and Paraguay, and by international law each country owned half of the water. The 1966 Act of Foz do Iguaçu stipulated that the two nations share the electricity produced by any hydroelectric dam constructed on the river. Brazil made two extraordinary concessions to Paraguay in their subsequent negotiations: first, Brazil agreed to finance Paraguay’s share of the costs of construction; and second, Brazil extended to Paraguay equal shares (direitos iguais) and ownership to both the dam itself and its subsequent administration. As outlined in the Brazil-Paraguay

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96 “7 Quedas,” Banas Informa: revista econômica e financeira (24 de janeiro de 1966), 6. The Portuguese reads: “...uma nação com potencial humano e recursos materiais de vulto” and “...uma nação de perspectivas mais modestas de crescimento.”

97 Motoyama, Tecnologia e industrialização no Brasil, 179.

98 For a discussion of the peculiarities of constructing a bi-national project in the Río de la Plata Basin as well as the corresponding treaties, see Laércio F. Betiol, Itaipu: modelo avançada de cooperação internacional na Bacia do Prata (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1983) and Debernardi, Apuntes para la historia política de Itaipú.
Treaty of 1973, the Alto Paraná project, christened in 1974 with the name of “Itaipú Binacional,” would be built with 50 percent Brazilian capital and 50 percent Paraguayan capital, or at least in theory. The “equal shares” doctrine also extended to its construction, as the consortium of five Brazilian construction firms had to be matched by a consortium of five Paraguayan construction firms. In Paraguay, ANDE would be responsible for administration of the completed project, and in Brazil, Eletrobrás would perform a similar role.

While it was not difficult to find five Brazilian firms with the size and experience to construct such a massive project, the opposite was true in Paraguay. The “equal shares” policy required that both Brazilian and Paraguayan firms participate, though it was clearly unrealistic to expect full compliance, in the dam’s construction. Wilson Quintella, as part of Corrêa Camargo Co., the largest construction firm, relates that he approached Enzo Debernardi, the director of A.N.D.E, with the idea of creating a consortium of five Paraguayan companies. Each of the members of the consortium would be linked to their counterpart in the consortium of Brazilian companies, which as a senior partner would oversee operations. Although far short of the 50/50 ideal, the Paraguayan consortium was expected to complete approximately 10 percent of the total construction on the dam. In the resulting meeting in Asunción with the twenty top businessmen in Paraguay, Quintella made his pitch. In this meeting, the engineer and entrepreneur Juan Carlos Wasmosy emerged as a leader of the faction of Paraguayan businessmen.

Under the auspices of the Itaipú Binacional entity, the hydroelectric dam project was built as a joint venture between the military dictatorships of Brazil and Paraguay. For each officer in Brazil there was an identical counterpart in Paraguay, for example, the

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99 Itaipú was the name given by the indigenous people to the small, rocky island located in the middle of the Paraná River, on the site of the eventual hydroelectric dam project. In Portuguese, however, there is no accent on the last syllable.

100 If interested in viewing the various documents, including treaties, financing agreements, negotiations, and the role of Conempa, see Juan Carlos Wasmosy Monti, Archivo ITAIPU: memorias y documentos inéditos (Asunción: Colorshop Estación Gráfica, 2008). For the legal and diplomatic background, see Efraim Enríquez Gamón, Aguas que valen oro (Asunción: Edición del Autor, 1975); Laercio Beitol, Itaipú, modelo avançado de cooperação internacional na Bacia do Prata (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1983); and Enzo Debernardi, Apuntes para la historia política de Itaipú (Asunción: Editorial Gráfica Continua, 1996)

101 Quintella, Memórias do Brasil Grande, 288-89.
positions of General Director, Technical Director, Director of Finance, Administrative Director, and so forth. Thus the corporate structure is duplicated at all levels, while a main CEO (in practice, always Brazilian in nationality) for the corporation coordinated the activities of each branch. In addition, a representative of the respective governments monitored and reported back to national leaders, in this case, the military.

To build the dam, the reservoir, and the necessary physical and social infrastructure, the bi-national corporation eventually expropriated vast tracts of land totaling 105,883 hectares on the Paraguayan side and 124,941 hectares on the Brazilian side of the Paraná River. Working as sub-contractors for the bi-national entity, a consortium of Paraguayan companies, Conempa, S.R.L., and a consortium of Brazilian companies, Unicon, Ltda, together constructed the hydroelectric dam project. However, it was understood that the Brazilian consortium Unicon would steward the Paraguayan consortium Conempa.

The consortia built 9,374 housing units (5,226 in Brazil and 4,148 in Paraguay), recreation facilities, parks, churches, supermarkets, and administration buildings, paved roads, street lighting, and sewerage in three developments (conjuntos habitacionais) in the outskirts of Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil (popularly known as Vilas A, B, and C) and eight developments (Áreas 1-8) in and around the small Paraguayan towns of Puerto Presidente Stroessner, Hernandarias, and Puerto Presidente Franco. The subcontracted firms built a school system designed for nearly 16,000 students, medical clinics, and hospitals for workers and their families. In addition, both Conempa and Unicon were jointly responsible for the construction of the main dam works. To this end, the consortium companies housed about 21,100 Brazilian and roughly 14,600 Paraguayan (mostly married or partnered) workers and family members. Up to 12,000 single men

102 Conempa, or Consorcio de Empresas Constructoras Paraguayas S.R.L., comprised the following Paraguayan companies: Ecca, S.A.; Barrail Hermanos S.A de Construcciones; Compañía General de Construcciones, S.R.L.; Empresa Constructora Minera Paraguaya (Ecomipa), S.A.; Jimenez Gaona y Lima-Ingenieros Civiles Empresa de Construcciones; Ingeniero Civil Hermann Baumann Empresario de Obras. Unicon, or União de Constructoras Ltda., consisted of the following Brazilian companies: Cetenco Engenharia, S.A.; Constructora Mendes Júnior, S.A.; Companhia Brasileira de Projetos e Obras (C.B.P.O); Constructora Andrade Gutierres, S.A.; and Construções e Comércio Camargo Correa, S.A.

103 Motoyama, Tecnologia e industrialização no Brasil, 179.
Map 2: Proprietary Zone and Worker Housing Developments, Áreas 1-8 (Paraguay) and Vilas A-C (Brazil)

lived in quarters, known as “H Barracks” owing to their shape, on the construction site.\textsuperscript{104} [Table 2.1] In addition, a small number of single male engineers and managers lived in a development of small apartments located on-site.

As implemented by the corporation, the workers’ communities were divided both by space and a gendered division of labor that separated engineers from cement workers, single men from family men, and men from women. Married and skilled workers with families lived in new residences constructed for them in town and safely away from the construction site, unskilled and semi-skilled workers lived in housing constructed closer to the dam, and single male workers were housed in large barracks on the site. Women workers, banned from construction jobs, were employed by the bi-national corporation as secretaries, nurses, cleaning personnel, and to a lesser degree as teachers and social and welfare professionals. Additionally, large numbers of women stayed at home to take care of household responsibilities and children.

The engineering project proceeded on a construction schedule (cronograma) beginning approximately in 1974 and ending in 1991. [Table 2.2] The social infrastructure, such as roads, houses, etc., for workers and their families, and the engineering infrastructure commenced in 1974. Thereafter, the project proceeded in three major phases: the diversion of the Paraná River (1976-78), the construction of the dam (1979-1982), and the installation of the turbines and related electrical equipment (1983-1991).\textsuperscript{105} The period 1977-1981 represented the most labor-intensive phase of the project and required the employment of large numbers of unskilled workers, particularly by the subcontracted firms. Broadly defined, workers on the project fell into the four different categories of engineers, administrators, employees, and laborers, based on their level of skill, education, and function within the companies.\textsuperscript{106}

**Conclusion**

From the first months of 1957, when Paraguayan governmental, Church, and military officials reached out to found a new city on the banks of the Alto Paraná to the beginning

\textsuperscript{104} The work site had a total capacity to house 12,000 workers, mostly in the “H Barracks.”

\textsuperscript{105} The dam reached full capacity (12,000MW) in 1991, with the installation of the last turbines.

\textsuperscript{106} These four broad divisions are enshrined in the Itaipú Binacional logo, with a different color representing each category of worker.
of construction on Itaipú Binacional in 1974, the borderlands became an increasingly important location for Brazil and Paraguay, and their respective national aspirations. In particular, the hydroelectric power potential of the Paraná River and its tributaries was seen as a panacea for the economic ills of the two military regimes. For Paraguay, the region represented an “emporium of progress,” a new outlet to the sea, and an end to exploitation at the hands of Argentina. For Brazil, harnessing of the power of the Paraná River meant continued industrialization and a shot at realizing its aspirations to great power status.

The future promise of the region, particularly employment, drew thousands of migrants from all over Brazil and Paraguay. For those men (and women) who found work on the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project, corporate officials sought to reshape them—not without complications—into productive, patriotic, and healthy citizens of the nation. Focusing on Paraguay, the Alto Paraná represented a “promised land” with the power to forge a “New Paraguay” from among the men who migrated there in search of work.
Table 2.1: Number of Employees of the Contracted Firms in Operation in the Itaipú Project Area

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¹ A consortium company specializing in the fabrication and installation of electrical equipment and turbines.

² Category that consisted mostly of general contracting companies employed to assist in the construction of the social infrastructure of the worker’s communities.

³ After 1986, Itaipú Binacional no longer reported the breakdown of the number of employees by subcontractor. Data is approximated from 1987-1989, based on figures provided in the Annual Report.
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Figure 2.1: The Paraguayan State Arrives to the Alto Paraná, February 1957

Figure 2.2: Stroessner and Kubitschek in Foz do Iguaçu, 1956

Figure 2.3: Men of Steel

Figure 2.4: The “Friendship Bridge” under Construction, c. 1963

CHAPTER THREE

Prodigal Sons in the Promised Land: Migration, Work, and Masculinity at the Itaipú Hydroelectric Dam, Alto Paraná, 1976-1980

The garden of Itaipú, though planted under a banner of peace, dialogue, and understanding, is irrigated by the laborious sweat of our sons.

The Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project attracted migrants from all corners of Paraguay in search of employment and a better future. Once there, company officials, engineers, social workers, and medical personnel sought to transform workers to their own ends, the needs of the company and of the project, and to the future productivity of the nation. These officials engineered every detail of the physical environment in which workers lived and labored, through vocational and training programs, worker safety programs, sports and recreation programs, codes of conduct, and fiscal incentives.

Despite the best efforts of company officials and educators, many Paraguayan single male workers proved difficult, if not impossible, to control and reform. While company officials simultaneously denigrated and celebrated the traditional Paraguayan worker, single male workers molded and adapted themselves to the new work environment at Itaipú Binacional according to their own understanding of their masculinity. Such adaptation, however, often ran counter to corporate programs that sought to create model workers and good citizens. By late-1979, company restructuring signaled the beginning of the end of the single male Paraguayan worker as the predominant category of worker and a transition to the era of the married, family man on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project.

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1 Ernesto Wasmosy, Administrative Director of Conempa. “Itaipú Abre una Nueva Era,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de 1978), 2. The Spanish reads: “La era de Itaipú es, sin embargo, realizada en un marco de paz, diálogo, entendimiento, y regada con el sudor laborioso de sus hijos.”

2 While both male workers and their female partners and children fell under the purview of the company, this chapter will address only the men, in particular the single male migrant worker housed on the job site. Male workers with spouses and families will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter.
Conempa: The National Company

On 5 December 1978, General Alfredo Stroessner, President of the Republic of Paraguay, from his executive office in the Palacio de López in Asunción, penned a brief letter to the engineer Juan Carlos Wasmosy Monti (and future president of Paraguay) congratulating him and his company Conempa, S.R.L. for their generous contribution to the nation. The company had constructed and then donated two public schools in the towns of Boquerón and Paso de Patria in the State of Ñeembucú. Founded in December of 1975, Conempa, S.R.L, a consortium of Paraguayan companies, represented the most important and highest profile corporation in the history of the country. Conempa was also one of the two main consortium companies selected to construct the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project in the eastern border state of Alto Paraná and on the Paraná River.

In his communiqué to Wasmosy, Stroessner praised Conempa, stating that hydroelectric dam project “had definitively established the ability, the bravery, and the intelligence of the Paraguayan Man.”3 The rest of the citizenry of the nation, he went on to say, should feel a legitimate pride in every one of the employees of the company. For Stroessner, however, the directors of Conempa represented a “true spirit of patriotism” (un verdadero sentido de Patria) because they had not forgotten to extend the fruit of their labors altruistically to the Paraguayan peasantry and “source of all of our worry and disquiet.”4

In Stroessner’s letter cited above, Conempa and its directors and projects tied together several characteristics and themes current in the 1970s in Paraguay. First, the company was an open collaboration between the military, business elites, and the ruling Colorado Party, of which both Stroessner and Wasmosy were members. Thus, Conempa was, to cut through the flowery rhetoric of patriotism, simultaneously both Paraguayan and Colorado, corporate and political to its core. Second, as the General’s thinly veiled statements show, the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam represented more than just a construction project, but rather the very validation of the Paraguayan man and his

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3 Letter reprinted in “Honroso para CONEMPA,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 1. The Spanish reads: “…ha consagrado definitivamente la capacidad, el valor, y la inteligencia del Hombre Paraguayo.”
4 “Honroso para CONEMPA,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 1. The Spanish reads: “…fuente de todas nuestras inquietudes y preocupaciones.”
abilities. Therefore, in many ways, the Itaipú hydroelectric dam was a test of, and, according to General Stroessner, a triumph of national masculinity and manhood. Lastly, under the combined rubrics of national development and patriotism, Stroessner rightfully drew attention to the rural peasant and migrant as the locus of the energies of company officials and signaled his relief at the full employment the project provided to this sector of the population. While General Stroessner did not make it clear the reasons behind his “worry and disquiet,” most likely he referred to the political activism of landless peasants in the countryside and the related calls for agrarian reform.\footnote{For a discussion of land tenure and social conflict in Paraguay during this period, see Quentín Riquelme, \textit{Los sin tierra en Paraguay: conflictos agrarios y movimiento campesino} (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2003) and Beverly Y. Nagel, “‘Unleashing the Fury’: The Cultural Discourse of Rural Violence and Land Rights in Paraguay,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 41:1 (January 1999):148-181.}

**The Promised Land: Paraguayan Labor Migration to the Alto Paraná**

Dozens of Paraguayan men arrived daily from every corner of the country to the Conempa Employment Center (Centro de Admisional) located in Puerto Presidente Stroessner on the Paraguayan side of the border. Emblematic of these men was the small knapsack that they carried on their shoulder that contained the few possessions that they brought from their hometown or, in colloquial speech, their valley. According to Juan Báez Florencio, Director of the Conempa Department of Human Resources (Departamento de Recursos Humanos), these men arrived with “an enormous cargo of illusions and a desire to work” as “pilgrims in search of a better horizon” to the patch of native soil that Itaipú had converted into the “promised land” (\textit{tierra prometida}) of Paraguay.\footnote{“Recursos Humanos,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 2. The Spanish reads: “...un enorme cargamento de ilusiones y ganas de trabajar...” and “...peregrinos en busca de un horizonte mejor.”}

Paraguay, in general, and Alto Paraná, specifically, fashioned as the Promised Land, reversed the pattern in which laborers ventured to neighboring countries, most often Argentina, in search of employment. As the editor of the company newspaper \textit{Conempa Remiandú} remarked:

\begin{quote}

it was normal that the youth...looked to the other side of the border and set out on a journey, with an uncertain destiny, in the search for better horizons and the remote hope of some day returning to their
\end{quote}
native land and opening a ‘boliche’ (neighborhood grocery) with their saved earnings from Buenos Aires, to buy a ‘pingo’ (good horse, promiscuous woman, or both), in order to test fate in the popular professions of their valley.\(^7\)

This traditional pattern of labor migration provided an unskilled and cheap workforce for Argentina and acted as a safety valve for excess and non-utilizable labor in Paraguay. However, as the editors of the company newspaper made clear, the traditional ebb and flow of labor migration had contributed to the chronic underdevelopment of the nation.\(^8\) Not all of these migrants returned to Paraguay with the same resources, the editor argued, as some found greater success than others because they knew how “to take advantage” (*aprovechar*) at just the right moment. The theme of saving money in order to invest in a small business upon return to the native village is a central plotline in these migration narratives.

For corporate and governmental officials, therefore, the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project represented a reversal of the past and “the return of the prodigal sons to the familial bosom,”\(^9\) allowing for the first time for native Paraguayans to work on Paraguayan soil, to work for a Paraguayan company, and to work with other Paraguayan professionals and laborers. Within this official corporate narrative, there is no mention of female migration or the return of “prodigal daughters,” only sons. In addition to unskilled laborers, skilled professionals (such as engineers often trained in other Latin American countries, Europe, and the United States) also worked outside of Paraguay for lack of employment opportunities within their own borders. Thus, for company officials, the new narrative of migration to the borderlands had the Paraguayan male, prodigal or otherwise, as its central figure and protagonist.

\(^7\) “La Vuelta de los Hijos Pródigos,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “...era normal esperar que los jóvenes y los mismos adultos pasaran sus miradas allende las fronteras y emprendieran el viaje, con suerte desconocida por cierto, en la búsqueda de mejores horizontes y con la remota esperanza de volver alguna vez a la tierra natal e instalar un buen ‘boliche’ con lo ahorrado allá por Buenos Aires, y comprarse un buen ‘pingo’ parejero, para tantear suerte en las carreras sabatinas de su valle.”

\(^8\) For a study of internal labor migration in Paraguay, see Berta Hochsztajn, *Paraguay: estudio de la migración interna, utilización de una muestra censal, 1962* (Asunción: Centro Latinoaméricano de demografía, 1973).

\(^9\) “La Vuelta de los Hijos Pródigos,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “...la vuelta de los hijos pródigos al seno familiar.”
The terms *barrageiro* or *represero*, the respective Portuguese and Spanish words for dam worker, could be applied generally to all workers on the project from the highest level of management to the lowest level of general laborer. However, the terms *barrageiro* and *represero* often referred to skilled workers with prior experience on hydroelectric dam projects. Beginning with the Urubupungá hydroelectric dam complex, engineers and workers with prior experience constructing dams moved from one project to the next in succession. Such workers hailed mostly from Brazil, which had a longer history of hydroelectric dam construction in both Latin America and later in Africa, although they could be of Chilean, Argentine, and even Paraguayan nationality. Importantly, these skilled workers tended to be married with children and to live in the worker housing developments built by the corporations. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the spouse of the dam worker often was referred to as the *barrageira* or *represera*, whose labor in the home acted as a complement to his work on the job site.

Paraguayan examples of the dam worker include Domingo Escobar Ferreira, who migrated to the borderlands from the interior resort-town of Ypacaí to work as a foreman for the Companhia Brasileira de Projetos e Obras (C.B.P.O) constructing the Yguazú Dam project in Brazil before joining Conempa in 1976. An additional example is Florencio Solís Portillo, a native of General Artigas, who worked for Conempa as the head foreman of the crane and monorail section. Before his position at Itaipú Binacional, Solís worked on several hydroelectric dam projects in Argentina and Uruguay, including as a foreman for the Italian engineering firm Impregilio Zolíazo constructing the Chocón-Cerro Colorado Dam from 1971 to 1973, the Planicle Banderita Dam in 1974, and the Salto Uruguay Dam from 1974 to 1977. At Itaipú Binacional both men were married and lived with their family in Area 4 located in Puerto Presidente Stroessner.10

A third example is the Paraguayan Victoriano Fernández, who literally worked his way across the country several times, from the Chaco in the west to Alto Paraná in the east, before landing a job on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. Fernández’ itinerant work history is fascinating in itself. In 1956, he worked clearing away the forestland as part of the construction and paving of the portion of the international highway extension from Coronel Oviedo to Puerto Presidente Stroessner. After the completion of the eastern

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10 “La gente de Conempa,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:5 (20 de febrero de 1979), 5.
highway, he found employment operating heavy machinery for the Compañía Morrison before moving back to the western part of the country to work for the Compañía Punto Cuarto constructing the Chaco portion of the Ruta International between the towns of Cerrito and Tacuaras. Afterwards, Fernández migrated back to Alto Paraná. In Puerto Presidente Stroessner, the Brazil-Paraguay Mixed Commission, charged with assessing the hydroelectric potential of the Paraná River, contracted Fernández for a short time. In 1963, he was employed on the Acaray Dam project, located just to the southwest of the Alto Paraná town of Hernandarias, being constructed at the time by the Italian engineering firm Torno. After its completion, Fernández found employment at the nearby Yguazú Dam project in Brazil, working for C.B.P.O as a foreman in charge of heavy machinery. In 1975, he joined Unicon as a bulldozer driver before transferring to Conempa, where he eventually worked his way up through the company to a position as general foreman by 1979.11

In contrast were the unskilled and mostly unmarried Paraguayan laborers that migrated on their own accord from all parts of the country to Puerto Presidente Stroessner in search of employment on the Itaipú Binacional project. Once in the borderlands, there existed within the hiring process a clear distinction between skilled or professional workers and unskilled laborers. Skilled, educated, or generally experienced workers were most likely recruited in Asunción (and other urban centers) or, as the previous examples demonstrate, transferred from prior hydroelectric dam projects. For example, Dario Caceres Invernizzi worked for Conempa as a carpenter and, as a single male, lived in the worker’s barracks located on-site. A native of Caaguazú, Caceres had attained a basic education (3rd Basic Course) before he arrived at the border zone. For the first five months of employment by Conempa he worked as a carpenter’s assistant and, with subsequent experience and training, eventually moved up to a Level 2 Carpenter.12

Paraguayan migrants also found employment with the Brazilian consortium company Unicon and were housed in the H Barracks located on the Brazilian side (termed the M.E., margem esquerda, or left bank) of the project. For example, five Paraguayans resided together in room number one of the A-6 Barracks. Typical of the

12 “La gente de Conempa,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:5 (20 de febrero de 1979), 5.
barracks, the room contained three sets of bunk beds and housed six workers in total. The Paraguayan residents included Rumildo Pedrozo, a native of Sapucaí, Francisco Cardozo of Barrero Grande, Gabriel X. of Iturbeño, and the Rodríguez brothers, Hermenegildo and Juan B., of Misiones province. Rumildo and Francisco worked as personnel assistants, Hermenegildo and Gabriel worked as carpenters, and Juan B. worked as an assistant in the Topography section, all for Unicon.

These particular workers came to the attention of company officials for two reasons. First, as an example of the “festive spirit of the Paraguayan” (el espiritu festivo del paraguayo), the article highlighted the common practice among Paraguayans of the giving of nicknames based on physical appearance. Importantly, the names were in Guaraní and included Cururú (frog), Mburicá (mule), Guiagüingüe (of slight build), Yasy Yateré (light-haired and pale-skinned), and Teyú (lizard). Second, the young men became famous for the artwork that they drew on the walls of their room, in particular the work of 22 year-old Rumildo. Rumildo sketched a variety of images on the walls of the room that included among other things a motorcycle, musical motifs, and the British group The Beatles. However, the predominant images were of nude or scantily clad women.  

Generally, unskilled workers such as Dario Caceres and the young men of A-6 barracks were not formally recruited by the company, but rather formed and utilized informal social networks to facilitate migration to the border zone and the procurement of employment on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. For example, a worker who had migrated already and successfully found a job typically would sponsor a friend or relative from his native town or village. In this scenario, once in the border zone the pupilo (boarder) searched for employment and lived in the home of the manager. In this way, the so-called radio peón (peasant radio) channeled workers to the borderlands.

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14 Interview with Lic. Rubén Amado Colmán Vargas, Centro Comunitario de Itaipú, M.D., 17 March 2006. Not only unskilled workers utilized this “radio” network, however. Professionals with degrees in a variety of fields, such as psychology, sociology, etc., migrated to the borderlands to apply directly to the companies. In this interview, Colmán also reported that, in an inversion of gender roles, the boarder performed household chores, such as washing the other male worker’s clothes, in exchange for room and board, until he found employment.
Once in Puerto Presidente Stroessner, the unemployed lined up at the Conempa Employment Center. To obtain employment with the consortium company, applicants had to complete a battery of exams that tested intelligence, personality, and vocational knowledge in specific fields. From this applicant pool, candidates for employment were then interviewed and processed into the company. Conempa official’s goal was to sort out and select only the best workers among the applicant pool. Juan Báez Florencio, Director of Human Resources for Conempa, stated it directly: “we are interested in knowing the individual being interviewed: his personality, his family circle, his inclinations, his sense of responsibility, his pretensions, as well as any potential problems of a social or economic nature derived from this veritable exodus registered from the furthest corners of our country to the Itaipú zone.”

However, despite the department’s best efforts, Director Báez openly admitted that the need for such a great volume of workers on the project forced the company to accept applicants that fell well below the desired standard.

Officials involved in the selection of workers for employment at Conempa understood their task to be two-fold. First, to employ the men that arrived in search of work and, second, to not “extinguish the flame of illusions that shines in the pupils in each person that arrives in our Centro Admisional looking for work.” Additionally, officials recognized that the “immense majority of those that arrive…come from afar, with their ‘cargo of hope’ (carga de esperanzas), but frequently without financial means to confront a negative outcome or delays.” Signaling their sensitivity to the plight of the applicant, Conempa’s upper management put in place a staff with a clear sense of service to the company whose task it was to “search for the most convenient and least dramatic way to say no to some applicant, always leaving in his soul some spark of hope of what

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15 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:5 (20 de febrero de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “...nos interesa conocer del individuo entrevistado: su persona, su círculo familiar, sus inclinaciones, su sentido de responsabilidad, sus pretensiones, así como los posibilidades problemas de índole social o económica derivados de este verdadero éxodo que se registra desde los rincones más alejados de nuestro país hacia esta zona de ITAIPU.”

16 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 2. The Spanish reads: “...tratar de no extinguir esa llamita de ilusiones que brilla en las pupilas de cada persona que se llega hasta nuestro Centro Admisional, solicitando trabajo.”

17 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 2. The Spanish reads: “...la inmensa mayoría de los que llegan hasta nuestro Centro Admisional, viene de lejos, con su carga de esperanzas, pero, con muchísima frecuencia, sin medios económicos, como para afrontar un resultado negativo o demoras...”
some day might be possible.” In addition, officials also wanted to protect the image of Paraguay’s flagship company, believing that applicants developed their first impressions of Conempa through the admission process.

Applicants who successfully ran the gauntlet of diagnostics and interviews moved on to a series of medical examinations that tested the physical health of workers. For example, applicants received a physical exam, chest X-ray, and fecal, urine, and blood tests to screen for tuberculosis, parasites, and syphilis, both upon hiring and every 6-12 months thereafter. Additionally, nurses administered injections of vaccine to protect workers against tetanus and yellow fever and treatment for lice infestation. [Figure 3.2] Taken as a whole, company officials argued that both the mental and physical examinations were necessary in order to establish proof of mental and physical aptitude required for the job to be executed. At the end of the hiring process, workers received a Conempa identity badge and a specific employee number.

After processing through the Employment Center and the Human Resources Department, single male hires reported to the Work Site (Sitio de obras) for orientation. For the newly hired and unmarried worker, the Social Service (Sección de Servicio Social) of Conempa figured prominently from that point forward. The Social Service Section was a department under the umbrella of the Department of Social Welfare (Departamento de Bienestar Social) of Conempa. Social Service employees greeted the newly hired workers, conducted a tour of the Work Site and community facilities, showed workers where and how to dock time cards, where to eat, and assigned rooms in and explained the rules and regulations concerning single worker housing in the H Barracks. In addition, Social Service agents escorted new hires to other departments within the complex, for instance the Conempa Department of Workplace Safety and Hygiene (Departamento de Seguridad y Higiene del Trabajo, S.H.T), where specialists gave a basic, introductory lecture to workers on the prevention of accidents and the rules and regulations regarding worker safety. Additional instruction offered in the community center located on site later built upon these introductory courses.

18 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 2.
20 Itaipú Binacional, “Acuerdo administrativo complementario sobre higiene y seguridad del trabajo aplicable a los trabajadores contratados por la Itaipú y sus contratistas y subcontratistas de obras y locadores y sublocadores de servicios,” Documentos oficiales de Itaipú, 131.
A New Paraguay

Within the confines of the proprietary zone of Itaipú Binacional, Conempa officials provided services to workers that included health, education, recreation, culture, and religion that represented “a perfect society in miniature with all of the needed services for a highly demanding and diverse human Community.”\(^1\) Additionally, for the purposes of peace and worker harmony, the company prohibited the sale of alcohol in company stores and its consumption, banned gambling, and prohibited male workers from having female visitors in their rooms at any time of the day or night.

In this way, corporate officials drew a sharp distinction between the chaos and conflictive nature of labor, often characterized as a violent war between Man and Nature, on the construction site of the hydroelectric dam project and the contrasting organization and tranquility of the utopian community that housed workers on-site. All in all, these facilities catered to a diverse population of workers, both from different levels (laborers, general employees, and engineers) within the consortium companies Conempa and Unicon and Itaipú Binacional and to a variety of nationalities. Thus, the Work Zone (Cantero de Obras\(^2\)) existed as a multinational, multicultural, and multilingual space where workers could live and work in harmony.\(^3\) Within the work site, additionally, both the Spanish and Portuguese language had official status. As company officials liked to point out, on site one could find Brazilian engineers speaking Spanish and Paraguayan engineers speaking Portuguese, but “always using the same language…[of] brotherhood.”\(^4\)

The main focus of the services provided on-site centered upon single male workers and their real and imagined needs. After the “profound and the heroic labors of the work day,” Conempa officials had to interpret the rather mundane mandate given to them by Itaipú Binacional, namely, that the workers and employees housed on-site have

\(^1\) “Guerra en Itaipú,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:12 (20 de setiembre de 1979), 3. “The Spanish reads: “...una perfecta sociedad en miniatura con todos los servicios requeridos por una Comunidad humana altamente exigente y variada.”

\(^2\) The area of construction could be referred to as either the Sitio de obras or the Cantero de obras, almost interchangeably. However, the Cantero specifically denoted the portion of the proprietary zone where workers lived, ate, shopped, and recreated.

\(^3\) “Nucleo Comunitario, sitio de obras M.D., qué es, como funciona,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 2.

\(^4\) “ITAIPU: Separata da revista Construção Pesada,” Construção Pesada (Março de 1979), 4
healthy entertainments to fill their free time.\textsuperscript{25} To that end, in the El Cantero Community Center located within the proprietary confines of the job site, the Conempa Administration Department (Departamento de Administración) operated a climate controlled movie theater, gymnasium, a lounge for watching television, rooms for the playing of games (checkers, chess, billiards, etc., but not card games) and small commercial shops that included a bank, barber shop, a shoe and clothing store selling “the latest fashions” (\textit{con las últimas modas}), laundry, small electronics shop, newsstand and a snack bar.\textsuperscript{26} [\textbf{Figure 3.3}] The work site also housed a state-of-the-art Medical Center that included an emergency room, dental clinic, infirmary, and a pharmacy.

Moreover, the on-site community center included classrooms where workers met with instructors for a variety of educational objectives. For instance, the Literacy Center (Centro de Alfabetización) offered courses for workers to learn how to read and write. Beyond basic literacy and education, the stated purpose of these classes was to create better Paraguayans. For instance, instructors sought to instill a feeling of respect and veneration for national values through “a purer sense of what it meant to be Paraguayan” and to instill the value of education and consciousness regarding citizenship and democracy so that workers would be in the end more useful to society.\textsuperscript{27} As the instructor Sra. Francisca Luz Bella de Garayo underscored, the program gave “opportunity to each individual to develop his abilities, habits, and knowledge…to the end of arriving at being…each day more useful not only to the Company, but also to the country and their family.”\textsuperscript{28} [\textbf{Figure 3.4}]

Such courses met three times per week for sessions of 50 minutes each over a period of five months. One graduate of the program, Conempa employee Teófilo Benítez, wrote homage to the “people’s company”:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} “Ecos de las Febriles Competencias,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 8. Itaipú Binacional oversaw the entire operation, however, Conempa and Unicon officials implemented and administered their own programs for workers on their respective side, or bank, of the project. While similar in many respects, Conempa and Unicon programs differed in the details of the program, usually based on cultural differences.
\item \textsuperscript{26} “Próxima Habilitación del Centro Comunitario M.D.,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:1 (20 de octubre de 1978), 8.
\item \textsuperscript{27} The Spanish reads: “los más puros sentimientos de paraguayidad.”
\item \textsuperscript{28} “Alfabetización y Educación de Adulto,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 2:19 (20 de abril de 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “oportunidad a cada individuo a desarrollar sus actitudes, hábitos y conocimientos...a fin de llegar a ser...cada día más útil no sólo a la Empresa, sino también al país a la familia.”
\end{itemize}
**Hymn to Conempa** (Himno a Conempa)

CONEMPA - the Paraguayan Company,  
Who will ever forget you?  
Under the banner of brotherhood and love,  
Your sons happily embrace you.  
CONEMPA, CONEMPA!  
National company  
With you I found purpose,  
A job and an education.  
ITAIPE – a grandiose project,  
Already becoming a reality  
through the force of two grand Nations,  
Of Brazil and Great Paraguay  
CONEMPA-la Empresa Paraguaya,  
¿Quién puede olvidarte ya?  
Tus hijos se abrazan contentos,  
En signo de amor y hermandad.  
¡CONEMPA, CONEMPA!  
Empresa nacional  
En tí yo hallé trabajo,  
Trabajo y educación.  
ITAIPE – una obra grandiose,  
que se torna ya una realidad  
con esfuerzo de dos grandes Naciones,  
del Brasil y el Gran Paraguay.  

The hymn clearly defines Conempa as a distinctively Paraguayan enterprise and highlights the twin benefits of work and education provided by the company, while simultaneously highlighting the cooperative spirit between the nations of Brazil and Paraguay. The hymn, in addition, reinforces the notion that the national company is a place for the sons of the nation, who are working for the future greatness of Paraguay. In any case, the poem is an example of patriotic propaganda and its influence on workers.

In addition to literacy programs, workers could enroll in a course in primary education that offered instruction at a basic, remedial level. In March of 1979, approximately 70 adult workers enrolled in the literacy program and approximately 85 adult workers took part in the remedial program. Furthermore, the complex contained classrooms where workers received instruction in worker safety and vocational programs. For example, during the high watermark year of 1978, approximately 800 courses were offered to 10,000 workers and employees depending on their category that included instruction in carpentry, welding, masonry, mechanics, auto maintenance, electrical systems, and hydraulics, instruction in the proper operation of heavy machinery, trucks, bulldozers, and cranes, and instruction in security protocols, effective management techniques, the psychology of human relations, worker safety, and first aid.  

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In a separate complex adjacent to the community center, a large dining hall, with a capacity to serve 10,000 meals at a time, feed workers and employees of the companies. Based on precise calculations of calories necessary for the labor of each category of worker, scientific principles regulated the daily menu. For instance, according to the research, administrative personnel required 1500-1700 calories per day, while laborers required 1700-1800 calories per day. Furthermore, the distinctive cultural tastes of Brazilians and Paraguayans were taken into consideration and both nationalities selected from a variety of ethnic and even regional dishes.31

For the workers housed on-site, a Catholic mass held each Tuesday evening in the cinema provided religious sustenance. Importantly, Catholicism was the only religion promoted by Conempa within the work site and the only choice offered to workers on the Paraguayan side of the project. Catholic workers from Itaipú Binacional and the consortium companies of Unicon and Conempa all could participate in the services. According to company officials, the Itaipú hydroelectric dam showcased the power of the engineer and of machines, but held a special significance to Christian life because Man exposed his true human dimension through the exploitation of Nature. In the process, priests argued that a form of Christian progress resulted for everyone.

For their part, company officials hoped to imbue a distinctively Catholic and “Christian meaning to engineering.”32 To this end, the Italian Padre José Pascotto, chaplain for the worker’s communities, conducted the religious service. Pascotto, himself an immigrant, came from Italy to Paraguay in 1975 to work in the Alto Paraná communities of Verbo Divino and Hernandarias. In 1978, the Bishop of Alto Paraná assigned Pascotto to minister to the worker communities of Itaipú Binacional. At Itaipú Binacional, however, the priest lamented the fact that he could not plan a program for more than one year in the future and that his work was not the “normal pastoral mission, it’s something that needs a lot of imagination, faith, hope, and perseverance,” owing to the fact that workers had little stability and had yet to develop a strong feeling of

31 The Food and Nutritional Education Program (Programa de Alimiento y Educación Nutricional, P.A.E.N.) and the National Institute of Training and Technology (Instituto Nacional de Tecnologia e Normalização, I.N.T.N.), each conducted research and informal interviews with workers to determine the “typical” cuisines of Paraguay and Brazil.
32 The Spanish reads: “un sentido cristiano de la técnica.”
community. In his sermons, Father Pascotto exhorted single male workers to learn and practice only two fundamental actions—fasting and prayer—in their daily lives. “Fasting” (ayuno), in this case, did not mean depriving the body of sustenance, which itself would have been a dangerous practice for workers, but rather it meant that male workers must renounce their human weaknesses, faults, and bad behaviors.

To assist workers in the reduction of unacceptable behaviors, company officials sought to foster good habits, such as thrift and fiscal responsibility. Toward that end, a branch of the Paraguayan National Development Bank (Banco Nacional de Fomento) opened in 1978 in the Cantero community center that allowed for the first time single workers the opportunity to open a banking or savings account, the latter seen as “a better destination” (un mejor destino) for worker’s salaries. In addition, these deposits could be used by the national bank to fund additional development projects throughout the country. Furthermore, a bank account allowed workers to put their money in a secured location, instead of hiding their pay in risky places such as pillows or a box in their rooms in the H Barracks.

Workers themselves sang the praises of the bank, as Blás Rubén Martínez (Conempa badge #6533) stated, “for the alojados all of this is really great and because it’s a free service it permits us to save a little bit of money from our pay.” Importantly, now properly secured in a bank account, such funds could be remitted to relatives and family members living in the worker’s native towns and villages. In addition, company officials argued that in the long run an established history with the national bank meant that workers, after completing their time at the dam site, would have easier access to credit and loans for future entrepreneurial ventures.

The work site also offered opportunities for recreation. The stated purpose of these facilities was to offer full relaxation and mental and physical exercise for workers.

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33 “Asistencia Espiritual en la Zona de ITAIPU,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “...una pastoral normal, es algo que necesita mucha imaginación, fe, esperanza, y perseverancia.”


35 “Un día en el Centro Comunitario,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:17 (20 de febrero de 1980), 8. The Spanish reads: “...los alojados todo esto es muy agradable y por ser un servicio gratuito hasta nos permite ahorrar un poco de dinero de nuestro salario.”

36 “Agencia Bancaria en el Sitio de Obras,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 3.
in order to recuperate their energies for the next shift. Prof. Angel Varela Segovia, the Director of the Conempa Department of Social Welfare, was particularly fond of the gymnasium as a place where workers could “develop their muscles and sculpt their bodies, in the process forging a healthy body through exercise that in turn will be to the benefit of the Company, because the worker who practices it will be more productive.”

In the gymnasium, courses were offered to instruct workers in the fundamentals of calisthenics, boxing, and martial arts.

Movie houses were in full operation by the end of 1978. The first movie shown to workers in the theater was “El pasajero de la lluvia” (Rider on the Rain, 1969) starring Charles Bronson. Bronson’s macho or “tough-guy” (duro) persona was highlighted as being especially appealing to dam workers. The film poster featured a shirtless, muscular Bronson “manhandling” his female co-star, while brandishing a revolver.

[Figure 3.5] Films were show twice daily, at 2pm and 8pm, in order to accommodate workers on both the day and night shifts. Films were only shown for a week at a time and up to nine different films were shown each month. The films, mostly Hollywood productions, spanned a variety of genres including comedy, action, kung fu, horror, and drama.

Male workers also had the opportunity to partake in educational talks and workshops deemed important to their health. For example, the Department of Hygiene and Occupational Medicine and the Department of Social Welfare jointly offered a series of talks during what they dubbed the “Week of Hygiene” (Semana de la Higiene) for residents of the on-site H Barracks. During the week medical personnel covered a variety of topics, including cleanliness of their person and of the living quarters, a healthy mouth, prevention of venereal diseases, and the eradication of parasites. Often, these educational talks were combined with recreational offerings, such as outdoor movies. In

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37 “En Pos del Bienestar Social,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “...desarrollen sus músculos, estilicen sus cuerpos, llegando a forjar un cuerpo sano, mediante el ejercicio, que redundará, a su vez, en beneficio de la Empresa porque aquél obrero que lo practica rendirá más.”


39 However, on the Brazilian side of the project, workers had the additional option of viewing soft-core porn films, in addition to the other offerings.

40 “Semana de la Higiene,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:5 (20 de abril de 1978), 5.
one example, a popular film was followed by a talk given by the sanitary educator who discussed the dangers of dehydration, the importance of keeping the barracks clean, and how to eliminate the proliferation of flies and other insects.\[41\] [Figure 3.6]

As imagined by company officials, during non-working hours (\textit{horas libres}), the daily schedule for a single male worker living in H Barracks included an active social life: workers passed their free time with healthy activities in the game room, TV lounge, cinema, and in the gymnasium. Furthermore, “ideal” workers dined on nutritious food, took Catholic mass once a week, attended educational classes and cultural events, and saved the bulk of their salary in the national development bank. Officials hoped these workers would remain on the premises of the work site and not seek other forms of unacceptable “recreation” in town. In short, the company provided everything that they thought was needed to ensure healthy, happy, and productive workers.\[42\]

Some workers appreciated the activities offered at the community center. As Anatalio González (Conempa badge #7591), a general construction worker (\textit{albañil}), stated, “Thanks to the good planning of the Directors of the Company, workers find healthy entertainment here, [and] because we don’t have to go outside of the work site we can avoid expenses and social problems.”\[43\] González did not elaborate on the nature of the “social problems,” though he probably referred to the bars, brothels, and gambling houses located in town.\[44\] While easily dismissed as company propaganda, such favorable portrayals of Conempa and its programs modeled appropriate and acceptable behavior to other men, in the process privileging idealized forms of male homo-sociability that took place within the protected space of the on-site community center and barracks.


\[42\] As seen in the previous chapter, many of these policies designed and implemented by the company had been developed and designed as a result of the day-to-day experience derived from prior hydroelectric dam projects, particularly Jupiá, in Brazil. As such, Conempa company officials most likely took their cue from Unicon (specifically Correa Comargo) directors.

\[43\] “Un día en el Centro Comunitario,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 3:17 (20 de febrero de 1980), 8. The Spanish reads: “Gracias al buen pensamiento de los Directivos de la Empresa, los obreros encontramos aquí una sana diversion, porque no saliendo afuera (de la obra) evitamos gastos y problemas sociales.”

\[44\] Again, a similar “social problem” existed in Três Lagoas, during the construction of Jupiá. See Quintella, \textit{Memórias do Brasil Grande}, 222.
Company officials sought to reproduce all of the conveniences of a modern Latin American city, but without the vice, temptations, and “social problems” found there. Clearly, they hoped that workers would remain within the confines of the construction site. In addition to the creation of ideal spaces that catered to the need of workers for entertainment and healthy activities, company officials sought to instill discipline and order both on and off the job, during working hours and free time. To this end, Conempa officials created departments that oriented, monitored, and often reminded workers of their responsibility and obligation to the company and to their fellow workers. In addition, officials attempted to soften the hard edges of corporate policies targeted to workers by creating agencies that mitigated the relationship between management and workers.

**Order and Discipline: The Internal Code of Conduct**

An unnamed Conempa administrator posed the question of the purpose of the Paraguayans who moved to Alto Paraná and the reasons that justified “the great sacrifice” (el gran sacrificio) of leaving behind hearth and home. He hypothesized that Paraguayans faced an immense national and international responsibility in the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam that required them to leave everything behind. In return, Conempa provided what “perhaps before we could not have imagined and still to this day continues to bring even better living and working conditions, offering us everything possible to ensure our well-being, be it an individual or the group.”45 However, the official argued that the relationship was reciprocal and that the corporation demanded something in return: workers were obliged to be “sound in mind and body, produce what normally corresponds to a human being, to get along with the man that labors at his side, and to observe and follow the rules of social cohabitation.”46

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45 “La Voluntad y la Responsabilidad como Factores de Rendimiento Positivo,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “…quizás como antes no nos imaginábamos y que aún hoy sigue empeñado por brindarnos mayores y mejores condiciones de vida y de trabajo, ofreciéndonos todo cuanto sea posible por ofrecer bienestar, ya sea éste personal y colectivo.”

46 “La Voluntad y la Responsabilidad como Factores de Rendimiento Positivo,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “…seguir siendo sanos de cuerpo y mente, producir lo que normalmente corresponde a un ser humano, cooperar con el que labora al lado nuestro, observar y practicar las normas de convivencia social.”
much to workers, company officials demanded that workers obey the regulations instituted to bring order and discipline to the work site.

To comply with the requirements of the company, officials argued that Paraguayan workers had to possess the dual “virtues” of will (voluntad) and personal responsibility (responsabilidad). These two qualities in particular were necessary for the successful completion of the dam project. Workers, for their part, needed the virtue of will to consume a balanced diet and to go to sleep at an appropriate hour in order to wake ready for work. Moreover, the company asked workers to use their will to limit their consumption of alcoholic beverages and other unnamed “perverse diversions that poisons the organism, that make one feel depressed and abnormal, for days on end.”

While the virtue of will centered on the care of the physical body and the development of good personal and moral habits, responsibility dealt directly with work and a worker’s obligation to the company. The virtue of worker responsibility required that workers not only perform their assigned task, but also to carry out said jobs with meticulous exactness and at a quick pace. In return, the company argued, workers received a fair wage for their labor as mandated by favorable corporate labor policies that allowed them to work and to live under a framework of decency. However, the same labor regulations that generated an enviable standard of living for the worker also gave the company the right to demand that workers be punctual and highly productive on the job. This reciprocal relationship, according to company officials, represented a new way of confronting the old worker-boss relationship.

Two offices of the Department of Social Welfare helped to regulate the “new relationship” between the worker and management. One branch was located in the El Cantero Community Center (for workers housed in the barracks) and another branch located at the exit to the Work Zone. Agents of the Department of Social Welfare,

47 “La Voluntad y la Responsabilidad como Factores de Rendimiento Positivo,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “...las diversiones perversas que envenenan el organismo, haciendo que nos sintamos deprimidos y anormales, incluso hasta transcurridos varios días.” Alternate English translation is “perverse diversions that last for several days on end, that make one feel depressed and abnormal.”

48 “La Voluntad y la Responsabilidad como Factores de Rendimiento Positivo,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2.

49 “Premio a la Responsabilidad,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 3.
including those of the Social Service, sought to solve the problems of workers, regardless of their nature. In particular, the social workers located in the work zone endeavored to solve “whatever problem arises between workers (obreros) and management (empleados),” further stating that “we look to simplify and not to complicate with bureaucratic actions.” According to Lic. María Gloria L. de Osorio, Director of Conempa’s Social Service Section, her work went beyond just cutting the red tape of corporate bureaucracy and included helping each person to develop a higher spiritual potential embodied in individual liberty, personal responsibility, and a healthy personality.

In daily practice, however, social workers dealt with a myriad of everyday problems, both big and small, of workers and their families. In addition, these welfare professionals highlighted their service to actual workers and eschewed the use of formulaic solutions to worker’s problems. An example of a typical problem and its solution is the case of a young Paraguayan worker who came to the Social Service office to ask them to intercede on his behalf with the boss. According to the dam worker, he had been officially granted a two-day leave of absence in order to tend to his sick father in his native town of Caazapá. However, on the evening of his intended return, a torrential downpour rendered the road out of town impassable. Not wanting to lose his job, the worker turned to the section for assistance upon his return to the work zone the next morning. To solve the problem, the social worker contacted the worker’s boss and subsequently the worker was allowed to return to the job site later that afternoon without consequence.

The first years of intensive construction witnessed high levels of worker turnover, absenteeism, and the flaunting of established rules, as the consortium companies struggled to manage a large workforce of mostly migrant workers. In these years, the pace of construction combined with a steady flow of unskilled labor meant that company officials might have been unwilling or unable to enforce the existing code of conduct.

50 “Los Importantes Servicios de ‘Bienestar Social,’” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “...cualquier problema que surja entre los obreros y empleados,” and “Buscamos simplificar y no complicar con gestiones burocráticas.”
However, by 1979, companies began the process of “restructuring” or switching to a smaller, though more highly skilled workforce.\(^{53}\) In February 1979, Conempa reformulated its internal policies that had regulated worker absences, vacations, and stipulated awards.\(^{54}\) Unexcused absences from work not only negatively impacted the amount of pay workers earned, but also reduced the amount of vacation that workers received.\(^{55}\) Unexcused absences, additionally, disqualified workers from receiving pay raises for a period of six months.\(^{56}\) The company excused some kinds of absences: such as 2 excused days off to marry, 1 day off to celebrate the birth of a child, 1 day off to mourn the death of a spouse, child, or immediate family member (parent, grandparent, or sibling), and 2 days off to comply with legal or governmental obligations.\(^{57}\) In the case of illness, Conempa offered three days off with pay, as long as a company doctor authorized the absence.\(^{58}\) To further encourage workers, Conempa offered a perfect attendance prize in the form of 16 hours of extra pay for any worker who completed a month without incurring an absence, either excused or unexcused.\(^{59}\)

To assist in the acquisition of and proper adherence to the so-called virtues of will and responsibility, corporate officials implemented and occasionally reminded workers of Conempa’s Internal Code of Conduct (Reglamento Interno). Reprinted in the pages of *Conempa Remiandú*, officials sought “to refresh the memory” (*refrescarnos la memoria*) of workers regarding the rules and regulations that governed appropriate worker behavior, stating that the “details of our internal rules for discipline or cohabitation… remain buried under neglect or simply ignored, perhaps because [workers] have not had

\(^{53}\) The better skilled workforce was also predominately Brazilian, thus restructuring also signaled a turn away from Paraguayans, which dominated the lowest-skill category.

\(^{54}\) “Disposiciones sobre Vacaciones, Descanso y Premios,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 3.

\(^{55}\) Based on a sliding scale, for example, during a twelve-month period workers with 5 or fewer unexcused absences received 30 consecutive days of vacation, workers who missed between 15 and 23 days of work received 18 days of vacation, and workers with more than 32 absences forfeited their right to a vacation.

\(^{56}\) “Faltas Injustificadas y ‘Descuentos’ de Vacaciones,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 2.

\(^{57}\) In addition, absences due to obligatory military service or work-related accidents were granted as much time off as necessary.

\(^{58}\) “Datos Importantes sobre el Descanso Semanal Remunerado e Inasistencia,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 2.

\(^{59}\) “Disposiciones sobre Vacaciones, Descanso y Premios,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 3.
the opportunity of reading and assimilating them.”60 The company newspaper, copies of which were distributed free of charge to the mailboxes of H Barracks, provided a monthly forum to disseminate pertinent information such as rules and regulations impacting workers.

The reprinted, albeit abbreviated, version of the Internal Code of Conduct contained ten major actions proscribed by the corporation. The short list, however, represented only a portion of the overall list of prohibitions. Thus, one could assume that workers most frequently engaged in and grievously violated these particular tenets of the code of conduct. First and foremost, the code prohibited workers from unauthorized absences without prior written permission and, in the case of missed shifts due to illness or injury, without the presentation of a note from a company doctor upon their return to work. Workers were prohibited from abandoning their post during the work shift without prior authorization from an immediate superior, particularly if that absence included the ends of relaxation or sleeping during working hours. Second, the code prohibited workers from showing up to work in a state of intoxication or under the influence of narcotic drugs, banned the carrying of arms (unless required by their post and authorized by the company), and prohibited workers from discussing ongoing quarrels or instigating fistfights during working hours. Lastly, the list of regulations required all workers to leave the work zone at the end of their shift, except those men that were housed on-site.61

Further rules and regulations proscribed the actions of workers housed on-site and within the H Barracks. Workers were admonished to keep their rooms clean and to rigorously respect all of the rules of hygiene demanded by Conempa, were forbidden to alter the room in any way, including the rearrangement of furniture, and were not allowed to use electric heaters, hotplates, or other such small appliances in their rooms.62 Furthermore, workers were not allowed to offer accommodation to friends or relatives or to bring strangers into their rooms. Lastly, gambling and alcoholic beverages were

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60 “Que nos dice nuestro Reglamento Interno,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:13 (20 de octubre de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “...detalles de nuestras normas normas internas de disciplina o conveniencia, queden sepultadas en el olvido o simplemente ignoradas, porque tal vez nunca tuvimos la oportunidad de leerlas y asimilarlas.”
61 “Que nos dice nuestro Reglamento Interno,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:13 (20 de octubre de 1979), 3.
62 “De Interés para los Alojados,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 6.
expressly forbidden in the worker barracks. Clearly, company officials did not wish for workers to socialize in the barracks during non-working hours, especially considering the lengths to which the company had gone to in the creation of acceptable social spaces for workers on-site.

Responsibility for maintaining order and enforcing the internal code of conduct was the domain of Conempa’s Security and Vigilance Sector (Sector de Seguridad y Vigilancia). As outlined in the editorial pages of the company newspaper, the work site was an “immensity, where man is lord and owner” and that a project “of this magnitude…could only go forward respecting the basic principles of order and discipline.”63 To this end, the department operated a Security Guard (Guardia de Vigilancia), which controlled the entrance of vehicles and persons onto company property, issued temporary identity badges for visitors, chaperoned the transportation of the payroll, patrolled company bus stops, and also broadly regulated relations among employees.

Sr. Blas Ignacio Gonzáles, head of the branch of the Security and Vigilance Sector that operated in the Paraguayan side of the dam site, argued that security emerged out of the concepts of proper respect, order, and safety. Gonzáles encouraged guards to respect and treat workers as if they were a parent or sibling or as a friend, all the while bringing much-needed order and discipline to worker’s lives. Furthermore, protocol demanded that guards address workers and employees by their first names, if known personally, or in any case workers should receive the “treatment owed to a person of high status” (tratamiento de Señor). Order and its maintenance—formulated as proscription of behaviors that perturbed the company and coworkers or that sullied the company’s good name and damaged its property (patrimonio)—permeated the entire workday and represented a permanent, daily worry of the guards themselves. Gonzáles further argued that safety and its ever-vigilant implementation by the department should watch over every moment of a worker’s daily life, from the barracks, the dining hall, and the bus stop, to any place where workers gathered, such as the work site and even the line to

63 “ITAIPU: Un Crédito Inagotable de la Naturaleza y el Hombre,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 3, 6. The Spanish reads: “…inmensidad, donde el hombre es dueño y señor…” and “…de la magnitud…solo puede ir adelante respetando los principios elementales del orden y la disciplina.”
receive their pay packets. Workers who failed to cooperate, Gonzáles ominously assured, would be duly informed of the appropriate role that they must play in the company.64

Through both incentives and the disciplining of wayward workers, company officials employed a “carrot and stick” policy that sought to ensure order while instilling the disciplinary values of clean living and personal responsibility. In a sweeping fashion, the company constructed the daily lives of workers, established and refreshed the memory of workers regarding the code of conduct and work rules, and disciplined workers that deviated from the norm. However, in yet another piece of the puzzle, company officials also sought to train and mold workers to their own ends, for instance, through programs to educate workers in safety measures. Again, such measures often functioned through the proscription of certain behaviors and cultural traits associated with the Paraguayan male worker. Education programs, particularly those aimed at making safer workers, point to attempts to modernize the rural peasant, seen as rife with human faults and limitations, and to eliminate the human factor.

The Human Factor: Toward a Collective Consciousness of Worker Safety

At the highest levels, administrative accords between the national governments of Brazil and Paraguay stipulated both worker safety programs and the provision of medical services to employees of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors. Specifically, the dual administrative accords of January 8, 1975 signed in Brasília by government officials of Brazil and Paraguay broadly regulated worker hygiene and safety and medical care for employees. The accord required that the Paraguayan Institute of Social Prevention (Instituto de Previsión Social, or I.P.S.) and the Brazilian National Institute of Social Prevention (Instituto Nacional de Previdência Social, I.N.P.S.) to administer the medical services available to workers and their dependents, regardless of nationality or country in which they signed their work contract. The accord further stipulated that workers and

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64 “Seguridad y Vigilancia en el S.O.-M.D.,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), p. 3; “Seguridad y Vigilancia,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 6.
their dependants have access to surgical, dental, pharmacological, and maternity services and access to full medical care in the event of an accident.\textsuperscript{65} The accords also required the corporations to organize all workers into safety teams consisting of equal numbers of Brazilians and Paraguayans. Referred to as Internal Commissions for the Prevention of Accidents (Comisión Interna de Prevención de Accidentes, or C.I.P.A.), these groups formed the basic organizational unit for instruction in the protocols regulating work-site safety. The accord also required the use of safety gear by workers and its distribution free of charge. Workers could be fined, penalized, or fired for infractions of the safety code. Additional remuneration was attached to specific jobs deemed particularly hazardous to a worker’s health or safety. The accord also banned minors and women from jobs that involved hazardous or unhealthy working conditions.\textsuperscript{66} Overall supervision and enforcement of these safety accords fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Occupational Safety and Hygiene (Departamento de Higiene y Seguridad Ocupacional, D.S.H.O) of the Paraguayan Ministry of Justice and Labor and the Office of Labor Relations (Secretaria de Relações de Trabalho, S.R.T.) of the Brazilian Ministry of Labor in Asunción and Brasília respectively.

Itaipú Binacional and the consortium companies of Conempa and Unicon prioritized the prevention of accidents on the job. Prevention of accidents fell under the responsibility of the Conempa Department of Workplace Safety and Hygiene (S.H.T.). Specialized divisions within the department handled instruction in explosives, security and traffic patrols, firefighting, and so forth. Additionally, international administrative accords mandated the organization of workers into safety teams. After an accident on the job, safety engineers analyzed the causes and then presented their results to the group on how to best avoid such incidents in the future. For example, as part of their calculations for the month of August 1979, the most common types of accidents that occurred on the

\textsuperscript{65} Itaipú Binacional, “Acuerdo administrativo reglamentario sobre prestación de servicios médicos a los trabajadores contratados por la Itaipú y sus contratistas y subcontratistas de obras y locadores y sublocadores de servicios,” Documentos oficiales de Itaipú, 141.

\textsuperscript{66} Itaipú Binacional, “Acuerdo administrativo complementario sobre higiene y seguridad del trabajo aplicable a los trabajadores contratados por la Itaipú y sus contratistas y subcontratistas de obras y locadores y sublocadores de servicios,” Documentos oficiales de Itaipú, 133-37.
job fell into three broad categories related to “falls” (caídas), “blows” (golpeados), and “pinning” (prensaje entre).  

Safety engineers argued that prevention of accidents made good economic sense to the companies. The rampant safety violations, most obvious in worker’s blatant refusal to wear the mandated protective gear and subsequent accidents, resulted in lost productivity, higher costs associated with medical care for injured workers, and the cost of the pensions for injured workers and their families, not to mention damaged property and an overall increase in the total cost of the dam project. One poster summed up this corporate philosophy: “Work Safely. The careless worker that doesn’t pay attention worries his family and fails the nation.”  

By early 1979, safety protocols and their successful implementation took on increased importance. 

On the ground, Conempa officials collaborated with the D.S.H.O, but formulated their own ideas about how best to implement policy. Conempa safety engineer Carlos Muniagurria argued that success in any endeavor depended upon disciplined behavior and the harmonious relationships between members of the work group, a point of view that complemented official company policy regarding worker safety. Singling out the lack of discipline, moreover, presented not only an obstacle to success, but also a danger to collective security and, most importantly, to worker’s safety. The problem could be solved only by the creation of a hierarchical disciplinary regime. According to Engineer Muniagurria, “when the relationships within the group are good, if the boss is the leader, and if a high degree of discipline exists, then the risks of worker accidents will be reduced to a minimum.” Furthermore, all workers, even those guilty of faults and limitations, could redeem themselves through a basic knowledge of safety and by disciplined behavior in their actions. 

The question remained as to which management policies would produce the desired level of safety among workers. To this end, corporate officials in charge of worker safety and the creation of educational programs targeted toward workers.
consulted a variety of sources that included publications of specialists in the field. For instance, the Conempa S.H.T. reprinted an excerpt of Engineer Rafael Esponosa de los Monteros’ *Safety for Middle Management*, written as a manual for the proper implementation of corporate safety programs.\(^7^0\) The excerpt in question appeared in the company newspaper and specifically addressed the causes of worker’s accidents, citing reasons such as shift work, an increase in production, an increase in the number of workers, longer working hours, and the negligence, carelessness, imprudence, or ignorance of the workers themselves, and a general lack of preparation on the part of company officials.\(^7^1\)

While the causes of accidents were many, Espinosa argued that the only solution was the creation of a “collective consciousness of safety” among workers that only could be fomented through an accident prevention campaign. The eradication of false concepts through the dissemination of correct information was the principle goal of such campaigns. According to Espinosa, a well-organized and comprehensive campaign would not only reduce the number of accidents, but would eliminate accidents completely for long periods of time. The proper planning, promotion, and implementation of worker safety programs by management, furthermore, could negate “the human factor” (*el factor H*) of worker carelessness, negligence, and irresponsibility. Safety engineers taught adherence to the fundamental concepts of proper maintenance of machinery, replacement of parts, and appropriate ventilation and lighting. Safety protocols further outlined proper supervision, which included the distribution of personnel that took into account worker’s individual aptitudes and defects, and training programs for both management and workers.\(^7^2\) Thus, the implementation of worker safety programs “by the book” promised an end to worker accidents well within the reach of the corporation and management.

Education in safe working practices took on a variety of forms that went beyond classroom instruction. For example, Conempa routinely published *historietas* (comic strips) in the pages of its newspaper depicting the proper usage of safety equipment and

\(^7^0\) Rafael Esponosa de los Monteros, et al., *Curso de Seguridad para mandos intermedios* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo, Instituto Nacional de Previsión, 1966).
\(^7^1\) “Causas de Accidentes,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 2:14 (20 de noviembre de 1979), 6.
\(^7^2\) “Causas de Accidentes,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 2:14 (20 de noviembre de 1979), 6.
the unfortunate consequences of the actions of the foolish and disheveled worker who engaged in unsafe work practices. In a characteristic example, one strip depicts a worker sharpening a metal tool on a lathe as metal fragments spray into his eyes. The caption states to the worker: “Watch out! Don’t be imprudent like the man in the scene above. Use safety glasses. This is preferable to a loss of vision.”\(^{73}\) Other strips instructed workers to turn off machines before cleaning, to learn how to use fire extinguishers before a fire breaks out, the proper use of ladders, the dangers of smoking cigarettes while handling flammable liquids, and the hazards posed by being intoxicated at work. Both serious and jocular, such comic strips allowed non-literate workers to visually comprehend appropriate worker safety practices. Corporate officials hoped that the worker would see himself, his bad habits, and also his potential for rehabilitation in the laughable situations depicted in the strips.

Comic strips visually juxtaposed images of the homely, unskilled, and unsafe worker with that of the polished, skilled, and safe worker. These humorous images underscored what corporate officials viewed as the transformational power of instruction in worker safety. Given the dearth of heavy industry in Paraguay, corporate safety programs sought to instill knowledge of safe practices in employees who had little or no experience in an industrial setting.\(^{74}\) The lovable, although accident-prone, buffoon represented the mass of unskilled workers from the Paraguayan agricultural countryside. The dirty, disheveled, and unsafe worker smoked cigarettes, drank caña (rum), and refused to wear safety gear on the job. In comparison, the safe worker represented the transformed worker of the modern industrial environment of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, often embodied by the idealized and nationalized worker-athlete.

**Muscular Nationalism: The Conempa Worker-Athlete**

Company sports programs constituted an additional arena in which corporate officials hoped to educate and ultimately transform workers. The image of the worker-athlete represented an idealized masculine model couched in terms of worker health, harmonious relationships between men, acceptable corporate homo-sociability, and good citizens.

\(^{73}\) *Conempa Remiandú* (Sito de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 6-7.

\(^{74}\) What industry that did exist was mostly confined to the capital of Asunción and centered on food processing, bottling, etc. and other light industry.

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Furthermore, sports programs linked friendly competition with corporate and national histories, particularly events that military, governmental, and corporate officials wished to promote. Company officials hoped that the worker-athlete and his skilled and safe counterpart represented a shift in the traditional, backward workforce of the Paraguayan nation to a new workforce that, as seen in company rhetoric, also would bring a better future for all. A desire to produce a more reliable, productive, and malleable workforce under-girded such propaganda.

A central example of such promotions is the yearly olimpiad organized by company officials. On the warm spring evening of 20 October 1978, the Olimpiad ’78 got under way in the “Pai Coronel” Stadium situated on the grounds of the Minga Guazú Club located on the Paraguayan side of the border alongside the Ruta Internacional (International Highway) linking Paraguay with Brazil. Hundreds of “enthusiastic fans” (hinchadas), corporate officials, off-duty workers, and family members gathered in the stands of the stadium to watch.

As the major event on the corporate amateur sports calendar each year, the Olimpiada was modeled on, though on a much humbler scale, the international Olympic Games. Instead of medals, however, winning individual worker-athletes and teams received trophies and various prizes, including a color television for the overall best athlete and a stereo sound-system for the winner of the half-marathon. First held in 1977, the company-sponsored event, organized under the direction of the Conempa Department of Social Welfare, provided a friendly forum for male workers to compete against each other. For its part, the Olimpiada ’78 featured competition in soccer (fútbol), volleyball, basketball, and track and field.75 Company officials hoped that the Olimpiada ’78 would contribute to the establishment and fostering of “gentlemanliness and honorability” (caballerosidad y hidalguía) among male members of the “family of Conempa.”76

[Figure 3.8]

After the playing of the Paraguayan national anthem, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, the founder and President of Conempa, officially inaugurated the year’s Olympiad festival.

75 Competition in soccer included field, indoor, and “Swiss” formats and the track and field events included the 100m, 200m, 4x100m, 800x1500m, and 12k races and the high, long, and triple jumps, the shot-put, discus, and javelin.
76 “Olimipiada Conempa 78,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:1 (20 de octubre de 1978), 7.
In his opening remarks, Wasmosy praised the recent completion of the diversion channel of the Paraná River, and stated in his speech that, “this historic act has made manifest the mystical, the capacity and abnegation of the Paraguayan worker.” Furthermore, Wasmosy underscored that this irreversible step in the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam would change the mentality of those Paraguayans “who are lukewarm (los tibios) and do not believe in the fatherland (la Patria) and in the sacrifice of their sons.”

Continuing, Wasmosy euphemistically mentioned “those who had embarked upon the journey without return,” and called for a minute of silence, specifically in honor of several workers who recently had lost their lives in a tragic car accident, and for the men who had died in the prior several years of the construction of the project. They, Wasmosy stated, “will not be able to say they have seen the crowning achievement among the greatest of all achievements.” In addition, Wasmosy drew upon the trope and imagery of the extended family of Conempa, arguing that the Olimpiada ’78 constituted proof of “unity, mysticism, [and] all that is outstanding in this project, in sport, in work, in friendship, in religion and in all of the displays where Conempa presents itself before its fellow man.” Wasmosy’s words draw attention, not only to the founder’s vision and corporate agenda, but also to his sense of a national and universal purpose for Conempa, more broadly.

The outstanding worker-athlete of that year’s Olimpiada, Lucio Chaparro, won the coveted first prize of a new color television set. As a 28-year-old bachelor and native of Caacupé, Chaparro had worked for Conempa for one year as a safety supervisor in the S.H.T. Before moving to Alto Paraná to work on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project,
Chaparro attended the Colegio de Encarnación where he excelled in track and field and, after college, played professional soccer in the town of Coronel Oviedo for the Club “12 de Junio” of the Paraguayan Liga Cordillerana. Given his background and athleticism, it is not surprisingly that Chaparro dominated the Olimpiada of 1978. However, as he states, “I could not hide my state of excitement, when I received the congratulations of the Supervisors, Engineers and coworkers in the Company.”

Winning the best athlete accolade elevated, for a time at least, the status and profile of Chaparro within the company. Corporate officials, however, delayed the distribution of trophies and prizes and the official recognition of worker-athletes in a formal awards ceremony until December of 1978, in order to coincide with the three-year anniversary of the founding of Conempa.

In addition to larger forums such as the Olympiad, smaller events such as tournaments were also given themes and were scheduled to coincide with important anniversaries in Paraguayan history. Under the rubric of Celebrations of the Fatherland (las fiestas Patrias), a variety of events were commemorated in May of each year, including Independence Day (May 14) and the Comuneros Revolt. Additionally, military victories were commemorated. For instance, the football tournament in September 1978 officially celebrated the victory of Paraguayan military forces over the Bolivian military at the Battle of Boquerón during the Chaco War (1932-35).

Beyond being a sporting event, such tournaments for the May celebrations and the Victory of Boquerón allowed company and governmental officials an opportunity to educate workers and spectators about the more illustrious moments of national history and of the Paraguayan military, in the process allowing officials to link themselves symbolically with a glorious past. For instance, the opening and closing ceremonies of the tournament included a parade of soldiers and sailors, local students, public employees of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, high-ranking government officials of the state of Alto

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81 “Lucio Chaparro: El mejor atleta de esta temporada,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:3 (20 de diciembre de 1978), 7. The Spanish reads: “Yo no pude disimular el estado de mi ánimo, cuando recibí las felicitaciones de Superintendentes, Ingenieros, y compañeros de la Empresa.”

82 “Brillante Apertura de la Olimpiada ´CONEMPA 78´,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de 1978), 7.
Paraná, and the participating athletes from Itaipú Binacional and Conempa.\(^{83}\) Additionally, two surviving veterans of the Chaco War and then-current employees of Conempa, Romilio Duarte and Antonio Pompa Especini, spoke briefly about their experiences during the conflict. The company held these men up as models of patriotism and hard work, stating that, “yesterday they offered their blood on the altar of a threatened nation and today they offer the sweat of their brow to the altar of labor.”\(^{84}\)

In this way, company officials utilized sports and sporting events to make stronger the connection between the worker, the company, and the nation (embodied by those events and heroes that the military regime wished to commemorate). Partially about fostering friendly competition and harmony among workers, sporting events and tournaments provided a platform for corporate and government officials to promote the ideal worker. According to this formulation, the ideal worker-athlete is physically fit in body, he is patriotic and sacrificial in spirit, and he is an honorable gentleman in his relationship to other men in the corporate family. In short, he is the ideal citizen.

The worker-athlete combined with the previous formulations of the good worker; namely the healthy, educated, skilled, and safe worker already discussed. Taken as a whole, the ideal worker represented the transformation of the prodigal son and the rural peasant. With the sweat of these sons of the nation, the Paraná River and the jungles of Alto Paraná had been tamed and the workers found themselves in a process of transformation. Not only had the prodigal son returned to the national family, he also would return to his native village as a new man. As Rubén Antonio Ranulfo Ortiz optimistically argued, Itaipú Binacional represented:

new ideas toward a new reality, distinct from what we are accustomed to, so much so that it has brought about a necessary mutation in the traditional and routine framework that has characterized our nation, with its humble customs and traditions, at times conservative and timid, that now we have acquired new and expanded values, positive

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\(^{83}\) “Torneo Homenaje al Aniversario de la Victoria de Boquerón,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:1 (20 de octubre de 1978), 7.

\(^{84}\) “Ecos de la Semana de la Victoria de Boquerón,” “Torneo Homenaje al Aniversario de la Victoria de Boquerón,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:1 (20 de octubre de 1978), 7. The Spanish reads: “...hoy siguen ofreciendo el sudor de sus frentes en aras del trabajo, así como ayer ofrecieron sus sangre en aras de la patria amenazada.”
and progressive, strong and daring, full of vitality and vigor, that can easily be seen in every corner of Alto Paraná.\textsuperscript{85}

For Ranulfo, the experience of constructing Itaipú hydroelectric could transform the mentality of the entire nation; starting in Alto Paraná, Paraguayans would be remade into a productive and laboring people. Compared to the Unknown Soldier of past wars, the Unknown Worker (El Obrero Desconocido) of Itaipú Binacional, Ranulfo believed, had made possible through “his humble labors and self-sacrifice” (su humilde labor y abnegación) the future progress of the nation. This view, however, would be complicated, as the consortium companies began a process of restructuring dictated by the construction schedule.

**Corporate Restructuring: Reevaluation of the Paraguayan Workingman**

The period 1975-79 represented a particularly labor intensive phase of construction on the hydroelectric dam project. During these years, the demand for a large number of unskilled or semi-skilled workers reached its zenith. For example, by the middle of 1979, Conempa had issued approximately 9,000 employment badges during its first several years of operation.\textsuperscript{86} By October 1978, however, work was completed on the diversion channel for the Paraná River and construction began on the earthworks upon which would rest the main body of the hydroelectric dam.

In June 1979, Conempa officials began what they termed a process of “restructuring,” which entailed the firing of some categories of workers and the hiring and training of more specialized and technical personnel. The experience of training unskilled peasant workers led engineers in the S.H.T. to reexamine the root causes of worker accidents on the job and to reformulate hiring practices. While education of workers remained a central priority, department officials now argued that some

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\textsuperscript{85} “El Pensamiento y la Acción en ITAIPU,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “...ideas nuevas hacia una nueva realidad, distinta a la que estaba acostumbrado, y tan es así que sutilmente se opera una necesaria mutación en el marco tradicionalista y rutinario que caracterizó a nuestro pueblo con sus humildes costumbres y tradiciones, a veces conservadores y timidas, que en la actualidad adquieren con nuevos y substanciales valores una modalidad positiva y progresista, pujante y atrevida, llena de vitalidad y vigor, que fácilmente hoy se puede apreciar en las periferias del Alto Paraná...”

\textsuperscript{86} “Salutación a los Pioneros de CONEMPA,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 4.
Paraguayan workers simply did not have the necessary abilities suited for the new industrial environment.

Representing a discursive shift, officials now centered on “aptitude for work” (aptitud para el trabajo) as the core quality for both successful completion of the job and for the overall safety of the worker. Not just counterproductive, worker inaptitude constituted a potentially disastrous situation. Engineers asked their readers, “Is the inept person to blame for the work they do?” Answering the question, the article responded by stating that “Not always, but in the majority of cases, yes.”

The inaptitude of Paraguayan workers at Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam, the article argued, developed out of the peculiarities of traditional labor market. In their take on national history, they argued that a lack of options in the traditional labor market created a situation in which many Paraguayan men lacked a permanent profession, moved from job to job, and only earned subsistence wages. Thus, the previous workforce of itinerant laborers was not well suited to the new labor regime being forged at Itaipú Binacional.

Initially, S.H.T engineers argued the locus of the solution to the problem lay in recruiting and selecting better-suited male workers. According to the safety engineers, employees in the Conempa Personnel Department (Departamento de Personal) responsible for recruitment and hiring of workers should be able to more accurately discern the previous vocations of potential recruits and the likelihood that such would-be workers would do a good job once hired. A higher percentage of quality workers, they further argued, would facilitate the “professional fulfillment of the Worker, provide greater safety on the Project, and improve productivity from the point of view of the company.”

The arguments of the S.H.T engineers regarding the hiring process by the Personnel Department echoed in the popular sentiments of workers. Workers, however, drew different conclusions than did the engineers. While workers acknowledged that the department rightly operated as the gateway to a job at Itaipú Binacional, they however

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87 “Causas de los Accidentes,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “Tienen culpa las personas de la falta de aptitud para determinados tipos de trabajo que ejecutan?” and “No siempre, pero en la mayoría de los casos, sí.”
88 “Causas de los Accidentes,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 7.
89 “Causas de los Accidentes,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “...la realización profesional del Trabajador, en dar mayor seguridad a la Obra y en mejorar la productividad desde el punto de vista empresarial.”
expressed confusion at the bewildering process of “taking or rejecting personnel, utilizing God knows what criteria for selection.” More interestingly, accusations of nepotism emerged, such as the favorable treatment for the son of the compadre of a high-level manager or of an owner of a subcontracting firm who had been hired “very easily, without complications, without protocols, [and] without [the] strange exams” that other workers had to endure. Clearly, both workers and safety engineers found fault with the company.

Representing a complete turnaround of opinion and despite worker’s own insights into the problem, safety engineers now argued that well-suited and highly trained workers could only go so far in preventing worker accidents. According to S.H.T. engineer Carlos Muniagurria, the social environment in which Itaipú dam workers lived and worked had bred unpleasant characteristics of aggression, indolence, and negligence that compromised worker safety. As a result of living and working in close proximity to one another, these so-called “human faults” (fallas humanas) combined with a propensity for excess and vice to influence worker behavior on the job. Clearly, Muniagurria’s view contrasts sharply with the utopian harmony, supposedly produced by the worker’s community, envisioned early on by many company officials.

In addition to the vices of intoxicating substances such as alcohol and drugs, worker safety could be affected by illness, fatigue, and a variety of personal distractions. Singling out worker’s “worry” (preocupación) as an area of concern, Muniagurria argued that problems in the domestic, financial, and romantic arenas all had the potential to distract workers and cause accidents on the job. In addition, ignorance on the part of the worker of the underlying causes of his anxiety further hampered efforts at its resolution. Moreover, the engineer argued that many of the worker’s problems originated in the worker’s own imagination. To vanquish “worry” Muniagurria advocated that workers seek out the “advice or moral assistance of someone who could alleviate the anxiety, or

90 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de 1978), 5. The Spanish reads: “...de tomar o rechazar personales, utilizando, sólo Dios sabe qué criterio de selección...”
91 “Recursos Humanos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de 1978), 5. The Spanish reads: “...en forma muy sencilla, sin complicaciones, sin protocolos, sin exámenes raros...”
92 “Las fallas humanas,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 5.
give him a solution to problems that are not always as bad as they seem.”\footnote{“Preocupación y Accidente,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:7 (20 de abril de 1979), 2.} In any case, Muniagurria believed that the blame for worker’s accidents fell squarely on the shoulders of the workers themselves, owing to their human weaknesses and faults, and outside of the ability of the company to make long-lasting changes.

Restructuring—in this case a policy of dismissal of workers as the project entered a new phase of construction—and its direct implications brought the discussion about the good and bad qualities, both real and imagined, of workers to center stage. Corporate officials of Conempa began to analyze and scrutinize workers more intensely and searched for clues to explain and justify dismissal, both to themselves and to their workers. Additionally, restructuring signaled a transition away from a dependence on a largely single and unmarried workforce living in the H Barracks toward more highly skilled and married workers (for example, “the family man”), particularly as the project entered a new phase of construction dictated by the schedule. While company officials had worked to transform in a relatively short time the unsafe and unskilled single male worker of the Paraguayan countryside, by the middle of 1979, a new dialogue emerged that centered on the distinctive and problematic masculinity of the single male Paraguayan worker in the form of the “bold macho.”

\textbf{Arriero Perô: The Problematic Masculinity of the Paraguayan Worker}

Not surprisingly, the potential for the mass firing of workers caused a stir at the work site and generated controversy and hard feelings. An anonymous Conempa official reminded disgruntled workers that the hydroelectric project was built in engineered stages and according to its own logical progression. To this end, workers would be hired and fired by the company as one part of the project began and another ended. As such, there was no job security. In reaction to what he perceived as worker’s ungratefulness to the company, the official asked the question: how many laborers entered the company without any profession and were made into carpenters, blacksmiths, or brick masons at the project?\footnote{“Reflexiones Acerca del Proceso de Reestructuración,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 6.} Furthermore, the official highlighted all of the benefits that the company provided to workers, including free transportation, education, food, housing, medical
care, and even entertainment. In the end, the official portrayed workers as ungrateful, selfish, and childish in their protestations.

Like Runulfo’s “obrero desconocido” mentioned previously, corporate officials often lazily spoke of the mass of “anonymous workers” (obreros anónimos) constructing the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam or, often the case, company administrators simply lumped Paraguayan workers into the amorphous category of “Itaipuyanos,” a heterogeneous conglomeration that obliterated differences of nationality, gender, and class. These unknown (and perhaps seemingly unknowable) Paraguayan laborers, however, colloquially referred to themselves as los mitá (the boys) and, on certain occasions, as the arriero perô (the bold macho), the latter term signifying a particularly notorious and infamous type of Paraguayan male that worked on the Itaipú Binacional dam project. Both terms emerged from the mixed Spanish-Guaraní dialect (jopara) spoken by rural Paraguayan peasants and were later adopted by company officials. In any case, as one anonymous worker stated, the term arriero perô is itself “the fruit of the rich imagination of the Paraguayan worker-peasant” and he is exactly “the same one that arrived at the Itaipú Work Site with…a small knapsack on his shoulder.”

I would also argue that we have seen him before, as portrayed by company officials; namely, he is the prodigal son and raw country hick of the comic strips.

Published under the heading “Letter from an Arrierio Perô,” the submissions of one worker appeared for a brief time in the pages of the corporate newspaper Conempa Remiandú. For their part, the editors purported to believe that the letters were the product of a single, though anonymous, male worker who lived in the H Barracks on the work site. Or, judging by content, it appears that multiple workers submitted “letters” to the editors and subsequently had been editorially subsumed under the mantle and voice of a singular “bold macho.” However, a critical reading of these letters opens the possibility that the editors themselves constituted the authors or at least inscribed these letters with their own agenda as part of the cautionary tale of the failed Paraguayan worker that justified dismissal from the company. Thus, such letters should be viewed within the larger framework of corporate restructuring.

95 “Carta de un Arriero Perô,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “...es el que llegó al Sitio de Obras de ITAIPU con lo puesto y un bolsocito al hombro.”
In general Spanish usage, the word *arriero* denotes a muleteer or someone who guides, usually from horseback, the transport of goods by pack animal. As adopted into Guaraní from Castilian Spanish, however, *arriero* signifies someone who is plain and simple, but also brave, bold, and a womanizer. In traditional usage in Paraguayan Spanish, therefore, the term *arriero* calls to mind someone who is generally ignorant and unable to follow even basic instructions, although usually they may retain the characteristics of simplicity, straight-forwardness, and also their boldness and bravery. In more contemporary usage, however, the figure of the *arriero* is transformed into the infamous *arriero pórtepe* (also *arriero porte*) as the model of traditional, rural Paraguayan masculinity and the appropriate “way to be a man” (*manera de ser hombre*) in society.

Given the recentness of the trend toward problematizing men as a category of analysis, it is not surprising that the historiography on Paraguayan masculinity is virtually non-existent. However, there are some clues. Dionisio Gauto, in his analysis of Ṇe’enga, or popular sayings, refrains, and proverbs, argues that Paraguayan men—typified by the cultural figure of “Don Tranqui” (Mr. Tranquil)—are characterized by their poverty, lack of hurry, lack of vision or planning, absence of initiative, failure to save, and by fatalism, passivity, and stoicism. While resisting the trap of peddling in “machista” cultural stereotypes, the Paraguayan model of male behavior is believed to have several additional hallmarks: requiring men to suppress and hide their emotions, to abuse alcohol and other drugs, to restrict their communication with others, to adopt risky or unsafe behaviors, to refuse to comply with safety protocols at work, and to commit violence against other men and women. The point here is not to argue that only one model existed for the entire country and for all men, but rather that the *arriero pórtepe* model appears to be the base for formulations of the specific rural masculinity embodied by the *arriero perõ*.

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97 The Paraguayan model of male behavior is in keeping with the general, though simplistic and stereotypical formulation of Latin American “machismo.” See “Machismo es la principal causa de muerte de hombres paraguayos,” *Paragay Noticias* (15 de enero de 2008), n.p.
98 Unfortunately, no definitive historical study exists that examines Paraguayan masculinity or the appropriate role of men in society. The closest discussion is Dionisio Gauto, “Perfil del hombre paraguayo en algunas manifestaciones culturales populares: los Ṇe’enga (refranes, dichos o proverbios),” in Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya, *VII Semana Social Paraguaya: El hombre paraguayo en su cultura* (Asunción: Editora Litocolor, 1986), 63-70.
glance, Don Tranqui and the “bold macho” appear at odds; however, the analysis of the *arriero perô* that follows demonstrates a complex blending of models.

According to the anonymous writer, the Paraguayan *arriero perô* brought no material possessions with him to Itaipú Binacional, but rather his character represented his true value. For his part, however, the *arriero perô* did bring his intelligence, experience, willpower, and a desire to work and his own customs, language, style, and jokes that represented a distinct Paraguayan presence on the job site. While acknowledging that the work environment at Itaipú Binacional constituted something new for most Paraguayan workers, the editor stated:

> [the *arriero perô*] looks about, he studies the surroundings and says nothing; he listens, he ask questions about what could be of importance to his job, but he says nothing. Some weeks later he is self-sufficient enough to understand the regulations, to gain the benefits that the company offers; in a few months he is “expert” (*baqueano*) in everything.  

In this way, the *arriero perô* is particularly adept at “molding himself” (*se amolda*) to the new work environment at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam. However, the adaptability of the *arriero perô* belies the fact that his “expert” knowledge is superficial and is designed to play the system to his advantage and to fool company officials for his own financial gain.

Ricardo Pereira Insfrán of Conempa believed that the popular personage of the *arriero perô*, although soon to disappear from the work site, in time would enter into the realm of national legend alongside the famous Perú Rima (Ugly Rima) of Guaraní myth. Perú Rima is a central figure in the oral tradition of Paraguay, whose exploits have been passed down from generation to generation. Helio Vera, a Paraguayan writer and cultural critic, argues that Perú Rima is a local incarnation of the hero of medieval Spanish picaresque literature (in particular, Cervantes’ Pedro Urdeales). As told in the folkloric stories of Paraguay, Perú Rima preferred to use the power of guile and cunning

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99 “Carta de un Arriero Perô,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “...estudia el ambiente y no dice nada: escucha, pregunta todo lo que le puede interesar en el trabajo pero no dice nada. Unas semanas le bastan para comprender los reglamentos, para enterarse de los beneficios que le ofrece la empresa; a los pocos meses es un ‘baqueano’ en todo.”

100 “Feliz Aniversario!,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 2:13 (20 de octubre de 1979), 3.
without resorting to naked force and “with his tricks, he appears ridiculous to the king and the king’s representatives, in the end marrying the princess, if only for her riches.”

Perú Rima joined with two additional figures prominent in oral tradition of Paraguayan folklore, namely, Pychaichi and the pokaré. Pychaichi, with his clothing infested by chiggers, is always doing what he should not be doing and thus he has a reputation as an ignorant fool. In addition, Pychaichi exaggerates his bad luck through self-mockery, in the process, only accentuating his ridiculousness. The self-deprecating humor of Pychaichi, however, masks his self-resignation; he is simply trying to get by. The pokaré, on the other hand, much like Perú Rima, prefers to utilize his guile in the absence of personal courage and is “a survivor by instinct…he will prefer the stealth of the fox to the bravado of the jaguar.”

These characters would have been widely known and understood by most all Paraguayans working at Itaipú Binacional. The arriero perõ, therefore, is an amalgamation of these folkloric characters and contains traits of them all. While Pereira celebrated the arriero perõ as a modern-day mythic folk hero and highlighted his rather benign attributes, the arriero perõ often was derided and denigrated for his notorious behaviors on the job, in particular those actions more reminiscent of the laughable Pychaichi than of the wily Perú Rima or the pokaré. In one example of the contrast between Pychaichi and Perú Rima, the editors of the company newspaper poked fun at the ignorant worker by using the categories of the “El Toque” and the “El Anti-Toque,” literally the one who has “the touch” and the one who lacks “the touch.” El Toque (the modern-day Rima) engaged in a variety of behaviors, that included “sneaking” into the work site, wearing a blue helmet in order to pass as an engineer, entering the Dining Hall by using someone else’s badge, first marking overtime hours and then spending the night fishing in the Paraná River, getting paid and then going to certain

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101 Helio Vera, En busca del hueso perdido: (tratado de paraguayología) (Asunción: RP Ediciones, 1990), 240.
102 For more on the folklore of Paraguay, see Mauricio Cardozo Ocampo, Mundo folklórico paraguayo (Asunción: Editorial Cuadernos Republicanos, 1989).
103 Vera, En busca del hueso perdido, 240-41. Vera argues that this is a central characteristic of the Paraguayan, seen in the Spanish phrase “A mí, me tenia que pasar” and in the Guaraní concept of chemiro guara, or “just getting by.” See also Gauto, “Perfil del hombre paraguayo,” 63-70.
104 Vera, En busca del hueso perdido, 240-41.
105 “Humor Made in CONEMPA,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), 8.
zones of prostitution in Hernandarias, and missing work on Monday after a partying binge only to present a doctor’s note allowing him to return to work on Tuesday without negative consequences. El Toque, in this example, is particularly adept in avoiding detection and punishment for his transgression of the rules.

El Anti-Toque (the modern-day Pychaichi), on the other hand, constituted an embarrassment to himself and the company. He fished in the Paraná River using twine (liñada), pawned his badge and helmet in the whiskería (bar/brothel) La Mariposa in order to pay for sex, was detained at the Security Guard station because he did not have his badge, was caught watching a film in the cinema during his work shift, and then acted surprised by the “scolding” (tirô-ysa) from the supervisor. Most importantly, El Anti-Toque let himself be called an arriero perô because he lacked the ability to cover his tracks and to deflect attention. In this way, editors drew a distinction between the cunning worker and the foolish worker and squarely situated the arriero perô in the latter category. Both workers engaged in the same behaviors of the manly arriero, however only the Anti-Toque allowed himself to be caught and thus openly shamed by and punished for his actions.

The fate of the arriero perô after dismissal by the company, at least according to the editors, was not wholly negative. In another letter, the unnamed arriero perô stated that he had worked for Conempa as a water pump operator (operador de bomba) for almost two years (note that he had not moved up to a more skilled position) and that upon termination of his employment on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project he planned to return to his native pueblo in Paraguari province. Although hoping to continue working for the company, he stated that he would be “leaving behind at the work site many beautiful, good, pleasant, and beneficial things. But I carry in my heart lovely memories, wonderful experiences, [and] a cheerful gratitude.”106 Beyond a positive work experience and lack of hard feelings toward the company, the good-natured arriero perô looked to his future in his native village of La Colmena, stating that, “together with my severance pay I also carry home enough money as well. As a bachelor, I can invest this in something that will go on to open the road toward the future” and “I feel better,” the

106 “Carta de un Arriero Perô,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “...dejo, allá en el Sitio de Obras, muchas cosas lindas, buenas, agradables, beneficiosas. Pero llevo en mi corazón hermosos recuerdos, valiosas experiencias, una viva gratitud.”
worker further states, “with my letter of release (carta de liberación) in hand and a paycheck in my pocket.”

A specific benefit mentioned by the arriero peró was the literacy course offered through the El Cantero Community Center at the job site. According to the worker, one evening he attended the class, mostly out of curiosity. Although having completed primary education in his native town, the worker stated, “I did not know that I had forgotten almost everything that I had learned as a child,” but after graduating from the program, the arriero peró argued that, “besides understanding better what I already knew, I am acquiring very interesting knowledge for myself, my family, and my community.” Education comprised but one of the benefits offered to the worker, if he decided to commit to the effort.

Another letter exposes the anxiety experienced by the worker facing dismissal from the company. The so-called arriero peró wished to continue working for Conempa, possibly on the rumored refurbishment of the Bay of Asunción. After all, he felt he had behaved properly “as a good Paraguayan I don’t want to be a hypocrite. I want to refute the deeds that people attribute to us, the Paraguayans.” For him, the work experience gained at Itaipú was priceless. Working for Conempa, he said, made him “feel almost important” and that he had “a mountain of privileges totally dependent for me to utilize them all and in their proper place” and light-heartedly likened his opportunities at Conempa to “the egg of the golden goose” (el huevo de la gallina de oro). However, the worker lamented the fact that his job at Conempa, once lost, would not be easy to find again, stating “I’m worried because I am used to things going badly for me. Conempa

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107 “Carta de un Arriero Peró,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “…con esta indemnización llevo también a mi casa bastante dinero junto. Yo que soy un soltero puede invertir esto en algo que me vaya abriendo el camino para el futuro,” and “Con mi liquidación y mi carta de liberación en la mano y mi cheque en el bolsillo me siento mejor.”

108 “Carta de un Arriero Peró,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “…no sabía que había olvidado casi todo lo que de niño aprendí,” and “Además [sic] de comprender mejor lo que ya sabía, adquiero nuevos conocimientos interesantísimos para mi, mi familia, y mi comunidad.”

109 “La carta de un ‘Arriero peró’,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 5. The Spanish reads: “Como soy un buen paraguayo no quiero ser falluto. Quiero desmentir con hechos lo que la gente dice de nosotros, los paraguayos.”

110 “La carta de un ‘Arriero peró’,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 5. The Spanish reads: “Me siento casi importante,” and “…un montón de privilegios todo depende de mi para utilizarlos todos y en sus debido lugar.”
gives me a lot of benefits, and what will happen to me when the work ends in my section? A company equal to Itaipú is difficult to find.”

Not surprisingly, the worker who smartly and diligently saved his pay for the inevitable end of the Itaipú project, now emerged as a counter example to the *arriero peró*. For example, the company held up Oscar Martínez Agüero, a security guard for Conempa who knew how to take advantage of his years of work. Martínez happily affirmed that, “in three years…I have not missed a single day of work” and that “in case I lose my job as part of the restructuring, I can dedicate myself to my business: a record shop in Hernandarias, [the shop is] the fruit of my labor and savings from these three years of work at Conempa.” As argued earlier, the worker that knew how to exploit or “to make the most of” a situation to his advantage is a recurring theme found throughout the story of migration and in this case of work in the borderlands and on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. Constituting a success story, Martínez and others like him would return to their native towns and villages (or in case of Martínez, remain local) to open their own businesses.

One letter submitted by and subsumed under the banner of the *arriero peró* makes evident the dangers of work environment. However, in this case the worker argued that he did not deserve such a title. While excavating a particularly hard section of rock at the dam site, a fragment flew into and perforated his right eye. As the worker recounts, the work-related injury required that a variety of corporate officials become involved in the case, including the S.H.T, B.S (Bienestar Social), P.S.M.D (Programa de Salud-Right Bank), and I.P.S (Instituto de Previsión Social). Medical personnel attempted to save his sight and, in the meantime, social workers tended to his wife and two children.

According to the injured worker, if he returned home with only one good eye it would not be in the state of disgrace of the typical *arriero peró*, but rather simply because he thought the eye injury had “surpassed human abilities. So they didn’t abandon me.

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111 “La carta de un ‘Arriero peró’,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 5. The Spanish reads: “…estoy un poquito preocupado porque me ando acostumbrando mal. Conempa me da muchos beneficios y cuando terminen los trabajos de mi Sector qué me va a pasar? Una empresa igual a Itaipú es difícil encontrar.”

112 “Un vigilante que supó aprovechar su trabajo,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 5. The Spanish reads: “Em tres años…no falté a mi trabajo ni una sola vez,” and “En caso de que por reestructuración me toque salir de la Empresa, me dedicaría a mi negocio: una Casa de discos en Hernandarias...el fruto de mi trabajo, el ahorro de estos tres años de trabajo en Conempa.”
And all of the departments are complying with their obligation.”\textsuperscript{113} The company provided full assistance, the worker said, because he had observed the appropriate safety protocols and the usage of protective equipment such as safety goggles. To the \textit{arriero perõ} reading his letter, he admonished them, stating “\textit{compañeros}, it is always better to pay attention, to look out for accidents…Each injured man is linked to incalculable responsibilities to other human beings. Me, for example, I am young, I have a wife and two small children, and others that need me to have both eyes.”\textsuperscript{114} Though married and observant of safety protocols, the worker clearly feared that his injury would indelibly mark him as a “bold macho.”

These examples in the pages of the company newspaper—the dismissed worker, the smart worker, and the injured worker—combined narratives of worker migration, success, and failure while casting the company in a favorable light. Additionally, editors also published excerpts presumed to be letters received from other workers, usually under the generic heading “Letter from a Worker.” These other letters appear to have less of an underlying agenda than the category “Letter from an Arriero Perõ,” thus giving weight to the argument that editors played some part in their creation or, at least, their content and presentation. Whatever the case, both the workers and the editors engaged in the construction of an editorial narrative that juxtaposed formulations of the “good” and the “bad” worker within the context of company restructuring of the late-1970s. The letters present a complex negotiation between those workers that took advantage of their opportunity at Itaipú Binacional and those workers that did not. But regardless of the individual case, Conempa officials wished to believe that they at least had lived up to their end of the bargain.

\textsuperscript{113} “Carta de un Arriero Perõ,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “...superó las posibilidades humanas. Pues, no me dejaron solo. Y todos los sectores están cumpliendo con su cometido.”

\textsuperscript{114} “Carta de un Arriero Perõ,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 2. The Spanish reads: “...compañeros, siempre es mejor cuidarse, cuidarse de los accidentes...Cada persona accidentada está ligada a un sinnúmero de compromisos con otros seres humanos. Yo, como ejemplo, soy joven, tengo una esposa también joven, hijos (dos), pequeños y otros quienes precisan de mis dos ojos.”
Conclusion

At the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, the consortium company Conempa provided an opportunity for Paraguayans of all classes to work and earn a living on their native soil. Altering the established pattern of labor migration, in the late 1970s, Itaipú Binacional pulled the “prodigal sons” of the nation to the Alto Paraná borderlands in search of work.

Employed by the “national company” Conempa, administrators and a host of welfare professionals sought to transform the peasant into a modern industrial worker. However, despite the best efforts of administrators, some workers proved resistant to programs to shape safe, healthy, and sober citizens of the nation. By the middle of 1979, as the project moved along its schedule of construction, the single peasant worker in the form of the “bold macho” was deemed lacking in the necessary aptitude for the emerging work environment. As shown in this chapter, the Bold Macho contested the gendered corporate meanings of appropriate behavior, including sexuality, in the quasi-utopian locale of the on-site barracks and community center. Often, this tension manifested itself in the company press, which discursively separated the “good” worker from the “bad” worker in terms of the “safe” and “unsafe” worker.

In any case, company officials already had begun to embrace the skilled, safe, and married man as the next focus of the company. In particular, as the social infrastructure in the worker communities finally reached completion in early 1979, the nuclear family, not the individual dam worker, increasingly garnered the attention of corporate officials.
Figure 3.1: The Paraguayan Workers of A-6 Barracks and Their Art

Source: Upper image photographed in 1978 and published along with article in *Informativo Unicon*, 1:1 (4 de fevereiro de 1978), 6.; Lower image from photo archive, Itaipú Binacional, Office of Public Relations, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. Saved from destruction, the panels are now permanently in the Itaipú Ecomuseu in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.
Figure 3.2: Vaccination of Dam Workers

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:13 (20 de octubre de 1979), 2.
Figure 3.3: A Billiards Tournament in the El Cantero Community Center

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 2.
Figure 3.4: Workers Housed On-Site Participating in a Literacy Course in the El Cantero de Obras Community Center, Paraguay

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de abril de 1980), 8.
Figure 3.5: A Model of Masculinity

Figure 3.6: Movie and an Educational Talk, H Barracks

Source: Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:3 (10 de março de 1978), 5.
Figure 3.7: Depictions of the Unsafe and Safe Worker

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 6.
Figure 3.8: The Conempa Olimpiada of 1979

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 8.

Note: Marcelino Monzón competing in the high jump during the Olimpiada Itaipú ’79. The H Barracks are visible in the background.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Family Life: Creating Worker Communities at the Itaipú Hydroelectric Dam, Brazil and Paraguay, 1979-1984

What’s here is wonderful: comfortable homes and social welfare, schools and training programs, pharmacies, hospitals, and various clinics for everyone, sports for both sexes; with education and morals.¹

As construction on the hydroelectric dam project proceeded to plan, company officials increasingly focused on the worker’s family and home as the object of attention and concern. As such, Itaipú Binacional and its consortium companies employed a series of “welfare professionals”—including social workers, family and sanitary educators, public health officials, dieticians, physicians, and nurses—given the task to educate and mold proper mothers, fathers, and children both inside and outside the company housing developments. Moreover, the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project represented the culmination of knowledge gained through the construction of previous projects, primarily in Brazil, and how best to attend to the social and community needs of workers, with and without prior experience, and their families.

While male dam workers were being transformed into industrial laborers and skilled professionals at the dam site, female spouses were instructed as how best to be housewives, to scientifically manage the home and raise children, and to fill the “free hours” of the day with productive activities. Thus, the discourse centered on the nuclear family—defined as the father, mother, and children—and the worker’s home as the new locale for instilling notions of female domesticity and, to a lesser degree, male responsibility to the home. In addition to appropriate roles for women and men, the company sought to impart knowledge of the scientific management of the household and the proper way to raise children in the modern home.

¹ Excerpt of O que era antes de ser Itaipu (1978), a poem by Laurentino Schwartz Haupt. “O que era antes de ser Itaipu,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:10 (6 de julho de 1978), 6. The Portuguese reads: “O que aqui tem de mais legal: casas de muitos confortos e assistência social; escolas e treinamentos, farmácias e hospital e vários ambulatórios; por toda obra em geral, esportes para todos os sexos; com treinamento e moral.”
Creating Dam Workers

Neither the company town nor dam worker housing communities represented new inventions, but the sheer size of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam and the necessary workforce necessitated the implementation of a vast system of social infrastructure that included housing and medical, educational, spiritual, and recreational facilities for dam workers and their families. Generally speaking, dam workers with prior experience on dam projects, known as the barrageiro or represero (male dam worker in Portuguese and Spanish, respectively) and particularly high-level professionals and administrators, expected that the company would provide for all of their basic needs, including the recreational and educational requirements of wives and children during the day while the men labored at the construction site. Virtually every man working on the project could, and often did, claim the title of “dam worker.” However, those men with prior experience on numerous projects were referred to, particularly in Brazil, as the “O velho barregeiro” (Old Dam Worker), and were held in high esteem among regular workers.

For those men and women without prior experience of life at a dam site, or those that recently had migrated from the agricultural sector, the companies offered an array of instruction, both on-the-job and in the classroom. For unskilled men, this meant access to vocational and technical training designed to impart a useful skill. For “unskilled” women that remained at home, company officials and welfare professionals created a whole host of classes and courses, mostly targeted to new wives and mothers, in the appropriate way to live in and the proper arrangement of the home, defined as her “job-site,” and the proper way to cook, clean, and raise children. Broadly, social welfare and family education programs targeted both women without prior experience living at a hydroelectric dam site and those with prior experience.

The spouses and partners of male dam workers, in the complimentary role of the “female dam worker” (barrageira or represera), became a locus of concern and attention on the part of company officials. Courses for women sought to mitigate the problems encountered earlier at the Jupiá hydroelectric dam project, where stay-at-home housewives were portrayed as problematic for husbands because they did not have sufficient activities in which to engage in after completion of her “work day.” Thus, company programs had two objectives: first, to impart important domestic skills to new
housewives and mothers and, second, to provide suitable social and recreational activities for women intended to fill her “free time” and to head off domestic strife and marital conflict. As such, the company sought to center the nuclear family and the family life experience within the context of its own social welfare institutions, with the intent to create more productive and healthy workers for the future.

The House that Itaipú Built: Company Towns and Peripheral Communities

By the middle of 1979, all of the housing developments in Areas 1-8 and Vilas A-C planned by Itaipú Binacional had been constructed according to the master plan. In the same year workers completed the diversion channel for the Paraná River and commenced the construction of the main dam works. Long-time residents of Foz do Iguaçu, for their part, took to calling the company housing developments, or Vilas, the “cidade de cá” or “cidade de lá,” which translates as the “other city” or the “city over there.” Despite reaching completion in 1979, the company-built developments never fully satisfied the demand for housing, as many workers and their families never received a housing assignment. Access to housing, moreover, became a bone of contention between workers and Itaipú Binacional. Almost from the onset of the project in 1975-76, a housing crisis developed on both sides of the border, which spurred the growth of cities and towns adjacent to the company housing developments, and led to the development of squatter or peripheral communities. As a result, even in the light of its scarcity, company officials touted housing as one of the great benefits offered to workers and their families.

Citing the housing crisis in the region, officials highlighted the difficulties of “building a roof of one’s own or simply to rent an even moderately comfortable and dignified house.” To house dam workers and their families, the consortium companies constructed three developments, officially known as Conjunto A, B, and C (but popularly referred to as “Vilas,” a shortened version of vilas operárias or worker’s villas) on the outskirts of the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu and in eight developments (Áreas 1-8) in or adjacent to the existing Paraguayan towns of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner,

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3 “Para los moradores de villas residenciales,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo de 1980), 8. The Spanish reads: “...para hacerse de techo propio o simplemente para alquilar una vivienda medianamente confortable y digna.”
Hernandarias, Puerto Presidente Franco, and the agricultural hamlet of Colonia Stroessner.

At the height of the construction of the hydroelectric dam these developments housed approximately 21,000 Brazilian and 14,600 Paraguayan workers and family members. Generally speaking, nationality did not matter in the allocation of housing assignments; Brazilians lived on the Paraguayan side of the border and vice-versa, along with a smaller contingent of other nationalities. Thus, the company-built communities often existed, not unlike the Work Zone as multinational, multilingual, and multiethnic spaces. Company officials intended to reproduce the social hierarchy of each country by allocating housing assignments among the employees of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms based on an employee’s function and income. As such, there existed a wide variety of floor plans that reflected the economic and social hierarchy. [Figure 4.1] However, given the sheer number of personnel needed for the project, not all dam workers and their families could be housed within the Vilas and Áreas pertaining to Itaipú Binacional.

On the Paraguayan side of the project, Area 1 in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner housed the highest paid employees, including architects, engineers, economists, lawyers, administrators, and medical doctors, and their families. Centrally located adjacent to the international highway, Area 1 included 276 residences, an educational center for preschool, primary, and secondary levels, a recreational club, and a commercial center. In Area 1, each home was designed to accommodate a single nuclear family and at least one domestic servant, who usually cooked meals, cleaned up after the family, and tended to children.

Area 2 housed middle level functionaries and their families and contained 249 residences, a community center, a church, supermarket, and the main Itaipú Binacional Hospital serving the Paraguayan side of the project. Areas 3-5 and 7-8 were mixed developments of both middle and lower level workers. Area 3 contained 378 residences and an educational center for preschool and primary levels. Area 4 contained 837 residences, a community center, an educational center for preschool and primary levels, and a church. Area 5 contained 652 residences, an educational center for preschool, primary, and secondary levels, and a supermarket and commercial center. Area 6, the
largest and predominantly working-class community in its composition, housed the lower and middle tiers of employees and their families and contained 1,680 multi-family residences and an educational center for preschool and primary levels. Area 7 contained 53 residences and Area 8 contained 164 residences, recreational facilities, primary school, and a vocational-technical college to service residents of the preexisting small agricultural community of Colonia Stroessner. [Table 4.1]

In Brazil, the design and layout of company housing reflected a more rigid social hierarchy and a clearly defined three-tier class structure. Vila A, located just north of the international highway (BR-277), contained 2,105 residences designed to house middle-class technical and administrative personnel and their families. Amenities included a church, commercial center, bank, supermarket, schools, the Floresta Club with four swimming pools, and the main 182-bed Itaipú Binacional Hospital serving the Brazilian side of the project.

Designed as a gated community, Vila B was constructed on a high bluff overlooking and adjacent to the Paraná River and just north of the international highway and the Friendship Bridge that linked Brazil with Paraguay. Within the community, 221 residences were designed to house the high-level officials of Itaipú Binacional and the subcontracted companies, including architects, engineers, accountants, lawyers, administrators, and doctors, and their families. As in Area 1 in Paraguay, each home in Vila B accommodated a single nuclear family and at least one servant. As before, live-in domestics tended to children and shopped for and prepared meals for the family. Given their upper-class status, the housewives of Vila B most likely did not prepare meals, clean, or tend to children. Additionally, employees of the corporation maintained the landscaping of the individual homes and public spaces. An ecumenical chapel served the religious needs of the community. Furthermore, the members-only Ipê Clube satisfied recreational needs with a large swimming pool, sporting fields, social club, and a private marina. Of all of the communities that Itaipú Binacional created, Vila B aspired to the highest standard for its residents—appealing to a particularly North American style of

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4 A similar formula was applied at Jupiá hydroelectric dam project. The difference is that at Jupiá, Vila A housed the highest level of workers.

5 Vila B housed the most professional and highest paid employees, but company planners did not assume any religious affiliation on the part of residents. Generally speaking, the Brazilian side of the project contained less emphasis on Catholicism, in direct contrast to the Paraguayan side.
living—and with particular attraction to the architectural style and luxury homes and lifestyle (imagined to be) found in Sausalito, California.⁶

In striking contrast, Vila C, a large development of 2,900 structures located within the proprietary zone of Itaipú Binacional and closest to the hydroelectric dam itself, housed approximately 20,000 unskilled and semi-skilled workers, including the categories of general laborers, carpenters, stonemasons, painters, drivers, cooks, office assistants, mechanics, welders, and electricians, and their families. Itaipú Binacional officials never intended Vila C as permanent and, as such, the company intended to demolish this housing development upon completion of the hydroelectric dam.⁷ As a result, dwellings were constructed of the most basic materials, cinderblock walls and corrugated tin roofs, resembling the architectural style of the “humble dwellings of the countryside” of Brazil.⁸ Each structure contained four internal subdivisions and accommodated four families in total. Within the community, a school designed for 5,000 students operated with classrooms, a covered gymnasium, and two outdoors sports fields. Additionally, sixteen physicians staffed an outpatient hospital and an emergency room. [Table 4.2]

As with the hydroelectric dam itself, construction of the planned worker communities proceeded in stages. Generally, medical facilities were constructed along with the worker community housing. Often the case, the completion of the social and commercial infrastructure occurred after the construction of the residences for workers. For example, only in July 1979 did workmen complete the commercial center for Area 1. Included in the project were the affluent zone’s first supermarket, pharmacy, bank, hair salon, and shops selling clothing and shoes. Concurrently, the church and education

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⁶ It is not clear why Sausalito had been singled out here. One possibility is that the community’s affluence and natural setting would have appealed to residents who had traveled to the Bay Area. More broadly, the planners of the community most likely wished to evoke an “American” or “Californian” lifestyle, particularly embodied by the ranch-style homes of Vila B and Area 1, which featured high “livability” in its rambling single story, open floor plan, large windows, garage, and grassy lawn.

⁷ Vila C was never demolished as planned by the company. The protests of residents combined with those of city leaders, who cited a lack of affordable housing in Foz do Iguaçu, led Itaipú Binacional officials to spare the community. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the community later became a hotbed of militant labor protest in the late-1980s.

center remained under construction. In March 1979, Conempa workmen completed the construction of the worker housing in Area 6 located closest to the dam site on the Paraguayan side of the project and represented the last of the worker housing to be built. Viewed from above, such company housing developments in the early stages of development appeared as islands completely surrounded by dense vegetation and connected by muddy, unpaved roadways (especially during the rainy season). However, by the end of 1979, on both sides of the project the infrastructure for the community housing and medical facilities existed in nearly all of the worker communities.

Lacking in infrastructure more generally, the Paraguayan side of the dam project required more development and took longer to complete. For example, a major infrastructure project undertaken by the subcontracting firm Conempa was the construction of the bridge over the Acaray River, which linked by superhighway the western entrance to the Work Zone and the Paraguayan cities of Hernandarias and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. Construction on the transportation infrastructure project commenced in late 1978 and reached completion in April 1980. Once completed, the Acaray River Bridge and corresponding access highway operated as the main land route to the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project from the Paraguayan side of the border and linked the communities of Hernandarias and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner.

Importantly, the highway and bridge further opened the Paraguayan side of the zone to makeshift settlements, eventually referred to as “peripheral communities,” comprised of dam workers employed by the subcontracted firms, though usually unskilled and recently arrived from the countryside. In Paraguay, examples of peripheral communities include Barrio Don Bosco (with 1,250 residents), Barrio Obrero (850 residents), Villa San Francisco (1,150 residents) and the geographically specific communities of Kilometer 7 (75 residents), Kilometer 16 (600 residents), and Kilometer 20 (530 residents) located along the superhighway. Similar peripheral communities of

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9 “En breve se inaugura el Centro Comercial del Area 1,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 2.
10 “Intensa labor en Puente Acaray,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:4 (20 de enero de 1979), 3.
11 Though not peripheral communities per se, in October 1978, it was reported that Ciudad Presidente Stroessner contained 2,050 dam workers, Ciudad Presidente Franco contained 1,890 dam workers, and Hernandarias contained 600 dam workers unable to obtain company housing. “Entrevista
dam workers and their families unable to acquire company housing existed on the Brazilian side of the project as well, for example in Três Lagoas located on the outskirts of Foz do Iguaçu. While not officially part of the company housing projects (the “company town”), dam workers and their families residing in these so-called peripheral communities otherwise enjoyed the same benefits and scrutiny as other workers residing in the Vilas and Areas of Itaipú Binacional.

**The First of the Year: Migration, Gender Relations, and Everyday Life**

For the period July 1979 to July 1983, the main Hospital de Itaipú located in Vila A on the Brazilian side of the project alone registered 7,209 births, or approximately 1,142 births per year, to dam workers and their spouses. As company officials touted, the high level of attention provided to mothers and newborns formed a key pillar in what they referred to as the “total assistance complex” (complejo sistema asistencial) offered to dam workers and their families. For normal deliveries, the Itaipú Binacional hospitals offered accommodation to pregnant women in labor, a doctor to supervise the birth, and post-natal care before and after returning to the home. Subsequently, social workers visited the home to inspect for the proper care of the newborn and the maintenance of a suitable home environment. However, medical attention comprised but one of the benefits extended to workers and their families.

The “first baby of the year” born on both the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the project garnered special attention in the company press. The reports not only highlighted the expanding family, but also provided company officials the opportunity to extol the services and benefits offered to dam workers and their families. Overall, the yearly first signals the turn in attention to the nuclear family as a focus, particularly as the social infrastructure reached completion and the dam project shifted to a more skilled workforce of mostly partnered or married men and their spouses. Moreover, given their random nature, the first birth of the year provides a valuable snapshot into the patterns of migration, gender relations, and everyday life of dam workers and their families.
On 5 July 1979, Vilma Martins gave birth to the first baby born in the recently completed Itaipú Hospital located on the Brazilian side of the dam project. Her husband, Euzebio Martins, had worked for the subcontracted firm Unicon for two years as a general laborer and he and his growing family resided in the dam worker community of Vila C. The couple had been married for seven years and the newborn girl, who they named Rosangela Aparecida (Rose), was the fifth child born to the couple. [Figure 4.2] As Vilma Martins recounted her prior pregnancies, the first three offspring were born at home with the assistance of a midwife and the last two births occurred in the company hospitals in Foz do Iguaçu. In her account, Vilma Martins told of the complications that she experienced after the birth of her second and third children, but praised the new Itaipú Binacional medical facilities, stating that “the care in the hospital is much safer, even more so in the new hospital. With the treatment received, I do not have any of the concern that used to worry me when delivering a new baby. Now, I can handle the complications with peace of mind.” The new mother, furthermore, argued that, “a woman feels more confident and suffers less in a birth occurring in hospitals, where everything seems to happen so much faster.”

A second example is the Ortíz family. Two minutes after midnight on the first day of January 1980, María Petrona Balbuena de Ortíz gave birth to a baby girl who she named María Isabel. María Isabel was the eleventh child born to the 39-year-old María Petrona and her husband Cándido Ortíz Aliendre and the first baby born in 1980 on the Paraguayan side of the project. The Ortíz household, comprised of five sons and three daughters, resided in the peripheral community of Villa San Francisco, located near the entrance to the dam project on the Paraguayan side of the border. Cándido Ortíz, a carpenter employed by Conempra, was at home when the baby was born at the Itaipú Hospital located in Area 2. He stated “I am very calm because I know that we can trust in our professionals…I am thankful to our Company and to our [medical] professionals in

13 “Es nena la primera criatura nacida en el Hospital de Itaipú,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 2:29 (26 de julho de 1979), 2.
14 It is unclear what happened to the other three children. It is possible that they died at some point before the family migrated to the border zone.
Area 2 for this greatest of gifts.” Cándido, a native of Sapucai, met María Petrona in the interior town of Coronel Oviedo where they married and later migrated together, first to Caaguazu, before leaving for the border in search of work at the hydroelectric dam.

The third example is the Rodrigues family. At 2am on the first day of January 1980, the first child of José Rodrigues and his wife Raimunda Viera dos Reis was born in the Itaipú Binacional Hospital located in Vila A on the Brazilian side of the project. The new parents named their child Fabio Viera dos Reis. José, employed by Unicon as a technician (técnico en Yeso) at the same hospital, declared that he felt happy to know that his first child had been born in good health and that his wife was in good condition and further stated that, “well I wanted the baby to be a boy and [my] desire was attained.”

A fourth example is the Insfrán family. In the first moments of the year 1981, Angel Ramón Insfrán Fernández, a Carpenter’s Assistant employed by Conempa for one year, became a father and his 18-year-old partner, Gregoria Dentella Zaracho, became a new mother to a baby girl they named Claudia Rossana. According to the account told by the new father, Gregoria began to have labor pains at 11:20 pm at which time he called the Itaipú Hospital of Area 2. Almost immediately, he stated, an ambulance arrived to their home and transported the pregnant Gregoria and Angel to the hospital in Area 2. According to Angel’s account, once admitted safely, he left Gregoria in the hospital and subsequently took part in the New Year’s Eve celebrations occurring nearby at the central traffic turnabout in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. Meanwhile, in the hospital, Blanca de Rotela, Doctor of Gynecology and Obstetrics, along with the assistance of the on-staff Pediatrician, Dr. Mariano Florentín, and two nurses, delivered the baby girl.

And the last example is the Cohone family. On 10 January 1982, Benedicta Candia de Cohene gave birth to the first child of that year registered in the Itaipú Binacional Hospital of Area 2 on the Paraguayan side of the border. The proud parents named their newborn daughter Mirian Beatriz. The parents, 21-year-old Benedicta

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16 “Nacieron con el 80,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 2:40 (15 de enero de 1980), 7.
17 “Nacieron con el 80,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 2:40 (15 de enero de 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “...pues quería que la criatura fuese del sexo masculino y su deseo fue atendido.”
18 “La primera bebe de año: Claudia Rossana nacida a las 00:00 hs, en el Programa de Salud,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:28 (20 de enero de 1981), 3
Candia and her husband, 23-year-old Arcadio Cohene Rojas (Conempa badge #63,741), both natives of Coronel Oviedo, had migrated for an “opportunity to work and a better life” (una mejor suerte de trabajo y bienestar) at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. As recent arrivals to the border, the couple settled in the peripheral worker community of Barrio Don Bosco, located adjacent to the superhighway linking Hernandarias and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner and near to the Acaray Dam. At the time of the birth of his daughter, Arcadio Cohene had worked for five months in the Framing Division of the Brazilian subcontracted firm Unicon.

The Cohene family lived in the “humble dwellings of the Paraguayans” of Barrio Don Bosco. The reporter remarked that “in an abode constructed of planks, [I] encountered doña Benedicta, mother of the baby of the year, in the presence of her mother-in-law (madre política), 50 year old Doña Teodora Rojas de Cohene, who very kindly welcomed us.”\(^{19}\) Doña Teodora, for her part, recently had arrived from Coronel Oviedo to assist in the care of the newborn. “ Quickly,” the reporter adds, the house “filled with other ladies from the neighborhood, who told us that their spouses also worked in the Sitio de Obras, for Conempa and Unicon, and the other [subcontracted firms], and that various homes in the community had received and were receiving visits from the stork.”\(^{20}\)

The examples cited demonstrate that some men and women migrated to the border zone with family in tow while others began to produce offspring once they arrived at the border and had secured employment. Moreover, these families that lived both in and out of company housing developments. In the last example, a mother-in-law provided additional support in the care of the newborn infant, but this does not appear to be a common experience. With or without children, cohabitating or married, each of these vignettes provides a window into the lives of the parents who newborn just so happened to be the first child born that year. While the “first of the year” was not the first child

\(^{19}\) “El primer nacimiento del año 1982 registrado en el hospital,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:40 (20 de enero de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “En un hogar construido de tables nos encontramos con doña Teodora Rojas de Cohene, de 50 años, no recibes muy amablemente.”

\(^{20}\) “El primer nacimiento del año 1982 registrado en el hospital,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:40 (20 de enero de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “Muy pronto la casita se llenó de otras señores, vecinas del lugar, quienes nos relataron que sus esposos también trabajan en el Sitio de Obras, en Conempa y en Unicon y los otros, y que varios hogares de dicha Fracción no sólo recibieron sino siguen recibiendo la visita de la cigüeña...”
born to the couple of María Petrona and Cándido, it is clear from their testimony that giving birth in a hospital setting and in the border zone represented a new experience. In the examples of Gregoria and Angel and Benedicta and Arcadio, these couples experienced childbirth for the first time. For both couples with children and new parents, company officials turned their attention to and promoted the proper care and upbringing of the children of dam workers.

According to the company press, the situation of infants and children had gained increased attention in both the national and local community as part of the consciousness-raising effects of the United Nation’s 1979 International Year of the Child. The International Year of the Child brought attention to the needs of children, including adequate nutrition, housing, health, and education, while decrying the deplorable situation of urban child laborers and marginalized and abandoned children. In Brazil, an additional impetus was public concern grew over the rising numbers of “street children” (meninos da rua) selling newspapers and gum on the streets of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro seemingly without a family, and perhaps more troubling for the future of Brazil, unprepared for life, exposed to malnourishment, illness, and crime. These concerns over “abandoned children” were not new, but rather the latest incarnation of public concern. In any case, as company officials of Itaipú Binacional and the subcontracted firms argued, the International Year of the Child had led adults in the local community to better

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21 Bringing the international event down to the local level, high-ranking members of Paraguayan society founded the Alto Paraná Regional Commission of the International Year of the Child. The commission organized a series of weeklong activities, called the Week of the Child (Semana del Niño), in which it sponsored a sports tournament for children (Olimpiada Infantil Itaipú 1979) and cultural exchanges between schools. Additionally, the commission set aside August 16 specifically as the Day of the Child (Día del Niño).

22 Two studies published in 1979 helped to raise awareness of the situation of the infant and child in Brazil. See Centro de Defesa da Qualidade da Vida – Rio de Janeiro, A Situação da criança no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Ilha Livraria Editora, 1979) and Rosa Maria Fischer Ferreira, Meninos da Rua: Expectativas e valores de menores marginalizados em São Paulo: pesquisa realizada por equipe do CEDEC para a Comissao Justica e Paz de Sao Paulo no periodo de fevereiro a novembro de 1979 (Sao Paulo: Centro de Estudos de Cultura Contemporanea, 1979). According to the study by the Centro de Defesa da Qualidade da Vida – Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil as a whole, 83% of infants suffered from malnutrition, 14 million children were homeless or lived in shanties, over 12 million children did not attend school, and 15.4 million children between the ages of 1-18 had been abandoned.

23 A similar concern, for example, could be seen in the 1950s, when the welfare professionals of SESI/SENAI worried about children exposed to vice in the streets of São Paulo. See Barbara Weinstein, For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 247-48.
comprehend and to take seriously “the simple but unknown world” of the child.\textsuperscript{24} More importantly, however, dam worker children took on special significance for company officials because they believed that “in a not too distant tomorrow they will continue our work.”\textsuperscript{25}

While the specifics of the exigencies of Itaipú Binacional combined with international programs and agendas of the 1970s drew attention to children and youths, professional concern over the raising of infants and children had existed, at least in Brazil, from the 1920s.\textsuperscript{26} As the social historian Ana Martins argues, Brazil had taken an interest in children and their health since the 1920s, with the creation of the National Department of Public Health that formulated policies for mother-infant health.\textsuperscript{27} Over the course of the century, moreover, concerns over public health penetrated into the larger medical discourse concerning the family and entered into corporate programs targeted to workers. In addition to fostering worker loyalty, company programs in health and family education sought to improve not only the material and day-to-day lives of workers, but also the quality of reproduction of worker’s offspring, thus leading to a healthier and more productive workforce in the future.

While health concerns, and particularly infants and children’s health, were not new, the context of 1970s Brazil and Paraguay impacted the shape and context of the programs and policies that emerged at Itaipú Binacional. Often, for doctors, nurses, social workers, and sanitary and family educators, the dam worker’s spouse and children represented the source material for both personal career advancement and continued national development and greatness.

\textsuperscript{24} “Casa Cuna en Ciudad Stroessner,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:12 (20 de setiembre de 1979), 7. The Spanish reads: “el sencillo pero desconocido mundo.”

\textsuperscript{25} “Nuestro homenaje al niño, en su Año,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:9 (20 de junio de 1979), 8. The Spanish reads: “...en una mañana no lejano ellos serán los continuadores de nuestra obra...”

\textsuperscript{26} Ana Paula Vosne Martins, “‘Vamos criar seu filho’: os médicos puériculos e a pedagogia materna no século XX,” \textit{História Ciências Saúde-Manguinhos} 15:1 (Janeiro-Março 2008):135-154. This is not say that such concerns by state and medical authorities did not exist in other countries in Latin America.

\textsuperscript{27} Martins, “‘Vamos criar seu filho,’” 145.
Agents of Social Welfare: Social Service and Family Education

Welfare professionals, particularly social workers and their assistants, had a tangible presence in the peripheral neighborhoods and company housing projects where dam workers and their families lived. Employed by both Conempa’s and Unicon’s Department of Social Welfare and divided among its two internal divisions of Social Service and of Family Education, social workers and their assistants operated in both the Work Zone and in the dam worker’s communities. The Family Education Section, as its name implied, exclusively attended to the dam worker communities and focused primarily on providing instruction to housewives. Overall, the directors of the Department of Social Welfare coordinated the activities of its two divisions that worked directly with dam worker families.

Social workers from the Social Service Section implemented a variety of programs targeted to dam worker’s family and their communities. The section had a broad mandate defined as “to attend to persons linked in some way to the Itaipú project in all [of the] multiple and diverse circumstances.” Social workers provided general advice, orientation to community life, and moral direction to workers and their families. For new residents, social workers and assistants conducted an orientation and made subsequent and periodic visits to the homes, particularly when the wife expected a child and after delivery of the baby. In these cases, Social Service Section agents inspected homes and coordinated nurse and doctor visits as part of the overall corporate Health Program for worker’s families. Importantly, the social workers worked with physicians, nurses, and public health officials to implement the larger program for “social hygiene” in the dam worker communities.

For example, in August 1979, the new offices of the Social Service of Conempa’s Department of Social Welfare opened in Area 6, which housed employees of the Construction, Planning, and Administration Departments of Itaipú Binacional and the subcontracted firms Conempa and Unicon and their families. From 7am to 4pm, social

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28 “Adorno, trabajo y alegría,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de 1978), 6. The Spanish reads: “asistir a las personas, ligadas de alguna manera a la Obra de Itaipú, en sus múltiples y diversificadas circunstancias.”
29 “Dpto. de Recursos Humanos y Bienestar Social,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:15 (20 de diciembre de 1979), 4
workers attended to a population of approximately 2,500 residents of mostly Paraguayan nationality. Similar to the Social Welfare Department’s offices operating at the entrance to the Work Zone, the new office in Area 6 formed the “base of operations of an important sector dedicated to the promotion of the well-being of the workers.”

Agents of the two sections of the Social Welfare Department focused on the needs of dam worker families, often operating in tandem with other corporate agencies, such as medical, health, and religious personnel, as part of what they termed their “medical, social, and educational mission” (labor médico-social-educativa) in the dam worker communities. Agents broadly organized sporting events for both women and children, craft workshops, conducted special commemorations, led nature excursions for family members, and assisted workers and their families in times of sickness, injury, and death. In addition, agents of social welfare provided information on how to obtain proper personal identity documents, voter cards, and temporary residency visas. For residents, agents could be called day or night for a variety of minor domestic problems; for example, if the water service to a home had been cut off or interrupted or if the garbage truck failed to pass by a block of homes on the designated day. All matters, however larger or small, could be brought to the attention of the employees of the Social Welfare Department of both Conempa and Unicon.

For problems of a more serious nature, Social Service Department agents could be contacted 24 hours a day in case of a medical emergency and called upon to coordinate assistance with doctors and nurses. In the event of the death of a dam worker, spouse, or child, agents made funeral arrangements for burial and coordinated religious ceremonies. In the latter case, social workers also prepared and filed reports for their superiors, Itaipú Binacional, and government officials. Furthermore, agents worked with Catholic Church

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30 “Servicio Social en Area 6,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “Es la base de operaciones de un importante sector dedicado a promover el bienestar de los trabajadores.”
31 “Las Madres son el centro de atención de provechoso curso,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:6 (20 de marzo de 1979), cover.
33 “Los importantes servicios de ‘Bienestar Social’,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 6.
officials to organize the preparations for a child’s First Communion, Last Rites, and other religious ceremonies.

As part of the orientation to company housing, agents not only disseminated a list of rules and regulations but, when applicable, also sought to supervise the area of public morals of residents. The list of proscriptions regarding working housing was extensive. For example, the rules asked residents to dispose of trash properly, to respect their neighbors, to refrain from playing radios or televisions loudly or to use amplifiers, to prevent damage to common areas such as parks, gardens, and walkways. In addition, the companies prohibited the use of the home as a place of business, refused to allow extended family members to live in the home, and banned modifications and additions.35 Given the close quarters, residents of Vila C were prohibited from keeping domestic animals, primarily dogs, in order to maintain the “tranquility of the residents, avoiding conflict and ensuring good neighborly relations.”36

The last rule, however, stipulated that all workers and their families residing in company housing must conduct themselves with “morality and good customs.”37 Along these lines, social workers resolved conflict between residents and, when necessary, mediated relations between men and women. For example, agents from the Social Assistance Department of Unicon stepped in to resolve marital conflict among couples in Vila C. As the resident Luiz Carlos stated in the local newspaper: “Fighting between couples is something common. There is not a couple that doesn’t have a fight. But in Vila C, fighting between husband and wife could be a reason for getting fired.”38 Not only did social workers seek to minimize domestic strife and the potential for violence and abuse in the dam worker home, but also shielded neighbors from disturbances in the community. In addition, as will be discussed later, marital strife was seen as detrimental to the health and welfare of children residing in the home.

35 “Para los moradores de villas residenciales,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo de 1980), 8.
36 “Aviso a los moradores del Conjunto Habitacional “C,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:1 (4 de fevereiro de 1978), 5. The Spanish reads: “…tranquilidad a los moradores, evitando problemas de relacionamiento y buena vecindad.”
37 “Para los moradores de villas residenciales,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo de 1980), 8. The Spanish reads: “con la moral y las buenas costumbres.”
Social workers also had the mandate to regulate sexual and marital relations between dam workers and their spouses. In one example, company social workers forced a husband to give up his mistress and to end the extramarital affair. Presumably, the dam worker’s spouse reported his activities to the Unicon Social Service Section of Vila C. As retold by a neighbor, the agents:

called [the worker] into the office one day, he was told off by the staff. He was told that, if he didn’t end this affair, they would take serious steps against him. Eventually they had to hold up his pay until he got rid of his lover.39

The outcome of the case is not known, however, such extramarital affairs had the potential to drain or spread thin male dam worker’s wages, and to place his primary family at risk, while simultaneously removing the husband from the home and the domestic life of his family.

In another example of marital conflict and its resolution, Luiz Carlos told of one neighbor who informed on the other to the Unicon social worker: “The problem is that he couldn’t sleep because of the ‘nheco-nheco’ that the neighboring couple’s bed made [during sex]. The social worker went to the home, met with the couple, and told them to stop making a racket; and if that wasn’t possible, they should put the mattress on the floor.”40 Although couched in terms of a violation of the “good neighbor” policy, the example highlights the reach of company officials in the everyday lives of workers and their spouses, and their emphasis on the home.

The “Home School” for Housewives

To the agents of the Family Education Section, the company home housed the nuclear family and was viewed as the fundamental building block of society. Lic. Hortensia Z. de Zaputovich, from Conempa’s Family Education Section, argued that, “from the dawn of

civilization, religion created the family as its center and its sanctuary, and the father as its
priest… [thus] the State originated in the family.” Furthermore, Zaputovich argued that
the family represented the roots and foundation of the schools, the library, and the
hospital. From the point of view of social workers, therefore, dam workers and their
families represented an important area of concern, particularly those deemed lacking in
the necessary skills for life in the new environment. These families were viewed as
problematic and less than ideal primary material for the new society being created at the
hydroelectric dam project.

Many of the families that migrated to the border in search of work had just left
their small agricultural villages. As one article from the company newspaper highlighted,
these families had left behind the small farm (chacra)\(^{41}\) in the rural countryside to seek a
better future in the city. As one Conempa engineer stated, “Today there are técnicos
(technicians) in construction that just yesterday left their chacras, their plows.”\(^{42}\)
Examples cited included Sinforiano Torres Céspedes, who migrated with his wife Regina
and 4-year-old Eulalio from the village of Loma Guazú, where he worked as a laborer
planting pineapple and cotton. According to Torres, “apart from agriculture I didn’t know
any profession and here I’ve learned so much, such as driving a bulldozer, how to solder,
and recently how to weld metal sheets and casings in the Metalworking Sector (Sector de
Embutido).”\(^{43}\) Recounting his work history at Itaipú hydroelectric dam, Torres stated that
he had started working as a day laborer (jornalero) and after three months transferred
to the Dosadora Sector as an assistant, before moving on to his current position as
metalworker. Living in the Barrio San Francisco, located at the entrance to the dam site,
the family had since expanded to include Lorenzo, two years old at the time of the
interview.

Another example is Ambrosio Lara Álvarez who migrated from his native village
in Caraguatay where he planted tobacco, tomatoes, and manioc. Despite having arrived in

\(^{41}\) Defined as an indigenous model of small, rural landholding.

\(^{42}\) “Aquellos que ayer dejaron sus chacras,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:26 (20 de
noviembre de 1980), 6. The Spanish reads: “Hoy son técnicos en construcción aquellos que ayer dejaron
sus chacras, sus arados.”

\(^{43}\) “Aquellos que ayer dejaron sus chacras,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:26 (20 de
noviembre de 1980), 6. The Spanish reads: “aparte de la agricultura, no conocía profesión alguna y aquí
aprendí tantas cosas, como por ejemplo, manejar una Pala cargadora, hacer soldaduras y ahora montar
placas y vainas aquí en el sector de Embutido.”
the city empty-handed (con las manos vacías a éste lugar), Lara stated, “I left all of that behind and arrived here in search of a better life.” Like Torres discussed above, Lara first found employment at Itaipú Binacinoal as a day laborer for two months before moving on to a position assistant welder. In addition to on-the-job training, Lara took a course for welders offered by the company and in collaboration with the Servicio Nacional de Promoción Profesional (S.N.P.P.) of Paraguay. Lara not only found work, but also lived in Barrio San Francisco with his spouse Ceferina and their two children Oscar and Máxima.

The examples cited above clearly demonstrate that male dam workers received training and instruction on site and were being transformed from agricultural to industrial laborers. Here, the agricultural laborer was molded into the industrial dam worker; the agricultural peasant formed into the barregeiro or represero. As seen in their stories, each of the men at first found employment as jornaleros, or day laborers, the lowest category of worker at the hydroelectric dam project. Day laborers were paid the lowest wages and given the fewest benefits, but often had the largest families and, according to the Catholic Church, the most “social problems of major resonance.” Often the case, day laborers and their families inhabited the squatter or peripheral communities or rented private residences located nearby and within already established towns and cities. Such communities and families existed in sharp contrast to those inhabiting the company towns, particularly those of middle and upper levels of employment.

As in the Work Zone, class distinctions were an important factor within the communities. As one housewife tells of life in the upper-class community of Vila B, “Still, I have no local friends, only the wives of other engineers. And this is a very rigid society, like the military or the diplomatic community. The wives measure their social position by their husbands’ ranks. The wife of a junior engineer doesn’t tend to be very

45 Created in 1971 and administered by the Paraguayan Ministry of Justice and Labor, the SNPP provides technical and vocational education to workers and to middle management.
46 “Aquellos que ayer dejaron sus chacras,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:26 (20 de noviembre de 1980), 6.
close to the wife of a more senior engineer.” In particular, the housewives of Area 1 and Vila B appear to have lived the most insular lives of all the families within the corporation. As one Brazilian housewife stated, the “happiest women here are the mothers of very young children who want to spend all of their time with their kids. The rest of us are just trying to fill our days. The administration here encourages all kinds of social clubs and sports activities. Pretty soon you start trying to get interested in as many things as you can handle, because otherwise boredom sets in.”

Women, however, did have daily contact with other women within the communities. While some housewives might complain of rigid boundaries within the circles of the elite, women from the lower and middle classes performed a variety of services for their upper-class counterparts. For example, some of the housewives without children of their own found extra work in the more affluent households of Area 1 as part-time domestics, babysitters, and tutors. Often, these work arrangements were made through the informal contacts between male workers. For instance, a high-ranking engineer who resided in Area 1 hired his driver’s wife to perform part-time domestic services in his home. Thus, relations among women in the communities could reflect the labor hierarchy that existed at the dam site and act to reproduce the class-based hierarchy within the communal sphere.

Moreover, company officials idealized the “full-time” stay-at-home wife and mother and the domestic space of the company home. For some families at least, the husband’s high wages, combined with subsidized housing, made her new role economically feasible, at least in theory. However, the wives of lower-level and middle-level dam workers, unlike their elite counterparts, performed their own domestic chores and tended to their own children, and in some cases worked outside of or ran small businesses from home. This is not to suggest that middle- and lower-class women who did not have servants and abundant leisure time were not housewives, but rather not all women experienced domesticity in the same ways.

49 Quoted in Kandell, Passage through El Dorado, 281.
50 Interview with Lic. Elena Mendoza de Leguizamón, Public Library of Puerto Presidente Franco, Paraguay, 13 March 2006.
To instill the appropriate skills to successfully manage the household—be it their own or other women’s homes—social welfare agents organized programs that instructed these women in the best and “scientific” way to live as good mothers and proper housewives, roles complementary to the male dam worker and deemed vitally important to the success of the hydroelectric dam project. Thus, like their male counterparts, the spouses and partners of dam workers also needed education. They received instruction and garnering attention from company officials and their corresponding cadre of welfare professionals and assistants, both inside and outside of company housing. In essence, company officials fostered the creation of the development of the barregeira or represera and her work in the home, as a complement to the labors of the male dam worker in the Work Zone. In addition, company officials sought to create when necessary and then to bolster and protect the working-class family residing in the worker’s communities, both planned and peripheral.

As early as 1978, the Social Service Section deployed its agents to the various Areas and Vilas to organize housewives and establish community commissions, in order to minimize conflict between residents, to encourage friendships across nationalities, and to jointly formulate recreational activities for women from diverse social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Thus, programs reflected the issues of women living in the company town, at least the concerns as understood by social workers, and not peripheral communities. For example, in Area 4, one of the most densely populated company housing projects in Paraguay housing both Brazilian and Paraguayan spouses’ families, Social Service Section agents sought to develop a network of female leaders within the community in order to recognize and solve problems facing dam worker families.

Under the banner of mutual cooperation and female friendship between residents, social welfare agents organized a Community Commission that encompassed elected representatives from each block of housing. The commission worked directly with Unicon’s agents in the Social Service Section to design and implement courses, such as cooking, decorating, and art classes, deemed of particular interest to housewives. The idea behind the program was not only to minimize tensions between women within the
dam worker communities through organized socializing, but also to integrate and co-opt
the dam worker spouse into the larger corporate framework and social agenda.\textsuperscript{52}

To that end, the Social Welfare Department of both Conempa and Unicon
sponsored Mother’s Clubs and organized “courses for mothers.” According to Lic.
Hortensia Z. de Zaputovich of Conempa’s Family Education Section, the mother’s
courses had the following objectives:

\begin{quote}
Our job is] to control the physical, mental, and social welfare of the
families of the employees of Itaipú [Binacional], Conempa, and Unicon. To uncover a remedy for the problems that threatens these families…To make the home not only the school for the children, but also for the parents. To instruct the mothers so that their free time is spent doing something useful and profitable…to budget sparingly….\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Notably, the Family Education Section sought as its objective to make the home into a
school for mothers with the aim of transforming women into proper housewives, to foster
community integration among members (and nationalities), and to channel energy into
productive activities.\textsuperscript{54} Additionally, company officials argued that the course for mothers
also directly benefited the household of the dam workers and added to the family’s sense
of well-being.\textsuperscript{55}

Social welfare agents, the majority of them female and of middle-class
background, were suited to impart knowledge of modern life and efficient management
of the home, at least as they understood it from their education and, perhaps, their own
personal experience.\textsuperscript{56} The need for such instruction, in some cases, derived from the fact

\textsuperscript{52}“Servicio Social de Unicon coordina desarrollo comunitario de Area 4,” \textit{Informativo Unicon}
\textsuperscript{53}“Adorno, trabajo y alegría,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:2 (20 de noviembre de
1978), p. 6. The Spanish reads: “…hacer del hogar no solo la escuela de los hijos, sino también la de los
padres. Enseñar a las madres para que sus horas libres empleen en algo útil y lucrativo. Proporcionar
esparcimiento. Controlar el bienestar físico, mental y social de las familias de funcionarios de Itaipú,
Conempa y Unicon. Hallar un remedio para los problemas que amenazan a estas familias.”
\textsuperscript{54}“Aviso a los moradores del Conjunto Habitacional “C”: Actividades para jóvenes y niños,” \textit{Informativo
Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 1:1 (4 de fevereiro de 1978), 5.
\textsuperscript{55}“Las Madres son el centro de atención de provechoso curso,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de
Obras), 1:6 (20 de março de 1979), cover.
\textsuperscript{56}In one estimate, Paraguay was believed to have only 150 social workers in 1978, most of whom
worked for the Ministry of Health, Social Security, and Education in Asunción, with the remainder
employed by the Municipality of Asunción, Rural Wellbeing Institute, and hydroelectric dam companies,
including Itaipú Binacional. See Roberto Rodríguez and Walter Tesch, \textit{Organizaciones profesionales del
that female migrants from the countryside had never lived in a home with running water, sewerage, or the array of electric appliances found there. In addition, many young women were indeed first time wives and mothers. For those women who were already wives and mothers (and perhaps with experience in the “modern home”), company officials sought to teach them how to perform her domestic duties more efficiently and in a more cost-effective manner. Such measures would be of equal benefit to both lower and middle class households, the main target groups, particularly when considering that money not spent could be saved for the future.

To this end, social workers and their allies instructed new housewives in the best and most rational utilization of their time and resources, a skill seen as the lynchpin to the entire project. To illustrate, Social Service Section agents from the branch located in the mostly working-class Area 6 offered a “Workshop for Mothers” (Taller para Madres) that offered talks dealing with a variety of themes. Information presented to housewives included the desirable qualities of a good spouse, common problems encountered in marriage, and how to best assist in the physical, mental, and emotional formation of children. Such talks, social workers argued, helped to consolidate the family unit, which represented a primary goal of the company.

In a specific example, a talk titled “How to manage the Home School,” (Cómo manejar la escuela del hogar) instructed women in the wide-ranging themes of women’s rights, care of a healthy mouth, how to deal with adolescents, how to decorate a child’s room, the benefits and preparation of healthy foods, and the basic principles of home gardening. When possible, instructional films accompanied the talks by the instructors. Clearly, women, in their roles as “good” wives and mothers, would be responsible for maintaining a healthy environment, establishing a nicely decorated home, and raising well-behaved children. Additional courses for mothers developed by the Family Education Section included the organization of a series of talks on the themes of marriage, family planning, childrearing, the family budget, personal grooming and cleanliness, house work and chores, home decorating, the creation of a home library, the

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57 For a discussion of similar programs to remake working-class women into housewives in Brazil, see Weinstein, For Social Peace in Brazil, 231.
58 “Taller para madres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:33 (20 de junio de 1981), 6
planting of a vegetable garden, the basics of human nutrition, and the preparation of an appetizing meal.

In these endeavors to create and manage an efficient home, the companies organized a variety of support programs. As mentioned previously, commercial infrastructure often lagged behind the construction of the company housing. The islands of homes, therefore, could also be characterized as “islands of housewives,” especially during the daytime when husbands were at work and children at school. Without private vehicles, housewives relied heavily on the company to provide them with transportation to and from existing commercial centers, particularly in the first years of inhabitation. Conempa and Unicon transported housewives via bus from the residential zones to the large supermarkets and local farmers markets. [Figure 4.4]

Presumably, the supermarket sold a variety of necessary products, including household and cleaning supplies, in bulk and at lower prices. In addition, in Colonia Stroessner, small farmers from the surrounding agricultural countryside gathered to sell locally grown produce, fresh meat, and eggs. The shuttle service provided housewives with the opportunity to save money and to buy more for less in the supermarkets, the butcher shop, and the agricultural colonies. In return, officials stated that the service equally benefited the men of the company because the “husbands can work tranquilly, with the knowledge that their households have the necessary means for the care of the family members.”

Clearly, successful completion of women’s domestic duties in the home had to ability to boost the productivity of the male worker, as his greater health and overall tranquility would be carried to the construction site.

With an eye toward the economical management of the domestic sphere, both Conempa and Unicon company officials promoted the creation of a Family Garden in which housewives in the community grew their own vegetables and herbs in order to provide a healthy supplement to the diet of husbands and children. Individual housewives (and some men) tended their own vegetable gardens located adjacent to the home. Vegetables derived from the “family garden” (horta doméstica) were considered free from contamination from pesticides, thus making them superior to what could be

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60 “Transporte para amas de casa,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:12 (20 de setiembre de 1979), 3. The Spanish reads: “...sus esposos pueden trabajar tranquilos, sabiendo que en sus hogares cuentan con los medios necesarios para el cuidado de los miembros de la familia.”
purchased in the supermarket. In Vila C, the Community Center sponsored a competition among residents, titled “The Most Beautiful Garden in Vila C” (A horta mais bonita da Vila C), in which Social Service agents handed out trophies and medals to housewives with the best tended plots.\textsuperscript{61} [Figure 4.5]

These family gardens, sponsored and provisioned by the corporate branches of the Health Program, were intended to boost the nutrition of residents by supplying needed vitamins and minerals at a reduced cost to the family budget. In addition, the family vegetable plot provided an additional source of food during periods of national economic instability, particularly prevalent in Brazil during the 1980s, when high levels of inflation eroded the purchasing power of households. To ensure a greater level of success, Federico Godoy, an agronomist and the head of the Department of the Environment of Itaipú Binacional, instructed housewives in how to properly prepare the soil in order to ensure germination of seeds. Thus, the gardens not only provided nutrition, but also acted as a hedge against inflation for the family budget maintained by the housewife.

Thus stocked with an abundance of fresh produce from their home garden or the supermarket, housewives received instruction in how to prepare high quality meals for their husbands and children. To do so, women had to learn to read and follow the instructions that accompanied recipes, to measure ingredients, and to plan meals and shop ahead of time. Officials from the Health Program offered housewives a course called “Preparation of Dishes” (Preparación de Platos) that included recipes that featured vegetables and herbs as the main ingredients.\textsuperscript{62} Fifty housewives of Area 6 participated in a two-month series of classes that sought to improve the quality of meals prepared on a budget while introducing women to the “culinary arts” of the kitchen.\textsuperscript{63} [Figure 4.6]

Beyond simply learning a variety of recipes and how to follow them, however, housewives were shown how the preparation of planned meals fitted into the larger “economy of the home” (la economía del hogar). For instance, in the cooking classes, women learned that the liberal use of inexpensive vegetables and soy products, instead of an emphasis on meat as the main ingredient, allowed for the preparation of easy and

\textsuperscript{61} “As hortas da Vila e os meninos da horta,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 7:110 (Outubro de 1984), 11.

\textsuperscript{62} “Huerta familiar,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:22 (20 de julio de 1980), 7.

\textsuperscript{63} “Mejorando la calidad de la cocina,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:27 (20 de diciembre de 1980), 7.
inexpensive meals for the family and provided nutrition without exceeding the allotted budget.\textsuperscript{64}

In addition to transport to the marketplace, the companies offered women with children of school age a free bus service for students that transported pupils to and from campus each day. Officials argued that such services increased parental tranquility and allowed for mothers to rest more peacefully during the day.\textsuperscript{65} With husbands at work and children safely at school, company officials believed that housewives were now able to fill their superfluous “free hours” (\textit{horas libres}) with more productive activities.

To illustrate, company officials encouraged the development of a “body culture” (\textit{cultura do corpo}) that allowed housewives to participate in physical activities with other housewives, for instance, the “women’s gymnasium” (\textit{gimnásia femenína}), featuring stretching and calisthenics, held each afternoon in Area 3.\textsuperscript{66} \textbf{[Figure 4.7]} The Community Center of Vila A, in addition, offered women the opportunity to participate in the Aesthetics Gymnastics (Ginástica Estética) class with the purpose of shaping and toning her abdominal area, waist, bust, thighs, and hips. Aerobics courses were accompanied by rhythmic “pop” music and motivational slogans from instructors, repeated by participants, such as “I am going to have a better life, a healthier life” and “I am going to get along better with others, I am happy.”\textsuperscript{67} While the slogans might reflect paternalist and state/corporate initiatives and programs undertaken elsewhere in Brazil at the time, the focus on a “body culture” also reflected the aerobics craze and obsession with diet and exercise prevalent in the late-1970s and early 1980s.

Additionally, in the community centers of each Area and Vila, social welfare agents and assistants worked with women to develop a variety of courses to instruct housewives in the ideal way to spend the so-called “free hours” of her day. One such course, titled “How to Take Advantage of Free Time,” (Como aprovechar las horas libres) instructed housewives in acrylic painting, flower arrangement, the making of arts

\textsuperscript{64} “Curso de cocina,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 8:62 (Setiembre de 1986), 4.

\textsuperscript{65} “Importancia y jerarquía de la educación en Itaipú,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:7 (20 de abril de 1979), 7.


\textsuperscript{67} “Mulher: Cultura do corpo faz bem para a cabeça,” \textit{Informativo Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 5:105 (Dezembro de 1983), 6. The Portuguese reads: “Eu vou ter uma vida melhor, uma vida saudável” and “Relaciono-me bem com as pessoas, sou alegre...”
and crafts such as crocheted pillows, rugs, and bags, and doll-making. Additionally, Hortensia Zaputovich, Mary de Ramírez, and Marta Pardo, agents of the Conempa’s Family Education and the Social Service Sections, respectively, jointly offered a course on handicrafts for the housewives of Area 4. For the housewives of Area 6, furthermore, social workers organized and offered courses in cosmetology, traditional Paraguayan lace-making (aho poi), and a three month course on dress and ribbon-making. As one Paraguayan housewife and alumni of the course titled “Decorating with Ribbons” offered to the residents of Area 2 stated, “I feel so enthused for having learned something useful, such as instructions in how to decorate a home [with ribbons].” During special celebrations, certificates were issued to students that successfully completed the courses. Furthermore, to exhibit and display the handicrafts of the housewives, the Social Area of both Itaipú Binacional and the Department of Administration of Worker Housing sponsored and organized Craft Exposions to showcase and sell the handiwork of housewives to the public at-large.

In Brazil, the Community Center of Vila A offered a variety of courses to the middle class women and children of the community. For housewives, courses included sewing, crochet and needlework, weaving, pottery making, and leather working. A small bazaar existed to sell these crafts to the public. For mothers with children too young to attend school, the center offered craft workshops in addition to instruction in theater, ballet, and a children’s circus. Additionally, the center housed the local branch of the Bandeirantes (Brazilian Boy and Girl Scouts) and the philatelic club (stamp collecting). The community center, furthermore, directed campaigns and programs promoting immunization, protection of the environment, and the planning and care of home gardens. The Mother’s Club of Vila A, additionally, sponsored a bingo night and organized fashion shows for residents. For the donas de casa (housewives) of Vila C,

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68 “Educación Familiar de Conempa en plena actividad,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 8.
69 “Exposición de artesanía,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:13 (20 de octubre de 1979), 7.
70 “Entrega de Certificados na Area 2,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 4:68 (2 de abril de 1981), 4. The Spanish reads: “Sinto-me bastante entusiasta por haver aprendido algo útil, como as técnicas para decorar uma casa.”
72 “Club de Mães da Vila A,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:3 (10 de março de 1978), 5.
the community center offered a variety of courses that included dressmaking, painting, crocheting, and macramé.\textsuperscript{73}

The stated objective of such courses was to instruct women in activities that could then be conducted in the home, toward the ends of both relaxation and profit.\textsuperscript{74} For example, the course on knitting (\textit{o tricô}) offered to the women of Vila A was touted as fulfilling variety of perceived needs of housewives: craft (\textit{artesanato}), therapy (\textit{tricoterapia}), entertainment (\textit{diversão}), and as an economic activity (\textit{atividade econômica}). As the Brazilian housewife dona Edi stated, not only could she sell her handmade blouses for 10 or 15 thousand \textit{cruzeiros}, thus adding to her household income, but she also benefited from the “undeniable mental exercise” (\textit{um arejamento mental indiscutível}) that she termed “knitting-therapy” (\textit{tricoterapia}). Gilda Rocha Martins, a wife and mother of two children, stated that her husband viewed his wife’s knitting as “a magic formula for relaxing the tensions associated with domestic chores.”\textsuperscript{75} Another alumni concurred by stating that knitting gave women “a daily routine, expanding our area of interest, and rewarding us with satisfaction when we finish a piece.”\textsuperscript{76} For Maria do Carmo de Mello César, moreover, the knitting course represented the equivalent of \textit{futebol} (soccer) games for men, allowing housewives the opportunity to socialize with other housewives outside of the home. Putting aside formulations of craftwork as “therapy,” which appears to be an interpretation provided exclusively by the participants, company officials succeeded in occupying women in activities they at least deemed to be enjoyable, while fostering friendly relations between women, and even erasing the “stress of domesticity.”

Moreover, some women parlayed their knowledge, for example in dress and ribbon making, as a way to earn income for the household. When needed, such “extra” paid work in the informal sector supplemented the male breadwinner’s wages and added

\textsuperscript{73} “Cursos na Vila ‘C’ atraem pela variedade,” \textit{Informativo Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 4:70 (30 de abril de 1981), 4.

\textsuperscript{74} “Actividades comunitarias,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 4:42 (20 de março de 1982), 3.

\textsuperscript{75} “Mulher: Bastam duas agulhas e dedicação para se fazer uma tricoterapia,” \textit{Informativo Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 5:103 (Septembro de 1983), 7. The Portuguese reads: “...uma fórmula mágica para relaxar as tensões próprias das atividades domésticas.”

\textsuperscript{76} “Mulher: Bastam duas agulhas e dedicação para se fazer uma tricoterapia,” \textit{Informativo Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 5:103 (Septembro de 1983), 7. The Portuguese reads: “...rotina do dia a dia, amplia nossa área de convivência e retribui-nos com a satisfação ao concluirmos uma peça...”
to the purchasing power of the family, especially during periods of national economic crisis, but without transgressing appropriate gender roles or the role of the housewife. As the company press stated, such strategies represented creativity in the domestic sphere and allowed housewives the ability to “confront the economic difficulties of the moment, without jeopardizing the well-being of the family.”

Well-being is best understood here to mean that women should stay at home. As such, these craft courses were not intended as vocational courses to prepare women for formal sector employment, but rather primarily as activities to fill idle time and only secondarily as an supplemental economic activity to the husband’s wages. For example, Maria Luíza, a participant in the dressmaking course, stated: “Look at this little outfit. My friend bought it for 22 thousand cruzeiros, while I am going to spend a maximum 5 thousand cruzeiros to make the same thing, but better constructed and with higher quality cloth.” The ability to make decorations for the home or to knit or sew clothing for infants and children, instead of purchasing them in the store, further allowed housewives to save money and to economize.

An additional discourse developed, increasingly centered on health, hygiene, and safety in the home, defined as the exclusive domain and preoccupation of women. At the same time, workplace safety for male dam workers was linked to male domestic responsibility to his home, which centered upon the maintenance and protection of the nuclear family. Thus, as will be seen, “women’s work” in the home became a critical complement to “men’s work” at the dam site.

**Women’s Work: Health, Hygiene, and Safety in the Home**

Medical professionals inspected the children of workers in order to determine their suitability to attend company schools and to collect basic data (such as age, height, and weight). Such inspections introduced mothers and their children to doctors and nurses and to the experience of medical examinations in a clinical setting. In this way, “taking

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77 “Mulher,” *Informativo Unicon* (Canteiro de Obras), 5:100 (Maio de 1983), 6. The Portuguese reads: “...enfrentam as dificuldades econômicas do momento, sem prejudicar a saúde da família.”

stock” of the offspring of workers represented an example of the combined efforts of doctors, nurses, social workers, and public health educators and their direct role in the lives of worker’s families.79

Before any improvements could be made in the general health and education of dam worker children, physicians and nurses sought to establish a basic knowledge of the population residing in and out of the dam worker communities. Like the higienistas of the 1920s, these doctors and nurses saw public health programs, termed “social hygiene,” as a way to lessen disease and suffering through the improvement of people’s living and working conditions.80 Over the course of the twentieth century, these concerns entered into the formal programs of the state and corporations. Of relevance in our case, the heavily working-class and densely populated communities, predominantly Area 6 and Vila C, garnered the most attention from public health agents and, as such, merited the most improvement. As part of Conempa’s Health Program, medical and welfare professionals targeted programs specifically to housewives living in these heavily working-class communities, both planned and peripheral.

For instance, the medical staff at the Clinic of Area 6 developed a program to inspect all of the children living in that dam worker community in order to evaluate the individual physical, mental, and emotional condition and to discover any physical defects or mental and emotional disabilities that could hinder normal development and progress in school. In addition, during their visits, doctors and nurses at the clinic took the opportunity to instruct mothers and their children in the basics of personal hygiene and mental health and to administer the required immunizations.

As seen with male workers housed on the job site, public health officials also educated worker’s families about immunizations and who should be vaccinated. The list of diseases prevented by vaccination included tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, meningitis, infantile paralysis, smallpox, measles, typhoid, and yellow fever.81 The densely populated Area 6 and Vila C and schools had special potential to spread

79 “Intensa acción en clinica del Area 6,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 4.
80 For a discussion of social hygiene in the Southern Cone, see Asunción Lavrin, Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 97-124.
81 ¿Qué son las vacunas,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:17 (20 de febrero de 1980), 7.
communicable disease, while the climate of the border zone promoted disease spread by mosquitoes and other insects. Residents of all communities were asked to remove standing water from around the home and to keep trashcan lids closed tightly in order to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes.

While immunizations protected dam workers and their families from a variety of diseases, mothers had responsibility for the care of sick children suffering from common, though incurable, colds and flu, particularly during the winter months. However, mothers were not free to develop their own homespun remedies based on their own personal experience, but rather were urged to seek professional medical attention as soon as possible. Honorina Sarges Pinto, head of Unicon’s Preventative Medicine Section (Setor de Medicina Preventativa) advised that, upon the first signs of fever and coughing, mothers should “in these cases, the only path is to the doctor, never to the drugstore.”

According to health officials, some mothers simply did not know what was best for the child. When confronted with an illness, Lic. Ramona B. de Benítez, the Sanitary Educator for Health Program of Area 6, argued for the existence of three kinds of mothers: those that kept their children confined to bed, those that administered some form of home remedy, and those that sought out some semi-miraculous cure. However, the correct action when confronted with a sick child, Benítez stated, was to consult the medical doctor, the only trained professional capable and responsible enough to assist a child when ill. Home remedies and miraculous cures concocted by neighbors, Benítez further stated, represented a form of traditional “folk healing” (curanderismo) that unnecessarily placed the child at-risk. The doctor, not the mother or well-intended “mother next-door” (la otra mamá), knew what the child required to regain a state of health. As such, she admonished mothers to never question the medical advice of the doctor, “not to look with unconfident eyes at the doctor that instructs what seems to be contrary, because surely he has good reason for his advice.” Lastly, mothers were not to intercept and place obstacles in front of or to question the “the higher status of the doctor” (jerarquía del médico).\footnote{Los niños y el médico,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:28 (20 de enero de 1981), 7}

\footnote{Mulher: as mães e os primeiros cuidados aos filhos,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 5:102 (Julho de 1983), 6. The Portuguese reads: “Para estes casos, só há o caminho do médico, nunca o de uma farmácia.”}
These professionals from the Health Program and the sections of the Social Welfare Department, and the courses that they offered, sought to instill notions of cleanliness of the body and of the home and in the consistent use of sanitation services (trash collection, etc.) provided by the company. Furthermore, nurses employed by Conempa as part of the company’s program worked in the clinics of each area of worker housing. In addition to assisting doctors in a clinical setting, nurses offered what was termed “preventative assistance” (asistencial preventivo) to workers and their families.\(^\text{84}\) Company health officials argued that it was easier and cheaper to prevent accidents in the home than to cure them at the medical post or hospital. Again, placing the emphasis on the home also highlighted and focused attention on the central role of the housewife and of the mother while simultaneously providing a larger role and mandate for company social workers, sanitary educators, doctors and nurses in the lives of dam worker families.

The discourse on social hygiene and accident prevention took health and social welfare agents directly into the homes of dam workers. The worker’s home represented a location rife with danger, both real and imagined. In particular, housewives needed to have extensive knowledge in first aid to attend to their children in case of accidents and before the arrival of emergency care providers or prior to transportation to the clinic or to the hospital.\(^\text{85}\) Thus “mother-nurses” represented the first line of response once accidents had occurred in the home.\(^\text{86}\) To that end, housewives were instructed in first-aid and how to fabricate a first-aid kit for the home. The Family First Aid Kit (Botiquin Familiar) addressed a variety of minor ailments (insect bites and small scrapes) and major emergencies.\(^\text{87}\)

In addition, the prevention of a wide range of potential accidents revolved around the responsibilities and actions of the good housewife. For example, commercially prepared poisons to eradicate ants, roaches, and rats from the home represented a potential source of poisoning, especially for children unsupervised during playtime.

\(^{84}\) “Enfermeras: al servicio de los obreros de Itaipú,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 6.

\(^{85}\) “En las Areas de los conjuntos habitacionales,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 1:7 (20 de abril de 1979), 6.


\(^{87}\) “Botiquin familiar,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 2:23 (20 de agosto de 1980), 7
Poison for rodents and insects, officials advised housewives, should be tightly sealed and stored away from food items. In addition, housewives should label all medications and be sure to store poisons in a separate area. Lastly, health officials warned of the dangers of non-potable water and of food poisoning, stating that, “so many lives are affected by vomiting and diarrhea, so frequent in our country, the most vulgar manifestations of poisoning from bad food.”

Officials advised housewives to avoid preparing dishes that contained mayonnaise or heavy cream or to consume such foods in one meal or to quickly and safely store leftovers in the refrigerator.

As part of the larger Health Program, the Conempa Sanitary Education Section (Servicio de Educación Sanitaria) offered recommendations to parents that promoted and protected the health of the family. In Area 6, for example, the resident social worker, the sanitary educator, and physicians teamed up to offer a course titled “Health in Your Home” (Salud en su Hogar). The course sought to educate women in the knowledge and practice of sanitary methods, to foster the active participation of the community in the creation of social sanitation, and to instill correct habits in the personal hygiene of the mother, her children, and the environment in which they lived.

For example, the superintendent of health of Unicon suggested that the entire family must bath daily, with plenty of soap and water, in order combat the spread of scabies and other parasites, stating that the “habits of hygiene are indispensable for your health.”

Sanitary educators admonished mothers and fathers to take children between the ages of 2 months and 4 years to the clinic for immunizations. In addition, proper sanitation required mothers first to boil water and milk, to cook food thoroughly, to eliminate flies and insects, and advised frequent hand washing and regular consultation with the physician. Interestingly, both parents were further reminded that marital discord, arguments, and continuous conflicts in the home hurt the mental and emotional health of

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88 “Nociones sobre primeros auxilios,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:28 (20 de enero de 1981), 7. The Spanish reads: “Los vómitos y las diarreas tan frecuentes en nuestro país, y que tantas vidas llevan, son las manifestaciones más vulgares de la intoxicación por alimentos en mal estado.”


Lastly, health officials reminded mothers to take their children in for a periodic medical examination.\textsuperscript{92}

The “woman of the house” (\textit{la Señora}) by far merited the most attention from sanitary educators. For her part, she was expected to protect the kitchen from flies and insects, not to throw scraps of food onto the floor, to keep a tight lid on the trash can, and to avoid the dangers of the kitchen by keeping hazardous chemicals and sharp objects out of the reach of children.\textsuperscript{93} Minimal in comparison, health officials dispensed advice to the “man of the house” (\textit{el Señor}), which included not waiting until ill to visit the doctor, to eat well, and to clean and maintain the yard around the home in order to prevent the spread of mosquito-born diseases. Additionally, officials argued, responsibility fell to the Father (\textit{Señor Padre}) to ensure that all family members received the required vaccinations.\textsuperscript{94}

To demonstrate the ideal kitchen, the \textit{Senhoras} (Ladies) of Vila C were given the opportunity to visit the massive cafeterias located in the Work Zone. As a rule, women were banned from working in or visiting the construction site, unless chaperoned on formal visits organized and closely supervised by the company. In addition to seeing where their spouses dined during working hours, the tour allowed the housewives to view the “equipment and methods utilized in the preparation of the food.” According to the report, the women walked away impressed by what they saw, particularly “the perfectly clean floor…that did not permit the appearance of a single insect.”\textsuperscript{95} Such visits may have modeled to housewives the highest levels of efficiency and cleanliness attainable in their own, albeit humbler, kitchen. However, the fact that at least some of the women of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{91} “Valiosas recomendaciones,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 4. It is unclear whether or not domestic violence was a endemic problem in the worker’s household. However, as the advice suggests, the absence of such conflict was deemed an essential aspect of a healthy home, particularly one in which resided children.
\bibitem{92} “Valiosas recomendaciones,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 4.
\bibitem{93} “Valiosas recomendaciones,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 4.
\bibitem{94} “Señor Padre de Familia,” \textit{Conempa Remiandú} (Sitio de Obras), 3:17 (20 de febrero de 1980), 7.
\bibitem{95} “Senhores da Vila ‘C’ visitam Canteiro,” \textit{Informativo Unicon} (Canteiro de Obras), 4:70 (30 de abril de 1981), 7. The Portuguese reads: “os equipamentos e métodos utilizados na preparação da comida” and “chão perfectamente limpo, não permite o aparecimento de nem um só inseto.”
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Vila C were taken aback suggests that many had failed to reproduce the lofty standard in their own home.

The dangers of the kitchen, as the exclusive domain of the housewife, received the most attention from educators concerned with safety in the home. Sanitary officials warned parents that more accidents occurred in the kitchen than in any room in the home and, to drive the point home, educators in safety asked parents “How many times have you read about or heard about real cases of serious burns of children?” Housewives, defined by health officials as managers of the home, had the most responsibility in diminishing domestic threats, seen as particularly present in the kitchen—boiling pots, poisonous gas used for cooking, and sharp utensils—all represented imminent dangers when in the reach of children. To avoid the potential for harm, officials advised housewives always to keep children out of the kitchen, especially when preparing food.96 Implementation of the advice, officials argued, prevented “unfortunate tragedies inside the home” (tragedias desagradables dentro del hogar).97

The Sanitary Team (Equipo Sanitario) of the Health Program of Area 6 formulated programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the dam worker’s communities. As part of its campaign titled “Improving Area 6 by Taking Care of Our Health,” public health officials urged residents to brush their teeth, wear shoes, consume fruit, wash their hands, tightly cover the trashcan, and to consult the medical doctor when feeling ill. Furthermore, health officials reminded parents of their responsibility to maintain high levels of safety in the home, especially regarding accidents that could potentially put children in the hospital.

Safety at work, the exclusive domain of the male dam worker, became increasingly intertwined with the discourse surrounding the nuclear family and directly to the domestic sphere. Unlike single male workers housed on the job site, married or partnered men both in and out of company housing, had the added responsibility to provide for a wife and children presumably dependent upon his job and wages.

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96 “Mulher: as mães e os primeiros cuidados aos filhos,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 5:102 (Julho de 1983), 6. The Portuguese reads: “Não deixar panelas destampadas ou com cabos voltados para fora do fogão; não largar detergentes ou medicamentos e objetos perfurantes ao alcance das crianças; e colocar proteção nas tomadas.”

97 “Valiosas recomendaciones,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:10 (20 de julio de 1979), 4.
Acknowledging this connection to hearth and home, safety engineers from the Conempa S.H.T. reminded workers “when you get into an accident, others will also suffer. Safety depends on you.”

Large signs placed at the work site constantly reminded men of their domestic obligations, for example, one billboard painted with the face of a young girl stated, “Papa, please don’t get into an accident!”

In this formulation, safety meant respect for the self and for others, primarily identified as the dependents of the male dam worker. To this end, safety officials evoked the tranquility and harmony of the worker’s home, stating that:

A newborn is safer when in the bosom of its mother, a child feels better when he holds the hand of his father, a mother when involved in the life of her son…You feel safe and fulfilled in your home. [The house] was built for you…in the same way the helmet, hat, gloves, safety belts, boots, etc. were made for the worker.

The maintenance of a safe domestic environment fell squarely on the shoulders of the mother and housewife, while her failure in the domestic sphere indirectly contributed to work-place safety. Along the same lines, a safe work environment also required that men keep their family and home ever-present in their minds. Like a father’s dedication to his family, company officials argued that, “Safety is or it’s not. There are no half-measures.”

Company safety engineers instituted a variety of campaigns aimed at both raising awareness of issues of worker safety on the job and reducing the number of accidents involving workers. For example, the S.H.T of Conempa organized a campaign titled “Without Accidents” (Sin Accidentes) aimed at the members of the central C.I.P.A. (Safety Team), which included a contest to design logos, slogans, and posters with safety as the central theme. Winning slogans included “Avoiding Accidents is Like Breathing: Easy and Necessary” and “Practical Jokes Can End in Misfortune.” In the poster category, Rusmildo Pedrozo took home first place honors for his drawing titled “Don’t

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98 “Consejos prácticos para el obrero,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:17 (20 de febrero de 1980), 2

99 “La seguridad personal riñe con la expresión: “si hubiese….,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:3 (10 de marzo de 1978), 4. The Spanish reads: “Una criatura está más segura cuando se aferra al cuello de la madre, un niño se siente mejor tomado de la mano del padre, una madre cuando acompaña la vida del hijo…Usted se siente seguro y a gusto en su casa. Ella fue hecha para usted y no lo contrario, de la misma forma en que el casco, la capa, los guantes, los cinturones, las botas, etc. fueron fabricados para el operario.”
Let This Be the Last (Goodbye)” depicting a wiry dam worker leaving his wife and small child before boarding the morning transport to the work site. [Figure 4.9] As commented by judges in the contest, such themes exposed “the worry of the male workers for their family, when they confront and think about safety.” 100

To increase the level of effectiveness, company officials intertwined general messages regarding worker safety on the job site to the home and hearth, and particularly to the children of male dam workers. For example, discussing the consequences of an accident, the safety engineer Lulio Gamarra argued that an “accident suffered by one member of the family always has consequences, maximized if it occurs to the father, “the axis” (el eje) of “the nuclear family” (el núcleo hogareño). To illustrate, Gamarra recounted the story of one worker who fractured his right clavicle in a fall from a scaffold. Taken to the medical post, the worker stated: “In those moments of uncertainty and worry, I couldn’t hide my very personal interior turmoil, included alongside my intense physical pain, my thoughts transferred to my home, children, and wife.” 101

For company officials, accidents and injuries not only represented an individual disgrace, but also negatively impacted the family, but also the company and the State. Alongside the physical pain, officials further argued, accidents at work brought a perturbing emotional pain into the home because the “head of the household” (el jefe del hogar), as primary provider, could no longer financially support the family. As a result, “the family drama” (el drama familiar) quickly converted into a social problem because the injured man and his family now depended upon the company and the state welfare program Social Security (Seguro Social) for their continued sustenance. In the end, safety engineers and social workers argued that the final cost of worker accidents represented a net loss for society as a whole. 102

100 “360 participantes tuvo concurso de Compañía,” Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 3:53 (31 de julho de 1980), 5. The Spanish reads: “...la preocupación de los obreros por la familia, cuando piensan y tratan sobre seguridad.”
101 “El accidente de trabajo y sus consecuencias,” Conempa Remiandá (Sitio de Obras), 3:28 (20 de enero de 1981), 2. The Spanish reads: “En esos momentos de incertidumbre y preocupación no pude ocultar mi drama interior muy personal, abstraído incluso del dolor físico que era intenso, mi pensamiento se trasladaba a mi hogar, mis hijos y mi esposa.”
What a Child Needs: Proper Parenting from Birth to Adolescence

Company officials broadly, and health and social welfare professionals specifically, developed a focus on the child that fell under the expansive heading of “scientific childcare” (puericultura). In the ideal formulation of the nuclear family of the dam worker, the distinct category of the child emerged alongside that of mother and father, and represented a critical area of concern. As historian Ana Paula Vosne Martins outlines in her study of twentieth century “maternal pedagogy” in Brazil, advocates of puericultura argued that good training and education of children had to progress beyond “love alone,” and advocated for the ideal of the “mother-nurse.”

As they had done with the topics of hygiene and safety in the home, company and public health officials targeted women, primarily in their roles as mothers and housewives, as the main providers of proper, “scientific” care of the child. Thus, the child in the dam worker home represented an area where some mothers were deemed in need of instruction. Indeed, motherhood represented the vehicle in which women were linked to larger corporate (and national) programs for social hygiene of the working-class. In this case, fathers (and by extension fatherhood), though not completely absent from the discourse, was given a lesser role, when spoke of at all.

In general, company officials extolled the joys of parenthood and highlighted the “splendid glory” (fulgores de gloria) of the expression “My Child” (Hijo mío). An anonymous contributor to the newspaper further sang the praises of the “God-given gift of parenthood” (el don de la paternidad), stating:

Who doesn’t have the immense happiness, the satisfaction, the pride of seeing the good grades of one’s children on their report cards, with their faces beaming proudly...in full homage of love presented to his parents...what joy, that we feel intoxicated by such deep affection,

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103 Puericultura has a longer history in Latin America as elsewhere. For a discussion of puericultura in the Southern Cone in the first half of the twentieth-century, see Lavrin, Women, Feminism, and Social Change, 97-124. Furthermore, in the second half of the twentieth-century, a variety of manuals for proper parenting had been produced in Latin America or translated into Spanish and published. For example, F. Powdermaker and L. Ireland Grimes, Children in the Family (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1940) translated and published in Argentina as Cómo atender y cómo entender al niño (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kapelusz, 1948). For an interesting examination dealing with the United States, see Ann Hulbert, Raising America: Experts, Parents, and Century of Advice about Children (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

From the perspective of the companies, good parenting represented a source of satisfaction and children a source of affection for parents. Increasingly however, a discourse developed that centered on motherhood, both its joys and its responsibilities.

Far from being viewed as “natural” by company officials, these values had to be instilled and encouraged among parents, primarily women, who were thought to lack such values. For example, Ramona Barboza de Benítez, Sanitary Educator (Educadora Sanitaria) for the Health Program for Area 6 and also the Coordinator of the Pregnant Women and New Mothers Clubs, sought to instill in parents a sense of open affection and love for their children. Additionally, she informed parents that children “need smiles, kind words, toys, and caresses as much as calories and vitamins.” Without proof of affection (pruebas de afecto), she argued, a child would grow to adulthood without knowing how to love. Furthermore, she encouraged mothers to be responsive to a child’s motives for crying, such as hunger, to behave naturally, and to relish in the joy of their newborns.

To the end of promoting and celebrating motherhood, employees of the section organized the May celebrations of national holidays (fiestas patrias) and of Mother’s Day (May 15). Symbolically connecting patriotism to motherhood and mothers to social workers, May 15 was also the day that was set aside to honor the employees of the Social Service Section. [Figure 4.10] Echoing the positive characteristics of mothers, the Day of the Social Worker highlighted the qualities of abnegation and dedication of social welfare agents that fostered the well-being and tranquility of the dam worker family. For the annual May 15 celebration of Mother’s Day, company officials from Conempa’s

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105 “En el año dedicado a la gente menuda,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 6. The Spanish reads: “Quien no tiene la inmensa alegría, la satisfacción, el orgullo al leer las buenas notas de los hijos en su libreta do calificaciones, al presentarnos con su carita radiante, rozagante...que como homenaje pleno de amor presenta a sus padres; que alegría, porque nos sentimos embriagados de profunda ternura, al contemplar a nuestros hijos pletóricos de vida, rezumando alegría, nos abraza el fervor de padre, amante y orgulloso de sus hijos.”

106 “Su hijo no exige afecto, pero lo necesita,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:20 (20 de mayo de 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “Los niños necesitan de sonrisas, buenas palabras, juegos y caricias, tanto como de calorías y vitaminas.”

Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Administration of Worker Housing joined forces to pay homage to the mothers living in the worker’s communities. Held at the Barracón Rosado in Area 3, the event brought together mothers from all areas on a date “to receive the demonstrations of sympathy and of gratitude through heartfelt words, artistic cards, and the unequaled fragrance of flowers.” In addition, company officials deemed the event a smashing success, arguing that the mothers had experienced moments of rare and “unusual joy” (inusitada alegría) in their lives.

Motherhood also denoted a series of responsibilities that required specialized knowledge that some women were believed to lack. Women who had recently given birth, presumably first time mothers, were organized into a Club de Lactantes (Nursing Mothers Club). For example, the Social Service Section office of Area 5, in coordination with Conempa’s Health Program and the Social Welfare Department organized an 8-day course of instruction for new mothers. The Visitadora Social Norma Ortigoza, the Recreation Assistant Yolanda González, and the Head Nurse Edith de Brítez coordinated the series of talks. The course included the topics of changes to the physical body of pregnant women, stages of child development, immunizations, illnesses affecting children, hygiene, cleanliness of the home environment, first aid, prevention of parasitic illness, prevention of accidents, and the importance of play and toys. Such talks, officials hoped, would provide mothers knowledge regarding the practice of “good habits” (buenos hábitos) with their newborns.

New mothers in the Club de Lactantes, furthermore, were instructed in the proper care and nutrition of their newborns. Nurse María G. de Cardoza of the Health Program offered new mothers advice in regards to their babies. For example, mothers should always support the head and shoulders of the newborn, especially when bathing, test the temperature of food before feeding, never place the baby near an open window, to wash her hands after feeding, changing, or handling the child, and to avoid holding the baby while smoking a cigarette or drinking a hot beverage.

108 “Homenaje a las madres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:8 (20 de mayo de 1979), 8. The Spanish reads: “...para recibir las muestras de simpatía y de gratitud a través de emotivas palabras, artísticas tarjetas y la fragancia inigualable de las flores.”
109 “Club de lactantes,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:20 (20 de mayo de 1980), 6
In an effort to summarize the advice offered to new mothers regarding their baby, company officials published a ten-point guide intended to improve maternal care and to reduce infant mortality. The guidelines were offered under the title, “Advice that Can Help a Mother” and consisted of the following tips:

**Advice that Can Help a Mother**

1. When touching a baby, do so softly and delicately, he will be hurt by rapid movements and lack of proper support.
2. The baby should not be forced to eat more than he wants; like being hungry or thirsty, a baby will be injured if forced to eat; not wanting to eat can be the result of two motives: either being full or being sick.
3. The position of the baby should be correct; you should monitor the position of the head, legs, and arms.
4. Clothing should be appropriate for the temperature and should not impede the movement of arms or legs, and the abdomen should not be constricted by clothing.
5. The crib or bed of the child should be appropriate and be sufficient in size to allow for the adoption of the most comfortable position. When necessary, the bed should be protected with rails to avoid falls.
6. Wet clothing should be changed as quickly as possible; the sensations of cold and wetness bother and cause suffering to children.
7. The room should be well-ventilated and well-lighted.
8. The child should be protected from any illness or accidents caused by others.
9. When the baby is sick, give him a little more affection in relation to his suffering, but return to normal levels when he returns to health.
10. All children should be treated with equal affection to avoid the formation of jealousy.  

Such tips encompassed a wide range of advice deemed to be vital knowledge for new mothers. In the absence of “natural knowledge” or female relatives, furthermore, the instruction provided by company health officials represented an invaluable source of information, particularly for young women far from female relatives, home-alone, and suddenly given the task of caring for a newborn for the first time.

Now instructed in the basics of the safe care of a newborn, the company offered instruction in the basics of proper nutrition. In Vila C, the Collective Health Unit of the Nursing Section of Unicon operated a Breast Milk Bank (Banco de Leite Materna) in

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111 “Consejos que pueden ayudar a una madre,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 3:41 (20 de febrero de 1982), 8.
which nurses collected mother’s milk, estimated at 4 liters per day, for use in the community clinic to assist premature infants and those infants allergic to cow’s milk. Health officials defined breast milk as the ideal food for newborns and highlighted its nutritional and disease fighting properties. In addition, the Health Program of Area 2 headed by Lic. de Zaputovich from Family Education and Lic. Nury R. de Hernández, the Dietician for Area 2, offered an educational talk (charla educativa) that highlighted the nutritional benefits of soy-based foods and soymilk for newborns. The course, furthermore, instructed mothers in the formulation of a menu utilizing soy as its base. Suggested recipes included cornbread (chipá-guazú), rice stew, diced and cooked meat with onion (so ó yosó py), meatballs (so ó apu á), flan, rice pudding, and fruit juices mixed with soymilk.

As the child developed beyond infancy, company health officials focused on the creation of a unique phase of development, broadly defined as childhood, and sought to instruct mothers in its proper stewardship. Childhood, at least as conceptualized by health officials, encompassed the period after infancy to the onset of puberty. Under the banner of “What a Child Needs,” officials in the Conempa Health Program argued that a healthy child needed to play outside, to know what is and is not allowed, be given the opportunity to acquire maturity, and be provided with suitable playthings. Indeed, the appropriate life for the child within the dam worker communities contrasted sharply with life on the rural farm or the urban megalopolis.

Time for play and the corresponding materials for play represented an area of major concern for health and welfare officials. In regards to suitable recreation for children, officials stated that the “job of the child is to play and the working materials the toys.” In this case, children were not to be employed as laborers. To the contrary, childhood would be a time of protected existence and of peaceful playtime. As Ramona Barboza de Benítez, Sanitary Educator (Educadora Sanitaria) for the Health Program for Area 6 argued, the mental health of the child is benefited and stimulated by play, as a

114 “Cuidando nuestra salud,” Conempa Remiadú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo e 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “El trabajo del niño es el juego y el material de trabajo, los juguetes.”
form of indirect education, and thus is of great significance in his or her life. Not all forms of play and playthings were considered beneficial or appropriate for children. For instance, Barboza de Benítez discouraged parents from letting children play with weapons or other “bellicose armaments” (los armamentos bélicos) or toys that imitate such weapons. Furthermore, homemade or improvised toys were discouraged, as their rudimentary construction allowed for dangerous imperfections and protuberances that could potentially injure children. To ensure safety, parents were asked to select and provide a wide variety of durable, manufactured toys attractive to and appropriate for the age and mentality of their child.\textsuperscript{116}

In addition to the provisioning of prefabricated playthings, parents were admonished to observe their child at play because “with small signals, [the child] will reveal something of themselves,” that could include a competitive nature, jealousy, and a lack of ability to share with others.\textsuperscript{117} Thus, child’s play and its revelations, Barboza de Benítez argued, not only allowed for parents to better guide their choice of toys, but also revealed the true nature of the child. Additionally, parents were asked to do whatever possible to develop a spirit of initiative and independence in their children, all values deemed to be important in the modern world. To that end, parents (or as seen in the example above, the company) should provide toys, a safe place to play outdoors, and supervision from afar. On occasion, furthermore, parents also made suitable playmates for children.\textsuperscript{118} It is unclear if parents, particularly fathers, had sufficient leisure time to devote such attention to offspring. However, Barboza de Benítez at least argued for a greater role for parents in the lives of their children.

As part of the Conempa Health Program, educators from the Sanitary Education Section and from the Social Service Section offered housewives a weeklong course on children’s health. Meeting in the Barracón Rosada of Area 3, Dr. Reinaldo López Bobadilla, the Director of Peripheral Clinics, Pediatrician Dr. Aníbal Báez Giangreco, Psychologist María Teresa de Oviedo, and Pediatric Nurse Mírta de Mendoza, instructed mothers in the care of their children. Topics covered included the common illnesses in

\textsuperscript{116} “El niño y sus juegos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:23 (20 de agosto de 1980), 7.
\textsuperscript{117} “El niño y sus juegos,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:23 (20 de agosto de 1980), 7.
\textsuperscript{118} “Los padres son también compañeros de juego,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:25 (20 de octubre de 1980), 7.
children and the importance of immunizations and the developmental stages of children. Specifically, educators addressed “the changes” (los cambios) suffered by a child from its birth to adolescence. Parents, and specifically, mothers, were instructed in how best to behave toward children in a variety of situations corresponding to these developmental stages in their children.  

The arrival of a newborn child into the home also represented a potential source of anxiety for siblings. In particular, parents were informed of the jealousy that the introduction of a baby often provoked in the first-born. According to officials in the Health Program, the jealousy stemmed from the competition for and an inability to share in “the maternal love” (el afecto materno). Children under six years of age, officials argued, did not understand that parents could love more than one child at a time because he thought that “a parent’s love is like candy (bonbones): if it is given to others, there will be less for him.” In particular, the moment the newborn is brought from the hospital into the home is the hardest for the first-born child. To diminish the negative impact, parents were instructed to prepare the way for the arrival of the newborn by slowly introducing the idea of a new sibling months beforehand and by visiting the mother and new baby in the hospital.

Active and interventionist parenting, health officials argued, represented the best remedy for the jealous child. Furthermore, officials advocated for the prior establishment of “friendly relations” (relaciones amigables) between parents and the first-born child long before the birth of a new sibling. For example, parents were advised to establish the habit of playing with their child and to give them simple domestic chores. At night and during vacations from school, furthermore, the parent should engage the child in conversation and read him or her stories. However, after the arrival of the newborn into the home, officials advised parents not to forget “their first love” (su primer amor) and suggested including the first-born in the care of the newborn. The mother, specifically, should reserve as much of her time as possible for the first-child, so as to avoid the impression on the part of the “old child” (antiguo niño) of being “second class” (segundo

120 “Niño celoso,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:26 (20 de noviembre de 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “...el amor de sus padres es como los bombones: si se le dá a los demás, quedará menos para él.”
following these guidelines, health officials argued that parents could increase the overall level of harmony in the home and between siblings.

For mothers for whom their newborn was their “first love” (*primer amor*), health officials informed them of what to expect in the future. At first, the newborn represented the center of attention in the home and represented a source of little bother. Officials stated that “now [the baby] is just a little creature that eats and sleeps and spends its day in the crib.” Soon however, health officials informed the mother that the baby would sleep all day and cry all night. By eight or nine months of age, furthermore, the toddler would enter the “me” (“sí mismo”) phase, discover the “other” (“el otro”), and began to talk. Learning to speak represented a major milestone, as Ramona Barboza de Benítez stated, the child “now is capable of fighting with others, of demanding, and above all, of opposing; he has discovered the ‘no.’” From the day that the newborn is brought home, Barboza de Benítez argued, the child would pass through extraordinarily complicated stages of development that mothers should be aware.

Barboza de Benítez, furthermore, warns parents that their children can fall into distinct categories of development. For instance, one child may grow “more quickly, sit, crawl, and walk sooner, in short, to be a child athlete.” However, she informs, every child develops at its own distinct pace. Another child, at first behind in its physical development, could eventually develop normally. The child athlete, she argues, could be destined to have strong bones, square shoulders, and powerful muscles, while the other child could grow to be a person of delicate and frail constitution. In any case, Barboza de Benítez advises parents that they should love and appreciate their child as they are and not spend much time thinking about any lack of qualities. Most importantly, she states that the child that feels highly valued by its parents, “although he may be ugly, badly constituted, and lack any remarkable intelligence, he will grow up with self-confidence,

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121 “Niño celoso,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 2:26 (20 de noviembre de 1980), 7.
123 The Spanish reads: “Ahora es solamente un animalito que come y duerme y se pasa el día en la cuna.”
125 The Spanish reads: “Ya es capaz de pelear con el otro, de exigirle y sobre todo, de oponerse; ha descubierto el ‘no.’”
and be happy.” On the other hand, the child that has never been valued “as they are” and that has experienced a sense that they are lacking, will grow up with a dearth of confidence in themselves, a feeling of inferiority, and an inability to achieve. Lastly, Barboza de Benítez advocated for parents to take their child for a periodic medical exam in order to determine if their child’s lack of development is caused by an illness or disease.

Health officials called special attention to the “middle stage” of development of a child defined as existing between infancy and adolescence. Roughly defined as the years 6 through 12, the child experiences a period of rapid growth before the onset of puberty. While still under the supervision of adults, however, the child gradually transforms into an individual who constantly learns about themselves and his or her world. According to Lic. María G. de Cardoza, nurse for the Health Program of Area 6, the middle stage of development would not be all “love and peace,” (paz y amor) because the child is now “a daring adventurer…that soon discovers that he has many things yet to learn” both inside and outside the home. Parents, furthermore, must assist the child in overcoming the turbulent “emotions, surprises, arguments, joys, and frustrations” uniquely associated with the everyday life of a family. The child, Cardoza reminds parents, is a “special person” (una persona especial) within the family unit.

Generally, health officials sought to inculcate parents with the notion that they represented the central figures in the development, particularly of the gender identity, of the child. Cardoza argued that the child constructs his or her personality based upon the gendered models assimilated through cohabitation, for example, the daughter could desire “to be pretty like her mother or the son to be strong like his father.” According to Cardoza, cold and distant fathers, particularly strict and unreasonable disciplinarians, produced children that were apathetic and lacked the ability to play or to laugh like other

125 “Su hijo no exige afecto, pero lo necesita,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:20 (20 de mayo de 1980), 7. The Spanish reads: “...aunque sea muy feo, aunque esté mal constituido, aunque carezca de inteligencia notable, crecerá confiado en sí mismo y será feliz.”
126 “El niño, una persona especial,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:41 (20 de febrero de 1982), 8. The Spanish reads: “El niño es un osado aventurero que a menudo descubre...que todavía tiene muchas cosas que aprender.”
children. Strict mothers, in addition, that frequently chastised and threatened should not be surprised to find their child to be incapable of defending themselves when attacked by others.

Health Program officials also sought to make parents aware of the impact of domestic strife in the home. For example, one illustration accompanying this advice to parents illustrates the negative impact of open spousal conflict in the home. With the caption “Continuous arguments between parents embitter the life of the child,” health program officials sought to discourage parents from arguing in front of the children. Additionally, marital conflict in the home adversely affected the development of children. For example, according to the material presented by the Health Program, the child that “observes that his papá screams at his mamá he will go on to scream at his younger siblings.”129 In addition to a safe home, health officials clearly viewed tranquil relations between parents as beneficial to the health of offspring.130 [Figure 4.11]

The sexual development of worker offspring represented another area of education for parents and for children. Parents were reminded of their role in the sexual education of children and encouraged to be sources of proper information surrounding human sexuality. Stating “what has not been taught about sex in a correct way will be learned in an incorrect way through a child’s friends and other persons,” Cardoza argued that instruction in sexual education should be appropriate to the age of the child. Furthermore, parents should be prepared for the inevitable question asked by every 4-year-old, “Where do babies come from?” with vague responses that drew upon the world of nature, specifically the familiar trope of the “birds and the bees” or, in this case, bucolic images of flowers and a young fledgling hatching from the egg.131

According to health officials, human sexuality should be explained in such a way as to make sex something “pure and natural” (limpio y natural). In addition, children should be prepared ahead of time for the onset of puberty. While parents are told that curiosity about genitalia is natural for children, they are also instructed to give prior

129 “El niño y la influencia de los padres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:36 (20 de setiembre de 1981), 7. The Spanish reads: “...que observa que su papá le grita a su mamá, también él va y le grita a sus hermanos menores.”
130 “Los pleitos continuos de los padres amargan la vida del niño,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo e 1980), 7.
131 “La educación sexual del niño,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 2:25 (20 de octubre de 1980), 7.
warning about the future transformation of the sex organs. Boys should be foretold of the transformation of the body, particularly of the penis, while girls should be foretold of the onset of menstruation. In any case, Cardoza argued that sexual education would prevent pubescent boys from experiencing feelings of “horror or anxiety” (horror o ansiedad) and girls from experiencing the “horror and emotional shock” (horror y choque emotivo) related to the emergence and development of their adult bodies.132

In addition, Cardoza told parents that children could also develop mental illnesses and other psychological problems through abuse, emotional indifference, or lack of proper care, culminating in the “abused child syndrome.” (síndrome del niño apaleado).133 In particular, a lack of affection was viewed as highly damaging to a child and had the ability to generate illness and even to cause death. Love from parents, conversely, acted as a stimulus for growth and fortified the child against the rigors of modern life.

Preparation for the so-called modern life, one characterized by urban living and wage labor, fell to the parents. Furthermore, parents were confronted with a bewildering array of new issues and concerns—scientific management of the home and proper raising of children—which were part and parcel of the family and its larger significance to society.

The Family Life

The examples previously discussed in each case were situated within what welfare and family education officials broadly termed “the family life” (la vida familiar). The so-called family life itself emerged from the necessities and experiences related to the formation and maintenance of the nuclear family residing in the worker housing. Moreover, family life required parents to think about practical matters, such as the household budget, meals, bedtimes, homework, and school schedules.

All of this, however, now had to take into consideration that each member of the family had their “needs, interests, rights, obligations, and desires” that had to find harmony within the home.134 As Nurse Cardoza stated:

134 “La vida familiar,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:42 (20 de marzo de 1982), 8. The Spanish reads: “...propias necesidades, intereses, derechos, deberes y deseos.”
Family life is like a delicate balancing act. Many personalities have to be taken into account at the same moment: the feelings and special interests of the husband and the wife, the kids, the grandparents, the neighbors and the people that live in the community.\textsuperscript{135}

Each member of the family unit, in this case constituted by Cardoza as the mother, father, son, and daughter, must feel vital and important in the home. Furthermore, the family unit represented a source of empowerment that would offer help in any circumstance, and teach the child the values of camaraderie, loyalty, and sharing, particularly useful outside of the home.\textsuperscript{136}

Officials worried that the rising standard of living and affluence of the dam worker family could take priority over the child’s need for love and affection. As one health official stated, “money and material possessions cannot replace the feeling of love and of confidence.”\textsuperscript{137} Advising parents on the need for balance between material goods, health program officials recognized that “our modern world offers so many attractive things for the home and the family, but parents should try to save the most money possible so in the end to give their children the best that life offers.”\textsuperscript{138} Officials, furthermore, sought to instill a respect for money that included how best to spend. Workers were reminded that the family needed a house, clothing, and food and that anything more did not add to true happiness. After all, as in one example offered by officials, a child is said to remark: “My father gives me everything I ask for, but I hardly ever see him. I love my father more than my bicycle.”\textsuperscript{139} Instead of memories of material wealth and abundance, officials wanted parents to give their children memories of a rich

\textsuperscript{135} “La vida familiar,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:42 (20 de marzo de 1982), 8. The Spanish reads: “La vida familiar es como un delicado número de equilibrio. Muchas personalidades deben tomarse en cuenta al mismo momento: los sentimientos e intereses especiales del marido y la mujer, los niños, los parientes, los vecinos y la gente que vive en la comunidad.”

\textsuperscript{136} “La vida familiar,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:42 (20 de marzo de 1982), 8.

\textsuperscript{137} “La familia y el dinero,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:44 (20 de mayo de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “El dinero y las cosas materiales no pueden reemplazar los sentimientos de afecto y de confianza.”

\textsuperscript{138} “La familia y el dinero,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:44 (20 de mayo de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “Nuestro mundo moderno ofrece tantas cosas atractivas para el hogar y la familia, que los padres pueden verse tentados de ahorrar el mayor dinero posible a fin de dar a sus hijos lo mejor de la vida.”

\textsuperscript{139} “La familia y el dinero,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:44 (20 de mayo de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “Mi padre me da todo lo que le pido, pero casi nunca lo veo. Yo quiero a mi papá más que a mi bicicleta.”
family life. Superficial items, they stated, did not make children happy, did not increase their feelings of true familial comfort, nor benefit society-at-large.

Within the life of the family, company health officials envisioned a central role for mothers, encouraged fathers to be more hands on in the raising and care of children, but limited the activities of grandparents. Nurse Cardoza argued that a mother’s tenderness provided to her child could not be given by any other person, stating, “the true mission of a mother is to ensure that each day her child needs her less…at the same time the child should have a positive image of her that will permit him or her to have a feeling of safety at first, then confidence later, and in the end a sense of his or her own worth.”

Furthermore, the mother that invests many hours of her time in her children will be provided the opportunity of loving contact during feeding, bathing, and bedtime. Lastly, while recognizing the valuable assistance and company that grandparents offered to parents, health officials proscribed the role of grandparents, stating that they should not be allowed “to rule life in the new households” (regir la vida de los nuevos hogares).

Fathers, for their part, were advised to take a more active role in the care of small children, including holding children, changing diapers, assisting in bathing, and giving the bottle. Cardoza, furthermore, argued that the baby required the physical presence of the father in its care. Moreover, the male child needed the attention and company of the father. In order to “complete his mission,” Cardoza stated that the father, “often found reading a newspaper, writing, or working on something, in such circumstances is interrupted with questions or proposals…it is necessary for him to abandon his task to

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140 Company policy limited the number of residents in the household to the immediate nuclear family, usually understood to consist of the father, mother, and children. Special permission had to be obtained to allow for elderly family members, for example, the father or mother of the dam worker or his spouse, to live in the company housing. No such restriction existed, however, in the peripheral communities. Interview with Lic. Rubén Amado Colmán Vargas, Centro Comunitario de Itaipú, M.D., 17 March 2006.

141 “Consejos útiles para los padres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:45 (20 de junio de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “La verdadera misión de una madre reside en obtener que cada día su hijo la necesite menos y se valga más por sí mismo. Que al mismo tiempo vaya obteniendo de ella una imagen positiva que le permita tener intensamente primero seguridad, luego confianza y por fin sentimiento del propio valor.”

142 “Consejos útiles para los padres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:45 (20 de junio de 1982), 7.

143 “Consejos útiles para los padres,” Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 4:45 (20 de junio de 1982), 7.
Advising that fathers should not be annoyed by the inconvenient and seemingly trivial questions, Cardoza argued that such moments provided opportunity to fortify the ties of friendship and confidence by way of the patient attention of the father for his son. Such instances should be seized upon, Cardoza argued, because the father left the home very early, whilst the son is still sleeping, and returns after dark, thus leaving little time for interaction.

Cardoza modeled the hard-working father, though necessarily absent during the day, as a devoted family man at night. In this expanded role, however, the father still continued to have his own male prerogatives and interests, “to have the full right to read his newspaper, to play his game of chess, and likewise, to spend an enjoyable moment [playing] with his son on the rug.”

The father’s time outside of work could not be utilized for socializing with coworkers (or mistresses and prostitutes), as his proper place was now in the home with wife and child.

**Conclusion**

Company programs increasingly focused on the “home school” as a place in which women, as housewives and mothers, were viewed as central protagonists. In her role as both mother-nurse and housewife, she was responsible not only for managing and cleaning the home and feeding the family, but also for raising the children, with each task carried out according to the “scientific” principles of home economics and childcare. Thus, the home was fashioned as the “work site” for the female dam worker, while her male counterpart harmoniously labored in the construction zone of Itaipú Binacional.

Moreover, the housewife had the additional role to guarantee safety in the home, which dovetailed with corporate safety programs in the Work Zone that sought to connect “women’s work” with “men’s work” and the home and nuclear family to the construction

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144 “Puericultura del padre,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 4:46 (20 de julio de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “...que a veces se encuentra leyendo un periódico, escribiendo o trabajando en algo, es requerido en tales circunstancias con preguntas o propuestas. En esos casos, si el padre desea dar cumplimiento a su misión, es necesario que abandone por unos instantes su tarea a fin de dar atención al hijo.”

145 “Puericultura del padre,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 4:46 (20 de julio de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “El padre, tendrá pleno derecho a leer su periódico, a jugar su partida de ajedrez...como también, a pasar un momento divertido con su hijo en la alfombra.”

146 “Puericultura del padre,” *Conempa Remiandú* (Sitio de Obras), 4:46 (20 de julio de 1982), 7. The Spanish reads: “El padre, tendrá pleno derecho a leer su periódico, a jugar su partida de ajedrez...como también, a pasar un momento divertido con su hijo en la alfombra.”
site. Again, worker safety programs and initiatives were the forum by which administrators sought to instill male responsibility for and obligation to the home and to the nuclear family that he supported with his earnings. In turn, the home was situated as the locale in which healthy offspring would be prepared to take their place in the modern world as healthy and happy housewives and skilled laborers.

In this formulation, men as fathers were asked to take on added responsibility in the lives of their children, particularly their sons, who now needed a strong father figure in order to develop properly within the home. While not eschewing all of his masculine interests, he was asked to limit those activities to the confines of the home and to redirect his sexuality toward his wife and spouse. The next chapter, however, addresses some of those masculine interests and prerogatives, which could include a visit to the various zones of tolerance and, over time, led to an expanding itinerary of male sexual pleasure in the borderlands.
Table 4.1: Distribution of Housing by Area and Type (Paraguay)

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Source: “Obras de infraestructura,” ITAIPU BINACIONAL.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Housing by Area and Type (Brazil)

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Source: “Obras de infraestructura,” ITAIPU BINACIONAL.
Figure 4.1: Housing Plans of Itaipú Binacional

R-2, Vila B (Brazil) and Area 1 (Paraguay)  Upper-Class Home with Servant Quarters
R-4, Area 4 (Paraguay)  Modest Single-Family Home

Figure 4.2: The Martins Family

Source: Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 2:29 (26 de julho de 1979), 2.
Figure 4.3: Conempa’s Branch of the Social Service Section in Area 6

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de agosto de 1979), 3.
Figure 4.4: Transporting Housewives to Market, 1979

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (20 de setiembre de 1979), 3.
Figure 4.5: The Home Gardens of Vila C

Source: Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 11:137 (Setembro de 1988), 5.
Figure 4.6: Housewife 101: Introduction to the “Culinary Arts”

Figure 4.7: The Women’s Gymnasium of Area 3

Source: Informativo Unicon (Canteiro de Obras), 1:11 (26 de julho de 1978), 1.
Figure 4.8: “Papa, Don’t Get Injured!”

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras de Itaipu), 1:12 (20 de setiembre de 1979), 2.
Figure 4.9: First Prize: “Don’t Let This Be the Last (Goodbye)”

Figure 4.10: Día del Asistente Social, 1978

Source: Informativo Unicon (Sitio de Obras), 1:11 (26 de julio de 1978), 7.
Figure 4.11: The Effects of Domestic Strife in the Dam Worker Home

Source: Conempa Remiandú (Sitio de Obras), 3:18 (20 de marzo de 1980), 7.
CHAPTER FIVE


In spite of all of our incredible success in the areas of economic progress and our heavy industry, automobile plants, Brasília, and in all of the other surprising goals reached, still we remain a country of hunger…

She stood beside me, and her mini-skirt revealed long, ample, and well-built legs. We sat down on the edge of the bed, everything within me chimed with pleasure, like bells announcing the incredible luck of having, so easily, at my side, such a beautiful woman. For that hour, I celebrated the joys provided to men by sweet capitalism.

The “Project of the Century,” as the corporate, military, and governmental officials took great pride in calling the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, represented the culmination of the forces of order, progress, and national development for the military governments and, more broadly, the nations of Brazil and Paraguay. These same officials touted the technological marvel of the dam project as the apex of Brazilian “know-how,” continued industrialization, and as the crucial infrastructure work that would free Brazil from its foreign energy dependence and “third world” status. On the ground, however, the project unleashed massive change on the physical, social, and sexual landscape of the Alto Paraná borderlands. While the bi-national corporation busied itself with the construction of new communities to house its own workers and their families, tens of thousands of additional persons migrated to the borderlands from all points within Brazil. There, the migrants encountered small towns and riverside communities wholly unprepared for the

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1 Quoted in Marcel Bursztyn and Carlos Henrique Araújo, eds., Da utopia à exclusão: vivendo nas ruas em Brasília (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 1997), 5.

2 Fran Cepiro, A rainha da boate: a mundane e o criminalista, romance (São Paulo: IBREX, 1973), 18-19. The Portuguese reads: “Estava de lado para mim, e a mini-saia revelava pernas longas, grossas e bem feitas. Ao sentarmos no banco do canto, tudo o que estava dentro de mim tiniu de alegria, como sinos repicando a sorte incrível de ter, de modo tão fácil, ao meu lado, aquela mulher tão bela. Naquela hora, celebrei, pela primeira vez, as alegrias que nos fornece o doce capitalism.”

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human flood that arrived in search of work and a better life. Rather than a shining example of “order and progress,” for many recent arrivals, the borderlands became a nightmarish urban dystopia of sexual exploitation, crime, homelessness, unemployment, and chaos.³

The New(est) Eldorado

In October 1975, the Brazilian national weekly news magazine Veja sent its regional correspondent, Hélio Teixeira, to Foz do Iguaçu to report on the situation at the border. Teixeira wrote that Foz do Iguaçu, once a quiet “refuge for tourists and couples on their honeymoon,” had been transformed by “developmentalist notoriety” (notoriedade desenvolvimentista) of the “epic of Itaipu” (epopéia de Itaipu) that had commenced in the borderlands in 1972. Teixeira made several observations to support his claim, thus providing a snapshot of the transformations occurring as a result of the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. Taking its cue from the article and its “view from the coast,” this chapter ties together the themes of migration, urban growth, and sexual commerce in the booming border town of Foz do Iguaçu.

Teixeira pointed out that Foz do Iguaçu had experienced a recent wave of arrivals of migrants that could be found mingling among the tourists and shoppers on Avenida Brasil, the now congested main artery of the city. Among the “men with primitive faces, sun-hardened skin, and dusty straw hats, usually trailed by numerous progeny,” Teixeira counted the “foreigners” (forasteiros) to the city: day laborers, barregeiros (dam workers), and agricultural workers recently displaced by the July 1975 frost.⁴ According to the reporter, these men had converged in western Paraná, now extolled as the latest “New El Dorado” (O Novo Eldorado), from all corners of Brazil in search of employment at the hydroelectric dam. For example, the northeasterner (nordestino) Argeu da Silva and his wife and five children had recently arrived from Bahia, stating succinctly that, “I heard that they needed people to work here.”⁵

³ This argument is in contrast to Ribeiro in her doctoral dissertation titled Itaipu, a dança das águas, in which she argues that Foz do Iguaçu represented, at least discursively, order and progress, especially when compared to Cuidad Presidente Stroessner. Ribeiro, Itaipu, a dança das águas, 106-07.
⁴ “Foz do Iguaçu: Começa a epopéia,” Veja, 8 de outubro, 1975, 50. The Portuguese reads: “...homens de fisionomia rude, pele curtida pelo sol e empoeirados chapéus de palha, geralmente comboiando numerosas proles.”
⁵ “Foz do Iguaçu: Começa a epopéia,” Veja, 8 de outubro, 1975, 50.
In addition, Teixeira reported on the high cost of living at the border, being driven by rapid inflation. For example, clothing and food cost 40 percent more in Foz do Iguaçu than in the state capital Curitiba. Fueling the high prices, such items were not produced in sufficient quantities locally and were imported from outside the region. In addition, affordable housing did not exist. Recent arrivals were forced “to wait” (amontoadar) in the Rua do Lixo (Street of Trash), referring to a favela (shantytown) located just 500 meters east of the city’s main thoroughfare, Avenida Brasil, and along the banks of the Paraná River. [Figure 5.1] The shantytown, furthermore, was reported to be growing by at least three shacks each day. According to Teixeira, the development of favelas in the city represented “an urban distortion” (uma distorção urbana) previously unknown in Foz do Iguaçu. Included among the residents of the infamous Street of Trash, Teixeira told of the mystic Maria da Veiga, whose ringing refrain “Christ is the hope” (“Cristo é a esperança!”) could be heard in the street. In addition, Gladis, the proprietor of Betty’s Drinks, complained of all “the trouble caused in the bars by the laborers.”

Moreover, in his article Teixeira commented on another “street of trash,” specifically the Três Lagoas prostitution zone located just outside of the city limits. In the primary zone of prostitution, unlike in the favela, a visitor did not hear cries of lamentation, sadness, or religious devotion. Rather, as Oswaldo Faria stated, one heard “so much euphoria” (tanta euforia) while relating his own personal experience of “a golden shower just like in the bang-bang films.”6 Furthermore, the article stated that even the absence of electricity failed to drive away the patrons of the houses of prostitution. The sex worker “Sueli,” who worked at the Boate Neocid, related that given the pleasurable offerings of the zone of tolerance, the frequenters of her establishment had “never once complained about the hot beer.”7

Beginning in the 1970s, the term Rua do lixo or “street of trash” entered the popular vocabulary of Brazilians, partly due to the success of the play “Rua do lixo, 24” (1968) written by the playwright Vital Santos. The play tells the story of a poor nordestino (northeastern) family living in a community that became inundated by trash

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7 In Brazilian Portuguese, boate signifies a type of nightclub or, in this case, a brothel.
and subsequently transformed into an urban trash heap (lixão). Such popular works formed part of the early emergence of cultural expression for and about the masses that dealt with the everyday life of the common man and woman. As Luís Mendonça, the Pernambucan film director and actor, stated in an interview about criticism levied against the popular theater that dealt with the lives of the poor, “Pay attention to the view that some intellectuals have about what I do: they believe it is low-brow, dirty, and scandalous. I realize that what I am is an active part of an underdeveloped nation.” It is precisely this tension between respectable order and non-respectable urban chaos that informed larger discourses in the 1970s and 1980s in Foz do Iguaçu on the social issues surrounding urban development, the growth of the shantytown, and the rise and fall of the zone of Três Lagoas prostitution zone.

As seen in the Veja article, the “street of trash” was synonymous with the favela. In turn, the shantytown became associated with a whole host of social ills. Moreover, the term carried a cultural marker, as the rua do lixo became emblematic of the urban chaos and overpopulation of the cities of the Northeast, which had spread to other parts of Brazil. The term itself brought to mind groups of people marginalized by society who subsisted by living off of the discarded food and clothing dumped into the city landfill. Thus, the landfill represented a visible example of social inequality and the failure of the military government’s scheme for national development. As such, the poor majority lived...

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8 Vital Santos, Rua do Lixo 24 (1968), unpublished. Eventually, due to urban growth, the nearby town of Caruaru encircled the community, in the process converting the now central location of the trash heap into coveted prime real estate and the desired home of the city’s elite. The play narrates the lives of the members of the family, and their descent into domestic conflict, violence, and drugs. In 1969, after receiving critical success at the Festival Nacional de Teatro, the play began a tour around the country, generating controversy and discussion in the process.

9 In respect to subject matter, popular theater had much in common with Cine Novo (New Cinema) movement in Brazil, which also began at the same time.

10 “Sem medo de errar,” Veja, 7 de dezembro de 1977, 71. The Portuguese reads: “Atente-se para a visão que alguns intelectuais têm do que faço: acham que é popularesco, sujo, moleque. Mas tenho consciência de que sou parte ativa de um país subdesenvolvido.” The second half of the quote reads: “Then, in the moment that I deny my low-brow, dirty, and scandalous side, my artistic production will lose all its feeling, it will die within the confines of good taste and sophistication that they want me to import into it.” In Portuguese, “Então, no momento em que eu negar meu lado popularesco, sujo, moleque, minha produção artistic perderá todo o sentido, morrerá confinada nos padrões de bom gusto e bem-pensar que querem me impor.”

11 One need only think of the iconic images of Brazil from the 1980s, which included children digging through landfills. Two excellent works exist on this topic in Brazil. See Marcel Bursztyn, ed., No meio da rua: nômades, excluídos e viradores (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2000). For a discussion of the case of Brasília, see Marcel Bursztyn and Carlos Henrique Araújo, eds., Da utopia à exclusão: vivendo nas ruas em Brasília (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 1997).
off the waste of a wealthy minority. Like the *lixão*, the shantytown existed as a form of dumping ground, albeit a human one. The unwanted of Brazilian society resided in the trash dump: the abandoned, poor, insane, infirm, and aged, as well as the orphan, the recent migrant, the unemployed, the unskilled laborer, and the street prostitute.

In Foz do Iguaçu, to live in a “rua do lixo,” either metaphorically or physically, marked one as marginal and an outsider, and as a person fleeing a bad life somewhere else, or attempting to escape drought, hunger, sexual exploitation, family problems, and even bad marriages. On the positive side, Foz do Iguaçu and the shantytowns that sprang up within its limits provided a place for many migrants “to wait” until something better could be arranged for and, at minimum, a chance at survival. Thus, the “Rua do lixo” was compatible with the promises of the “New Eldorado” in the borderlands.

By the early 1970s, Foz do Iguaçu had developed as a town that served the adjacent rural agricultural communities established by *gaúcho* and *catarinense* migrants from the respective Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. Before the arrival of engineers from Itaipú Binacional in 1974, the town only had one paved road and only a few buildings over two stories tall. The urban population primarily consisted of military personnel from the Frontier Battalion and Brazilian Army officers, small hoteliers and shopkeepers from Avenida Brasil, and dockworkers, while the remainder consisted of a semi-marginal class of petty border smugglers eking out a subsistence living.12 Tourism provided additional economic activity, consisting mostly of visitors to the famed Iguaçu Falls located nearby. Beyond the required visit to the waterfalls, tourists often took a day-trip across the border to Paraguay (to buy contraband scotch-whiskey, cigarettes, and to gamble in the casinos of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner).13

Both governmental and corporate officials expected the planned Itaipú hydroelectric dam project to increase rapidly the population of the borderlands. With this understanding in mind, Brazilian officials of Itaipú Binacional, the Federal University of Paraná, and the government of the State of Paraná collaborated to develop the 1974 *Foz do Iguaçu Urban Development Plan*. Objectives of the plan included outlining of the

ordered and harmonious growth of the city, promotion of a durable economic base, minimization of the impact on and integration of the population directly or indirectly linked to the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, and to serve as a useful “tool” to combat the challenge of explosive growth and the resulting pressures on civic order.¹⁴ According to planners, this new logic of “urban evolution” (evolução urbana) sought to redefine and redirect growth in terms of Itaipú Binacional through the integration of new dam worker communities into the existing city, development of the spaces located in between, and the removal and relocation of existing communities that did not conform to or were in the way of the plan. Not surprisingly, not everything unfolded according to the development plan.

At the time, it was reported that the population of Foz do Iguaçu had increased at a rate never seen before in Brazil.¹⁵ This dubious statement highlights the “hysteria” surrounding the hydroelectric dam project. However, barely two years after Teixeira’s article in Veja touting the newest Latin American El Dorado in the borderlands, the population of Foz do Iguaçu again had more than doubled: rising from 34,000 inhabitants in 1975 to 80,000 inhabitants in 1977.¹⁶ [Table 5.1] By 1980, the city contained over 136,000 inhabitants. According to José Gonçalves Fontes of the national daily Jornal do Brasil, demographic explosion, land speculation, urban infrastructure problems, and a housing crisis all represented the “hidden terms” (cláusulas ocultas) of the Brazil-Paraguay Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that had laid the groundwork for the construction of the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam. The “cycle of Itaipú” (ciclo de Itaipú), a term often used by officials, represented the new economic engine and rationale powering the economic and social life of the Alto Paraná borderlands. Like previous economic cycles, the “cycle of Itaipú” brought profound changes to the region.

Urban Distortions

Both on the national and local level, sufficient and affordable housing did not exist or fell outside of the reach of many families, both urban and rural. Thus, the favela represented a collective response to the lack of housing in post-World War II Brazil, as the country experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization.17 In Foz do Iguaçu, however, the construction of the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam accelerated this process, outstripping local, state, and corporate official’s ability to address the situation despite the existence of a formal development plan. While squatter settlements have been shown to be a vital part of the socioeconomic fabric of the modern Latin American city, relatively ordered and peaceful, although heterogeneous in their composition, they were usually viewed by other city residents and officials as obstacles to order, progress, and economic development.18

Moreover, the process of mechanization of agricultural production, the creation of latifundia (ever-larger agricultural estates), and the rise of North American style agro-business practices had forced peasants off the land in Brazil in general and Paraná state in particular during the 1970s. In Paraná state, 2.5 million people had been displaced from the countryside during that decade alone.19 Additionally, several years of frost in the coffee plantation zone of northern Paraná state encouraged many farmers to switch to cattle ranching or soybean production, both of which required less labor.20 According to the founding document of the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST), founded in Cascavel, Paraná in January 1984, the military regime’s economic policies that favored exports and big capital, both domestic and foreign, had lead to greater concentration of land in the hands of a few and had contributed to a growing problem of landlessness in Brazil.21


19 Figure quoted in Sue Branford and Jan Rocha, Cutting the Wire: The Story of the Landless Movement in Brazil (London: Latin America Bureau, 2002), 25.

20 Branford and Rocha, Cutting the Wire, 149.

21 Branford and Rocha, Cutting the Wire, 25.
Combined with displacement, the promise of work on the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project pulled thousands of families who migrated from throughout Brazil. The vast majority of Brazilian migrants consisted of itinerant manual laborers or seasonal agricultural workers, popularly known as bóias-frias (temporary wage laborers), recently arrived from the fields. While a demand for labor existed at the border, the subcontracted firms of Itaipú Binacional preferred more skilled workers when possible, particularly as the project progressed. Thus, the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam project directly absorbed some, but not all, of the arriving pool of unskilled labor. The majority of manual laborers entered into the expanding informal sectors of the economy, particularly after the conclusion of the major phase of construction on the hydroelectric dam project.

Moreover, Foz do Iguaçu lacked sufficient housing for many of the poorest residents of the city. By the end of 1980, close to 30 percent of the inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçu squatted, without legal title, on the private property of others. Even for those fortunate enough to have housing, the majority of the city’s neighborhoods lacked even basic infrastructure, including running water and sewerage. In response, the Prefeitura (City Council) of Foz do Iguaçu and the state government of Paraná initiated construction programs, known as Profilurb and Cohapar respectively, designed to alleviate the crisis by constructing affordable public housing developments (conjuntos) within the city limits. While successfully completing two projects with a combined total of 1,400 homes, the efforts of municipal and state officials still failed to house more than a tiny fraction of those in need. In addition to public housing projects, city officials worked to extend basic infrastructure throughout the growing city. Indeed, city officials scrambled to address the basic needs of its citizens within a framework of explosive urban growth.

In Foz do Iguaçu, the rapid influx of migrants drove housing prices to levels 100 percent higher than in the state capital of Curitiba. Furthermore, in April 1977, the local

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24 “Povão,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 3-10 de dezembro de 1980, 13.
25 “Crise de Moradia,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 10. The figure was reported to be as high as 75 to 85 percent of the city.
newspaper reported a situation in which not a single home could be found for rent in the entire city. At the upper end of the scale, “a nice residence” (uma boa residência) made of brick or wood with three bedrooms and located near the city—for instance, the equivalent of the homes constructed for engineers housed in Vila B—rented for 15,000 cruzeiros or more.26 Outside of the city center, a comfortable two-bedroom home with kitchen and bath rented for upwards of 10,000 cruzeiros per month. Representing no bargain, a small room in a cabeça-de-porco (tenement) rented for 5,000 cruzeiros a month. The majority of the residents of Foz do Iguaçu employed in the formal economy earned far less than 15,000 cruzeiros each month, the minimum monthly salary set by the government at the time, forcing many families to reside either in substandard housing, tenements, outside of the city, or in the shantytowns located in town and nearer to their places of work.

Single men and entire families arrived daily at the bus station in Foz do Iguaçu, some shoeless, penniless, but all in search of employment in the “New Eldorado.” There they mingled with a cast of borderland characters. The Foz do Iguaçu bus station offered a backdrop to the unfolding human drama:

men, women, and children covered in dust, carrying everything they own in a few discolored suitcases and cloth sacks, descending from the bus in search of employment. Soon they blend in with the prostitutes, vagrants, and children selling food…that form a surreal and dangerous welcome committee.27

For many of the newly arrived poor, the bus station represented the first stop before they moved into the Rua do Lixo, Favela de Pluma, M’Boici, Vila do Sossego, Rincão São Francisco, or any number of other growing shantytowns in the city. The most destitute, tired, and unimaginative arrivals slept under trees, in parks, or wherever they could find an unoccupied space.

27 “Foz do Iguaçu, aqui Itaipu produz agora o choque do futuro,” Jornal do Brasil (Rio de Janeiro), 18 de abril de 1977, page unknown. The Portuguese reads: “homens, mulheres e crianças, transportando em poucas maletas desbotadas pela poeira e sacos de pano todos os seus bens, descem dos ônibus empoeirados, procurando anted de tudo um tipo de atividade remunerada. E logo se confundem com as prostitutas, vigaristas, menores vendedores de alimentos...que formam um surrealista e perigroso comité de recepção.”
Not everyone decided to remain after arriving in the borderlands. For example, the 52-year-old Ukrainian immigrant Miguel Aranzu migrated from Apucarana after the devastating frost of 1975 wiped out the coffee crop in northern Paraná state. Aranzu had heard about the possibility of work at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project and the high wages offered there, stating “I gathered together some money and left on the first bus to Foz do Iguaçu.” Once in the city, Aranzu spent three days looking for work, without success, citing a lack of jobs “for a 52-year-old unskilled worker.” As a result, he bought a ticket on the first bus to São Paulo, deciding to try his luck where “it appears they have a lot of industry and are in need of people.” Aranzu had enough money to leave Foz do Iguaçu in search of better opportunities elsewhere. Thus, Foz do Iguaçu also acted as a transit point for displaced agricultural workers on the move.

The draw of the border city caused such disarray that the military government stepped in to limit further unwanted migration. In early 1977, officials from the National Highways Department (Departamento Nacional Estradas de Rodagens, DNER) established roadblocks at the entrances to Foz do Iguaçu with the purpose of turning back “those truckers referred to as ‘cats,’ (gatos) labor contractors that collected [unemployed men] from the agricultural estates in exchange for payment, [and whose vehicles were filled with] laborers without any qualifications, promised a non-existent Eldorado.” The so-called “cats,” essentially sham labor-procurers, operated in parts of the interior of the country with high rates of unemployment and promised the unemployed a wage of 3 cruzeiros an hour, or more. Once in Foz do Iguaçu, however, the labor procurer disappeared, the job failed to materialize, and the men moved into the favelas. With no money and few prospects for work, city officials reported that, “every day people appear who want to return home.” Without money to return, however, most of these men remained in Foz do Iguaçu and sought housing and employment with little or no resources at their disposal.

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28 “No mundo das barragens,” Veja, 24 de março, 1976, 64.
29 “Foz do Iguaçu, aqui Itaipú produz agora o choque do futuro,” Jornal do Brasil (Rio de Janeiro), 18 de abril de 1977, page unknown. The Portuguese reads: “...os caminhões dos chamados gatos, empreiteiros de mão de obra, que recolhem, nas fazendas em troca de pagamento, trabalhadores sem qualquer qualificação, prometendo um Eldorado que não existe.”
At the beginning of 1977, the Prefeitura of Foz do Iguaçu estimated that there existed within the city limits approximately 1,200 shacks (barracos) containing nearly 6,000 residents. In addition, favelas appeared throughout the city, including in the center of town, along the fringes, and on any vacant or underutilized patch of property. Both economic necessity and relative convenience drove the founding and location of shantytowns. The favela called M’Boici, one of the largest shantytowns in the city, existed on the swampy banks of the M’Boici River, which snaked along the southeastern and southern border of the city before finally draining into the Paraná River. [Figure 5.2] Residents of the M’Boici shantytown constructed their dwellings out of discarded paper, plastic, metal, and wood, and built their own places of worship, bars, and even rudimentary roads and a plumbing system. The forty families that dwelled in the two-dozen shacks of the favela Vila do Sossego, located in the Rua Mato Grosso, resided there because they wanted to be close to where they worked. Constancia Rodrigues da Silva stated that “Folks already earn so little, everything is expensive, and we can’t go around spending like mad like some people that I know. That’s why we’re here and why we’re not going to move ten or twelve kilometers away from the center of town.”

The owners of the property in which favelados (shantytown residents) built their communities had few options in dealing with the problem. Laurindo Ortega, as owner of the land upon which sat the favela M’Boici, unsuccessfully pressured the authorities to dislodge by force the squatters from his property. Stating that he “was afraid to go there and talk to those people, they are capable of doing whatever they want to me,” Ortega simply lacked the resources to deal with the problem on his own. The shantytown dwellers, for their part, argued that the officials from the Prefeitura had promised to provide them with new homes in the Profilurb development. However, three years later, the paper placards and letters promising resettlement yellowed and rotted on the walls of

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33 Quoted in “Uma favela que de sossego só tem o nome,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 11. The Portuguese reads: “A gente já ganha pouco, tá tudo caro e não podemos gastar circular adoidado como muitos que eu conheço. Por isso estamos aqui e não vamos morar lá prá longe dez ou doze quilômetros longe do centro.”
the shacks. \(^{34}\) The Prefeitura of Foz do Iguaçu remained reluctant to use police force to remove the squatters, for both a fear of negative press and a lack of viable alternatives for housing the multitude of those who dwelled within the *favelas*.

Other proprietors decided to break their properties up into smaller pieces (*lotes*) that could then be sold at a profit. For instance, the Roter family, as owners of the land underneath the *favela* Vila do Sossego, advised the *favelados* that the Prefeitura would construct a new road through the middle of the settlement, thereby opening the property up to further development and destroying the resident’s dwellings in the process. The *favelada* Maria Camila dos Anjos defiantly responded by stating that they would not go anywhere as long as the Prefeitura failed to provide everyone with housing close to where they worked. \(^{35}\)

The ensuing conflicts pitted property owners with legal title to the land against *favelados* who claimed a “right” to housing promised to them by the city. Other shanty dwellers also evoked their right to a home regardless of who legally owned the land. Felicia Azevedo, her husband, and two young sons had lived for ten years in a one-room shack they constructed of wooden planks and a plastic roof on private property located near the city’s telephone transmission tower. [Figure 5.3] Her husband worked as a day laborer in Paraguay on a farm owned by a *brasiguaios* (Brazilian agriculturalist residing in Paraguay) \(^{36}\) where he earned 5,000 to 6,000 cruzeiros per month. Azevedo washed clothes on the side to pay for the “grub” (*rango*) for the family and their dog. \(^{37}\) The new Portuguese owner of the property, however, opted to divide (*lotear*) his newly acquired property holding. Now on the third ultimatum to leave the property, Azevedo demanded that the new owner provide her with a small house of her own, stating that in the final

\(^{34}\) “Cartazes, amerelados, promessas esquecidas,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 11.

\(^{35}\) “Uma favela que de sossego só tem o nome,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 11.


\(^{37}\) “Daqui só saio se derem uma casa para morar,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 11.
analysis “my neighbors and I have this right because we have already been here for ten years.” 38 Azevedo evoked her rights as a *posseiro* (squatter), because she and her family had physically occupied the land for a decade and had made improvements, although clearly they lacked a legal title to the property. 39

Some property owners managed to force illegal squatters off their land. For example, the city councilman Severino Sacomori, who had recently purchased a plot of land from a Curitiba businessman, expelled approximately 60 families from his property and, illegally resettled them on city property. As Edson Francisco Dias, a resident of the *favela* for four years stated, “One afternoon Sacomori came and began belching loudly: you all are leaving for good or ill. Those who leave willingly I am going to arrange some land, pay for the move, and give nails and materials to construct another shack.” 40 For those that chose to remain, Sacomori purportedly vowed to plow under the houses with a tractor. The resettlement site, however, proved to be uninhabitable due to flooding and, in addition, was considered undesirable because of its location farther from the city center. As Maria Luzirda Vasconcelos lamented:

> the *favela* were we used to live was close to the city and people could find some work [as domestics] in the houses without having to take the bus. We can’t find work here because we have no money for the bus. Last week I went hungry and felt a strong desire to return to where I lived before. 41

In addition, the new settlement, unlike before, lacked access to a Posto de Saúde (Health Clinic) or public schools. Some former squatters harbored no hard feelings toward

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40 “Sacomori jogou favelados num banhado,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 27 de julho a 2 de agosto de 1984 , 5. The Portuguese reads: “Uma tarde veio lá o Sacomori e começou a arrotar grosso dizendo: vocês saem por bem ou por mal. Para quem sair por bem eu vou arranjar terreno, pago a mudança e dou os pregos e a lona para construírem outro barraco.”

41 “Sacomori jogou favelados num banhado,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 27 de julho a 2 de agosto de 1984 , 5.
Sacomori who, after all, had paid to resettle them and to build a new residence. As Zoraide Martins stated, “Certainly it’s terrible to live here, but I know that on Sacomori’s land, it’s not any different.”

Purchasing a lot of one’s own also proved to be a gamble for many residents. Shady real estate companies preyed upon the desperate hopes of those recently arrived from the countryside. For instance, Imobiliária Chaparral scammed as many as 120 families who had bought lots and proceeded to construct homes, only to discover that the company “forged the title” (grilagem de terra) to the property, tricked the city into opening access to the property, sold lots illegally, and then subsequently went out of business. One hundred of the families decided to leave both their lots and the structures that they had constructed there, losing everything they had invested in the process. The remaining twenty families decided to fight for indemnity and a return of their money. Meanwhile, the legal owner of the property, Velocino Pedro Medeiros, threatened to bulldoze both the unwanted residents and their homes. 42

Desperate Housewives

Employment at the hydroelectric dam project did not guarantee a housing assignment within the worker communities constructed by Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms. Dam workers, mostly semi-skilled tradesmen, arrived with their family in tow after having previously secured work on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, but without firm housing arrangements. For example, the majority of the Favela da Marinha consisted of semi-skilled workers employed by the subcontracted firms of Itaipú Binacional, small business owners, and low-level city employees. 43 As such, the very definition of a favelado became elastic over time.

It was estimated that an additional 6,000 homes were needed just to house workers constructing the dam project. For example, the carioca (native of Rio de Janeiro) Antônio Bispo da Silva migrated from Rio de Janeiro, where he lived in a favela and earned 10 cruzeiros a day, after he heard on the radio about the need for workers at the

42 “Povão,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 3 a 10 de dezembro de 1980, 13. The outcome of the conflict is unknown.
Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. Once at the dam site, da Silva found employment on the project inspecting the tires of the gigantic earth-moving vehicles for ten hours each day and earned approximately 3,000 cruzeiros a month. However, he could not find decent housing, stating that, “I live in a favela near the center of Foz [de Iguaçu], where I pay 300 cruzeiros in rent. With the prices they are charging in the city, I can’t move.”

Despite having traded one shantytown in Rio de Janeiro for another in Foz do Iguaçu, the “cheerful black” (risinho negro) waxed optimistic, arguing that, “I am working for the future, to save some cash to get married and to bring out my mother.”

For better or worse, the housing in Vilas A and B offered to the middle and upper level employees of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms formed the standard by which all other living situations were judged. Even Vila C, considered the least desirable of the company housing options, appeared comparatively comfortable when viewed against the shantytowns. Housing represented a marker of the labor hierarchy that existed among dam workers and more broadly the social hierarchy that had formed in the borderlands. Thus housing, or the lack of it, developed into both a status symbol and a point of contention among workers and city residents without access to an affordable and decent place to live. Furthermore, a stark contrast existed between the lives of the residents of the company housing projects and the shantytowns.

Despite sharing both the educational and health facilities with the residents of Vila A, but in light of the general housing crisis in Foz do Iguaçu, many considered the lifestyle within Vila B as a scandalous “model of social inequality” in Brazil. As a private gated community, armed members of the Itaipú Binacional Serviço de Segurança (Security Service) controlled access to the community and patrolled the grounds and the stretch of the Paraná River forming the village’s western border in order to keep out both local fisherman and curious tourists. Of all of the communities that Itaipú Binacional created, Vila B aspired to the highest standard for its elite residents.

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47 “Itaipu perdeu a vergonha,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 28 de janeiro a 4 de fevereiro de 1981, 2.
Within the ranks of the elite, housing marked a form of status that acted to establish and maintain the social hierarchy. As one wife of an engineer stated:

Then you get caught up in all of the other stupid status games. Take the homes, for example. There are four or five different types of prefabricated homes here. Each type is supposed to be exactly the same dimensions, with exactly the same garden. But my neighbor’s house was just a little bit better than ours. The living room was a little bigger, the porch had a better floor, and there were a couple of trees in her garden and none in mine. And her husband was exactly at my husband’s professional level. So I felt slighted and I started to complain. But then I realized it was all so idiotic.  

While Vila A and Vila B mirrored the socio-economic divisions that existed within Brazilian society more broadly, they also exposed more local class distinctions. Some upper-level employees decided not to relocate their family to the borderlands. Despite the distant location of Foz do Iguaçu, upper-level and highly paid employees and contractors of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms maintained separate residences in their place of origin and commuted back and forth from the border. For example, high-level directors, engineers, and administrators often flew out of the Foz do Iguaçu international airport on Friday afternoon to be with their wives and families in Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, or Rio de Janeiro and returned on Monday afternoon just after lunch. Clearly, such practices modeled a luxury that many low- and mid-level workers and poorer residents of the city’s favelas could not afford to emulate.

In stark contrast to the “desperations” of the wives of elite engineers is the story of the families of two carpenters employed by Unicon and that resided in the Rincão San Francisco, one of the most densely populated shantytowns. Up to twelve persons, often comprised of two or three families, lived in one room measuring 20 square meters. Feliciana da Silva and her husband migrated from Chapecó in Santa Catarina state after he secured work as a carpenter with Unicon. The couple and their growing family consisting of two children (one three-months- and another four-years-old) shared a one-room shack with the family of a coworker. In order to cut down on expenses, the couples

split the rent and the cost of meals. Among their concerns, maintaining respectable sexual relations proved to be a problem for the couples. As a remedy, da Silva and her roommates developed a plan:

so that we could have sex, we entered into a rotating system with the other couple. As the men of the house both work for Unicon, each week one of them works at night. During that week, only one couple has sex, and the other goes on ‘a diet.’ During the daytime we don’t do anything because the kids are coming and going and the other woman always seems to come up with something to do in the room. At night it’s a different story, we find a small corner of the bed, push the kids out, and have at it. Meanwhile, the woman in the next bed lies there, hearing the noises, with her finger in her mouth.50

Such problems did not exist in the company housing developments, at least not in Vilas A and B. Perhaps only in Vila C, with its close quarters, poor design, and temporary construction, did sex represent a real problem for couples. In any case, the shantytowns offer a stark juxtaposition to the upper class lifestyle of Vila B and the middle-class lifestyle of Vila A, including the boredom and petty class distinctions.

The Case of the “Drowned” Brazilian Prostitute

The construction of the hydroelectric dam project and its resulting migrations forever changed the face of sexual commerce in the region. The influx of dam workers, engineers, and corporate officials coincided with other migrations to the borderlands. Counted among the forasteiros arriving in Foz do Iguaçu, single women migrated to the border in order to engage in sexual commerce with the large numbers of male workers. They too sought to find their fortune, or simply “to wait,” in another of the borderland’s “streets of trash,” namely the city’s primary zone of tolerance located in Três Lagoas, or crossed the border to work in the brothels located in Paraguay. Before turning to the example of the sanctioned zone of tolerance in Três Lagoas in Brazil, the controversy

50 Quoted in “Enquanto fazemos o amor a vizinha fica com o dedo na boca,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de fevereiro de 1981, 11. The Portuguese reads: “para terem relações sexuais combinam com o outro casal um sistema rotativo. Como os dois homens da casa trabalham na Unicon, cada semana um trabalha à noite. Nesta semana há relações sexuais entre um casal o outro fica de dieta. Durante o dia não dá quando não são as crianças dando volta por aí, entrando e saindo e a outra mulher que sempre inventa alguma coisa para fazer dentro do quarto. De noite já é outra coisa, a gente se joga lá num canto da cama, põe as crianças para os pés, e dá um jeito. Enquanto isso a vizinha fica lá na outra cama ouvindo os ruidos com o dedo na boca.”
surrounding the death of a Brazilian woman employed as a prostitute in Hernandarias provides a crucial comparative glimpse into the nature of sexual commerce in the borderlands.

On Friday, 16 February 1979, while swimming in the arroyo Pira Pytã, a ten-year-old boy stumbled upon the dead, naked body of a woman. The boy immediately informed his parents, who then contacted the appropriate authorities. Shortly thereafter, the director of the Centro de Salud (Health Clinic), Dr. Rubén Báez Osorio, along with the son and the private secretary of the local juez de justicia of Hernandarias (Paraguay), arrived on the scene to investigate. During his inspection of the body, the doctor was reported to have expressed his remorse: not over the death of the young woman, but rather for the loss of 2,000 guaraníes per month. Despite standard policy and procedure in such situations, the authorities failed to conduct an autopsy on the body, took no fingerprints or dental records, filed no death certificate, made no attempt to identify or contact the deceased woman’s relatives, and did not open an investigation to determine the circumstances of her death. The next day, on Saturday morning, officials hastily buried the body in a local cemetery and the police informed the dead woman’s employer, doña Acela, owner of the popular whiskería “La Mariposa,” that one of her employees had met with an untimely end. For their part, the police labeled the death an accidental drowning. Case closed.

The story might have ended there, except for the arrival of Alcibiades González Delvalle, a local reporter working for the “opposition” national daily newspaper ABC Color based in Asunción. The newspaper was founded in 1967, and over the course of the 1970s, its owner and editor Aldo Zuccolillo increasingly criticized the Stronato military dictatorship, thus making the paper the unofficial daily and voice of the opposition.51 González Delvalle was sent to investigate the so-called submundo (underworld) of Hernandarias, in particular allegations of corruption and violent crime, of which the death of the young woman appeared to be the most recent case in point.

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51 As a result, General Stroessner ordered the paper shuttered in 1984. However, the paper resumed operations after the downfall of the Stroessner regime in 1989. In addition to calls for greater freedom of the press and a return to true electoral democracy, the series of articles published on women and prostitution in Hernandarias represents the starting point of the open antagonism between the owner and editors of ABC Color and officials of the military regime.
Located directly adjacent to the massive Itaipú hydroelectric dam project then under construction, the borderlands community of Hernandarias had experienced explosive growth and a host of social ills related in part to the presence of large numbers of male dam workers. Specifically, the development of an entire barrio (neighborhood) of “centros nocturnas” (after-dark establishments) backhandedly devoted to sexual commerce troubled residents of the community.\textsuperscript{52} No doubt somewhat ironically, the community in question took on the name Barrio María Magdalena. Located at the edge of town and closest to the entrance to the hydroelectric dam, the establishments discussed in this chapter officially were designated as whiskerías (bars serving alcohol), though most all existed as fronts for houses of prostitution.\textsuperscript{53} Popular among working-class men of the lowest ranks, the whiskerías were small, simple wooden buildings often without windows or doors. \textbf{[Figure 5.4]} According to his own first-hand tabulation, González Delvalle placed the number of active whiskerías at 37 and approximated that 10 or more women worked in each establishment, for a total of around 400 women working in the sex trade in Hernandarias.\textsuperscript{54}

Upon his arrival, González Delvalle set about the task of uncovering the mystery surrounding the death of the young woman. Returning to the arroyo Pira Pytã located northwest of Hernandarias on the road to Santa Fe, the reporter interviewed witnesses who suggested foul play. According to witnesses, on the previous Wednesday, eleven young women and three men arrived to the site in a Volkswagon taxi-van and proceeded to swim in and to sunbathe along the banks of the stream. According to employees at the cantina, the men and women purchased and consumed large quantities of beer. In addition, several witnesses reported overhearing a heated argument between members of the group, but as known prostitutes, the cantina staff paid little attention to them at the time. When interviewed, the witnesses stated that they expected behavior of this sort from such women; thus on the day of the incident the commotion had passed without much notice or concern.

\textsuperscript{52} As such, the bars were referred to as “noctámbulos,” a cross between the so-called centros nocturnas and the prostíbulo (brothel).

\textsuperscript{53} It is important to note that the whiskerías were but one form of brothel available in Hernandarias.

\textsuperscript{54} In addition, during his initial visit, he noted that several more establishments appeared to be abandoned or inactive for unknown reasons.
According to the eyewitness testimony, several hours after the argument, some of the women appeared to be searching for one of their female companions, who apparently had separated from the others. The missing woman’s clothes had been found on the bank of the stream, but she could not be located; the women worried out loud that their companion might have drowned in the stream. Inexplicably, the remaining ten women and the three men hurriedly boarded the taxi-van and returned to Hernandarias. Upon returning, not one of the members of the outing reported the young woman missing, nor discussed the events of the day. Three days later, however, the lifeless body of the young woman turned up at the site of the arroyo Pira Pytã. Eyewitnesses reported that the woman’s body appeared to have a “large swelling” (golpe) on the head. Despite the determination that the woman accidentally had drowned, employees of the cantina argued that the stream was too shallow and the current too calm for anyone to drown there.

The facts of the case now pointed back to the whiskerías of Hernandarias, and the houses of prostitution. Given the bad publicity, the Delegación de Gobierno del Alto Paraná intervened in the case, requesting that an investigation be opened to determine the exact cause of death. New information began to emerge, including the possible name of the unknown and presumably “drowned prostitute.” According to information from her employer, coworkers, and others who knew her, the authorities believed the deceased woman to be a 16-year-old female from Medianeira in Paraná state (Brazil), with the name of “Adriana da Silva,” or possibly the surname of “da Silveira.”

Adriana da Silva (or da Silveira) worked at the popular whiskería “La Mariposa,” owned by doña Acela Rodríguez de Maldonado, also known by her Guaraní name, Ña Chiní. Da Silva or da Silveira, known as a “pupila” (student), slang for women who worked for the dueñas (owners) of houses of prostitution, did not return that afternoon in question. Furthermore, doña Acela’s husband, Eduardo Maldonado, had traveled to the arroyo on that day, thus making him a key witness and possible suspect. As a result, police officials detained for questioning doña Acela, her husband, and the nine remaining sex workers of the “La Mariposa.” In addition, police detained Florencio Ramón Cabrera, the driver of the taxi-van; but the third male, still unidentified, remained at-large.

The press coverage and subsequent police investigation brought to light the inner workings of the sex trade in Hernandarias, specifically, and the Alto Paraná borderlands,
more broadly. Regulations required that women who wished to be employed as prostitutes present themselves in person to the Alcadía (Office of the Mayor) of Hernandarias. However, officials did not require the women to show their identification cards or other official documentation attesting to their true identity. Thus, the women usually registered under false names. In any case, “Adriana” most likely was not the real name of the “drowned” Brazilian woman, thus leading to questions about her actual identity.

Cooperating with the investigation, Eduardo Maldonado, the husband of the owner of the whiskería “La Mariposa” forwarded to authorities a list of workers employed in the establishment. In addition, he stated that the worker’s registration cards (fichas) and medical inspection certificates from the previous month had been filed, as per the regulations required by the office of the Alcadía. However, when compared to the reports given by witnesses at the arroyo Pira Pytã, the picture of “Adriana” attached to the registration card on file at the mayor’s office reportedly did not match that of the victim. Furthermore, the registration card for “Adriana da Silva” listed her place of employment as the whiskería “Vat 69,” another popular bar in the barrio María Magdalena. Given the conflicting information, exactly who was the woman that died at the arroyo Pira Pytã?

The Justice of the Peace, Pedro Matiauda, in charge of the official investigation, quickly found no evidence of foul play and released doña Acela Rodríguez de Maldonado and Eduardo Maldonado from police custody. The report concluded that misinformation regarding the location of employment and the final resting place of “Adriana da Silva,” though suspicious and incompetent, represented no crime on the part of municipal authorities. However, Matiauda never disclosed the reasons behind the hasty departure of the companions of “Adriana da Silva” from the scene and their subsequent failure to report her missing. In addition, the motives for the hasty burial in an unmarked grave in the private cemetery of Brazilian farmer also remained a mystery. Apparently, all indications pointed to the fact that a Brazilian woman had drowned at the arroyo Pira Pytã; at least this emerged as the official story in regards to the identity and

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55 “Se ha pedido la clausura de todos los prostíbulos,” *ABC Color* (Asunción), 9 de marzo de 1979, 11.
circumstances of death of the “drowned prostitute,” but many questions remained unanswered.

The case of the drowned prostitute proved to be a messy affair and, despite an official investigation, there remained many suspicions. While González Delvalle and the editors of ABC Color clearly fanned the flames, the investigative reporting conducted did elevate to national attention the inner workings of the sex trade in the Alto Paraná borderlands. Based on his investigation, González Delvalle reported that each sex worker paid the Alcaldía the sum of 1,500 guaranies (the monetary unit of Paraguay, henceforth written as Gs) to register, and 1,000 per month thereafter. Moreover, each whiskería owner paid 10,000 Gs monthly, not including an additional 5,000 to 15,000 Gs for “special protection” from the police, which included patrolling the barrio and returning runaway women. According to his calculations, the officials of the Alcaldía received approximately 600,000 Gs per month in fees garnered directly from the sex trade in Hernandarias. Furthermore, the Centro de Salud, tasked with the job of performing bimonthly health inspections on the sex workers, received 1,000 Gs per visit to the clinic, for an approximate total of 600,000 Gs per month. However, no clear indication emerged as to where these fees went after being collected by the officials of the Alcaldía and the Centro de Salud. In any case, the flow of such vast sums of cash represented a compelling and undeniable motive for the alleged cover-up of the case of the drowned prostitute on the part of the authorities, at least from the point of view of the editors of ABC Color.

In addition to the fees paid directly to the Alcaldía and the Centro de Salud, sex workers paid the owner of the whiskería 1,000 Gs each day for room and board. Reportedly, the price of sex ranged from 500 to 700 Gs, depending on the extent of the service performed. In addition to sex, the whiskería provided a convenient no-frills locale for working-class men, mainly consisting of dam workers, to socialize and to drink in the company of women and fellow workers. However, the products were sold at

56 “Las autoridades alientan y se aprovechan del vicio,” ABC Color (Asunción), 21 de febrero de 1979, 10.
57 “Se aprovechan en exceso de las indefensas muchachas,” ABC Color (Asunción), 23 de febrero de 1979, 11.
58 By way of price comparison, at that time, intercourse cost the same as a man’s shirt, priced between 700-1,000 Gs., if bought in a clothing store in the capital of Asunción.
inflated prices: for example, a soft-drink cost 50 Gs, a bottle of domestic beer cost 100 Gs, a “cuba libre” (caña and cola) cost 250 Gs, and a pack of cigarettes cost 150 Gs. Women received a kickback of 50 percent of the cost of each cuba libre sold and of each sexual service. Thus, owners extended a monetary incentive to women to push costlier mixed drinks and to provide sexual services to male patrons.

The case, however, exposed the fractures within Paraguayan society and laid bare the inner workings of the political and judicial system of Hernandarias, which some viewed as both incompetent and corrupt. Moreover, in the opinion of the political opposition, the vice and corruption of Hernandarias represented a local manifestation of the larger issue of endemic corruption, violence, and social problems fostered by the military dictatorship in Paraguay and generated by the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project.

Allegedly, the collusion of city officials and the owners of the whiskerías operated to further exploit women. For example, failure to present oneself to the medical authorities for the bimonthly health inspection could land sex workers in jail in the Alcaldía. The cost of bail was reported to be 3,500 Gs if the prostitute paid her own fine, and rose to 5,000 Gs if the owner of the establishment paid to free one of its workers. In the latter case, owners added the cost of bail to the account of the worker, to be paid off through the proceeds from sex and the selling of alcohol and merchandise.59 Lastly, owners of the whiskerías were reported to have to pay a so-called “special protection” fee to the local police who patrolled the barrio. In turn, the police reportedly returned women who had attempted to escape from the premises.60

While most viewed economic and sexual exploitation of prostitutes as unfortunate, the institution of prostitution did not garner the same level of criticism. At best, González Delvalle argued that Paraguayan society considered prostitution “a necessary evil” (un mal necesario), that channeled unbridled male sexuality to “fallen” women specifically employed for this reason. However, prostitution in Paraguay, like in much of Latin America, was alternately tolerated, denounced, regulated, criminalized,
and sensationalized.\textsuperscript{61} For its part, the military government of General Stroessner maintained a hands-off approach to the regulation of prostitution, deferring instead to the Ley Orgánica Municipal No. 222, \textit{artículo} 81, \textit{inciso} 2, which delegated to the municipalities the regulation “of all matters concerning prostitution and the relations derived from it.”\textsuperscript{62} The local governments interpreted this law as both legalizing prostitution and mandating its regulation—including the granting of business licenses, fees, registration, decisions about formal location, sanitation, and medical and health inspections of both the premises and the sex workers. While the exact legal status of prostitution remained unclear, each municipality had the right to pass specific ordinances for control and even prohibition. In short, prostitution continued to be a local matter, not to mention a legitimate and lucrative revenue stream for municipalities.

In the specific case of Hernandarias, prostitution did not bother residents as much as their concerns over the scale of the trade and, partly due to the unfavorable press coverage surrounding the “drowned prostitute,” the infamous reputation that it had brought to the community. Residents feared that Hernandarias would become synonymous with prostitution and the indelible “stain” (\textit{mancha}) of prostitution would be associated with all members of the community regardless of occupation and socioeconomic level. More than anything, residents wished that the now infamous \textit{barrio} of vice would move somewhere else.\textsuperscript{63}

To combat the perception of rampant vice and corruption, the city’s leading citizens and officials quickly pointed out that the \textit{barrio} of prostitution was not representative or constitutive of the neighborhoods or morals of the residents of


\textsuperscript{62} “Prostitución: ordenanza sería reconsiderada,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 5 de Enero de 1977, 18. The Spanish reads: “...la reglamentación de todo lo concerniente a la prostitución y a las relaciones nacidas de ella.” Prostitution “as a way of life” was banned by the national government for a time, through the presidential decree Poder Ejecutivo No. 2436 (1951) before being replaced by the Ley Orgánica Municipal No. 222, mandating the regulation of prostitution by municipal officials.

\textsuperscript{63} “Itaipú tendría que aceptar al barrio de Hernandarias,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 25 de febrero de 1979, 9.
Hernandarias. However, the “problem of prostitution” could not disappear as long as the catalysis for its creation and continuation remained, namely, the male workers constructing the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, the nation’s omnipresent example and measure of national development. As González Delvalle argued:

Prostitution may be considered a necessary evil. However, in the case of Itaipú, it’s not even considered that. Over there, it’s considered as a vital part in the construction of the world’s largest hydroelectric dam.\(^{64}\)

As way of explanation, the role of prostitution centered upon the “utility” (utilidad) of women in the context of the construction of the hydroelectric dam project, particularly as it related to acceptable male sexuality.

The so-called utility of prostitutes, as understood by González Delvalle, revolved around the sexual services they provided to male dam workers. Without such outlets for male sexuality, the project could be delayed due to a lack of sex: in a circular logic, men could not function properly without regular intercourse, and the hydroelectric dam project could not be constructed without the male dam workers. In short, there could be no hydroelectric dam without the sex workers of Hernandarias. Furthermore, unknown “commotions” could be unleashed upon the local communities if male dam workers found their sanctioned choices restricted or non-existent. While never made clear, such social disturbances very well could have included labor organizing, rape and sexual predation, and homosexuality. Male sexuality, best contained and directed onto women “employed” for this very reason, and prostitution constituted the lesser of two evils.\(^{65}\)

Thus, in the discourse on national development, prostitution itself was not anathema to progress, but rather viewed as an indispensable ingredient.

Moreover, González Delvalle and *ABC Color* chastised company officials of Itaipú Binacional and the community leaders of Hernandarias for not taking responsibility for the situation and, in addition, for their hypocrisy. In stark contrast to the *barrio*, engineers and administrators of Itaipú Binacional had planned every detail for its workers and their families residing in company housing projects—the various Areas

\(^{64}\) “Itaipú tendría que aceptar al barrio de Hernandarias,” *ABC Color* (Asunción), 25 de febrero de 1979, 9.

\(^{65}\) “Itaipú tendría que aceptar al barrio de Hernandarias,” *ABC Color* (Asunción), 25 de febrero de 1979, 9.
(Paraguay) and Vilas (Brazil)—including education, health, recreation, nutrition, religion, and vocational training, and had a direct hand in their planning, construction, and maintenance. The male dam workers, in turn, provided the demand for prostitution that supported the creation of the casas nocturnas of Hernandarias, including the whiskerías, while owners and procurers provided a steady supply of young women. Thus, Itaipú Binacional did not have a direct role, but rather the impetus emerged from its workers and as an indirect consequence of its activities. For their part, the officials of Itaipú Binacional refused to take responsibility for, or to even openly discuss, the zone of prostitution in Hernandarias. Clearly, company administration viewed the matter as a problem to be handled by the municipal authorities.

In any case, González Delvalle stopped short of arguing that sex workers should be employed directly by Itaipú Binacional. In light of its role, however, González Delvalle argued that the company and its subcontractors should recognize prostitutes as a legitimate category of workers and to extend the generous benefits offered to male dam workers and their families, including education and day care for children, and vocational training to the women in the brothels. The newspaper suggested that medical supervision of sex workers should be transferred to hospitals and clinics operated by Itaipú Binacional, as a remedy for the alleged exploitation of women at the hands of municipal officials and the Centro de Salud. Itaipú Binacional and the disgruntled residents of Hernandarias, furthermore, were accused of having knowledge of the situation, but no consciousness or will to action—prostitution was seen as a necessity, but only tolerated as long as it remained hidden from view. González Delvalle, in any case, thought that Itaipú Binacional would not ever recognize the sex worker’s important contribution, stating that “when the dam is finally inaugurated, no one will find any plaque whatsoever to commemorate or in honor of the young women of Hernandarias.”

The resulting national attention engendered by the death of the “drowned prostitute” led to a major shift in the geography of sexual commerce in borderland

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66 “Itaipú tendría que aceptar al barrio de Hernandarias,” ABC Color (Asunción), 25 de febrero de 1979, 9.
67 The residents of Hernandarias are not unique in this view. Generally speaking, this is the position taken by most Paraguayans in relation to prostitution.
68 “Itaipú tendría que aceptar al barrio de Hernandarias,” ABC Color (Asunción), 25 de febrero de 1979, 9.
communities, as the local outcry forced city officials to close down the brothels of Hernandarias. As a result, the emerging “problem of prostitution” moved to points south and possibly into Brazil. As will be seen in the next section, the sanctioned zone of tolerance there also underwent a process of formation and decline, but for very different reasons.

**Três Lagoas: The Rise and Downfall of the Zone of Tolerance**

A zone of tolerance had long existed to service the borderland population of Foz do Iguaçu. At the time of the formal founding of Foz do Iguaçu in 1914 the *zona de meretrício* (zone of prostitution or tolerance) existed one kilometer from the city center and just beyond the northeastern city limits. At some point, however, almost all of the houses of prostitution in the zone moved a couple kilometers west to an area just north of the limits of town, leaving only a few houses operating in the old locale.69 Thereafter, the area adjacent to the old *zona de meretrício* developed as the site of main bus terminal for the city. The abandoned structures and open land, however, eventually attracted squatters and the area soon developed into the shantytown of Favela de Pluma, named after the principal bus company operating out of the ground transportation terminal. Thus, by the early 1970s, two zones of tolerance, one primary and one secondary, existed in Foz do Iguaçu.

In January 1975, when initial construction began on the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, eight houses of prostitution, referred to on the exterior signage as “nightclubs” (*boates* or *boites*) operated in the primary zone of tolerance, amidst persistent rumors of a pending expropriation of their premises.70 However, the arrival of the first wave of construction planners and civil engineers initially boosted business in the *boates* of the prostitution zone. “Laieta,” manager of the Boate da Júlia exclaimed that, “Never have I seen so many “doutor” (professional men) in my whole life.” The owner of the Boate Neocid even went so far as to change, temporarily at least, the name of her establishment to Boate Itaipu, in anticipation of the hydroelectric dam project. In any case, the rumors of dispossession proved to be true. During the planning of the Itaipú Binacional dam

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69 “Zona, favela, seita religiosa,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 14 de janeiro de 1981, 18.
worker communities, company officials decided to construct Vila A on the site of the city’s primary zone of tolerance. Planners decided upon the land occupied by the zone because of its location on prime real estate halfway between Foz do Iguaçu and the hydroelectric dam site. In addition, the decision fit in with the basic concept outlined in the development plan, which sought to integrate new dam worker communities into the existing city and to remove existing communities that did not conform to the plan.

Under the direction of Itaipú Binacional, city officials of Foz do Iguaçu appropriated the land on which the houses of prostitution sat and encouraged proprietors to move their operations to Três Lagoas, then a rural area just outside the city limits approximately 5 kilometers northeast of the city center along the south side of the international highway (BR-277) that linked Foz do Iguaçu with the regional capital of Cascavel. At the time, Três Lagoas consisted mostly of corn farmers, reassigned to the area by the National Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization (I.N.C.R.A), and the homes of the few original inhabitants of the small community. The exact role of Itaipú Binacional in the wholesale removal and relocation of the prostitution zone is not clear, though local residents have long speculated that company officials not only bought out proprietors, but also gave them free land for a new zone. Clearly, company and city officials understood the necessity for a zone of tolerance that was sufficiently removed from the city center, easily accessible from the highway, and ample enough to contain the number of houses required to service the thousands of male dam workers that would soon descend upon the borderlands.

In Três Lagoas, the city’s new primary zone of prostitution now established itself on the south side of the highway. Concurrently, on the north side of BR-277, Itaipú Binacional officials settled displaced farming families from Alvorada do Iguaçu, one of the first communities directly affected by the initial land appropriations resulting from the formation of the proprietary zone of Itaipú Binacional in 1975. Thus, prostitution and agriculture initially existed within the same community. Amidst the cornfields, the first year of operation of the zone of prostitution in its new, rural location passed rather quietly following the traditional rhythm of sexual commerce in the borderlands. Along with a smattering of engineers and company officials, the usual tourists and Brazilians,
Paraguayans, and Argentines continued to be the majority of visitors to the zone of tolerance.\textsuperscript{71}

During the years of intensive construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, roughly during the period 1976-1982, thousands of male dam workers transformed the Três Lagoas prostitution zone into the most trafficked neighborhood in the entire city. Indeed, by the end of major construction on the hydroelectric dam project, Foz do Iguaçu had the unofficial title of “The Paradise of Prostitution” (O Paraiso da Prostituição) in Brazil.\textsuperscript{72} The zone represented one of the only places in the city where large numbers of male dam workers could openly and freely socialize in their free time.\textsuperscript{73} The prostitution zone also operated day and night. Shift changes at the canteiro (dam worksite) occasioned frantic preparations within the bordellos as the women anticipated the arrival of waves of buses and cars transporting Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers from the construction site to Três Lagoas.\textsuperscript{74} At the height of commerce in the zone, an estimated 800 to 1,000 women worked to provide sexual services to the large number of male dam workers.\textsuperscript{75}

During the heady days of full employment at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam during the late-1970s, business in the zone was both brisk and lucrative. Not unlike the male dam workers, young women from all over Brazil (and a smaller number from Paraguay) arrived at the Foz do Iguaçu bus station in search of their “fortune.”\textsuperscript{76} “Helen,”\textsuperscript{77} who had been working in the zone since its founding, stated that it “paid well here when all of the laborers from Itaipu came with their pockets full of cash. Every payday the workers were big spenders. I had one worker spend his entire pay packet in just one night.”\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{72} “Oitenta por cento das prostitutas de Foz do Iguaçu são sifilíticas,” \textit{Nosso Tempo} (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 to 29 September 1983, 3.
\item\textsuperscript{73} Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 180.
\item\textsuperscript{74} Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 182.
\item\textsuperscript{75} The exact number of bordellos that existed during the height of the zone is not known. However, if the number of houses is set at 40 and the number of 20-26 women working in each house, then an approximation is possible.
\item\textsuperscript{76} Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 179.
\item\textsuperscript{77} Names of sex workers appear in italics. Although these are the names as they are given in the sources, they are most likely aliases or professional names adopted by the sex workers.
\item\textsuperscript{78} “Movimento caiu muito,” \textit{Nosso Tempo} (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 14. The Portuguese reads: “Aqui dava bem quando vinha toda aquela pionada da Itaipu com os bolsos cheios de
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The architecturally simple houses were constructed of cinderblock and timber; some two storied and located behind walled enclosures, or opened directly onto the main, but unpaved street. A larger and open room, often used as the dance floor, fronted the houses with the women’s living and work quarters in the back, along with the kitchen. In the multi-storied homes, the second floor contained the owner’s private family quarters. The “nightclubs” had a variety of names, some more descriptive than others, including Boite 27, Boite Carinho da noite, Sambão, Boite Chanel, and Casa Júlia. Despite the popularity of the zone, the houses had few amenities. [Figure 5.5] The zone did not have electricity, running water, or sewerage. Gas or kerosene lamps provided illumination in the houses after dark. In this sense, the community was similarly underdeveloped to other parts of Foz do Iguaçu at the time.

Sex worker narratives tell of familial and marital conflict, physical abuse, and sexual violence, often combined with economic necessity, that pushed women into prostitution in the zone. For instance, the Brazilian “Lenita” recounted how her father threw her out of her parental home after he caught her having premarital sex with her boyfriend. Afterwards, she lived for a few months with her lover before their arguments over his heavy drinking and staying out late poisoned the relationship. One night she simply left the house and found employment in the zone of tolerance in the regional capital of Cascavel for three months, before moving to the zona in Três Lagoas. The Brazilian “Rose” recounted how she had left her husband and two-year-old son in Catanduvas just three months before. Mistreated by her spouse, “Rose” fled her home, marriage, and her young son. Rose offered missed her son and wanted to return to see him again.

The Paraguayan “Marina” tells of how her father took her to Encarnación (a Paraguayan town located on the Paraná River) in order “to make a little bit of money off

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79 When possible, the term “sex worker” will be employed instead of “prostitute,” although the work itself will continue to be referred to as prostitution. Sex worker is a less pejorative and broader term that not only encompasses exchanges of sex for money, but also those women and men engaged in paid erotic practices such as nude modeling, exotic dancing/stripping, massage, and escort services. Javier Murillo Muñoz, Trabajadores del sexo: testimonios y comentarios (Palmira, Colombia: CORPICH, 1996), 116. For a discussion on the theme, see the sections “Consideraciones generales” and “Razones para una profesión,” 115-131.

80 “Lenita foi expulsa de casa,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13.
of her” by forcing her into prostitution. However, the house where she was employed soon thereafter closed its doors. Not wanting to return to her parents’ home, she was drawn by the promise of plentiful work in Foz do Iguaçu. According to her account, owing to her illiteracy she could not find any formal employment and only found work as a domestic servant, washing clothes, and cleaning houses. These odd jobs did not pay enough to cover the high cost of living in Foz do Iguaçu, and, as a result, she reluctantly entered the zone of tolerance. Underscoring her plight, “Marina” stated that, “I suffer a lot, but at least I have a bed and food.”

The Brazilian “Lídia” “fell into” the life in the zone after being raped by a young man who offered her a ride in his car one day as she walking back from school. Tired from walking and since “he seemed like a good person,” “Lídia” accepted the offer only to be taken to an out of the way place where two other men waited. After threatening her life, the men raped her, and left her naked in the street. A car passed by and took her to the hospital for treatment. Afterward the incident, “Lídia” was afraid that the entire population of the small town knew what had happened and she “felt ashamed to look anyone in the face.” Attempting to find anonymity and work, “Lídia” fled to Foz do Iguaçu, and soon turned to prostitution in order to support herself.

One unnamed woman told of how she dated a young man for three years after which he finally proposed marriage to her. However, he did not want to see her anymore after he had “made the most of her.” Despite telling her friends her side of the story of what had happened, the other residents of the small town of Realeza spoke badly about her behind her back. Despite being a minor at the time of the incident, a fact that would have allowed her to seek redress of the matter with the local authorities, she decided not to go to the police and felt that she would never be able to find a man who would marry her. Another unnamed woman reported that she had been tricked into prostitution, initially thinking that the place was a lunch counter (lanchonete). After being hired as a

84 “Se perdeu com o namorado,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13. The Portuguese reads: “que ele se aproveitou de mim.”
waitress to serve customers, however, she soon discovered that the job entailed more than serving drinks in the bar. The woman ends the story by stating, “My parents live over in [the shantytown of] Rincão São Francisco and they think I am working in a restaurant. God help me if they discover that I am here [in Três Lagoas].”

Not all of the women reported having been tricked or fallen into “the easy life” (a vida fácil) of prostitution, as some had actually chosen that line of work. “Tere,” reportedly one of the most beautiful women working at the Boite Sambão, came from the coast of Santa Catarina state where she worked as a poorly paid schoolteacher. [Figure 5.6] For her, prostitution simply paid better wages than employment in the public sector. In addition, the twenty-year-old Brazilian “Geni” professed to be in the zone because she wanted to be there, that she had “always liked to have sex,” and that she began when she was just fifteen. Although her mother had come to the zone of tolerance on multiple occasions to return her home, she always ran away in order to come back to prostitution. Working in at least ten houses in the zone, she added that she did not feel any shame being a sex worker because she felt that “it’s a profession just like any other.”

The women had their own preferences for clients that centered on varying degrees of respect. While “Tânia Márcia” preferred mature men over forty years of age, stating that “they are more experienced, and not as nervous as the boys.” “Leticia” preferred Argentine and Paraguayan men, citing that they were easier to connect with than the Brazilian man who is “too macho and only wants to receive and not give anything in return.” “Tere” concurred, stating that Argentine men are more liberal than Brazilian men in matters of sex. Brazilian men, on the other hand, she stated, only “see a hole to fill. He doesn’t want to give anything, only receive. With the Argentine and the Paraguayan it’s the opposite.”

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85 “Pensou que era lanchonete,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13. The Portuguese reads: “Deus me livre se descobrem que estou aqui.”
87 “Cada um com sua mania,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13. The Portuguese reads: “São mais experientes e não são afobados como os garotos” and “é muito machão, só quer receber e não dá nada em troca.”

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Language barriers often made it difficult for the women to relate to their foreign clients. “Regina” remarked that they “don’t know how to say a word in Portuguese and we can’t understand anything that they say either. Nowadays it’s likely for an American or Englishman to turn up here and he’ll spend a night with me. One guy talked and I couldn’t understand and I talked and he didn’t understand anything. He just ended up spending the whole night saying ‘love, love.’”

The women tell of other clients with different tastes and out of the ordinary pleasures. “Tereza” had a regular whom she believed to be “schizophrenic,” and liked to masturbate while watching her perform a striptease. Additionally, one unnamed source revealed that women, not just men, frequented the zone: “Clearly women from the city also come here, and not to spy on their husbands. They come here because they want to enjoy something different. There is a blond in the city that comes here almost every week. It seems that she has fallen in love with woman from the Chanel nightclub.”

One German man lived in the city and had extravagant, but sexually perverted tastes. As “Beth” told the story, a German from Natal came about once a month on business and brought bottles of champagne with him. “He got three women and I was the fourth. It was such a spree. He gave us a champagne bath. At the end of the party we counted two dozen empty bottles.” And, the boates of Três Lagoas were not the only place where sex occurred between women and men. “Tereza” also reported that, “it is not uncommon for some “bigwig” (grã-fino) to hire half-dozen women and take them out to his country estate for an orgy. I know of cases that will make your hair stand on end.”

During non-working hours, the women of the zone engaged in a variety of activities: a visit to the local police station for the compulsory medical exam or a trip into

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89 “Cada um com sua mania,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13. The Portuguese reads: “Eles não sabem dizer uma palavra em português e nós também não entendemos nada o que eles falam. Esses dias pintou um inglês ou um americano ser lá e passou a noite comigo. Ele falava e eu não entendia eu falava e ele não entendia nada. Ele ficou o tempo todo dizendo ‘love, love.’”


92 “Cada um com sua mania,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981. 13. The Portuguese reads: “É frequente também o pessoal grão-fino pegar meia dúzia de mulheres e levar para a chácara para fazer bacanal. Sei de casos de arrebrar os cabelos.”
Foz do Iguaçu to shop, to visit the *cartomante* (fortune teller), to “unload the body” (*descarregar o corpo*) at the Umbanda spiritual center, or to send money back home to relatives.\(^{93}\) In the zone, mothers visited the local boarding house, run as a type of daycare center, to see their children, bring small gifts, and to pay the enrollment fee.\(^{94}\) Still others visited the dressmaker “Marlene,” who ran her own small business and acted as midwife for the women of the zone. Besides dressmaking, her repertoire of services included administering injections of large doses of vitamins to induce abortion.

Mothers who did not want to keep their babies found homes for them with families in Foz do Iguaçu or with other women in the zone.\(^{95}\) Children were born and raised in the zone of tolerance, albeit discretely removed and distanced from the houses in which their mothers worked and lived.\(^{96}\) Owners forbade romantic relationships between women and men because these partners, by definition, did not have to pay for sex, and thereby reduced the profitability of the house. To avoid such emotional entanglements, the proprietors constantly “substituted” new hires. As a result, many women spent only a short time in each house.\(^{97}\)

While sexual commerce constituted the obvious draw, the nightclubs also operated as “locales of sociability” for men. Customers enjoyed a range of entertainment, from music and dancing to food and drink, depending on the establishment or night of the week.\(^{98}\) Paydays, not surprisingly, were especially busy times in the zone. The number of clients and the number of times each woman had sex over the course of one night varied among the women. “Tere,” the renowned beauty of the Boite Sambão, reported that on a slow night she had sex with two or three different men, sometimes up to five, and a record of nine.\(^{99}\) Her relative exclusivity demanded a higher price for her services. Perhaps other women could not afford to be so discriminating as the number of customers and earnings could vary depending on physical beauty, reputation, quality, and specific demands of the establishment, the time of day or day of the week, and the health of the local or national economy.

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\(^{94}\) Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 166.
\(^{95}\) Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 177.
\(^{96}\) Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 166.
\(^{98}\) Ribeiro, “Entrando na ‘zona,’” 182.
\(^{99}\) “Professora virou prostituta,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 14.
Prior to the construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, along with the rest of the population, sex workers visited the health clinic (posto de saúde) located in the center of Foz do Iguaçu. However, the service ended partly due to the inability to accommodate so many women and due to the disruption they caused. As Dr. Antônio Carlos Gifoni described the typical scene at the downtown clinic:

When the treatment was done here, the women from up there [Três Lagoas] made a lot of racket, talking loudly and swearing in front of the mothers that came to get their children vaccinated. Because of that we had to have a separate service for them. 100

While certainly more efficient, medical officials did not design the new system with the women’s convenience in mind, but rather to avoid the spectacle of hundreds of sex workers descending on Foz do Iguaçu, disruptions of the peace in the city center, and to protect decent women and children. After all, as Dr. Gifoni believed, mothers and children visiting the clinic for routine vaccinations and checkups should not be exposed to foul-mouthed prostitutes who he believed carried venereal disease.

During the construction of the dam, the large numbers of sex workers necessitated a system in which the physician conducted exams in the police station located within the confines of the zone. To control the spread of sexually transmitted disease, the women had to pay for and undergo a physical exam conducted at Delegacia de Polícia, the local police station, by a medical doctor at least once a month. 101 In return, they received a certificate, often referred to euphemistically by the women as a “ballerina’s card,” that gave them a clean bill of health. To enforce compliance, the police and inspectors made periodic rounds of the houses to check for valid cards. For each invalid or missing certificate, the violator could face detention in the police station or the owner of the house could pay 1,500 cruzeiros as a penalty and temporarily avoid the loss of an employee. The system, however, remained open to corruption, as cash bribes by owners obliged officers to ignore regulations.

100 “Gonorréia,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 28 de outubro a 4 de novembro de 1981, 16. The Portuguese reads: “Quando esse atendimento era feito aqui, as mulheres lá de cima faziam muita algazarra, falavam alto e diziam palavrões na frente das mães de família que vinha se tratar ou vacinar seus filhos. Por isso deveria haver um serviço próprio para isso.”

101 “Gonorréia,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 28 de outubro a 4 de novembro de 1981, 16.
By early 1981, some of the houses had fallen on hard times due to the economic recession, high inflation, reduction in the purchasing power of workers, rising costs of doing business, and a growing reputation for danger and disease in the zone. Part of the bad reputation resulted from the death of a police officer, José Cândido do Santos, in a shootout that occurred after he attempted to arrest one member of a party of four drunken, young men “causing trouble in the nightclubs of the zone” in late-December of 1980.\footnote{“Tiroteio em Três Lagoas deixa um morto e outro ferido,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 18.} The perpetrator of the crime, Edu Manoel Alves, was employed at the time of the shooting by Furnas, a subcontracted firm of Itaipú Binacional. As a result, one proprietor of a house of prostitution alleged that Itaipú Binacional had ordered its workers to stay away from the zone.\footnote{“Movimento caiu muito,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 13-14.}

Second, the local paper publicized the “sexual danger” by highlighting the wave of venereal disease sweeping the city and thought to emanate from the zone of tolerance. Though without any hard statistical data, the paper’s editor estimated that 70 percent of the city’s sex workers had one form or other of venereal disease, including syphilis and gonorrhea. Interestingly, male promiscuity was seen as the primary culprit. As the chief of Foz do Iguaçu’s Sanitary District No. 8 (8o. Distrito Sanitário) argued, “Now, the guy that today is with one woman, tomorrow with another woman…logically he is going to be exposed to a disease…he is a carrier of venereal disease, then he goes to the zone and passes it to the woman. This woman will then pass it on to 20 or 30 men and they certainly are going to spread it to a large number of women that, for their part, will transmit it to other men...”\footnote{“Gonorréia,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 28 de outubro a 4 de novembro de 1981, 16. The Portuguese reads: “Agora, o cara que hoje está com uma, amanhã com outra...é lógico que está sujeito a contrair uma doença...é portador de uma doença venérea, vai à zona e passa para a mulher. Essar [sic] mulher irá transmitir para 20 a 30 homens e estes certamente irão passar para grande número de mulheres que, por sua vez, transmitirão à outros homens...”}

At the same time as business in the zone dropped by 50 percent, rents in Três Lagoas rose to the level of the houses in the center of town, thus making the cost of doing business even higher. Prices of the commodities sold within the establishments increased in order cover rising rents. In some establishments, a beer cost 150-200 cruzeiros, a soda up to 100 cruzeiros, and a shot of whiskey 200 cruzeiros. As a result, many of the houses...
in the second and third tier of service, who relied on the *peões* (manual laborers) for business, struggled to survive. Despite the economic downturn, 40 *boates* continued to operate with a mere 200 women then working in the zone.

According to the daughter of the proprietor of Casa Júlia, only the “lesser houses” catering to the common laborers experienced difficulties. Casa Júlia, as a renowned first class house of prostitution, cultivated a more discriminating clientele of engineers and businessmen and consequentially had experienced no drop off in business. The house owed its reputation to the exceptional facilities, including 20 apartments with private bath and the good health of its workers; each worker had a medical exam every 20 days. For their part, the women “earned their room and board and didn’t pay anything.” The other high class houses also reported no lack of business. For instance, “Kátia” of the Boite Sambão house stated that business “continues like normal. The people that frequent this house are rich and because of this neither the crisis nor Itaipú affects us. They are, for the most part, wealthy businessmen, lawyers, engineers, and even doctors.” In these houses, the price charged for sex by the most attractive women often started at 1,000 *cruzeiros* or more. Clearly, the Três Lagoas zone was a locale for men of all classes, though the working-class clients had been reduced significantly in numbers.

As a majority of the houses began to fall on hard times, a rigorous selection process determined which women would be offered employment in the most lucrative houses of prostitution. Hopeful women had to submit to a visual examination by the owner of the house. Smart, pretty, and good talkers generally constituted the desired qualities of a potential sex worker. Furthermore, the famous Brazilian female *bunda* (large buttocks) remained desirable and made women employable. In terms of the desired physical characteristics, one proprietor stated that “we don’t look much at the breasts because there are men that like small ones, others big, but the backside must be large and

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105 “movimento caiu muito,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 14. The Portuguese reads: “elas ganham comida e cama e não pagam nada.”
very firm."  Additionally, so-called “sponges” (esponjas), women who could drink heavily, continued to be in demand because, when clients bought numerous overpriced drinks for the women, they helped to boost alcohol sales and the main source of revenue for the house.

In addition to the economic downturn, a shift in the demographics of Três Lagoas generated harder times for the zone. Beginning in 1981, employees and workers from Itaipú Binacional and Unicon, in search of affordable housing, increasingly settled on the “left bank” of Três Lagoas. The new settlement further altered the composition of the community and increased the population to 5,000 residents. Thus, the respectable residents of the bedroom community now outnumbered those employed in the sex trade. However, much to the disappointment of the growing number of residents on the left bank of the community, the name Três Lagoas itself had become synonymous with the “vice of the right bank,” so much so that one resident claimed that, “When one mentions Três Lagoas, the majority of people turn their thoughts to the zone of prostitution.”

As a result, many residents of the left bank wished to change the name of their community. In addition, the infamous reputation of the zone of prostitution helped to explain the lack of infrastructure improvements that had been provided by the municipality of Foz do Iguaçu to the more respectable parts of town. Despite having a public telephone, street patrols, and public lighting, the left bank continued to lack paved streets or sewerage. One resident complained of the shame caused when giving her address to the store clerks in town because “few people understand that Três Lagoas is one thing and the zone is another.”

Eventually, the respectable side of Três Lagoas received the much-prized road pavement and other infrastructure improvements. However, its other half, the zone of prostitution, did not. While respectable residents of the left bank of Três Lagoas derived pride from its urban infrastructure, amenities, tranquility and quality of life, they made a sharp distinction between the two halves. For example, the mayor chose to believe that

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107 “Movimento caiu muito,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 14. The Portuguese reads: “Os peitos nós não olhamos muito porque tem homen que gosta de pequenos, outros de grandes, mas a bunda tem que ser grande e bem durinha.”
108 “Três Lagoas, uma vila que não tem nada a ver com a Zona,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 1 a 7 de julho de 1981, 13.
109 “Três Lagoas, uma vila que não tem nada a ver com a Zona,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 1 a 7 de julho de 1981, 13. The Portuguese reads: “pouca gente sabe que a vila é uma coisa e a zona é outra.”
the “zone is not exactly in Três Lagoas, but more in [the] Lote Grande, rural area.”

Thus, both symbolically and physically, municipal officials excised the zone of prostitution from the community. In essence, it forever remained a “street of trash.”

Despite the poor health of the national economy in the early 1980s, the large numbers of workers insulated the zone to a certain degree by ensuring a steady stream of clients. However, the completion of the major phase of construction of the hydroelectric dam in 1982, not the complaints of the residents of the respectable side of the community, signaled the real end of the Três Lagoas zone of tolerance, first to a period of sharp decline and its eventual disappearance. The layoff of thousands of male dam workers removed the customer base for the zone and subsequently the very reason for its existence, rapid growth, and phenomenal size. In particular, the construction industry and related services were hardest hit. According to data from the Regional Labor Department (Departamento Regional do Trabalho, D.R.T), some 6,000 men lost their jobs in this sector in 1983 alone. Underlying the significance, the construction sector employed 70 percent of the economically active population of Foz do Iguaçu.

By 1983, now a mere shadow of its former self, less than 30 houses operated in the zone and employed approximately 300 women. However, the first of the month, when workers received their pay, continued to be a time of increased activity in the zone, though never reaching the earlier level of traffic experienced during previous years. To make matters worse, in 1984 an estimated 25,000 persons, representing a 50 percent unemployment rate, were without work in Foz do Iguaçu as a result of the economic recession in Brazil and the layoffs resulting from the conclusion of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. The situation improved somewhat by the first months of 1985. However, an estimated 15,000 men remained unemployed in the city.

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110 “Três Lagoas, uma vila que não tem nada a ver com a Zona,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 1 a 7 de julho de 1981, 13.
111 “Vinte e cinco mil desempregados,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 9 de agosto de 1984, 6.
112 “Zona de meretrício de Três Lagoas em ritmo de completa decadência,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 de abril de 1985, 5.
113 “Vinte e cinco mil desempregados,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 9 de agosto de 1984, 6.
114 This figure is according to data from the Paraná Institute of Social and Economic Development (Instituto Paranaense de Desenvolvimento Econômica e Social, IPARDES).
In the logic of sexual commerce, the Três Lagoas zone of tolerance no longer made economic sense. Rampant and astronomical inflation eroded male worker’s wages, rendering the cost of a night in the zone prohibitive for most working-class men. For example, in 1985, the outlay for a visit to the zone was estimated at a minimum of 100,000 cruzados: 40,000 for a taxi to and from the zone, 6,000 for the required beer or shot of whiskey, 5,000 to rent the room, and 40-50,000 for sex. The local newspaper reporter added an additional 200,000 cruzados to the total, in order to pay the doctor for the certainty of “later treatment to cure gonorrhea or other venereal disease.”

According to its own investigative reporting on city corruption, proprietors in the zone had been able to bribe police and health officials to provide their employees with a clean certificate of health, even after the women had tested positive for syphilis. Thus, male clients could no longer trust the public health policy of routine testing of sex workers.

Overall, the zone increasingly suffered from a decline in both health protections and physical standards. The houses themselves could no longer maintain the highest standards. Alcohol and food sales and room rentals constituted the primary revenue stream for owners. In exchange, sex workers often received free room and board, which in turn ate into the establishment’s meager profits. Ultimately, houses of prostitution, when faced with declining patronage and food and beverage sales, could no longer maintain the premises to an acceptable level.

In addition to crumbling infrastructure, rumors circulated that girls and women, as young as 14- or 15-years-old, could now be found working in the sex trade. These women’s reasons for entering into prostitution contrasted sharply with previous accounts given by women working in the zone during its heyday, which often mingled narratives of economic hardship and domestic strife with a spirit of adventure and independence. As one police inspector argued, women no longer sought their fortune or freedom, but rather economic necessity alone had pushed women into prostitution in order to sustain their

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115 “Zona de meretricio de Três Lagoas em ritmo de completa decadência,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 de abril de 1985, 5. The Portuguese reads: “...tratamento posterior para curar a gonorréia ou outra doença venérea...”

116 “Oitenta por cento das prostitutas de Foz do Iguaçu são sifilíticas,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 a 29 de setembro de 1983, 3.
entire families. Thus, the Três Lagoas zone increasingly took on an aura of sexual exploitation, which contributed to its fast deteriorating image.

In April 1985, acting on a tip, a police inspection of the Boate Nordestina discovered two sisters, ages 14- and 15-years-old, “ingesting alcoholic beverages and turning tricks” (ingerindo bebidas alcoólicas e fazendo programas). According to the accounts given to police, the young women had been working in the Três Lagoas zone for only three weeks at the time of discovery. Echoing concerns over child kidnapping and white slavery, the police reported that the young women had been enticed under false pretenses from their home in the favela Rincão São Francisco by a procurer who specialized in the prostitution of children. It was unclear whether the parents of the young women had known of or colluded in the sisters’ entry into the business of sexual commerce.

Also in April 1985, the Boite da Sônia mysteriously burned to the ground, leading many owners and residents to finally acknowledge the pending demise of the zone.

[Figure 5.8] The newspaper reporter from Nosso Tempo sent to the zone to investigate the fire, disparagingly observed of the decadent community:

Ruins, potholed streets, puddles of stagnant and contaminated water, a bad smell, decrepit women, ugly and visibly sick, form a spectacle of complete degradation in the Três Lagoas zone of prostitution. Foz do Iguaçu presents diverse areas and gatherings where the human misery descends to the lowest degree, but no other place is so annoying as the collection assembled around the business of prostitution in that district.

Clearly, the zone had become a diminished version of its earlier self. As proof of its sharp decline, 20 of the houses in the zone had been completely abandoned due to a lack of

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117 “Corrupção de menores em Foz do Iguaçu,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 2 a 8 de maio de 1986, 10.
118 “Corrupção de menores em Foz do Iguaçu,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 2 a 8 maio de 1986, 10.
business, including the ruined hulks of the once famous houses of Manjar, Sambão, Guarani, and Bambu. [Figure 5.9]

Not all of the houses had closed. For example, the houses that were “managed with the competence that the business demanded,” such as the Casa Júlia and the Boite Iguaçu, remained in operation. The bad press and public scrutiny, however, did not help matters. The scandal of minors engaged in prostitution and the Boite da Sônia fire both signaled the end of the zone. By the end of the decade, the Três Lagoas zone of prostitution had all but ceased to exist.

A Change of Behavior

While the evaporation of the mass clientele of dam workers, out of control inflation, bad press, and deteriorating conditions all partly explained the decline of the primary zone of prostitution, the shifting pattern of sexual commerce and a “change of behaviors” (às mudanças dos costumes) also contributed in a significant way. \(^{121}\) Specifically, beginning 1983, everyday forms of prostitution had begun to relocate outside of the formal zone in Três Lagoas to the center of Foz do Iguaçu; namely to the bars, saunas, motels and hotels, and directly onto the city streets. By 1985, as the country moved toward civilian rule, a concurrent democratization of the erotic landscape occurred in Foz do Iguaçu, as the city witnessed an explosion of “after-dark” or “adult entertainment” establishments (casas no turnas) located in the urban center, particularly along the busy Avenida Brasil and its adjacent streets, and an increase in clandestine forms of prostitution. For example, the Agua na Boca Drink’s, located on the Avenida Brasil, advertised itself as the best casa nocturna in the entire region, offering shows six-days-a-week by “renowned international artists,” and striptease beginning each night at 1am. \(^{122}\)

While those men with money increasingly found pleasure in the city’s growing private adult entertainment establishments, the ongoing economic crisis not only had increased the number of women, including married women, “renting their bodies” (alugam o corpo) on the streets, but also generated (or made visible) a new category of sex worker: the male sex worker. Characterized as more of a type of young “street

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\(^{121}\) “Zona de meretrício de Três Lagoas em ritmo de completa decadência,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 de abril de 1985, 5.

\(^{122}\) Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 22 a 28 de março de 1985, 5.
hustler” (rufiões) than sex worker, these so-called gigolos openly solicited sex on the main thoroughfare of Avenida Brazil.\textsuperscript{123} \textbf{[Figure 5.10]} Less stigmatized, however, the open nature of their activities lent them a reputation for masculine brazenness and virility. Added to the male sex worker were the so-called mariposas (butterflies), effeminate men who worked on Avenida JK at the intersection with Avenida Brasil.\textsuperscript{124}

Sex workers also could be found in bars and small restaurants of the city center. Although sex workers became a visible presence on the street and in some bars, the sex act itself continued to occur mostly behind closed doors. While the “point of encounter” (ponto de encontro) between sex workers and clients remained on the street, in the last three months of 1983, prostitution had become firmly established in the motels of the city center.\textsuperscript{125} Proprietors of motels and hotels not only rented rooms by the night, but increasingly, for shorter stays as well, reportedly paying a “commission” (comissão) to sex workers for the business, thus transforming these establishments into de facto houses of prostitution. For example, the city center establishments Hotel Fortaleza on the Rua Rui Barbosa, Hotel São Jorge on the Rua Marechal Floriano, the Dormitório Apolo and the Hotel Holiday on the Rua Rebouças, and the Hotel Real on the Rua Marechal Deodoro, each had a reputation as establishments that catered to sex workers and their clients. Near the Hotel São Jorge, “jangos” (pimps) operated from the adjacent Bar e Lanchonete JM where they played pool while keeping an eye on the comings and goings of their “jacarés,” (alligators), slang for the prostitutes in their employ.\textsuperscript{126}

Given the “changing customs” and increasingly stiff competition, the prostitutes of Três Lagoas took the sex trade from the houses of the zone of tolerance “to the streets” (fazer trottoir) of Foz do Iguaçu. Indeed, working in the Três Lagoas zone no longer provided a decent living for women employed in that sector of the sex trade, thus leading to an exodus of sex workers. In many instances, women continued to live in the zone, but

\textsuperscript{123} Becoming visible in the 1970s in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, there these male hustlers were known as michês. See James N. Green, \textit{Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 254-255.

\textsuperscript{124} “Tráfico de escravas brancas: o rendoso comércio de sexo em Foz,” \textit{Nossa Tempo} (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 a 30 de setembro de 1983, 12.

\textsuperscript{125} “Tráfico de escravas brancas: o rendoso comércio de sexo em Foz,” \textit{Nossa Tempo} (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 a 30 de setembro de 1983, 12.

\textsuperscript{126} “Tráfico de escravas brancas: o rendoso comércio de sexo em Foz,” \textit{Nossa Tempo} (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 a 30 de setembro de 1983, 12.
worked in the city where there existed a base of potential clients. In essence, the city itself became one large zone of tolerance, for if the clients would not come to the zone any longer, the women would have to go to them. Indeed, Foz do Iguaçu already had witnessed the birth of the “sex motel” (*motel sex*) as a new alternative to the zone of tolerance which had long been the safer, preferred, and sanctioned choice. The word “motel” itself, in contrast to the more respectable “hotel,” took on the new signification of physical locales of prostitution. The main Três Lagoas zone, in contrast, increasingly became a “a bad choice” (*uma péssima escolha*) for working-class men, for “with the same money and with better safety, those that resort to prostitution get more of their money’s worth from the city center’s *casas noturnas* and from the innumerable [sex] motels that have spread throughout the city in the last years that altogether have finally pushed the tolerance zone into near extinction.”

Concurrent with the decline of the Três Lagoas zone, clandestine “little zones” (*zoninhas*) of prostitution flourished throughout the city, but primarily in the shantytowns. Not a new phenomenon, the little zones had existed during the major phase of construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project as a low-cost and convenient alternative to the primary zone located in Três Lagoas. Usually, the lowest paid day laborers or those men looking for a no frills or quick encounter frequented the little zones. Often the case, sex workers plied their trade openly on the streets, thus lending her work a high-level of visibility to other residents and potential clients. Male dam workers derogatorily referred to sex workers who offered sexual services in the little zones as the “pê inchado” (swollen feet), apparently an allusion to the time she spent on her feet. The “swollen foot” represented the most basic and cheapest form of prostitution available in the city.

The *zoninhas* were known as locales where prostitution was on offer, however, not exclusively so. The little zones consisted mostly of working-class families that lived alongside informal houses of prostitution or, more likely, houses where sex workers lived and sometimes worked. A rough estimate placed the number of women employed in the *zoninhas* of Foz do Iguaçu at 300, with no more than a few women operating in each

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127 “Zona de meretrício de Três Lagoas em ritmo de completa decadência,” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 de abril de 1985, 5.
locale. The public nature of the solicitation of sex represented one of the defining characteristics of “the little zone,” thus setting it apart from the less-visible, private world of the sanctioned and better-organized primary zone of tolerance in Três Lagoas. However, the continuation of the little zones and clandestine prostitution depended on the collusion of local police officials who extracted a “tolerance tax” (taxa de tolerância) from sex workers in exchange for lax enforcement of the city’s regulations on moral order and public decency. In any case, the proliferation of the little zones of prostitution occurred alongside of the decline of the Três Lagoas zone.

The restriction of prostitution, however, represented a losing proposition as long as economic hardships and familial instability worked together to push women into the trade. The entrance of minors into prostitution became a particular concern in 1985. As the 13-year-old “E.N.S.,” who worked on Avenida JK, stated her reasons for entering “the life”:

I had no other choice. My father earns the minimum salary and I have eight siblings. My mother works as a domestic or washes clothes for others. There was chaos in the house. A neighbor took advantage of me because he saw me in short-shorts and had sex with me. He gave me some small change to keep my mouth shut. I learned to be deceptive. Money, my friend. It’s all about the money.

While “E.N.S.” at first remained at home with her parents, returning from the street “ashamed and inventing lies” as to her whereabouts, she eventually became estranged from her parents and siblings, returning home only sporadically.

Addressing the logistics of the business, “E.N.S.” told of the motels in the city center that paid commissions to sex workers that brought in business and room rentals and, for those men with little money, of the quick sexual acts that occurred in the bushes.
or behind walls. Like the pê inchado, the affordability and ease of clandestine sex in or near the city center generated high demand among working-class men. In part, it was the increasing openness and public visibility and the age of the sex workers that drew the attention of city residents and public officials.

The proliferation, visibility, and disorder of prostitution and other vice in the city center—not to mention lax police enforcement and endemic corruption—forced the Foz do Iguaçu City Council to step up efforts at its regulation and control. Apparently, new vices conducted in arcades (casas de jogos eletônicos), namely, electronic gambling and drug use had emerged alongside clandestine prostitution among the city’s youth. Arcades, in particular, were seen as problematic since they enticed and were frequented by minors and subsequently acted as a new point of encounter between young men and drug dealers.

In March 1985, the City Council (Câmera Municipal) passed resolutions that called for the “open supervision and policing of the principal streets of the city, in order to repress prostitution and gambling...” in Foz do Iguaçu. Chief councilman Perci Lima informed both the Delegado da Polícia Civil and the office of the Juiz de Menores (Youth Magistrate) of the new “vigorous efforts” (providencias energicas) enacted by the council to curtail urban vice. As councilman Lima stated in regards to the problem of prostitution:

As regards the problem of the hotels that in actuality are motels, they are frequented by women that devote themselves to the act of prostitution, that offend morality and good conduct, now that so many ‘hotels’ are concentrated in the urban center, consequently alongside of houses with families that are subjected to living among prostitutes and pernicious elements.

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131 “Corrupção de menores em Foz do Iguaçu,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 2 a 8 de maio de 1986, 10.
132 “Perci Lima quer o fim da jogatina e da prostituição,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de março de 1985, 4. The Portuguese reads: “...uma fiscalização e um policiamento mais ostensivo junto as principais ruas da cidade, no sentido de reprimir a prostituição, as casas de jogos eletrônicos...”
133 “Perci Lima quer o fim da jogatina e da prostituição,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de março de 1985, 4. The Portuguese reads: “Quanto ao problema dos hotéis que na realidade são moteis [sic]...é público e notório que são frequentados pelas mulheres que se entregam ao ato da prostituição, atentando contra a moral e os bons costumes, uma vez que tais ‘hotéis’ concentraram-se no centro urbano, consequentemente ao lado de casas de familias que ficam sujeitas ao convívio com prostitutas e elementos perniciosos.”
The City Council of Foz do Iguaçu did not ban prostitution, which remained legal in the city. Furthermore, city leaders made no attempt to confine prostitution to any one geographic area or to force men and women back into the zone of tolerance in Três Lagoas. Rather, the council simply enacted resolutions that enforced the existing ordinances regarding public order and moral decency and increasingly jailed violators of the law.

Despite the city effort to curb prostitution and other vice, child prostitution continued to be an issue and a prime area of concern. As before, the motive for entering the trade remained economic necessity and familial disintegration brought about by low wages, high inflation, and unemployment. According to the local press, the “repressive solution” (solução repressiva)—enforcement of the existing laws and a stepped up level of arrest and punishment—only exacerbated the problem, as young women jailed in the “dark cells” (cubículos escuros) in the Delegacia de Polícia now found themselves among “marginal women and men, where human degradation reached its lowermost level.”134 Furthermore, the planned construction of a minor’s wing (ala para menores) to the city jail also would expose young women to criminals and other corrupting influences.

Many viewed the problem as having an economic and social base, which meant that any solution would require a fundamental alteration in the social and economic structures of the country in favor of the poor. Indeed, social commentators argued that the economic model followed by the national government had created the problem of abandoned youth in the first place. In addition, local efforts to assist abandoned youth, such as vocational training programs, discriminated against young women. For example, the recently established carpentry program of the Centro Social Urbano (Urban Social Center) provided vocational training to 80 youth between the ages of 8 and 14 years old. However, the program only assisted “abandoned boys” (meninos de rua). Helping to explain the exclusive focus on males, some social workers and program officials viewed young women as problematic, stating that, “it is not possible to mix them in the same physical space, because it would be difficult to prevent sexual relations, and the risk of

134 “Brava gente Brasileira, as meninas prostitutas,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 6. The Portuguese reads: “...mulheres e homens marginais, onde a degradação humana chegou ao seu nível mais baixo.”
Furthermore, one of the only options for “abandoned girls” (*meninas de rua*) remained the Lar de Meninas (Home for Girls). Thus, both class and gender operated in tandem to limit solutions for the problems facing the “abandoned girls” in Foz do Iguaçu.

Participation in sexual commerce remained an option for the so-called “abandoned youth” in the city. However, young women that took this option occupied a discursive space somewhere between sympathy over a lost youth and consternation over the streetwise adult female prostitute. In the former, girls were portrayed in the press as “angels” (*anjos*) preyed upon by “pedophiles” (*pedófilos*) while, in the latter, they were defined variably as “mature girls” (*meninas maduras*), “girl prostitutes” (*meninas meretrizes*), and “girl-women” (*mulheres meninas*).

In any case, the *meninas de rua* could be found throughout the city. The “points of encounter” during the day included the Gresfi Bend, the intersection fronting the international Ponte de Amizade (Friendship Bridge) with Paraguay, the environs of the Hotel Estoril, and in some lunch counters (*lanchonetes*). At night, the *meninas de rua* worked the infamous “Esquina do Pecado” (Corner of Sin) located at the intersection of Almirante Barroso and Jorge Samways, on Avenida Brasil, and on the Rua Rui Barbosa near the intersection with Rua Paraguacu. In these locations, the *meninas de rua* mingled and worked alongside the city’s other categories of sex workers, namely adult female sex workers and the growing number of trans-gendered males known as *travestis*.

By August 1987, the supply of sex workers in the city had outstripped the demand for their services, thus leading to a glut in the market and a limited number of potential clients. Thus, on the streets, the *meninas de rua* represented unwelcome competition and as such were persecuted by both the adult female prostitutes and the male *travestis*.

Furthermore, some underage sex workers could earn double the income of adult female

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135 “Brava gente Brasileira, as meninas prostitutas,” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 6. The Portuguese reads: “...que não é possível misturar num mesmo espaço físico, pois seria difícil impedir relações sexuais, existindo o perigo de gravidez.”

136 “Brava gente Brasileira, as meninas prostitutas,” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 6.
sex workers. For example, the *meninas de rua* charged at least 1,000 cruzeiros extra, but possibly more depending on the client and his perceived affluence.\(^\text{137}\)

In addition to persecution by other sex workers, the *meninas de rua* faced arrest in the frequent “dragnets” (*arrastões*) and detention in the city jail’s Women’s Section. There, they reportedly learned “new depravations and deceptions” (*novas depravações e malandragens*) from adult female sex workers, termed *mulheres vividas* or “women with life experience.” Although enemies on the street, sex workers made friends and allies while incarcerated. In jail, for example, the *mulheres vividas* “adopted” the *meninas de rua*, becoming their “tia” (aunt) and offered them protection and professional advice regarding “new ways to rake in the money” (*novas formas de melhorarem o faturamento*) made through prostitution. Thus, in the absence of vocational training programs for young women, the jailhouse represented a “training center” of sorts in which the *meninas de rua* received advice and tips from more seasoned sex workers on how to maximize the profitability of the commerce once back on the streets.

The 13-year-old “Nega,” a name she received due to her black hair and bronzed skin, reported that she earned more than the other street sex workers that worked the Gresfi Bend, her preferred location. According to one “short and fat prostitute with a scarred face” (*prostituta gorda e baixinha com uma cicatriz no rostro*), men simply “liked the new girls better.” In addition, “Nega” set herself apart from the other women by wearing discreet clothing and no make-up, which undoubtedly accentuated her youth.

“Nega” recounted her personal story that led to her current situation: like many girls from poor backgrounds, she had been hired to work as a domestic, in this case for a local family of Polish descent. The money she earned helped to support her eight younger siblings. One day while the parents were absent from the house, the oldest son seduced the young girl and then threatened her not to tell anyone. According to “Nega,” she and the *Polaco* “went to bed a few times, then he threatened to call the police if I said anything. He said he would accuse me of stealing a pair of roller skates.”\(^\text{138}\) Afterwards, “Nega” became pregnant and decided to have an abortion. In the resulting scandal, she

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\(^\text{137}\) “Brava gente Brasileira, as meninas prostitutas,” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 6.

\(^\text{138}\) “A amarga esperança de ‘Nega,’” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 7. The Portuguese reads: “…pra cama várias vezes e ele ameaçou me entregar para a polícia se eu falasse alguma coisa. Disse que iria me acusar de ter roubado um par de patins.”
lost her job as a domestic servant. At first, she stayed with an aunt and later moved into a shack, which she shared with two other women, in the Favela da Guarda Mirim. There she turned to prostitution as a way to support herself and her family.

“Nega” stated that she conducted up to five programas each day and preferred much older men as her clients. Despite taking precautions, her two constant worries remained pregnancy (she reported having had two additional abortions) and being exposed to HIV, stating that, “People get around with everyone else and I know where they have been.”

“Nega” had dreams of marrying one of her clients, namely a young brasiguayo who lived in Santa Rosa, with whom she had had sex on two occasions. According to “Nega,” “Whenever he comes to Foz, he stops by here and we take off together. The last visit he promised that he’d take me back to the colônia with him, where I hope to have a little house and a quieter life. But while I’m waiting for him to come back, I’m going keep on turning my tricks, because I’ve got to help in the house.” For “Nega,” helping in the house meant providing an additional income for her family through sex work.

Not all of the meninas de rua worked on the streets. 10-year-old “Gretchen” worked mostly out of the lanchonetes located in the favela Rincão São Francisco and, on Saturday nights, at a local discotheque. She lived with her single mother, who worked as a barmaid (copeira) at an establishment in the city center. At the time of her interview, “Gretchen” had been working in the sex trade for one year. She had two friends, one 12-years-old and the other 10-years-old, who worked in the Porto Belo prostitution zone, both employed at the boate Porto Belo, where the owner provided them with room and board. For her part, “Gretchen” refused to work for others, preferring not to be dependent on anyone, stating, “I am not going to that place, no way. I pick up clients right here, I set the price, and what I earn is mine.”

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139 “A amarga esperança de ‘Nega,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 7. The Portuguese reads: “A gente anda com todo tipo de cara e sei lá por onde eles passam.”
140 “A amarga esperança de ‘Nega,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 7. The Portuguese reads: “Sempre que ele vem a Foz, passa por aqui e saímos juntos. Na última vez prometeu que vai me levar para a colônia, onde espero ter uma casinha e uma vida mais tranquila. Mas enquanto espero ele passar de novo por aqui, vou fazendo meus programinhas, pois tenho que ajudar em casa.”
141 “Na zona não,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 7. The Portuguese reads: “Eu não vou para esse lugar não. Pego o cliente por aqui mesmo, acerto o preço e o que ganho é meu.”
Small restaurants continued to be a favorite point of encounter between underage sex workers and their clients, even when the sex act later occurred within the brothel. At the age of 8, the young sex worker “Xuxa,” so named because of her blond hair and blue eyes, reported having had been molested by the boyfriend of her mother. At the age of 9-years-old, she and other girls began exchanging sex for money, first on the Avenida JK and later at the base of the Friendship Bridge. Currently, “Xuxa” lived at the boate Porto Belo, although she made contact with clients at the Restaurante Da Vinci, located just across the street. Afterwards, “Xuxa” brought her clients back to the boate, containing 30 small rooms, for sex. According to the proprietor of the Porto Belo, the house specialized in young girls, with some younger than fourteen. Indeed, part of the draw centered upon the age of the sex workers, as clients liked to treat them “as if they were their own daughters” (como fossem suas próprias filhas). Furthermore, as a unique attraction, the house had a “virgin that only performs oral sex.” As with the other residents of the boate, the owner of the Porto Belo only charged the women for room and board. However, he did not take a cut of the money received for sex. As part of standard practice, the boate earned additional profits through the sale of food and beverages to clients.

Along with a “change of behavior,” the very definition of what constituted decent and appropriate morality and urban disorder and vice began to blur, or at least opted for a further change of locale and greater sophistication. As will be seen in the next section, sexual commerce responded to the emerging forces of urbanization, industrialization, globalization of the economy, and advances in technology. In short, sexual commerce underwent a process of “modernization.”

A rota do prazer: the New Itinerary of Male Sexual Pleasure

In a new entertainment section that debuted in February 1987 in the Foz do Iguaçu weekly newspaper Nosso Tempo, readers viewed exactly what the city increasingly offered to its adult citizens and tourists. Projected over the photographic backdrop of the Avenida Brasil and the skyline of Foz do Iguaçu taken at dusk, the title of the section

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142 “Menina de bordel,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 14 de agosto de 1987, 7.
143 For a comparative example of this process in Bogotá, Colombia during the same period, see Carlos Iván García Suárez, “La prostitución en la segunda mitad del siglo xx: dinámica de la mo(ral)dernización,” in Aída Martínez y Pablo Rodríguez, eds., Placer, dinero y pecado: historia de la prostitución en Colombia (Bogotá: Editora Aguilar, 2002), 281-326.
certainly set the tone, which read “Route of Leisure and Pleasure” (“Rota do lazer e do prazer”) and had the sub-title “In this Land You Will Find More Happiness” (“Nesta terra você têm mais felicidade”). Referring back to the mythic Eldorado, the Portuguese words “mais felicidade” could also be translated, in addition to happiness, as more success and good luck. Indeed, as the Veja article from 1975 (that opened this chapter) demonstrates, the discourse on Eldorado in the borderlands had always contained a core element of erotic diversion and sexual freedom and pleasure, along with its prerequisite heavy doses of promised independence and financial riches.

The so-called Route of Leisure and Pleasure offered a variety of entertainment options, not all of which centered on sex or erotic pleasures. These pages advertised nightclubs and bars that offered live music and dancing, and the hottest restaurants and churrascarias (Brazilian-style steak house) of the moment. For the well heeled, referred to as “vips” (V.I.P.s), the nightclub at the refined Rafahin Palace Hotel offered a respectable night of entertainment and represented the “most tasteful option” (opção de melhor bom gosto) in the city. For a more popular audience, the Club Trevão featured the sertaneja (country music) duo Brazão e Brazãozinho, which played to packed crowds, and on Saturday nights offered its popular Grito de Carnaval (Carnaval Shout), which featured live samba music and dancing. Catering to tourists, the Sambalaô club offered samba music and dancing every night of the week. The advertisement for the club featured an image of Carmen Miranda, complete with her trademark fruit-laden turban and hoop earrings. The recently inaugurated Bowling Center, a concept imported from the United States, catered to couples and families and constituted a tamer option for the night, where the main activities consisted of bowling and consuming pizza.

In any case, the emerging “itinerary of leisure and pleasure” (o roteiro de lazer e prazer) had as its center the lure of sex, while obscuring the sex-for-money aspect of the business. In essence, the “roteiro” (itinerary/schedule) of male sexual pleasure in the city, now mostly located in the downtown, represented yet another option for men, to both locals and tourists alike. [Map 3] Indeed, the city center transformed into a virtual erotic playground for men, with varying degrees of licentiousness. For men who wanted to keep their clothes on, the Karaokê Pirâmide allowed men to pass “enjoyable hours in the

144 “Rota de Lazer e do Plazer,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 21 a 26 de fevereiro de 1987, 8.
Map 3: The Itinerary of Male Sexual Pleasure, Foz do Iguaçu, 1975-1989

Source: Google Maps, modified with assistance from the Map and Geographical Information Center (MAGIC), University of New Mexico.
company of beautiful girls, music and live show, smart cocktails, and a microphone at your disposal for you to sing.” The ad for the novelty karaoke bar, a recent phenomenon on the scene, included a silhouetted image of a naked woman, clearly signaling the establishment’s offerings. [Figure 5.11]

As part of a night on the town, the itinerary featured a stop at one of the city’s saunas catering to heterosexual men. Reportedly the best option in town, the Saunas Vila Romana for Men featured, in addition to the requisite dry sauna and steam rooms, an “executive bar” (bar executivo), coffee shop, small drug store/pharmacy, secure parking, and a staff of “20 pretty receptionists” (20 lindas recepcionistas). The latter, referred to in the advertisement for the sauna as “Scort Girl,” slang for female escorts, apparently offered massage and “physical therapy” to patrons. Furthermore, the sauna included the added benefits of discretion, security, and secrecy required to make men feel “very comfortable” (super-tranquilo) during their visit.

While the Vila Romana for Men set the standard, additional saunas vied for men’s patronage. With embedded silhouettes of naked women, prone and demurely posed, the advertisements for the Relax Center Sauna for Men and the Boyte e Piscina J.I. featured the usual hot and cold baths, but both offered the added amenities of an open-air pool, pornographic videos, and various erotic live shows and strip-tease each night, in addition to the required private parking, executive bar, massage, and “scort girls.” Interestingly, as a euphemism for a male orgasm, the word “relax” itself denotes sexual pleasure and release.

The March 1987 edition of the pleasure itinerary featured the Saunas Presidente and highlighted its newest attraction and star, namely the 19-year-old “Raquel de Fátima” recently arrived to Foz do Iguaçu from Goiás. The itinerary contained several photos of the young woman, including one of a bare-breasted “Raquel,” reclining demurely on the bed in the romantic “luxury suite” (a suite de preferência). [Figure 5.12] At the Saunas Presidente, “Raquel” catered to the “elite clientele” (a clientela elitizada) that frequented the establishment. According to the text, “Raquel” specialized in massage, and “total

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145 “Rota de Lazer e do Plazer,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 21 a 26 de fevereiro de 1987, 8. The Portuguese reads: “...horas agradáveis na companhia de lindas garotas, música e show ao vivo, refinados drinks e um microfone a seu dispor para você cantar.”

146 “Rota de Lazer e do Plazer,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 21 a 26 de fevereiro de 1987, 8.
physical and psychological relaxation” and “hours of happiness and lots of love” for her clients. In tongue and check prose, the article characterized “Raquel” as the introspective type: the refined gentleman constituted her primary joy in life and she enjoyed performing striptease, while she detested fakeness and insincerity in others. Furthermore, in her free time she liked to swim and to get “dolled up.” Not counting “Raquel,” 15 other bilingual (English/Portuguese) so-called “recepcionistas” (secretaries), “all of high quality” (todas de alto nivel), worked in the Saunas Presidente. In addition to the Preference Suite, the sauna offered additional accommodation, including the Presidential, Japanese, and Arabian themed suites.¹⁴⁷ As the accompanying advertisement stated, “Welcome to Foz! Enjoy your free time with our attractive hostess-guides, in a very comfortable place, where you can have a good massage and relax.”¹⁴⁸

Unlike many of the other attractions, the Saunas Presidente was located, not in the city center, but at the exit to the city, near the highway to Cascavel. As such, the “sauna for men” usurped, both symbolically and physically, the old location of the zone of prostitution for the city. In addition, in colloquial language, women “recepcionistas” or “secretaries” now worked in the saunas and had replaced the euphemistic “ballerinas” of the old Três Lagoas zone. Certainly less romantic, sex workers had received a professional promotion of sorts, while her “job” continued to be more or less the same as before, albeit in a different environment. She now had a skill, instead of just talent. Furthermore, the quite different figures of “Raquel” from the Saunas Presidente and “Tere” from the Três Lagoas zone, both considered the star attraction of their respective establishments and era, catered to an elite clientele of men, while other women tended to the working-class man. Thus, the sauna, like the zone of prostitution before it, continued to be a location for male homo-sociability and sexual entertainment.

The “itinerary” also shed additional light on the continued development of the sex motel. In particular, the genre had reached its full development in the newly opened Motel Play Time, located on the Avenida Costa e Silva. The Motel Play Time catered not to single men seeking to purchase sex or receive a massage, but rather couples and groups looking for a private location to have sex. As the author of the itinerary argued, “in the

choice of a motel for an amorous affair that makes up the life of the *iguacuenses* (residents of Foz do Iguaçu) or of the tourist that visits here, there doesn’t exist a better travel tip than the Playtime.”¹⁴⁹ The sex motel offered single rooms and suites (with up to three beds) and a plethora of amenities: each room included vibrating beds or heated waterbeds, fridge, cable TV, video cassette player, video games, neon lighting, and 24-hour room service and an on-premise swimming pool, sauna, restaurant and *churrasqueria*, and a dance floor. Contained entirely within its walls, couples and groups found everything they needed on-site for a night of sexual adventure.

Change in sexual behavior went hand-in-hand with the development of Foz do Iguaçu as the “Capital of Tourism” (“O Capital do Turismo”). By the mid-1980s, approximately 1 million tourists visited the city each year. As a result, the city contained the fourth largest hotel complex in the entire country, despite only being ranked as the eighth largest city in the entire state of Paraná. After the completion of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, the city in essence had returned to its roots as a tourist destination and center of commerce. Despite the havoc generated by its construction, the Itaipú hydroelectric dam and the large reservoir, perfect for boating and aquatic sports, constituted a new tourist attraction, complementing the already existing natural wonder of the Iguaçu Falls. Taken as a whole, these attractions represented an emerging international “tourist complex,” which also contained a new component, sex tourism.

**Borderland Dystopias**

The borderlands continued to attract migrants throughout the 1980s. Some 95 percent of the population residing in the *favelas* of the city originated in the countryside. As before, continued consolidation of landholdings in the rural sector and state policies that favored the production of soybeans for export worked hand-in-hand to displace smallholders from their land. Despite efforts by the national government to resettle displaced smallholders in so-called agricultural frontiers, such as Rondônia and the Amazon Basin, the preferred destination of migrants remained the urban centers of the state of Paraná. Displacement from the land coincided with a continued deterioration of the Brazilian economy. Most

¹⁴⁹ “Rota de Lazer e do Plazer,” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 21 a 26 de fevereiro de 1987, 8. The Portuguese reads: “Na escolha de um motel para a aventura amorosa que pintou na vida dos iguaçuenses ou dos turistas que por aqui aportam, melhor dica do que o Playtime não existe.”
critically, inflation had eroded the purchasing power of salaried workers, and the minimum salary had fallen to its lowest level in the history of the nation, from a high of 80 dollars in 1960 to a low of 33 dollars in 1987.\footnote{150 “A explosão urbana de Foz do Iguaçu,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 24 a 31 de julho de 1987, 6.} [Table 5.2] The case of the rehabilitation and eventual demise of the Pluma shantytown and efforts by the city to eliminate street commerce provide a window into the tensions between moral disorder and urban respectability illustrated by the regulations of the City Council.

The Favela de Pluma, named after the national bus company of the same name that operated its garage facilities nearby, contained some 80 families on 5 alqueires (1 alqueire = 4.84 hectares) of land located at the northeastern corner of the city along Avenida Costa e Silva. Brazilian and Paraguayan families existed in roughly equal numbers within the shantytown and most lived in abject poverty and misery. Characteristic of squatter settlements, no family held title to the property on which they had built their dwelling. Not surprisingly, the land title fell into dispute, with several individuals (who resided outside the settlement) claiming ownership. As a result, the sorting out of the exact status of the title passed to the Brazilian Justice Department. In the meantime, the residents of the Favela de Pluma went on with their daily lives.

At least two communities existed within the Pluma shantytown. One group of believers operated its own evangelical church (seita religiosa) named the Igreja Evangélica Congregação Cristã Povo de Deus. This new religious group sought to turn the community into a “respectable favela” by seeking redress of the conflict over the land title, by changing the name of the shantytown from Pluma to Santidade (Holiness), and by eliminating the vice of prostitution. Complicating the issue, the Favela de Pluma was located on the site that once constituted Foz do Iguaçu’s first zone of tolerance, a fact that residents most likely did not know. For many years, the area had operated as one of the numerous clandestine zoninhas that existed in the city. [Figure 5.13]

While only two or three houses of prostitution remained in this older “little zone” in the Favela de Pluma, its urban, inner-city location at the entrance to town made it especially visible to the other inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçu and, perhaps more troubling, to tourists visiting the city. Provoking the additional ire and opposition of self-titled
“Santidade” residents, the sex workers solicited their customers openly on the city street, thus making no attempt to disguise the nature of the commerce. By definition, zonas denoted free spaces where “anything goes” that existed both outside the limits of the city and thus “beyond the limits” of respectable society. Clearly understood by the religious community in the new “Santidade,” the continuation of the zone of prostitution trumped any efforts at moral respectability sought by its residents, at least in the eyes of their fellow citizens.

Combined with its reputation as a zoninha, the Favela de Pluma never escaped its illegal status. In 1987, the Prefeitura of Foz do Iguaçu implemented the Projeto de Desfavelamento, a program to demolish shantytowns, intended to relocate favela residents to public housing. The foundational study conducted prior to the implementation of the project identified 4,900 families or approximately 23,000 persons living in the city’s shanties. In October of 1987, project officials transferred 140 families from the Favela do Queijo, located in neighborhood of Vila Portes, to the new Profilurb housing project in Porto Meira. In March 1988, an additional 20 families residing in the Favela de Pluma moved to the Profilurb housing project; city trucks and workers showed up at the favela and transported entire families and their possessions to the new site.

Constructed of masonry blocks and only 30 square meters in size, the new homes had electricity and running-water. In addition, the housing project was located near to a market, pharmacy, public school, daycare, and public transportation. While considered small for the generally large families of favelados, the homes “represented for them a comfort and a triumph that makes them privileged in relation to the miseries of the shacks made of pieces of wood, paper, and plastic that they had left behind.” As José Ademir Sauer, president of the Resident’s Association (Associação de Moradores) of Jardim Cláudia, stated, “with this, the problem of these poor people is resolved, improving the

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151 “Zona, favela, seita religiosa,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 14 de janeiro de 1981, 8.
152 “Favela da Pluma é transferida para o Puerto Meira,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 17 a 24 de março de 1988, 5. The Portuguese reads: “...representam para eles um conforto e uma conquista que os torna privilegiados em relação aos miseráveis que ainda não podem deixar para trás os barracos feitos de retalhos de madeira, papelão e plástico.”
profile of the neighborhood and also the entrance of the city. That was an ugly postcard for the tourists that came to Foz do Iguazu.‖

Concerns over the public face of the city as presented to tourists extended beyond efforts at demolishing shantytowns and the relocation of residents to public housing. In addition, city officials tackled the emerging problem of mobile commerce (comércio ambulante), abandoned children, crime, and fear over the spread of sexually transmitted disease in the urban center.

As part of these efforts, city officials targeted the proliferation of “street peddlers” (vendedores ambulantes) who sold a variety of products on the city’s sidewalks. Seen as a response to un- or under-employment, street peddling provided a means for persons to subsist and survive in hard economic times. In 1984, city officials estimated the unemployment rate at nearly 50 percent or approximately 25,000 unemployed persons. With the completion of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project, the formal sector economy, principally the construction industry, simply could not absorb the pool of available labor. As a result, an estimated 16,000 persons entered the informal sector as street peddlers and engaged in other petty commerce, while the remainder had no source of income whatsoever.154 Additionally, the age range of the unemployed men was between 20 and 40, thus robbing men of their most productive working years. Reportedly, male unemployment created domestic instability and fostered a precarious existence and crisis of masculine identity, as men accustomed to working outside the home for 8 to 10 hours a day suddenly found themselves at home all day with their spouse or to search endlessly for work that they knew did not exist. Adding an additional insult, unemployed men experienced the “shame of being at home when his neighbor left for work.”155

City officials viewed informal sector commercial activity as a detriment both to the urban esthetic and to formal commerce because it did not contribute to the city’s tax base.156 In May 1984, the city mayor, Wádis Benvenutti proposed regulation to the

153 “Favela da Pluma é transferida para o Puerto Meira,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguazú), 17 a 24 de março de 1988, 5. The Portuguese reads: “Com isso, se resolve o problema desses pobres, melhora o aspecto do bairro e também a entrada da cidade. Isso aí era um cartão postal meio feio para os turistas que vêm a Foz do Iguazu.”
154 “Vinte e cinco mil desempregados,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguazú), 9 de agosto de 1984, 6.
155 “Vinte e cinco mil desempregados,” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguazú), 9 de agosto de 1984, 6.
156 “Comércio ambulante será proibido no centro,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguazú), 17 a 24 de março de 1988, 2.
Câmara Municipal that sought to regulate the informal commerce by banning street peddlers from the major tourist spots in the city and main thoroughfares, including Avenida Brasil, Avenida JK, Avenida Jorge Schimmelpfeng, and the Praça Getúlio Vargas. While not banning all informal street commerce, Benvenutti wanted to regulate such activity further by forcing sellers to register with the city, which would then allocate city property and provide a list of acceptable merchandise. Furthermore, street vendors would be required to form their own representative organizations that then would be incorporated into the municipal Associação Comercial (Merchant’s Association). Through a process of certification and permitting, city officials planned to verify the socio-economic status of each applicant in order to determine need and to prevent further social crisis in the city.

The acquiescence of the city officials in regards to peddlers represented another arena in which the “street of trash” invaded the planned urban order and development envisioned by city officials. Anxieties and conflict over the transition to democratic rule in Brazil soon dovetailed with fears over the introduction of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) into the borderlands population, placing the primary locus of contagion among homosexuals and trans-gendered prostitutes (travestis) working in the city center.

Transformations: Trans-gendered Sex Workers

Travestis, or trans-gendered homosexual sex workers, emerged as a “curiosity” among the residents of Foz do Iguaçu. In 1988, such sex workers could be found each night in the city center on the Rua Rebouças, between the Rua Almirante Barroso and Avenida Brasil. In total, 30 travestis were reported to exist in Foz do Iguaçu. These were men that dressed in women’s clothing, wore make-up, and often altered their male bodies through padding and, in some cases, injections of industrial silicone to form breasts, curvaceous thighs, and large buttocks in order to attract business. According to the monograph by the Norwegian sociologist Annick Prieur, trans-gendered homosexuals (and occasional sex workers) in Mexico City sought to “steal femininity” through this process. In the example of Salvador de Bahia, the American anthropologist Don Kulick argued that trans-gendered prostitutes there attempted to “out-do” real women, in the process becoming
more beautiful and desirable to clients than real female sex workers. However, in both examples, these homosexuals were not trans-sexual, as they retained their male genitalia and usually intended to do so.157

The report mentioned that the trans-gendered sex workers formed part of a larger “gay community” (comunidade gay) that resided in the city, although such a community most likely had existed prior to the phenomenon of the travesti as a visible presence on the streets.158 According to “Paula,” one of the first “transformers” (transformistas) in the city, many of the travestis hailed from Foz do Iguaçu and were members of elite families (“com certa tradição”) that had “embraced their homosexual side” and “have come to the corner to fight alongside the people. There is at least one who is the son of a politician.”159 For “Paula,” therefore, freedom to be one’s own self merged with a larger discourse on politics and political and civil freedoms and rights current in Brazil during the transition to democracy.

For some travestis, the border represented an opportunity for greater sexual freedom. In the words of “Shirley,” a travesti that had migrated from Campinas in São Paulo state and that was known for her extensive and luxurious wardrobe, compared to her hometown, Foz do Iguaçu and the Triple Frontier represented “a real paradise” (um verdadeiro paraíso). The sentiment expressed by “Shirley” clearly echoed the earlier portrayals of the borderlands by sex workers in the Três Lagoas zone as a haven and an escape from their former lives elsewhere. Thus, Foz do Iguaçu continued to be a draw for migrants in search of employment in the sexual commerce of the borderlands. There, they mingled among and worked alongside the native sons of Foz do Iguaçu, becoming incorporated both discursively and physically into the larger community of homosexuals.

Both city officials and travestis disliked the location—the Rua Rebouças—where they worked because it was well lit and heavily trafficked. For city officials, as usual, the location blaringly exposed the sexual commerce to city residents. For the travestis, the

158 For a discussion of homosexuality in Brazil, see Green, *Beyond Carnival*, particularly Chapter Four on the emergence of gay identity and Chapter Six on the period of military rule.
159 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...já vem para a esquina batalhar junto com a gente. Tem até um que é filho de político.”
location limited business, because “it’s very exposed, inhibiting those that pass by the place from making an approach.” As “Walquiria,” a travesti recently relocated from Londrina, related, many “tricks” (programas) were lost because the men who sought sex with the travestis required total discretion and anonymity, stating that many men “pass by the corner of [Rua] Paraguaçu, slowing down the car, but none have the courage to stop and make a direct approach” and added that “there exists a natural fear of being recognized.” A fear of being recognized could explain the breakdown of the patrons as reported by travestis: the majority of the clientele traveled from Paraguay and Argentina, and only one in three men came from Brazil. According to “Shirley,” the majority of the clients were “respectable gentlemen, many married, who seek us out in the anxiety to liberate their feminine side between four walls.” “Shirley” does not clarify what it meant to “liberate their feminine side.” However, as other researchers have pointed out, many (but not all) clients paid to be anally penetrated by the travestis.

To increase business and to protect their corner of the sex trade, travestis informally organized their own meetings, held each Sunday, to discuss the problems confronting them. Recognizing that their very visibility generated problems with city officials and police, travestis wished to relocate to a darker and less traveled part of the city, what they termed a “ghetto” (gheto), in which to conduct their commerce. In the meantime, the organization of travestis formulated their own “code of conduct” (código de ética) to self-regulate their behaviors and to reduce instances of breaches of the ordinances regarding public order and to curtail arrests.

According to “Renata,” the leader of the association, through the “project of raising awareness [among travestis], all the scenes and fights in public have stopped. These days we act in a more discreet manner, calling attention by our charm and the

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160 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...está muito a vista, inibindo quem passa no local a fim de fazer uma abordagem.”

161 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...passam pela esquina da Paraguaçu, diminuem a marcha do carro, mas não têm coragem de parar e fazer uma abordagem direta” and “receio natural de serem reconhecidos.”

162 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...em sua maioria senhores de fino trato, muitos casados e que nos procuram na ânsia de liberar seu lado feminino entre quatro paredes.”

163 Green, Beyond Carnival, 254. See also, Kulick, Travesti.
fancy dress of our self-production.” The travesti “Shirley” related how the process unfolded when a new sex worker arrived on the street: “when someone new shows up to turn tricks on the corner, [he/she] is called to participate in a house meeting, where [he/she] is examined and informed about the code of public conduct.” Furthermore, as a marker of its success, “Shirley” attributed the travesti code of conduct for the absence of problems with the authorities.

Travestis joined other categories of clandestine street prostitutes, including the before mentioned female jacarés and pê inchado, and the male gigolos and mariposas that plied the commerce on the street. While each of these groups brought a certain level of consternation from city residents and officials, travestis for their part introduced additional fears. Generally speaking, sex workers of all stripes generated concern over the spread of sexually transmitted disease, primarily syphilis and gonorrhea. However, after the mid-1980s, travestis (and homosexuals generally, no doubt) raised the added specter of spreading AIDS among the general population. On a positive note, “Shirley” reported that the arrival of AIDS to the borderlands had the effect of uniting the gay community of Foz do Iguaçu under a common cause.

Because of the “numerous transitory population” (numerosa população flutuante) of the border, Foz do Iguaçu represented a potential location for the spread of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the frequency of sexual exchanges coupled with the lack of regulation rendered travestis as loci of contagion. According to the sex workers themselves, travestis had at least three clients per night, and earned between 5 and 10,000 cruzeiros for each programa, depending on the service provided. Exactly what services were offered and where they were conducted is not known. However, according to the reporter

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164 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...um trabalho de conscientização, acabaram os escândalos e aprontadas na via pública. Isso é coisa do passado e hoje atuamos de forma discreta, chamando a atenção pelo luxo e charme de nossa auto-produção.”

165 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7. The Portuguese reads: “...quando chega gente nova para fazer ponto na esquina, é chamado para participar da reunião dominical, onde é examinado e passa a conhecer o código de comportamento em público.”

166 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7.

167 “Travestis querem mudança do ponto de ‘troitoir,’” Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7.
for *Nosso Tempo*, sexual commerce between *travestis* and their clients continued “despite AIDS” (*apesar da* AIDS).

The arrival of and public acknowledgment of HIV/AIDS in Brazil, coupled perhaps with the *travesti* migration to the borderlands and their novelty, occurred precisely at the moment that the country transitioned from military to civilian rule. Fear and concern over the spread of AIDS and the advent and visibility of *travestis* resonated with a population still in transition to democracy.

**A Change of “Face”: Transition Politics and Sexual Commerce**

In 1985, Tancredo Neves, the seventy-four-year-old governor of Minas Gerais, took over control of the government from the military and inaugurated the period of civilian rule known as the New Republic (*A Nova República*) in Brazil. On the eve of his inauguration, however, Neves fell ill and died thirty-eight days later, without ever having assumed the presidency. In his place, the vice-president-elect, José Sarney, a former senator from Maranhão, was sworn in as the first civilian president in twenty-one years.

As Wilber Albert Chaffee argues, the Sarney administration (1986-1990) can be divided into three phases: a battle for legitimacy, a period of popularity, and a final period of political and economic crises. After the consolidation of power, the period of popularity coincided with the success of the Cruzado Plan of 1986, as part of which the government introduced a new currency (*cruzo*), froze prices, and raised the minimum wage by 8 percent, all in an effort to halt inflation. Initially, the plan proved a success, as inflation dropped, and those earning up to one minimum wage (42 percent of the population) received a 15 percent wage increase, thus raising the purchasing power of the lowest wage earners by roughly 20 percent. The success of the plan proved short-lived, however, as the government raised prices and indirect taxes and, subsequently, inflation again became a problem. As a result, prior gains in the purchasing power of wage earners all but vanished in the first half of 1987. The resulting economic crisis—including business failures, rising unemployment, and eroded purchasing power—was

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168 Chaffee, *Desenvolvimento*, 145.

169 Chaffee, *Desenvolvimento*, 147.
considered the worst since 1931.\footnote{Chaffee, \textit{Desenvolvimento}, 151.} For Sarney, political crisis followed the economic crisis, dogging his administration until its final days.

The transition to democracy in Brazil, with all its associated ills and conflicts, is addressed at greater length in the following chapter. However, the above mention of the troubled transition to democracy serves as a departure for one additional analysis to be made about gender, sexuality, and the changing face of sexual commerce in the borderlands. In the issue for the week of 11 November 1988 of \textit{Nosso Tempo}, there appeared a comic strip by Heitor, the newspaper’s only resident lampoonist. Over the years, Heitor and his strip had illustrated a variety of local and national issues affecting the border community and he had inflected them with a sense of humor that underscored the editor’s stinging social commentary. For example, the perceived corruption and irresponsibility of Itaipú Binacional, its officials, and its subcontracted firms, had long been a favorite target of the comic strips. In addition, Heitor provided the newspaper with the occasional illustrations and drawings that accompanied its news stories. Two of these works are of interest here.

On the back cover of the issue for the week of 11 November 1988, Heitor had chosen the New Republic as his target and gender and sexuality as his themes, around which the humor of the piece depended. The strip, consisting of two panels, presents a “before and after” street scene of two men admiring a shapely blond woman from behind. In the first panel, the men are smiling as they ogle the woman’s alluring physical features: flowing blond hair, delicate arms, small feet, and a diminutive waistline. The most pronounced (and no doubt most sexy part to the men) of her features, however, is her large and well-developed \textit{bunda} (buttocks). The first man comments to the other “Look! The New Republic!” The second man responds “What a Beauty!” In shocking contrast, the second panel portrays the men in a state of utter horror and disgust, as the woman they viewed from behind as lovely and sexually provocative turns around to expose a hideous, “old hag” face composed of buck teeth, bug eyes, wrinkles, warts, and
facial hair. In addition, her large and mannish hands are now visible. To the men, she states simply “Hi!” [Figure 5.14] The obvious point to be taken away from viewing the strip is that the New Republic turned out to be less attractive than originally thought. Given the economic and political crises generated by the Sarney administration, it is not hard to imagine many a Brazilian’s disappointment in the civilian government. That said, Heitor purposely chose to express this frustration in terms of gender and sexuality. The humor is derived not only from the hideousness of the woman, but from the gullibility of the men whose machismo and open sexual desire led them to jump to a false conclusion about her beauty, without seeing the whole package, and actual sex. After all, was that a woman or a man? There is a “sub-text” to this comic strip that centers on male anxiety over gender, sexuality, and sexual commerce in the borderlands.

A discussion of another illustration by Heitor serves as a counterpart to the one above. Published just one month after the comic strip, the illustration in question accompanied the special report on travestis working in the city center. As an illustration, it is devoid of the humor and playfulness of the comic strip discussed above, however, the image also utilizes gender and sexuality to make its point. The simple illustration shows another street scene and a man similarly viewing a woman from behind. The silhouette of the man is darkened almost completely; in this case, he is a shadowy figure. As before, the woman has long flowing hair and a curvy figure, and is dressed in the same type of outfit. However, her build is more muscular, particularly the upper body, the waist more ample, and her buttocks are de-emphasized. In any case, the center of attention is clearly on the woman’s face, which is turning from the shadows to reveal, not a woman’s face at all, but that of a man. The face is marked as masculine due to its pronounced and strong jaw line and the stubble of a beard. [Figure 5.15] No text or dialogue accompanies the image. The man does not appear to be shocked or embarrassed, as apparently he knew exactly what to expect—indeed, he appears to be eager for such a sexual encounter. The artist Heitor does not tell the viewer of the illustration, neither how

\[\text{Figure 5.14}\]

\[\text{Figure 5.15}\]

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171 Comic strip by Heitor, Nossa Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 a 17 de novembro de 1988, back cover.
to think, nor what to feel, but rather his matter of fact tone lets them draw their own conclusions, most likely influenced by the text of the accompanying news story.  

**Conclusion**

The arrival of those persons seeking employment with Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms to the border profoundly transformed Foz do Iguaçu. Despite the best efforts of city and corporate officials, migrants to the city complicated efforts to establish urban order and a planned development scheme. As shown in this chapter, the entire city became a nightmarish “rua do lixo,” as city officials worked to remove the *favelas* and to confine prostitution and other vice in their appropriate locations, all according to the development plan.

Moreover, this chapter addresses issues related to sexual commerce in the borderlands and how it changed over time as the region developed from a sleepy tourist center to the “paradise of prostitution.” Such transformation could not have occurred without the parallel migration of women to the border in search of employment, many of who either willingly entered the sex trade or “fell into” the life out of economic necessity and familial disintegration. As shown in this chapter, borderlands residents in both Paraguay and Brazil alternately tolerated, denounced, regulated, criminalized, and sensationalized prostitution and sex workers, but failed to eradicate sexual commerce, which changed and expanded to include new patterns of male consumption.

Without overstating its significance, the comic strip and the illustration by Heitor at least draws our attention to the changing “face” of politics, gender, and sexuality in the borderlands in the late-1980s. Economic troubles and the end of the major phase of construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project spelled the end for primary zone of prostitution in Três Lagoas. Subsequently, the end of military rule and the transition to civilian rule also coincided with a “democratization” of sexual space and a change in behavior—as the city center became home to a growing variety of novel adult establishments and increasing levels of clandestine prostitution on the streets, including homosexual prostitution—embodied by the new urban “itinerary” of male sexual pleasure.

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172 Illustration by Heitor, *Nossa Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7.
Table 5.1: Population Growth of Foz do Iguaçu, 1960-2000

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>7,407</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>12,995</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>33,966</td>
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<td>1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>136,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>190,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>258,543</td>
</tr>
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Table 5.2: Monthly Inflation Rates, Brazil, 1986-1991

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<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
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Figure 5.1: The favela of Rua do Lixo, Foz do Iguaçu, c. 1975

Figure 5.2: The *favela* of M’Boici, Foz do Iguaçu, 1981

Source: *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de febrero de 1981, 11.
Figure 5.3: Felicia Azevedo and her Sons, Foz do Iguaçu, 1981

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 18 a 25 de febrero de 1981, 11.
Figure 5.4: The whiskerías “Tune” and “Ñajhatí,” Barrio María Magdalena, February 1979

Source: “La prostitución en Hernandarias (III),” ABC Color (Asunción), 22 de febrero de 1979, 11; “La prostitución en Hernandarias (IV),” ABC Color (Asunción), 24 de febrero de 1979, 11.
Figure 5.5: The *boites* Carinho da Noite and 27, Três Lagoas, c. 1980

Source: “Zona,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 de janeiro de 1981, 12.
Figure 5.6: Sex Workers “Kátia” and “Tere,” Três Lagoas, c. 1980

Figure 5.7: Unemployed Men Protesting Outside of City Hall, Foz do Iguaçu

Source: *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 14 a 20 de julho de 1983, 10.
Figure 5.8: The Boite da Sônia Burns to the Ground, Três Lagoas, April 1985

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 5 a 11 de abril de 1985, 10.
Figure 5.9: The Destruction of the Zona, Três Lagoas, 1985

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 5 a 11 de abril de 1985, 10.
Figure 5.10: Street Prostitution on Avenida Brasil, Foz do Iguaçu, 1983

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 25 de novembro a 1 de decembro de 1983, 12.
Figure 5.11: The Itinerary of Male Sexual Pleasure

Source: “Rota de Lazer e do Prazer,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 20 a 27 de março de 1987, 8.
Figure 5.12: “Raquel” Relaxing in the Luxury Suite at the Saunas Presidente

Source: “Rota de Lazer e do Prazer,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 20 a 27 de março de 1987, 8.
Figure 5.13: The Favela de Pluma and the New Evangelical Church of “Santidade”

Figure 5.14: The New Republic is Like a Woman

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 11 a 17 de novembro de 1988, back cover.
Figure 5.15: Travesti: the New “Face” of Prostitution

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 16 a 22 de dezembro de 1988, 7.
CHAPTER SIX

Strikes in the Cathedral of Concrete and Steel: Itaipú Dam Workers and the Transition to Democracy, Brazil and Paraguay, 1975-1989

These soldiers are murderers of our own blood, they did not engage anyone in combat, [but rather] they slaughtered productive lives of workers and of the nation’s family. ¹

We were not armed. How can [dam workers] afford guns if they barely earn enough to eat? The only weapons they had were forks and knives.²

During the years of major construction, Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors utilized every tool at their disposal to limit the possibility to organize or to unionize workers on the world’s largest hydroelectric dam project. During the long dictatorships in Brazil (1964-85) and Paraguay (1954-89), such corporate procedures, coupled with surveillance mechanisms, effectively proscribed the potential of and space for labor organization. As a result, large-scale strikes by dam workers against Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms occurred only after the exit of authoritarian military regimes from power.³ Yet, labor militancy took quite different forms and trajectories on each side of the border, owing to the peculiarities of the democratic transitions, and in the case of Paraguay, on the pivotal role of one man, Efigenio Lisboa, who led a wildcat strike against Itaipú

² Gerardo López, union lawyer, radio interview given from the Area 2 Hospital, December 12, 1989 “Interview with Worker’s Lawyer,” FBIS, LAT-89-239, 14 December 1989, 45. Document is written in English.
Binacional and its subcontracted firms in the name of workers and a truly independent working-class movement.

Focusing on these two pivotal strikes provides the lens for the comparison of labor in the Brazilian and Paraguayan transitions, while also connecting labor militancy on both sides of the border and across time and place. Moreover, as the Paraguayan case in particular demonstrates, international attention underscores the importance of these strikes against Itaipú Binacional as a case study that allows for the examination of the role of labor in political change in the late-twentieth century in each country.

**Labor and Democratic Transitions**

Before moving to a specific discussion of worker militancy at the Itaipú Binacional project during democratic transitions in Brazil and Paraguay, it may be helpful to understand the larger context of labor organization under military rule in both countries. While the nature of those transitions and the particular context of the Itaipú Binacional dam is the more relevant for the dissertation, the larger national context of labor relations, as will be seen, does impact how workers and unions organized, solved conflict, and often the outcome of militant action.

In Paraguay, General Stroessner intervened in the free labor movement in 1958, in order to prevent the spread of a general strike, and subsequently took over the Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores (C.P.T), the country’s main union.\(^4\) Thereafter, the military regime exercised a tight control over the C.P.T, created “phantom” unions within its structure, and reformulated the Labor Code, which now decreed that only recognized unions could function legally and bargain with employers, while outright banning strikes by government employees.\(^5\) Such actions, in effect, crippled the labor movement in Paraguay. However, within the C.P.T, the unions representing bankers,

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journalists, and hospital workers each continued to agitate for higher wages, better working conditions, and a labor movement independent of the military regime. In addition, Catholic trade unionists attempted to form agrarian leagues in the rural countryside. Despite continued repression on the part of police, these groups became more vocal during the last years of the Stroessner military regime, particularly after 1986, and some notable strikes occurred in Asunción.

In 1986, the Movimiento Intersindical de Trabajadores (M.I.T) formed as a collection of unions, including those of bankers, construction workers, metallurgical workers, journalists, and Catholic activists. By 1988, the M.I.T consisted of 30 unions and had 2,819 members. The total union membership in 1988 was approximately 22,000. After the fall of the Stroessner regime in February 1989, however, union organizing rapidly expanded as the Ministry of Justice and Labor extended legal recognition to any union that filed the necessary paperwork. As a result, union membership rose to 75,000 in 1989. It is within this context that Paraguayan workers of the subcontracted firms of Itaipú Binacional took direct action against their employers in 1989.

In Brazil, beginning in 1937 with the declaration of the Estado Novo (New State) by Getúlio Vargas, the independent labor movement and its leaders were forced into a corporatist labor system controlled by the State. Generally, the system gave the State the role as arbiter between labor and capital, mainly through the establishment of a network of labor tribunals, which mediated conflict, and prohibited free union organizing in the workplace in favor of national federations organized horizontally. In return, the State guaranteed minimum worker’s rights, workplace rules, and minimum wages, and provided a basic social security system. Consequently, subsequent populist leaders in Brazil harnessed the unions as a base of mass support.

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8 For a discussion on the corporatist system, see José Pastore and Hélio Zylberstajn, *A administração do conflito trabalhista no Brasil* (São Paulo: Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 1987).
The corporatist system of labor relations, however, began to break down in 1960 as the first years of that decade witnessed a wave of mass strikes in São Paulo. In part, renewed labor militancy combined with “populist ambiguity” helped to justify the military coup of April 1964. Subsequently, the military regime repressed labor, forcibly reapplied the corporatist system of labor relations (including banning strikes), drove down wages, and generally favored capital over labor. From 1968 to 1978, no major strikes occurred in Brazil. However, beginning in May 1978, waves of strikes erupted in São Paulo, first among autoworkers and then among metal workers and dockworkers. These strikes and their militant leadership, particularly embodied by Luis Inácio “Lula” da Silva, represented the “new unionism” movement in Brazil, which became increasingly dominant during the 1980s.

From this renewed conflict, emerged the formation of a new labor umbrella organization, the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (C.U.T), founded in 1983 and intended to form a counterweight to the corporatist system of labor relations. Broadly, the C.U.T argued for a working class labor movement independent of the government, the Catholic Church, political parties, or capital. However, the national union movement soon split into factions: those unionists who favored an independent labor movement free from government controls and those unionists who favored an independent labor movement but with the continuation of the corporatist labor system. Representing the latter camp, the Central Geral dos Trabalhadores (C.G.T) formed in 1986. Thus, it is within this context that Brazilian workers formulated strike activity against Itaipú Binacional in 1987.

15 Costa, Tendências e centrais sindicais, 191. For a discussion of the formation of the CGT, see Chapter Six.
In Brazil, the military returned power to civilian control in 1985 and initiated a period of democratic transition. Subsequently, on the Brazilian side of the project, Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers walked off the job in 1987, during the period of consolidation or “deepening of democracy” during the administration of José Sarney (r. 1985-1990), who presided over the promulgation of a new democratic constitution and direct presidential elections. On the Paraguayan side of the project, renegade dam workers went on strike in 1989, in the same year that witnessed a factional crisis within the ruling Colorado Party and a subsequent coup on the part of the military that finally toppled General Alfredo Stroessner (r. 1954-89) in February of that same year.16 In Paraguay, General Andrés Rodríguez presided over the democratic transition, first as interim president (1989) and then president (1989-93), before relinquishing power in 1993 to the civil engineer and businessman Juan Carlos Wasmosy (founder of Conempa) and the first directly elected civilian president in 39 years.

Rachel Neild characterized Paraguay as a “transition in search of democracy” and, despite attempts by General Rodríguez at political liberalization, she argued that the “dominant institutions from the Stroessner era continue to hold power…Most troubling, the Colorado Party maintains its established hegemony, and a cluster of persons accustomed to personalistic authoritarian rule still occupy many top government posts.”17 Furthermore, Neild pointed to the fact that when popular organizations, including labor unions, acted in pursuit of their demands, they continued to meet with repression by government forces. In narrating the first mass labor strikes against Itaipú Binacional and

its subcontracted firms, this chapter demonstrates that neither the military nor the old order had exited from the stage.

Transition to civilian rule destabilized the authoritarian pattern of labor relations, represented by the twin pillars of corporate paternalism and state, military, and corporate repression, intended to co-opt and discipline dam workers during the years of military rule. Afterward, in both “democratic” Brazil and Paraguay, the armed forces intervened in the emerging conflicts between labor and capital, decisively putting an end to strikes and forcing arbitration and mediation. First in Brazil in 1987 and then Paraguay in 1989, the respective cases of strikes at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project represented the first concrete test of the depth of the military’s commitment to the democratic transition and reaction to the re-emergent and increasingly militant labor movement, while highlighting the growing economic importance of the dam project in terms of national security. Indeed, the strikes of 1987 and 1989 exposed the fault line between the state/military alliance and popular movements, including those of workers, during the transition.

In the 1987 strike, despite violence on the part of the military, the relatively well-functioning Brazilian corporatist system of state labor courts and arbitration bodies (dating from the Vargas era) aptly mediated the conflict. In Paraguay, quite the opposite occurred, as the immediacy and unexpectedness of the fall of the Stroessner dictatorship in February 1989 unleashed long-repressed social actors, including a resurgent and militant labor and peasant movement that outright rejected governmental and corporate initiatives and controls. In this case, Efígenio Lisboa, a charismatic Paraguayan labor leader and dam worker who organized and led a breakaway union faction and launched an illegal wildcat strike in December 1989, confronted both the corporations and the government in the name of a truly independent working-class.

**Limits to Labor Mobilization**

Among other tactics, the Department of Security and Information of Itaipú Binacional shared information of interest with the national police. For example, a report dated 28 April 1975, discussed information received regarding certain workers of Itaipú Binacional and the subcontracted firm C.B.P.O believed to be organizing a strike,
possibly directed and funded by political exiles. As an added measure, background checks collected information used in the selection of suitable personnel. In Brazil, the personnel officials of Unicon charged with the hiring of dam workers systematically vetted potential hires through the regional military intelligence office, known as the Department of Political and Social Order (D.O.P.S), located in Curitiba. In Paraguay, in addition, an unnamed source within Itaipú Binacional notified the Department of Investigations (D.I) in Asunción of suspicious persons applying for employment on the dam project. For example, a “collaborator” informed the police that a Bolivian electrical engineer had applied for a position at Itaipú Binacional; he drew suspicion simply because he received his education at a university in the Soviet Union, located “behind the iron curtain” (de la cortina de hierro).

Company officials responded to attempts to organize unions at the hydroelectric dam with the firing of all workers involved or with the transfer of personnel. One published report by Reinaldo Garcia Sobrinho, a lab technician in the infirmary of the Hospital Madeirinha, tells of the first attempt to organize, in this case in 1982 on the Paraguayan side of the border. In short order, however, company officials labeled Garcia Sobrinho as a subversive and fired union leaders. As a result, the movement quickly “died in the shell” (morreu na casca). The company employed other techniques to limit union organizing as well. For example, according to Osvaldino Conceição Santos, an electrician with the subcontracted firm Itamon, he had been “set-up” by company officials, who accused him of having a physical altercation with a security guard as a false pretense for his termination. Santos argued that his “just cause,” thus technically legal, termination was in retaliation for his participation in union organizing.

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18 Informe No. 002/75, Itaipú Binacional, Asesoria General de Seguridad e Informaciones, 28 de abril de 1975, CDA. Evidence located in the CDA directly related to Itaipú Binacional is sparse but does suggest a linkage. Currently, the archive of the Department of Security and Information of Itaipú Binacional is not open to researchers.
19 Brief, Francisco A. Britez Borges, Chief of Capital Police, to Don Pastor Coronel, Chief of the Department of Investigations, Asunción, Paraguay, 3 July 1984, CDA.
20 “Funcionários de Hospital da Itaipu denunciam coações e perseguições,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 7 a 13 de agosto de 1987, 3.
21 “Operário da Itamon é agredido e demitido por ‘justa causa,’” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 20 de novembro de 1987, 5. Santos, reportedly, held on to his job due to the fact that he was a member of the workplace safety team CIPA, a position protected from arbitrary dismissal by the Labor Ministry.
Large-scale worker militancy—defined as an attempt to disrupt the normal functioning of the hydroelectric dam in order to win concessions from management—occurred within the context of democratic transition. However, on both sides of the border, the armed forces remained in power, either directly as in Paraguay or indirectly as in Brazil. In the case of Brazil, Alfred Stepan argues that, “in the first two years of the Sarney administration, the Brazilian military had been able to retain significant control over much of the political space they had occupied during twenty-one years of military rule.”

Both the armed forces of Brazil and Paraguay preserved their traditional and constitutional role as guarantors of “internal defense and domestic order” after the transition to civilian rule. However, Stepan makes a distinction regarding transitions in the authoritarian context. For example, “liberalization” connotes policy changes such as an end to censorship, the allowance of union organizing, release of political prisoners, return of political exiles, and the formation of political parties. “Democratization,” on the other hand, is defined as open contestation for the right to win control of the government and free elections. According to Stepan, there can be liberalization without democratization. As this chapter demonstrates regarding the specific case of dam workers, the Brazilian transition is best categorized as democratization, while the Paraguayan transition is best understood as liberalization without democratization.

As will be seen in this case study, the Brazilian and Paraguayan experiences of military authoritarianism shaped labor relations. Moreover, a resurgent labor movement and dam worker militancy during the 1987 and 1989 strikes demonstrate that recent experience, as well as the tensions and changes brought about by democratization, or lack thereof, at different junctures in country. My study continues the inquiry into the development of workers’ movements and, using the conceptual frameworks and methodologies of the new labor historians, explores the period of military rule in Brazil.

and Paraguay and its social impact upon workers, while illuminating hidden experiences of worker agency, gender and sexuality, and class relations in worker communities.

The bi-national nature of the project presented a series of difficulties in the realm of labor law, particularly as it pertained to labor relations and collective bargaining. To address these issues, additional labor protocols and administrative agreements, formalized in February and September of 1974 and in August 1975, established uniform terms of employment (for example, establishing standards of overtime, working hours, minimum wages, holidays, and so forth) and clarified labor relations policies not covered in the original treaty. One provision of the protocols stipulated that Brazilian labor law, seen as more favorable to the worker, would be referred to in the case of dispute. Importantly, the provision stated that Itaipú Binacional shared joint responsibility for any obligations entered into by its subcontracted firms. As a result, dam workers and their unions ultimately held the bi-national entity responsible for the actions and failures of the subcontracted companies that employed the vast majority of workers constructing the hydroelectric dam project. In practice, however, Paraguayan workers were generally perceived as receiving lower wages and fewer benefits, not to mention fewer legislative protections, than did their Brazilian counterparts. Union officials estimated that, over the period 1974-1991, Brazilian workers had received 540 million dollars more than their Paraguayan counterparts.

Also of importance, the protocols required that the nationals of the respective countries must be contracted in their home countries, known as the “country of contract principle” that placed workers under the jurisdiction of the labor laws of either Brazil or Paraguay, depending on his or her nationality. Thus, dam workers never ceased to be Brazilian or Paraguayan, regardless of which side of the project on which they lived and worked. In practice, such protocols divided and perhaps even prevented workers from claiming true bi-national or transnational status within the proprietary zone of Itaipú Binacional.

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Moreover, the border and the category of nationality that it engendered mattered to dam workers. Efrén Córdova of the International Labour Office (I.L.O) argued that the country of contract principle, linguistic barriers, and differences in national labor legislation worked together to prevent the establishment of a truly bi-national union representing all dam workers. As a result, dam workers organized and joined separate unions based on their respective nationalities and affiliated themselves with national labor organizations.\footnote{Córdova, “Labour law aspects of frontier works,” 314.} Furthermore, established labor protocols created the Joint Conciliation Board, composed of both management and worker’s representatives, as the official mechanism to solve internal labor disputes as they arose during the construction of the dam project. This body referred any agreements that emerged to the respective national ministries regulating labor relations. Such “in-house” resolution of conflict, as Córdova states, helped to avoid “recourse to direct action.”\footnote{Córdova, “Labour law aspects of frontier works: the Itaipú Dam case,” 315.} The fact that dam workers eventually opted for direct action against their employers brings into question the effectiveness of this policy over the long term and, specifically, during transitions from military to civilian rule.

**First Strikes: January and September of 1987**

On the morning of Wednesday, 14 January 1987, Arturo Daniel Garcete, a 28-year-old student and employee of the Brazilian subcontracted firm of Unicon, drew the attention of the Paraguayan secret police, known as the Joint Task Force (Fuerzas de Tareas Conjuntas, FTC) located in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, due to his suspicious actions, which included the public distribution of pamphlets.\footnote{Brief, Luis Ofedo G. to Dr. Victorino Oviedo Olmedo, Chief of D-3 Groups, Joint Task Force (FTC), Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, January 14, 1987, Documentation and Archive Center for the Defense of Human Rights, Asunción, Paraguay (henceforth CDA). The Joint Task Force (FTC), as its name implies, consisted of members from the military and civilian police.} After further investigation, the local Director of Political Groups and Related Affairs dictated a brief to the Chief of the D.I in Asunción informing him of the activities of certain labor agitators on the Paraguayan side of the border zone.\footnote{Brief No. 112, Alberto B. Cantero D., Director of Politics and Related Activities (DPA), to Don Pastor Coronel, Chief of the Department of Investigations, Asunción, Paraguay, January 15, 1987, CDA. As made clear in the report, the investigation had relied on submissions by a network of informants that collaborated with the ongoing surveillance of labor leaders.} According to the report, a university student and
employee of Itaipú Binacional, Víctor Aguilar, headed a group of dam workers and accounting and law students at the Universidad Católica who had initiated an “agitation campaign” (*campaña de agitación*). For his part, Aguilar called for the extension of benefits to Paraguayan workers by the subcontracted firm Conempa equal to those accorded to workers of the Brazilian subcontracted firm Unicon.\(^{32}\) According to Aguilar, the consequences for their actions included the unexplained transferal from the dam site to the headquarters in Asunción by order of the director, but not termination of their employment.\(^{33}\)

In mid-January 1987, workers of the Brazilian subcontracted firms of Unicon, Itamon, and Eletromon announced a strike in support of their demands for a 30 percent wage increase and additional bonuses for high-risk jobs performed at the dam.\(^{34}\) Workers intended to preempt the high-profile inauguration by the leaders of Brazil and Paraguay, Dr. José Sarney and General Alfredo Stroessner, respectively, of the two newly functioning turbines (nos. 14 and 15) on the hydroelectric dam project.

Taking advantage of the attention surrounding the event, workers left their jobs on Wednesday evening. On the morning of Thursday, 15 January, striking workers greeted President Sarney at the Foz do Iguaçu International Airport with placards and insults.\(^{35}\) According to the report filed by custom’s workers in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, shortly thereafter, militant “groups of people, presumably workers” proceeded to block the main access road (*camino truncal*) used by buses transporting workers to the

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\(^{32}\) In part, the regime was concerned over the linkage between the university students in Alto Paraná and the emergence of labor conflict among the Faculty of Medicine at the Hospital de Clínicas in Asunción. In general, the Stroessner regime sought to prevent labor from making wider alliances, particularly with the high-profile Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers.

\(^{33}\) “A palavra do leitor,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 5 a 11 de junho de 1987, 4.

\(^{34}\) This was not the first instance of labor militancy. In August 1986, workers of Itaipú Binacional and the Brazilian firm Furnas had threatened to conduct the very first mass strike of dam workers. Just prior, electrical workers had won concessions from the company Furnas related to a 30 percent increase in pay for dangerous jobs. However, under pressure from Itaipú Binacional, Furnas reneged on the agreement. In this case, the main union involved was the Union of Urban Workers (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Urbanas) based in Curitiba. Despite the threat of a strike, union officials opted for continued negotiations. See “Trabalhadores de Itaipu Binacional ameaçam com greve geral,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 30 de agosto de 1986, 9 and “Negociações continuam em Itaipu,” *Nosso Tempo* (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 a 29 de novembro de 1990, 32. Many of the demands, including higher wages, increased pay for dangerous jobs, etc., continued to be points of contention in January 1987.

Brazilian side of the dam site. As a result, workers had to abandon the buses, bypass the protestors on foot, reload onto waiting buses, and then were delivered to the entrance to the dam site. The union, however, agreed to let dignitaries enter the dam site without hindrance. Although confined to the Brazilian side of the border, Alves de Souza, the spokesman for the Union of Industry and Civil Construction Workers of Foz do Iguaçu (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores de Industria Construção Civil do Foz do Iguaçu, henceforth STICC-FOZ), reported that several hundred Paraguayans working in Brazil for the subcontracted firms also participated in the general strike. In total, approximately eight thousand workers took part in the first action of this kind.

The inaugural ceremonies proceeded as planned, despite the protests and work stoppage. Troops from the Policía Militar do Paraná, assisted by five tanks, guaranteed access to the site by the president of Brazil and, in the early morning hours, detained some striking workers. Entering the site by a hidden access road, however, Sarney most likely never saw the striking workers. In his speech given that day, President Sarney argued that the hydroelectric dam project represented an example of integration and cooperation in Latin America. “More than an enterprise,” he stated, “Itaipú is a cathedral of concrete and steel erected by the secular friendship of two countries which has marked profound changes in this region.” While also praising the “noble spirit” of Paraguayan-Brazilian cooperation, General Stroessner ironically highlighted his belief in the “well-being of the people achieved in freedom, which guarantees the dignity of human beings

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36 Brief No. 119, Alberto B. Cantero D., Director of Politics and Related Activities (DPA), to Don Pastor Coronel, Chief of the Department of Investigations, Asunción, Paraguay, January 15, 1987, CDA. The Spanish reads: “grupos de personas, presumiblemente obreros…”

37 Brazilian labor law required that workers in the same or related trades join a local union already in existence. Thus, in the case of Brazilian dam workers, one union represented the interests of dam workers. See Córdova, “Labour law aspects of frontier works: the Itaipú Dam case,” 314.

38 “Los obreros de la Itaipú están de vuelta al trabajo,” Ultima Hora (Asunción), 21 de enero de 1987, 16.


40 “Sarney, com Geisel, passa por grevistas e liga turbina,” Folha de São Paulo (São Paulo), 17 de janeiro de 1987, A-1. The workers were released after the ceremony.


42 “Sarney, Paraguay’s Stroessner Speak at Itaipu,” Foreign Bureau Information Service, VI. 20 Jan 87, Brazil, D1.
and the search for better days for mankind within the framework of a democratic society, aware of the challenges that social justice poses."  

In addition to the presidents, the event gathered together high-ranking government ministers, civil and municipal officials, and the military commanders of both countries. Special guests invited for the event included “personalities from the global financial world,” such as North American, European, and Japanese bankers representing the institutions supplying lines of credit and financial assistance for the project. The event garnered press coverage from around the world and was televised to a national and international Spanish-speaking audience that included Spain, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Beyond the actual inauguration of the electrical turbines, the event planners promised a spectacle of toasts, military honors, and high protocol followed by brief meetings by the heads of state regarding continued cooperation and integration between the two Latin American nations.  

Union officials had planned the work stoppage in such a way as to force the subcontracted firms to the bargaining table. During the assembly on Sunday, 18 January, however, union officials and members agreed to lift the strike. On Monday, workers returned to their jobs. Meanwhile, union and company officials from the subcontracted firms of Unicon, Itamon, and Eletromon continued their negotiations. For their part, union leaders presented a list of 31 grievances, which included better pay and working conditions, increased workplace safety, education funds, and access to company housing. Alves de Souza of the STICC-FOZ stated that the majority of workers earned less than 1,500 cruzados per month, far short of the total needed to support a typical family of five. Earlier in the month, the Sarney administration had ruled out raising the minimum wage to 3,000 cruzados to compensate for inflation. To bring an end to the work stoppage, however, company officials made only a simple promise that they would

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43 “Stroessner on Foreign, Domestic Issues,” Foreign Bureau Information Service, VI. 20 Jan 87, Brazil, D2.
44 “Stroessner y Sarney van a encontrarse por cuarta vez,” Última Hora (Asunción), 15 de enero de 1987, 13.
45 “Itaipu enfrenta greve na véspera da ligação de turbinas,” Folha de São Paulo (São Paulo), 16 de janeiro de 1987, 10.
46 “Los obreros de la Itaipú están de vuelta al trabajo,” Última Hora (Asunción), 21 de enero de 1987, 16.
listen and attend to worker’s grievances. Despite the good faith, the subcontracted firms failed to follow through with pay raises or increases in benefits.

Nine months later, on Sunday, 20 September 1987, open conflict again broke out among the workers on the Brazilian side of the project against the subcontracted firms. Brazilian union officials now demanded that the subcontracted companies immediately fulfill their promise for an increase or readjustment in their pay and improvements in working conditions. Over the course of the year, worker’s salaries had been further affected by high inflation, seriously eroding their purchasing power. In addition, rumors of pending mass layoffs of workers began to circulate in the press. High-ranking Itaipú Binacional directors denied reports regarding layoffs of workers at the hydroelectric project. However, officials admitted to a necessary period of austerity and the dismissal of some teams of construction workers and disposal of company housing units. Despite worker’s concerns, the corporate management of the subcontracted firms refused to capitulate to new pressure tactics fomented by laborers and rejected outright any increase in salary or benefits.

On Sunday evening, approximately 300 troops and 8 tanks occupied Vila C, where the majority of construction and electromechanical assembly workers lived. On Monday, 21 September, Brazilian workers responded by picketing at the entrance to the dam in Foz do Iguaçu. According to press reports, company security personnel and local police quickly dispersed the small number of protesters. The following day, however, an estimated seven thousand Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers gathered at the gate in Brazil for a “peaceful protest” against the administration. As before, company security and police quickly dispersed the large crowd. However, this time, suppression included the assistance provided by the Brazilian military, including the presence of Special Forces operatives and heavy tanks. According to Waldir João de Assis, the President of the STICC-FOZ, sixteen workers were injured in the confrontation with soldiers. The principal Itaipú Hospital in Foz do Iguaçu reported that at least five workers had received medical attention for lacerations produced by soldiers who utilized bayonets to disperse protesting workers from the entrance to the dam.

Subsequently, it became open knowledge that the Brazilian Director General of Itaipú Binacional, Ney Braga, had requested the Brazilian army to occupy the dam site with troops and tanks in order to guarantee continued access to the installation. After speaking directly with Director Braga, General Leônidas of the Ministry of the Army (Ministro do Exército) gave the order to deploy troops from the Motorized Infantry Division based in the regional capital of Cascavel. At Itaipú Binacional, production of the electricity generated by the seven functioning turbines continued without interruption. Given their mandate to protect domestic order, the Brazilian military did not require prior presidential, ministerial, or congressional approval for what they saw as within their legitimate sphere of action. According to historian Wendy Hunter, such shows of force were intended to “deliver the unequivocal message that neither the government nor the military would tolerate strikes in strategic sectors of the economy.”

Despite the military presence and violence, the protest grew quickly from an action against the subcontracted firms into a general strike (greve) against Itaipú Binacional. Rough estimates placed the number of striking workers at nine thousand, representing the largest such event in company and community history. According to STICC-FOZ, the union representing dam workers and leading the strike, 90 percent of the Itaipú labor force, mostly from Unicon and Itamon, adhered to the strike. Although the protests began on the Brazilian side of the project, a de facto work stoppage also resulted on the Paraguayan side, taken as a precautionary measure by management to prevent the spread of the strike.

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51 Alfred Stepan, Rethinking Military Politics, 110-11. As discussed by Stepan, in December 1986, the Brazilian military set a precedent in its occupation by armored personnel carriers of the industrial city of Volta Redonda and a steel mill in São Paulo and the railroad station in Rio de Janeiro in order to prevent the spread of a general strike (the country’s first since 1917). In March 1987, in addition, the army and navy were sent to protect refineries and ports from strike activities.


Company administrators refused to cede any ground to the demands of dam workers. In addition, corporate and military officials took a harder line with striking workers than they had in the past, by targeting worker communities and families. While striking workers had reported attempts at intimidation in the prior work stoppages, the September 1987 strike witnessed an escalation in the repressive techniques utilized by the Brazilian military to break the resolve of striking workers. For example, upon entering the worker community of Vila C, labor leaders reported that soldiers launched canisters of tear gas into homes and that family members, primarily children, often constituted the victims. Striking workers and observers alike were stunned “by the magnitude of the military deployment and the harshness of the tactics employed in the encounters [that workers] had with them.”

Following the standard mediation practices formulated by the national labor codes of Brazil, arbitration between management and the workers began immediately. At the regional labor tribunal held in the state capital of Curitiba on Tuesday, STICC-FOZ officials representing workers from the Brazilian subcontracted firms Unicon and Itamon demanded an immediate forty-percent increase in wages and an annual cost of living increase of six percent thereafter. Additionally, union leadership requested the allotment of company housing for workers without residences. As a counter proposal, management offered only a salary increase of 14 percent, well below the readjustment sought by union officials. Seeking to undermine further the resolve of labor, Itaipú Binacional spokesman Egon Josué Treml reported that some 1,900 workers had returned to the job under the protection of federal troops.

Bolstering the position of labor by threatening a widening of the movement, more than one thousand employees, mostly supervisors and foreman (capataces), of the management firm Entre Rios initiated a work stoppage in sympathy with the striking dam workers of Unicon and Itamon. Additionally, automobile drivers (choferes) began discussions among their own members to vote whether to join the strike as well. In a

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55 “Terminó huelga obrera en Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), 3 de octubre de 1987, 7. The Spanish reads: “…por la magnitud del despliegue militar y por la dureza que pusieron en práctica en los encuentros que tuvieron con ellos.”
meeting held at “ground zero” in the worker community of Vila C, union leadership and striking workers voted to reject the counter offer of a 14 percent pay raise promulgated by management. Furthermore, the union leadership ominously vowed to continue the strike “to its ultimate conclusion” or until management ceded to their demands.57 Amidst growing fears of further escalation, the press reported that the parties involved appeared “irreconcilable.”58

The Regional Labor Tribunal in Curitiba, for its part, recommended a salary increase of 24 percent, roughly halfway between that demanded by labor and that proposed by the administration. Despite earlier promises of a “strike without end,” labor leaders quickly agreed to the proposal put forth by the labor court. After only five days, the so-called “Strike of Ten Thousand” had ended. The outcome surprised observers who expected a lengthy arbitration process. In the end, the labor tribunal offered striking workers an immediate salary readjustment of 20 percent (retroactive to the 1st of September) and promised a further 2 percent increase for the months of December 1987 and January 1988. Furthermore, company officials agreed to pay workers for the eight days they participated in the strike and promised that there would be no future reprisals against striking workers.59

On Friday, the Brazilian military withdrew its troops as agreed from both the hydroelectric dam and from the worker’s communities located in Foz do Iguaçu.60 That evening, workers organized a celebration in Vila C in honor of their victory.61 On Monday, 5 October, Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers on both sides of the border returned to their jobs on the project. A condition of the agreement explains the rather expedient resolution of the conflict: workers sought the immediate withdrawal of the 1200 troops and 30 tanks of the Brazilian Army that had occupied the dam installation and the worker community of Vila C. Specifically, striking workers and the union leadership argued that the military presence within and the occupation of Vila C directly placed family members in harm’s way. The military’s control of the movements of striking male workers, furthermore, meant that workers could not protect family members

57 “Se agrava el conflicto obrero en Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), 2 de octubre de 1987, 12.
58 “Acuerdo pone fin a la huelga en Itaipú,” Última Hora (Asunción), 2 de octubre de 1987, 11.
59 “Acordo põe fim à greve em Itaipu,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 3 de outubro de 1987, 1.
60 “Acuerdo pone fin a la huelga en Itaipú,” Última Hora (Asunción), 2 de octubre de 1987, 11.
from violence. The proximity of Vila C to the entrance of the dam project and the fact of a single access road in and out of the worker community gave the advantage to the company and to the military forces. As the press reported, given the “special circumstances that surrounded the conflict, the brutal intervention of the Brazilian Armed Forces, among others, [the workers] looked upon the signed agreement as dressed in clothes of triumph.”

The presence and utilization of military troops, especially against workers and their families, also produced controversy and divided opinions within Brazil while highlighting Itaipú dam’s growing economic importance. Though no workers had perished in the confrontation, state government and union officials bitterly complained that sixteen men had been injured at the hands of military troops. The Governor of Paraná state, Álvaro Dias, argued that the police had effectively handled the situation in the past and that the military response proved both unnecessary and reactionary. In his view, the military should have been called out to assist and to support the state police, not the other way around. Furthermore, Governor Dias called attention to the fact that the military had been deployed at the request of the director of a corporation in an act that should not have been part of the mandate or function of the Army, stating “the Armed Forces should be preserved and reserved to comply with its constitutional mission of national defense.”

Lastly, Dias called for a revision in the Itaipú Treaty of 1973 that allowed for the deployment of the military to protect the hydroelectric dam. Partly, Dias’ concerns and arguments mirrored the larger national debate over the proper constitutional role of the armed forces within the new democracy.

In response, Itaipú Binacional officials, particularly Director Braga, defended the request for assistance, stating that the military operation had prevented the formation of an impenetrable barrier of workers and “had guaranteed the access of employees and the functioning of the turbines.” Engineers pointed out that an interruption in electrical

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62 “Terminó huelga obrera en Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), 3 de octubre de 1987, 7. The Spanish reads: “…las circunstancias especiales que rodearon al conflicto, la brutal intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas brasileñas, entre otros, revistieron los acuerdos suscritos esta mañana con un ropaje de triunfo…”

63 “Álvaro considera equívoco da Itaipu a requisição das tropas do Exército,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 30 de setembro de 1987, 51. The Portuguese reads: “…as Forças Armadas devem ser preservadas e reservadas para cumprir sua missão constitucional, que é defesa nacional.”

64 “Acuerdo pone fin a la huelga en Itaipú,” Ultima Hora (Asunción), 2 de octubre de 1987, 11.
production could have damaged the turbines, owing to the fact that the pumps needed electricity to remove water from the powerhouse. Antônio Maía, the Director of the subcontracted firm Itamon, recounted the prior experience from January, the earlier occasion dam workers left the job, stating:

if the strike had continued more than three days, we would have had problems...we had an agreement that [vital] operations personnel could pass through the picket line. For the strikers, it is impossible to know who really operated the dam and who didn’t. All went well the first day, then on the second day the courage began to run out, and on the third day it was practically impossible to pass.²⁵

Clearly, both Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms had learned from experience both the effectiveness of the picket line and striking worker’s ability to prevent vital operations personnel from entering the hydroelectric dam.

For his part, Director Braga characterized the situation as one that had demanded a rapid response in order to prevent the worst-case scenario of “Itaipu going up in smoke” (Itaipu saisse do ar) at the hands of strikers, a situation that could have paralyzed the country through a loss of energy production. Furthermore, he downplayed fears that the armed force’s action signaled a return of the military dictatorship.²⁶ José Wanderley Dias, editor of the Paraná daily newspaper Gazeta do Povo, echoed Braga, stating that the “labor question” (a questão trabalhista)—defined in this case as the unresolved dispute between dam workers and the subcontracted firms—constituted a matter for the Ministry of Labor and Justice, while the possibility of interruption in energy production represented a threat to national security and, as such, had necessitated swift action by the armed forces of Brazil.²⁷

The rising importance of the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project and its production of electricity partly explain the heavy-handed response of Brazilian governmental and military officials. During the strike, the Brazilian Ministry of Energy and Mines issued

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²⁵ “Explicações de Itaipu,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 2 de outubro de 1987, 11. The Portuguese reads: “…se a greve de Janeiro continuasse por mais três dias teríamos problemas...Houve um acordo com os grevistas de que a operação poderia passar pelo piquete. Foi bem no primeiro dia, no Segundo os ânimos começaram a se exauarem, e no terceiro ficou praticamente impossível passar...para os grevistas, é impossível saber quem opera a usina e quem não opera.”

²⁶ “Ney justifica a convocação dos militares,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 30 de setembro de 1987, 51.

²⁷ “Itaipu e o rompimento PFL-PMDB,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 1 de outubro de 1987, 5.
and distributed a report in which the ministry argued that the Itaipú hydroelectric dam, at the time operating only 7 of the 18 planned turbines, had become crucial to the economies of twelve Brazilian states (including São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, Goiás, Espírito Santo, Mato Groso do Sul, and the Distrito Federal) and produced approximately 25 percent of the electricity consumed in the South and Southeast regions. The continued operation and completion of the dam project, the report stated, should be maintained as the highest of national priorities.68

The day after the military intervention, Márcio Abreu, the superintendent of operations at Itaipú Binacional and the public relations directors of its subcontracted firms, held a press conference in Foz do Iguaçu that outlined the negative consequences to both Brazil and Paraguay of an interruption in production of electricity.69 According to the spokesmen, without the energy produced by Itaipú Binacional, there would not be enough electricity during the peak evening hours (carga de ponta), affecting public transportation, elevators, illumination, and industry. All together, Abreu warned of blackouts that could possibly lead to “social disturbances” (distúrbios sociais) in the urban centers, a prospect no doubt intended to terrify the populace.

The 1987 strike, the first mass direct action of dam workers against Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms, represented the first fruit of a resurgent labor movement and the democratic transition in Brazil. Practically speaking, dam workers and union officials succeeded in their attempts to wrangle meaningful concessions from Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms through the utilization of the existing corporatist labor structures intended to mediate conflict between labor and capital. The violence of the strike of 1987, however, clearly reminded dam workers that even so-called democratic regimes, if pushed, would resort to the use of the military in order to protect strategic and economic interests of the nation, now increasingly identified with the hydroelectric dam project.

In the subsequent years, dam workers on the Brazilian side of the project continued to press management and to threaten strikes in order to win better pay and

69 “Responsabilidade da greve é de empreiteiras, diz Werner,” Gazeta do Povo (Curitiba), 1 de outubro de 1987, 7.
working conditions. However, the next example of mass direct action occurred within another democratic transition, this time on the Paraguayan side of the border.

**Second Wave: Itaipú Strikes of November and December 1989**

During the years of construction on the hydroelectric dam, no major strike occurred on the Paraguayan side of the project. The downfall of the Stroessner military regime in February of 1989, however, brought Paraguayan dam workers new opportunity and freedom to organize. In May of 1989, the Union of Civil Construction Workers of Alto Paraná (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Construcción Civil del Alto Paraná, henceforth STICCAP) formed to represent all construction workers in the department of Alto Paraná. However, its primary constituency consisted of dam workers employed by the sub-contracted firms of Itaipú Binacional. The STICCAP quickly affiliated with the newly established national umbrella organization, the Inter-Union Worker’s Movement (M.I.T) in Asunción.

The STICCAP, led by Cayo Lucio Aguayo, argued that Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms had failed to provide the pay and benefits stipulated in the existing labor protocols. Specifically, the union leadership called for an immediate increase in pay for dangerous jobs, payment of overtime, and access to the medical facilities of the Hospital Madeirinha, located on the Brazilian side of the project. For their part, the Paraguayan directors of Itaipú Binacional signaled their openness to negotiation and the extension of benefits and salary increases to workers. However, the subcontracted firms rejected workers’ demands and refused to negotiate; in addition, the union accused the subcontracted firms of colluding with the administrators of Itaipú Binacional to lay-off some 3,000 workers. For its part, the C.P.T and the M.I.T each offered to send a legal representative to assist the STICCAP leadership. In the end, however, the open-handed position and willingness of management of Itaipú Binacional to negotiate with the union ultimately staved off the strike that union leadership had called for 22 May 1989.

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70 In October 1989, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Entidad Binacional Itaipú (STEIBI) formed to represent the interests of dam workers directly employed by the company. However, by late-1989 the Itaipú Binacional employed only a small workforce of administrators, technicians, and engineers. For its part, STEIBI did not lead workers on strike until the early 1990s.
72 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), *Informativo Laboral* (Mayo 1989), 38.
In addition to the activities of STICCAP, affiliated with the M.I.T, other unions also began to agitate for better pay and working conditions. For example, the National Union of Construction Workers (Sindicato Nacional de la Construcción, SINATRAC), affiliated with the C.U.T and representing employees of the subcontracted firms Conempa and C.I.E, conducted a work stoppage on 3 July 1989 targeted against Itaipú Binacional. SINATRAC representatives argued that “time has passed and the situation hasn’t changed, for that reason we continue to maintain our defiant position and reliance on the general work stoppage.”

Furthermore, union representatives petitioned the Ministry of Justice and Labor’s Reconciliation and Arbitration Board to investigate and mediate the conflict. However, in the subsequent hearing, company officials defied, without explanation, the request of the ministry and did not send representatives.

On 2 August 1989, 4,000 dam workers affiliated with the STICCAP and SINATRAC walked off the job. Two days later, the Paraguayan Ministry of Justice and Labor opened new negotiations between the unions and the management of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms. Complicating matters, the Labor Ministry’s own Reconciliation and Arbitration Board ruled the strike illegal, even as the head of the ministry, Alexis Frutos Vaesken, worked to bring the strike to an end. In solidarity with Paraguayan workers, 30 unions representing dam workers on the Brazilian side of the project also adhered to the work stoppage.

On 6 August, the unions lifted the strike, as management agreed to some demands, including a 30 percent increase in pay for dangerous jobs and the reinstatement of of Victor Rojas, secretary general of the union representing the workers of Conempa. After the strike, Aguayo proceeded to bargain with Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms Conempa, C.I.E, and Unicon, finally reaching an agreement for a new collective labor contract at the end of August 1989. STICCAP immediately issued a press release, which stated that “with Cayo Lucio

73 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Agosto 1989), 45-46. The Spanish reads: “el tiempo pasa y que la situación no ha variado, por lo que mantenemos nuestra posición firme y dispuestos al paro general.”
74 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Agosto 1989), 46.
75 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Setiembre 1989), 39.
[Aguayo] at the head of our union, the defense of the sacred interests of our union members now is assured.”  

Internal conflict within the STICCAP began to split the union membership in early August 1989, just four months after its formation. Reaching a head after Aguayo and the union membership agreed to the new labor contract with Itaipú Binacional, a dissenting faction within the union lead by Efígenio Lisboa “dislodged” (desalojó) Aguayo from the union headquarters and proceeded to purge the union leadership. For his part, Aguayo denounced Lisboa’s actions as “pure Communist-style behavior” (puro estilo comunista). Subsequently, in the meeting of the general assembly held on 28 October 1989, members of the STICCAP elected Lisboa as the new secretary general of the union. [Figure 6.2]

Born Efígenio José Lisboa Carrallo in 1959 in Encarnación, he began his labor-organizing career in 1982 when, along with a handful of coworkers, he agitated for improved working conditions for the crews that maintained the electromechanical equipment and obtained basic concessions from management of the subcontracted firms. According to Lisboa, in 1982 he and his fellow labor activists were fired from their jobs as a result of these activities. Shortly thereafter, however, Lisboa found employment as an industrial technician at Itaipú Binacional. A polemical figure in subsequent years, Lisboa developed into a champion of the working-class and of peasants struggling for land, activities which drew the ire of the military government.

Over the course of 1989, police detained Lisboa five times for a cumulative period of seven months. Often, labor leaders and other activists were charged with violating Law #209, the Defense of Public Peace and Freedom of Persons. In June, the

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76 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Setiembre 1989), 39. The Spanish reads: “con Cayo Lucio al frente de nuestro sindicato, está asegurada la defensa de los sagrados intereses de los asociados de nuestro sindicato.”

77 Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Setiembre 1989), 39. According to ABC Color, the conflict centered upon the high fees charged by lawyers employed by the union to negotiate on the behalf of workers, which some members felt to be too unreasonable.

78 This information is according to Lisboa’s file at the Department of Investigations. Ficha no. 5689, 2 de setiembre de 1989, CDA.

79 “Efígenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown.

80 No biography exists on the life of Efígenio Lisboa. Therefore, the information that scholars have is based mostly on the period surrounding the 1989 strike. At present, Lisboa is a lawyer in Puerto Presidente Franco, Paraguay.

81 “Exilado paraguaiio tem medo de ser morto se voltar ao país,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 23 de novembro de 1990, 2.
government arrested Lisboa in Ciudad del Este (formerly Ciudad Puerto Presidente Stroessner) and held him for 25 days in a military brig without legal council in reaction to an earlier speech delivered in support of landless peasants.\textsuperscript{82} According to Lisboa, the conditions were inhumane: he was not given food, was not allowed to see his family, and was denied access to his lawyer.\textsuperscript{83} Specifically, Lisboa had been accused of supporting the illegal occupation of land in the village of Itutí, a community located in the south of Alto Paraná state, led by Alberto Alderete.\textsuperscript{84} As a result of his arrest, protestors gathered in the Plaza de Paz in Ciudad del Este, where they called for his release, and marched to the nearby seat of the Catholic Archbishop, Augustin Van Haaken, to ask for his intercession.\textsuperscript{85} As a result of the protest, the government soon released Lisboa from custody.

Shortly after his election as the secretary general of the union and for reasons that remain unclear, Lisboa resigned from his union post in order to run for a position in the Alto Paraná section of the governing Colorado Party (Asociación Nacional Republicana, henceforth A.N.R). In the local election, Lisboa failed to win the desired seat. In defeat, he sought a return to his former (though brief) position as elected leader of the STICCAP. However, in the aftermath of his unexpected resignation, the position of secretary general of STICCAP had transferred to the then vice-secretary, Cayo Lucio Aguayo, who refused to resign the position.\textsuperscript{86}

For his part, Lisboa argued that he rightfully held the position of leader of the union. To complicate matters, on 25 November 1989, personnel officials from Itaipú Binacional sent a telegram to Lisboa informing him that his employment had been terminated. Lisboa appealed his dismissal to the Paraguayan labor courts, arguing that Itaipú Binacional violated Law #1172, which protected union leaders from termination. In addition, Lisboa stated that Itaipú Binacional failed to properly compensate him for


\textsuperscript{83} “Exilado paraguaio tem medo de ser morto se voltar ao país,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Igauçu), 23 de novembro de 1990, 2.

\textsuperscript{84} Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE), Informativo Laboral (Agosto 1989), 46.

\textsuperscript{85} “Dirigentes sindicales presos,” Nosso Tempo (Foz do Igauçu), 30 de junho a 6 de julho de 1989, 5.

\textsuperscript{86} “Conflictivo gremio renueva autoridades,” El Diario (Asunción), 4 de enero de 1990, 33.
wages and unused vacation pay and benefits. According to company officials, however, no labor laws had been violated by the company because Lisboa did not hold a position of leadership within the STICCAP at the time of his termination.

From the point of view of union and company officials, Lisboa represented a dangerous and unknown element. Confirming suspicions, on 28 November 1989, Lisboa claimed the mantle of the legitimate leader of a new breakaway faction within the STICCAP, now called the Workers’ Union of the Civil Construction Industry (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria de Construcción Civil y Afines, henceforth STICCA\(^\text{87}\)), and instigated a bold action against Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms.\(^\text{88}\) Lisboa intended the unsanctioned “strong-arm tactic” (*medida de fuerza*) to force the management of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms to comply with labor accords previously agreed to in late-August 1989 and ratified by the unions in early November 1989. Specifically, the *Acta del 30 de noviembre* (*Accord of November 30*) ratified by the unions outlined a series of worker grievances and their redress.

The *Accord of November 30* finalized the prior agreement from 6 August 1989 hammered out between the three legal unions representing the Itaipú dam workers, consisting of the Union of the Workers of Electromón (Sindicato de Trabajadores de Electromón, STE-SAT), the official wing of the Union of Workers in Civil Construction and Industry of Alto Paraná (Sindicato de la Industria de la Construcción del Alto Paraná, STICCAP), the Union of Construction Workers of Hernandarias (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Construcción Civil de Hernandarias, SITRACOH) and the subcontracted firms and Itaipú Binacional. The principal Paraguayan officials of Itaipú Binacional, including Eng. Fidencio Tardivo, Eng. Hans Krauch, and Drs. Luciano Giménez, Victorino Vega Giménez, and Anastacio Acosta Amarilla formally agreed to these demands put forth by union officials. As cosigners to the document, the subcontracted firms of Conempa, C.I.E, and Electromon each agreed to the basic tenets of the document.

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\(^\text{87}\) It is unclear the exact title employed by the breakaway union led by Lisboa. However, for sake of clarity, STICCA will be used to differentiate the renegade faction from the original union STICCAP.

\(^\text{88}\) Paraguayan labor law allowed for any group of 25 or more workers in the same or related trades to form a union and seek recognition from the Ministry of Labor and Justice in Asunción. In practice, such legislation promoted the establishment of multiple unions representing dam workers, often constituted by workers from the same company, city, industry, or as seen in this case, from within the same union. Overall, the legislation had the intended result of diluting the strength of workers and their organizations.
The Accord of November 30 stipulated the payment of outstanding benefits owed to Paraguayan workers and promised to redress a series of longstanding complaints. Broadly, Paraguayan workers sought equality in salary and benefits on par with that received by their counterparts in Brazil.\footnote{Indeed, workers for the Brazilian companies had long commanded the top of the labor hierarchy at Itaipú dam. Furthermore, Brazilian technicians and engineers and the Brazilian companies they worked for virtually dominated the high skilled category, particularly as the project shifted in the mid-1980s from its labor-intensive phase to the installation of electromechanical equipment such as turbines.} Particularly for middle-level employees and semiskilled or unskilled laborers, differentials in pay and benefits continued to be a source of bitter contention. The years had produced a long list of grievances: Paraguayan workers sought a pay increase of 50 percent, additional bonuses for jobs classified as dangerous, further access to company housing benefits, expanded vacation and increased vacation pay, retirement benefits, food bonuses, redress of complaints lodged against the company hospital, free transportation to school for children, and access to copies of all future contracts signed between Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors.\footnote{“Itaipú: Sindicatos fundamentan posturas,” ABC Color (Asunción), 4 de diciembre de 1989, 22.} The accord gave management until 20 December 1989 to comply fully with union demands.

While Efígenio Lisboa defended his use of the wildcat strike against the subcontracted companies and Itaipú Binacional, both the local unions and the national umbrella labor organization, the Central Worker’s Union (C.U.T), with which the official unions had affiliated, outright refused to support Lisboa and his unsanctioned strike.\footnote{“Itaipú: Sindicatos fundamentan posturas,” ABC Color (Asunción), 4 de diciembre de 1989, 22.} The C.U.T had been reorganized from the ashes of the M.I.T, an earlier labor organization. The leadership of the three local and legally recognized labor unions involved in the official negotiations responsible for the Accord of November 30, each denounced the wildcat strike. In Asunción, Silvio Ferreira, the undersecretary for C.U.T, called the action a violation of both the spirit and letter of the labor accords that had only recently been signed by Itaipú Binacional. Furthermore, though denied by Lisboa, C.U.T leadership argued that dam workers already had received 80 percent of the pay and benefits promised to them in the Accord of November 30.\footnote{“Desaprueban postura asumida por la CUT,” ABC Color (Asunción), 5 de diciembre de 1989, 18.}

While maintaining the overall rights of the union and the use of the strike as a bargaining tool against recalcitrant management, C.U.T leadership argued that strikes
should only be carried out when voted on and approved by a majority of union members. In this case, they argued that “a fringe group, such as is the group [led by] Lisboa…is carrying out the strong-arm tactic,” not a majority of workers.\footnote{“CUT se define sobre huelga d Itaipú,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 5 de diciembre de 1989, 21. The Spanish reads: “…un grupo mínimo, como lo es el grupo de Lisboa que está llevando a cabo la medida de fuerza.”} Furthermore, C.U.T leadership warned Lisboa of the unplanned consequences of his actions. Carlos Filizzola, the adjunct Secretary General of C.U.T, argued that “before a strike began it was important first to know the desired result of the action and to know when the cause is won or lost in order not to jeopardize the future of the employees.” In addition, Filizzola admonished Lisboa for not respecting the legal process of negotiation, the signed agreement, and the good faith of all parties involved. Lastly, C.U.T leadership stated that Lisboa had broken his ties with the unions when he had presented himself as a political candidate for the council of the Seccional Colorada of Ciudad del Este, thus renouncing the position of union leader for that of a politician.\footnote{“Sigue conflicto obrero en el Este,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 5 de diciembre de 1989, 21.}

Without support from either the official unions representing dam workers or national labor leaders and organizations, Lisboa and his followers failed to force management back to the bargaining table. In addition, rumors circulated that company officials threatened to dismiss and then replace workers who failed to return immediately to the job. Conempa, for its part, issued a statement that refuted rumors of mass firings of workers. Instead, company officials gave striking workers more time to return to their posts. Regardless, defiant workers under the leadership of Lisboa pledged to carry on the strike indefinitely.

Even without official support, the wildcat strike grew. By the eighth day of the action, company spokesmen from the subcontracted firms of Unicon, Conempa, C.I.E, and Electromon all reported an increase in the number of absentee workers. Official estimates placed the number of striking workers at approximately two thousand. Newspaper accounts highlighted the large numbers of spouses and children of workers carrying signs and placards near the entrance to the dam site, despite the intense heat of summer.\footnote{“CUT se define sobre huelga d Itaipú,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 5 de diciembre de 1989, 21.} Additionally, local buses from nearby Ciudad del Este began to arrive at the company gates in Hernandarias carrying fellow workers and some stunned union officials.
who had been sent to investigate. On Monday evening, sympathetic Catholic Church priests held an outdoor mass in support of striking workers and their families.

As the number of workers increased, they soon outnumbered the small force of company security and military personnel stationed at the entrance to the installation. On Tuesday, the confrontation escalated between striking workers and their families and the security forces of Itaipú Binacional. Striking workers and their wives and children attempted to block the entrance to the dam site and thus to deny access by workers not adhering to the stoppage, while offering them the opportunity to join in the strike. However, a contingent of company security and Paraguayan military personnel had orders to maintain unrestricted access to the dam site. Security forces attempted to disperse the crowd by utilizing the water cannon of the company fire engine, blasting workers and their family members with a torrent of water. This action, however, further angered the protestors, who proceeded to launch a barrage of stones. The ensuing melee resulted in “various injuries, among them women, workers, and soldiers, in addition to the destruction of the windshield on a fire engine owned by Itaipú Binacional.”

In an attempt to bring legitimacy to the strike, Lisboa dispatched Nicolás Russo and Hugo Lovera, his team of legal advisors, to Asunción where they met with Alexis Frutos Vaesken at the Ministry of Labor and Justice (Ministerio de Justicia y Trabajo). Specifically, the lawyers sought official recognition of the executive committee (comisión directiva) headed by Lisboa. In a press conference, Russo declared that the leadership of C.U.T had been blinded by its personal dislike of Lisboa, which limited its ability to defend the interests of the working class. In addition, the leadership for the striking workers accused the C.U.T leadership and the affiliated unions of STE-SAT, STICCAP, and SITRACOH of not having the interests of the majority of workers in mind. Furthermore, Russo stated that both the national and regional union leadership adopted a patronizing attitude toward the dam workers of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms. The criticism seemed particularly stinging considering that the C.U.T, after its legal recognition in October 1989, had emerged in a short time as the

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97 “Desaprueban postura asumida por la CUT,” ABC Color (Asunción), 5 de diciembre de 1989, 18.
vanguard of an independent Paraguayan labor movement, represented some 80 labor unions and peasant organizations, and had established institutional affiliations with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (I.C.F.T.U) and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). 98

In the face of such comments, national C.U.T leadership in Asunción, the regional affiliated Alto Paraná worker’s unions, and the subcontracted firms of Itaipú Binacional refused to recognize the strike. Conempa officials, however, hastily organized a meeting with their own workers. Eng. Miguel Angel Telesca reported that striking workers refused to talk to the company without the presence of the strike leadership and bitterly complained that Conempa officials wanted only “to talk with our coworkers, not with labor leaders that are not even recognized by the Ministry of Labor and Justice (Ministro de Justicia y Trabajo).” 99 Furthermore, Eng. Telesca sought to maintain open channels of communication between the company and its workers and promised not to make any reprisals against strikers.

Relating the scale of the conflict on the Paraguayan side of the project, company officials placed the approximate number of striking workers at one thousand: Conempa workers at 400 (out of 2000), Unicon workers at 280 (of 320), and C.I.E at 350 (of 434). While not reporting figures, the strike also impacted the subcontracting firms of Contecno, Plastisil, and Electromon. Lastly, Eng. Telesca reported that many striking workers from these companies wished to return to work but were too intimidated to do so.

**Marks of Repression: Labor Militancy and Democratic Transition in Paraguay**

By the tenth day of the strike, striking workers and military officials believed that a resolution to the conflict appeared imminent. On the eleventh day of the strike, however, the wives and mothers of the striking workers living in Area 6 called their own press conference in the headquarters of the local Worker’s Party (Partido de Trabajadores, P.T.) to draw attention to the conflict and its resolution. The women appealed for help


99 “Fracasó reunión de negociación,” ABC Color (Asunción), 6 de diciembre de 1989, 18. The Spanish reads: “…conversar con nuestros compañeros de trabajo, no así con los dirigentes sindicales que no están reconocidos por el Ministerio de Justicia y Trabajo.”
from the “decision making powers” (los poderes de decisión) in finding a final solution to the ongoing strike. The spouses of workers argued that management and the media had not properly informed the Paraguayan citizenry of the situation. Wives stated that striking workers, despite reports to the contrary, had not received any of the benefits formalized in the Accord of November 30 signed by management.100

The management of the subcontracted firms, however, refused to negotiate with the strike leadership. In addition, the Labor Board of the Ministry of Justice and Labor in Asunción issued Resolution #2039, pronouncing the illegality of the strike and the illegitimacy of Lisboa as the head of the STICCAP, thus belatedly “de-authorizing” him to lead any actions of the union either past or present.101 Instead, the board recognized the SITRACOH as the legitimate representative of the workers in the construction sector in Alto Paraná state. The frustrated Cayo Lucio Aguayo, the legal head of the STICCAP, openly denounced both the wildcat strike and its leader Efígenio Lisboa.102

Under mounting pressure, the legal advisor for the strike, Gerardo López, admitted that Lisboa, for fear of abduction, had fled from Alto Paraná and further hinted that Lisboa would soon petition for political asylum at the Venezuelan Embassy in Asunción.103 For his part, Lisboa argued that he had been a target of persecution by the military and police officials who employed a long-established repressive tactic to decapitate the head of the labor organization by detaining its leader. Lisboa recounted that “on various occasions they tried to detain me. A detained leader is an annulled leader: he’s no use at all.”104

With no end to the conflict in sight, the Paraguayan government increased the number of uniformed police and military personnel guarding the entrance to the installation. Officially, government officials intended for the deployment of additional troops to prevent future confrontations and further injury of workers and soldiers alike. Regardless, striking workers complained of the heavy presence of Paraguayan troops and

100 “Parientes de huelguistas solicitan colaboración,” ABC Color (Asunción), 7 de diciembre de 1989, 17.
102 “Llevan 10 días de paro trabajadores de Itaipú,” ABC Color (Asunción), 7 de diciembre de 1989, 17.
103 “Llevan 10 días de paro trabajadores de Itaipú,” ABC Color (Asunción), 7 de diciembre de 1989, 17.
104 Óscar Peraza, “Efígenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown.
the agents of the Special Operations Force of the National Police (Fuerzas de Operaciones Especiales de la Policía, F.O.P.E). In the latter case, strikers reported that FOPE agents rode in the buses transporting workers to the dam and prohibited sympathetic dam workers from exiting and joining in the strike.

Fearing police reprisals, striking workers closed the main access road leading into Hernandarias, in the process establishing effective control of the entrance to the worker’s communities and the passage of vehicles to and from the city. Clearly, striking workers understood the importance of preventing military and police control of the worker’s community. Leonicio Bernal, a union official of STICCA, stated that Itaipú Binacional officials threatened residents of the worker’s neighborhoods with permanent disconnection of power to their homes, if found to be aiding strikers by providing electricity for the public address systems of the union.

A dozen days into the strike, the Paraguayan press again reported that both the workers and the military had exhausted their desire to continue with the strike. However, the absence of Efigenio Lisboa as leader of the striking workers had introduced an element of uncertainty to the movement. Indeed, no one seemed to know for certain the actual physical whereabouts of Lisboa, though reports had placed him in hiding outside Asunción. According to a press release from STICCA officials, due to harassment from police and military officials, Lisboa had fled Alto Paraná by bus toward the capital. Word soon reached Lisboa on-route that the authorities had been stationed at the bus terminal in Asunción to sequester him upon his arrival. To evade capture, Lisboa switched to a private car and entered the capital without incidence. On Friday, 8 December, Dr. Nicolás Russo confirmed the rumor that Lisboa had petitioned for and been granted political asylum in Venezuela. Despite fear of detention or death, Lisboa ultimately decided not to go through with his plan to flee Paraguay.

Despite Lisboa’s temporary absence, STICCA leadership pursued a variety of tactics to resolve the conflict. Dr. Russo submitted a letter to the Tribunal de Cuentas

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(Arbitration Tribunal) in which he argued that Labor Board (Dirección de Trabajo), as a dependent body of the Paraguayan Ministry of Labor and Justice, had acted inappropriately when it issued its decision denying Lisboa’s position as leader of the union. STICCA leadership argued that the Ministry of Labor and Justice simply did not have the authority to decide the legitimacy of union leadership. Specifically, Russo drew attention to a conflict of interest on the part of Dr. Santiago Ruben Paredes, who held paid positions as a legal consultant (asesor jurídico) for Itaipú Binacional and as the director of the Labor Board.\(^\text{109}\)

In the extensive document to the Tribunal de Cuentas, Russo drew attention to the historic significance of the November agreement signed between labor and management and acknowledged the struggle against repression that had traditionally limited Paraguayan’s ability to bargain collectively, stating that:

> The mark of injustice and repression that the late dictatorship has left on the workers of the world’s largest hydroelectric dam has dissipated. This fact is witnessed by the strike that dam workers initiated in the month of August of this year to reclaim the labor benefits that Itaipú [Binacional] promised to provide. Now supported by the accord between management (la patronal) and the workers, August 6, 1989 was the culmination of everything.\(^\text{110}\)

Clearly, Paraguayan dam workers were long overdue in claiming their rights and benefits. However, Dr. Russo intended his comments to address the government, corporate, and sanctioned unions’ portrayal of the conflict as superfluous and unnecessary.

Quite to the contrary, STICCA leaders recast the strike as central to the reemergence of larger popular political and social movements in Paraguay. For example, a contingent of striking workers formally renounced their affiliation in the A.N.R, accusing the ruling political party of orpharing the unions by failing to force the companies to comply with the labor accords. In the petition submitted to Colorado Party


\(^{110}\)“Itaipú: Huelgistas rechazaron resolución,” ABC Color (Asunción), 9 de diciembre de 1989, 24. The Spanish reads: “los rastros de injusticia y represión que la dictadura pasada ha dejado en los obreros de la represa más grande del mundo salió a flote. Esto se materializó en la huelga que los trabajadores iniciaron en el mes de agosto del corriente año en reclamo de los beneficios laborales que la Itaipú nunca cumplió. Todo tuvo una culminación el día 6 de agosto de 1989, en base a la firma de un acuerdo entre la patronal y los obreros.”
officials, workers admonished the party for “not presenting a valid alternative that defends the people’s interests” and for their defense “of capitalists and large landowners...of which your leaders work for and form part of a privileged and exploitative social class within our country.”\footnote{111} Issuing a statement from his place of hiding, Lisboa further stated that Colorado Party had done little to protect workers and peasants in Paraguay. Instead of a focus on the transition to democracy, he argued, the Colorados had left the people vulnerable and exposed to the exploitation of bosses and large landowners as a result of their shameless quest for power.

In the meantime, STICCA leadership sought support for their strike from both national and international political and labor organizations. Ceferino Villaba, a member of the main opposition party, the Authentic Liberal Radical Party (Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico, henceforth P.L.R.A) and member of Paraguayan Congress, contacted the union leadership and promised to initiate debate in Congress regarding the claims made by striking workers. Furthermore, the P.L.R.A congressional leadership condemned the hostile acts taken by military officials against striking workers.\footnote{112} In Asunción, the Banco Unión worker’s union issued a statement in solidarity with Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers and criticized the C.U.T leadership for acting more like the government’s bosses (\textit{patrones}), by requiring that protocols be meticulously followed, instead of lending support to “the legitimate struggles of their \textit{compañeros}.”\footnote{113} In addition, the Market 4 Worker’s Union (Sindicato de Trabajadores de Mercado Quatro), the Gastronomic Worker’s Union of Paraguay (Sindicato de Trabajadores Gastronómicos), and the National Worker’s Central (Central Nacional de Trabajadores, C.N.T) voiced their support along with the Transportation Worker’s Union (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores de Transportes Rodoviarios de Foz do Iguaçu) in Foz do Iguaçu. In Brazil, the Socialist Party (P.S.B) and the Worker’s Party (P.T) quickly followed suit and expressed their solidarity with striking workers.\footnote{114}

\footnote{112} “La CUT ofreció mediar en el conflicto de Itaipú,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 12 de diciembre de 1989, 19.
\footnote{114} “Solidaridad dde varios sectores con los huelguistas de Itaipú,” \textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 10 diciembre 1989, 44.
On the international front, the STICCA leadership invited Bohdan Cywinski, the personal representative for Lech Walesa, the prominent leader of the Polish worker’s union Solidarity, to meet with striking Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers. Cywinski had been sent by Walesa to assess the advance of the union movement in Paraguay in the post-Stroessner era. In Asunción, Cywinski met with Dr. Alexis Frutos Vaeeken at the Ministry of Labor and Justice (Ministro de Justicia y Trabajo) where he underscored the importance of just laws (buenas leyes) regulating labor relations in a society in transition to democracy. For his part, Minister Frutos Vaeksen admitted that the Itaipú Binacional strike had drawn into greater focus “the labor question” in Paraguay and the possibility of modernizing the national Labor Code.  

During his visit to Ciudad del Este, Cywinski urged striking Itaipú dam workers not to give up the fight until all of their demands had been met. Drawing parallels to the Polish transition to democracy, Cywinski stated that, “when we were in the dockyards, we too made demands and carried out a strike deemed illegal and from this emerged [the movement] Solidarity…this meeting with striking workers has stirred strong emotions in me.” Cywinski reported that Itaipú dam workers carried on in the strike not so much due to a lack of promised benefits, but rather in protest of the actions of the Labor Board and their decision that deemed Lisboa and the elected leadership of the union as illegal.

Under mounting pressure, the adjunct Secretary General of the C.U.T, Carlos Filizzola, decided to reevaluate the position of the leadership on the matter. Filizzola visited Hernandarias and Ciudad del Este to see the situation first-hand. Officially, the CUT argued that the demands of workers had been met by company officials and remained adamant in its stance that the strike was extraneous and unnecessary. Meanwhile, the Alto Paraná labor leadership of the legal unions affiliated with the C.U.T, including Victor Rojas, Cayo Lucio Aguayo, and Carlos Matiauda, continued to reiterate...

117 “Acompañar la democracia con Buena ley laboral,” ABC Color (Asunción), 12 de diciembre de 1989, 19. The Spanish reads: “también cuando en el astillero estábamos llevando a cabo una huelga han declarado ilegal nuestras reclamaciones y a partir de ahí nació Solidaridad, por lo que el encuentro con los manifestantes me causó una sensación especial.”
the illegality of the strike. Itaipú Binacional, for its part, made additional guarantees and promises, including the announcement of the creation of new corporate agency, the Department of Labor Affairs and Union Relations (Departamento de Asuntos Laborales y Relaciones Sindicales) to manage future conflict.\footnote{According to Rojas, se lograron muchas reivindicaciones,}\textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 10 de diciembre de 1989, 44. By this time, workers had been on strike for 15 consecutive days, the longest and most contentious strike in company history.

On Monday, 11 December, at the meeting of the executive council, the C.U.T leadership in Asunción voted in favor of acting as a mediator in the conflict between Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors and the leadership of the striking workers. Filizzola argued that the C.U.T in no way had disregarded or slighted the strike, or those workers who participated in the event. However, the executive council refused to go so far to legitimize the extreme actions of striking workers, arguing that respect for the independence of their affiliated and legally recognized unions in Alto Paraná had tied their hands in the matter.\footnote{Hoy se resolverá si aceptan mediación,}\textit{ABC Color} (Asunción), 12 de diciembre de 1989, 19. Thus, the C.U.T national leadership in Asunción could not whole-heartedly support striking dam workers, unless the leadership of the affiliated unions altered their fundamental position on the strike and the legitimacy of Lisboa as the leader. However, given the toxicity of the conflict, neither outcome appeared possible. In the meantime, however, the C.U.T offered only to negotiate an immediate end to the strike and a return to work.

\textit{“Luchadores sociales”: The Climax of the 1989 Strike}

In Alto Paraná, striking workers continued to face off against the Paraguayan military and police forces at the main entrance to the dam site in Hernandarias. Workers had camped out in small tents located the margins of the main access highway and union officials had organized makeshift kitchens to feed workers forming the picket line.

Now fifteen days into the work stoppage, Lisboa faced a recalcitrant management and a divided labor movement. Given the seemingly intractable situation, Lisboa returned to Alto Paraná and decided to bring the situation to a head. On 12 December, while military and police personnel guarding the entrance to the dam ate lunch, workers moved...
to form a human barrier and completely block the entrance to the dam site, thus extending the strike to reluctant workers that had previously refused to participate. In response, the Paraguayan military and police mobilized to prevent workers from generalizing the strike. [Figure 6.3] In the resulting confrontation, two Unicon workers, Hermenegildo Benítez and Germán Cardozo Gayoso, were killed and nine others were injured. Popular press depictions of the event portrayed Itaipú Binacional, and its Brazilian leadership, in a negative light. [Figure 6.4]

The press published various competing versions of the events. For example, Gerardo López, attorney for the striking workers, argued that the military attacked the camps of strikers located adjacent to the main road and then fired weapons indiscriminately into the crowd. In the midst of the striking workers at the time, Lisboa asked why Cardozo had “sacrificed his life for Efígenio Lisboa, these bullets were directed at me, but they did not achieve their goal.”121 Presenting the military perspective, Lt. Colonel Jorge Caballero, Commander of the 3rd Border Cavalry Brigade (Destacamento de Frontera No. 3), stated that the shots began when several workers pulled out guns and began to fire at the soldiers.122 In an interview given to Asunción Radio Primero de Marzo shortly after the event, Lt. Colonel Caballero placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Lisboa and his striking workers, stating:

For 15 days we have been attacked by Mr. Lisboa and those who are closest to him. Despite several appeals for understanding and calm—because we have nothing to do with the Itaipú workers demands, although we agree that they are fair—this fellow has resorted to lies, has promoted hatred, has resorted to slander, has inflamed spirits, and has inspired this crowd to violate the law. We knew that there were some individuals who were armed with revolvers and handguns.123

121 “Los polémicos caminos de un sindicalista,” La Pluma (Ciudad del Este), date unknown. The Spanish reads: “…entregó su vida por Efígenio Lisboa, ya que esas balas eran dirigidas a mi persona, pero no le salieron las intenciones.”
123 “Violence between Strikers, Military at Itaipú Dam,” Foreign Bureau Information Service, LAT-89-239, 44.
From his point of view, Lt. Colonel Caballero thought that the military had responded to an open “declaration of war” made by Lisboa. The leadership of the strike, however, denied military reports that workers were armed and dangerous.

In any case, the death of the striking workers threatened a generalization and expansion of the strike to the Brazilian side of the installation and the possibility of additional violence. In response, the state government of Alto Paraná issued a ban on public protests and demonstration for a period of 48 hours. To restore calm, then President General Rodríguez dispatched General Ramón Humberto Garcete, commander of the First Army Division (Primer Cuerpo de Ejército), to Alto Paraná to mediate between the military leadership and workers. On the Brazilian side of the project, the main union of Brazilian dam workers at Itaipú, the STICC-FOZ, sent a telegram to Ney Braga, the Brazilian Director General of Itaipú Binacional, signaling that their members would join the strike in 24 hours, provided that no solution had been reached in the conflict on the Paraguayan side of the project.

In the morning edition of the national daily *ABC Color*, editors warned that the events at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam threatened the incipient democracy of Paraguay. The editor did not blame the military, which they argued had, until the end, acted with measured restraint. Rather, the editor argued that democracy had unleashed new forces, interests, and passions into the political system, each with more and more demands and each calling for instant redress. In Asunción, members of the minority parties in the Senate called an emergency session to investigate and to draft a condemnation of the violence. The long-serving senior senator Domingo Laño, as the main voice of the opposition P.L.R.A in the Senate, called for political, not military, responses to social conflict in the country and argued for a the establishment of a “social pact” (*pacto social*), similar to the one brokered in Brazil, to mediate and prevent future conflict between labor and capital. Furthermore, Laño stated that the peaceful non-military response constituted “a golden rule that we must learn, because without it I believe we

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will continue to repeat situations of this nature and also to jeopardize the peaceful transition to democracy.”  

In the resulting condemnation promulgated by the opposition in the Senate, members publicly condemned the actions of the Paraguayan military and police forces and their role in the deaths of two workers. However, in addition the document called upon the president of the republic, General Rodríguez, to immediately cease repression against other groups of “social activists” (luchadores sociales) in the country that had rallied behind the defense of the interests of the peasant and working classes. Furthermore, the opposition parties called upon the administration to reverse its decision to prohibit the entry into the country of Ananías Maidana and other members of the Paraguayan Communist Party living in exile who wished to represent workers.

Laíno further called for an independent audit of all of the companies subcontracted by Itaipú Binacional, arguing that Unicon, Conempa, and C.I.E had misallocated funds originally intended to provide the required benefits to workers while employed on the construction of the dam. According to Laíno, the lack of the minimum benefit to workers was particularly scandalous because so many high-ranking individuals and families in Paraguay had openly enriched themselves as a result of their connections, in one form or other, to Itaipú Binacional. Striking workers, therefore, had little recourse in what Laíno viewed as an unjust distribution of the benefits and resources flowing through the development project.

Despite denunciations by the political opposition, leading members of the ruling Colorado Party in Asunción rallied in support of General Rodríguez and refused to condemn the actions of the armed forces in the suppression of the strike or the military’s role in the death of two workers. For their part, Juan Roque Galeano and Luís María Argaña, the senior members of the ruling party, issued an official statement in which they blamed “professional agitators taking advantage of an excess of democracy and liberties

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127 “Laíno pidio respuestas políticas y no militares,” ABC Color (Asunción), 13 de diciembre de 1989, 5. The Spanish reads: “…una regla de oro que tenemos que aprender, porque sin ello creo que se van a ir repitiendo situaciones de esta naturaleza y también se irá agravando la transición pacífica hacia la democracia.”


and seeking to destroy our institutions and the peace of the Republic.”

Without naming names, the A.N.R blamed outsiders, what they termed “agents provocateurs,” extraneous to the union structure that sought to take advantage of the current breakdown of the formally good relationship between labor and management at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project. The workers of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms, they further argued, had the least to complain about because they were the best paid and received the most social benefits of any workers in Paraguay. Galeano and Argaña called on the better angels of the Paraguayan citizenry, particularly those citizens belonging to the A.N.R, through an appeal to the national virtues of prudence, discretion, and patriotism. Seeing the role of government as guarantor of “social peace” (paz social), the A.N.R leadership argued that the military had taken the necessary measures in defense of the Republic and its laws and institutions.

Representing the view of the conservative business community, the national umbrella organization of industrialists, known as the Paraguayan Industrial Union (Unión Industrial Paraguaya, U.I.P), not surprisingly parroted the position taken by the A.N.R. In their view, striking workers had denied other workers their right to work as guaranteed in the national Labor Code and the Constitution of Paraguay. The U.I.P argued that, “self-appointed labor leaders had organized into physical form a band of credulous followers with the express purpose of creating conflict, whose only objective is to win political gain.”

For these businessmen, violence begat violence and the outcome of giving in to lesser passions retarded the nation’s nascent transition to democracy.

In Asunción, the two umbrella organizations for workers issued their own condemnations and explanation of events. Julio Etcheverry Espinola, the newly appointed secretary general for the former stronista Paraguayan Worker’s Confederation (Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores, C.P.T), explained that the death of striking workers occurred due to a lack of dialogue between the working class and management (parte empresarial) owing primarily to a lack of experience in dealing with labor conflict.

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130 “ANR no condenó acción de FF.AA. y responsabilizó a ‘agitadores,’” ABC Color (Asunción), 14 de diciembre de 1989, 8. The Spanish reads: “el exceso de democracia y de libertades son desgraciadamente mal aprovechado por personas y agitadores profesionales, que buscan la destrucción de nuestras instituciones y de la paz de la República.”

131 “Comunicado de la UIP,” ABC Color (Asunción), 14 de diciembre de 1989, 9. The Spanish reads: “...autodenominados líderes sindicales que arrean la integridad física de sus credulos seguidores para crear conflictos, cuyo único objetivo es el de ganar espacios políticas…”
Pedro Parra, a member of the executive council of the C.N.T, placed the blame on the president of the republic, arguing that General Rodríguez had reneged on promises to respect human rights and an independent labor movement in the country.132

In light of a potential audit and recriminations, the subcontracting firms continued to defend their own position. For example, the attorney for the firms Conempa and C.I.E., Sebastián González, reiterated the established position of management, stating that, “the motive for the strike remains incomprehensible to us. We had no conflict with them. We only wished for everyone to return to work. There is no problem. If there is an error on our part, we are willing to discuss it. We are open…”133 Defending the heavy-handed response of the Paraguayan military, González reminded observers that the Itaipú Treaty of 1973 entrusted the nation’s armed forces with the security and maintenance of the sovereignty of the hydroelectric dam. Therefore, in González’ interpretation, the military had acted in accordance with its duty to the nation.

Despite the military’s attempt to contain the strike, the death of two striking workers and injury to several others had the unintended effect of generalizing the conflict. Importantly, members of the three worker’s unions that previously had refused to participate in what they deemed an illegal strike now joined their Paraguayan comrades at the barricades. By the next morning, a complete stoppage (paro total) had been implemented on the Paraguayan side of the project. Despite the expanding movement, production of electricity continued as normal and operations on the Brazilian side of the project remained unaffected.

Now encompassing a total of seven thousand members, striking workers organized a mass protest march in Ciudad del Este. The protest flagrantly violated the 48-hour ban on assembly issued by the state government of Alto Paraná. Joining in the 12-kilometer march were members of the Paraguayan Congress and the Commission on Human Rights. Despite a heavy presence of armed soldiers, protestors and marching workers called for justice, a cessation to repression, open dialogue with management, and

133 “Empresarios de Itaipú lamentaron la tragedia,” ABC Color (Asunción), 13 de diciembre de 1989, 10. The Spanish reads: “…nos resulta incomprehensible el motivo de la huelga. No tenemos ningún tipo de problemas con ellos. Queremos que todos vuelvan a trabajar. No hay problema. Si hay algún error de parte nuestra, tenemos toda la voluntud para discutir. Estamos abiertos…”
the removal and punishment of military personnel involved in the deaths of the Unicon employees Gayoso and Benítez.\footnote{Paro total de obreros paraguayos en Itaipú,” ABC Color (Asunción), 14 de diciembre de 1989, 9.}

**Men of the Laws, Men of the Barricades**

Negotiating an end to the strike finally brought representatives of labor, management, and government into direct dialogue with one another for the first time. The Paraguayan director general of Itaipú Binacional, Eng. Fidencio Tardivo, and the government’s envoy General Humberto Garcete agreed to meet with the leadership of the striking workers. However, these corporate and governmental officials refused to recognize Efigenio Lisboa as legal representative of the STICCA worker’s union. In addition, military officials refused to guarantee the safety of or to promise the continued freedom of Lisboa if he appeared at the negotiations. Indeed, the very willingness of Eng. Tardivo and General Garcete to open dialogue hinged upon the absence of Lisboa and his legal advisors from the negotiating table. For their part, STICCA workers refused to enter into negotiations without their director general.

Striking workers elected the members of the negotiating team. Fearing for the safety of Lisboa and failing to garner any guarantee for his safety, striking workers soon agreed to the condition that Lisboa not be present during the meetings. However, the union leadership refused to allow any national labor umbrella organization (C.P.T and C.N.T) to enter into dialogue or to mediate on their behalf. If Lisboa would not be allowed to attend, they argued, then no one else would be allowed to speak for him. To that end, the leadership of the Alto Paraná unions affiliated with the C.U.T, Cayo Lucio Aguayo, Víctor Rojas, and Carlos Matiauda were also barred from participating in the negotiations.\footnote{Se levantó la huelga en Itaipú,” ABC Color (Asunción), 15 diciembre 1989, 9.}

Within a span of seven hours, the two-dozen elected representatives of striking workers presented their demands to the management of Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms (Conempa, Unicon, C.I.E., Flor y Jara, Electromón-Contenco, and Plastizil) and military officials. In the meeting of 14 December, now mediated by the Congressional Commission on Human Rights (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del
Parlamento Nacional), the Director General of Itaipú Binacional, Eng. Tardivo, signaled that he had been authorized to immediately pay any outstanding monies owed to workers and to fully comply with prior agreements signed in the month of August 1989.

Without the presence of the strike leadership, principally Lisboa and the union’s legal advisors, the STICCA negotiating team stood at a disadvantage vis-à-vis management. According to Héctor Guerin, the reporter covering the event for the daily newspaper *ABC Color*, the negotiating team clearly lacked experience and, without Lisboa at their side, suffered from a crisis of confidence as well. According to Guerin, Lisboa was the union’s “confidence man” (*hombre de confianza*) without who the strikers were impotent against the corporations. Furthermore, the absence of legal advisors meant that the team failed to produce the necessary documentation to support the union’s claims against management. As Guerin described the scene, the out-manned, tired, and grieving workers:

> faced off against well-versed men of the laws, in the best of physical and psychological condition. These men had as their objective to show that the workers had no reason for complaint, that [Itaipú Binacional] was not responsible for the deaths [of workers], and, of course, without any imposition, how the workers were the cause of everything.

Without the stewardship of Lisboa and the legal advisors, not surprisingly, worker’s received few concessions from Itaipú Binacional and its subcontractors.

> Containing 27 articles, the final document clearly outlined the grievances of workers toward management. At the end of the negotiations, however, management denied roughly half of the requests and tabled others pending further study. For example, requests for equal benefits, such as meal allowances and equal pay, as those attained by Brazilian workers required further study by company officials. Or in the case of Article 26, management flatly rejected the request that all benefits previously won by Brazilian workers be extended immediately to the Paraguayan workers. In the negotiations, the team representing the STICCA called attention to the plight of what they termed the

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137 “Es factible otro conflicto,” *ABC Color* (Asunción), 17 de diciembre de 1989, 26. The Spanish reads: “…en frente a versados hombres de leyes, en las mejores condiciones físicas y sicológicas. Estos tenían como objetivo demostrar que los obreros no tenían razón, que ellos no eran los responsables de las muertes, y, por supuesto, sin ninguna imposición, como lo hicieron ellos.”
“requisitioned workers” (*trabajadores requisitados*) on the dam project. These temporary, short-term, or contracted workers received lower pay and reduced company benefits than did full employees of the subcontracted firms. Clearly, a labor hierarchy had been established in which some workers received full access to company benefits while other categories of workers received little or no benefits. As Leonicio Bernal, a principal representative of STICCA in the negotiations, optimistically stated, “in an open and free dialogue, we ceded many points in the interests of workers, so that they could receive their benefits.”

While Paraguayan workers coveted the benefits won by counterparts on the Brazilian side of the project and hoped to extend benefits to the so-called requisitioned workers, they sought to deny other groups from indirectly obtaining company benefits on the Paraguayan side of the project, particularly benefits related to social infrastructure of the worker’s communities. For example, Article 8 demanded that Itaipú Binacional prohibit the selling of homes in the worker’s communities to non-workers, specifically singling out potential purchases by the Chinese and Koreans, the merchant class of Ciudad del Este. Striking workers asked why, given the need for housing among workers, company officials had divested themselves of their responsibilities and ownership of the social infrastructure of the worker communities. Instead, workers argued that they should be allowed to purchase these homes after completion of their work on the dam project. Director Tardivo argued to the contrary, responding that former employees must give up their homes upon termination in order to make way for current workers to receive the housing allowance (*ayuda habitacional*). Access to company housing, long a bone of contention between workers and management, again emerged as an issue, albeit this time with prejudicial and racial overtones.

In the end, management made rather minor concessions to labor. As expected, company officials agreed to Article 2 of the document, demanding compliance with any remaining stipulations of the August 6 accords. In addition, Article 13 required company officials to make monthly payments to the families of the two dead workers.

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Furthermore, Article 15 obliged Conempa to pay for the replacement of union sound and electrical equipment destroyed during the strike. More importantly perhaps, workers received a series of guarantees that company officials would not fire workers who had participated in the strike within a period of ninety days (Article 5). In addition, workers called for company officials to respect Law 1172 of the Paraguayan Labor Code that protected the right of union members to choose their own leadership and, as demanded in Article 3, prohibited future interference in the election of the leadership of the STICCA.

Interestingly, the first demand (Article 1) related to protection of the person of Efígenio Lisboa, anointed in the press as “the man who finally stood up to Itaipú,” and other members of the union leadership. After the deaths of two striking workers, the Paraguayan press reported that judicial authorities had issued a warrant for the arrest and detention of leaders Lisboa and Isidoro Fernández and the union attorneys Nicolás Russo and Gerardo López. For their part, judicial officials in Alto Paraná denied the allegations. However, workers continued to believe in the veracity of the press reports. Lisboa, in any case, already had sought shelter and refuge in working class community of Barrio República. In response to the request to intercede on the behalf of Lisboa to judicial authorities, General Garcete promised to discuss the matter with President Rodríguez, but made no promises.

The strike at Itaipú Binacional represented the first challenge to the post-Stroessner regime of General Rodríguez and the continuation of the democratic transition in Paraguay. While a case could be made that workers were the victims of familiar tactics of repression, as witnessed by the death of two employees, when faced with a seemingly irreconcilable confrontation between labor and management, however, General Rodríguez chose to force management to bargain with workers. Once at the table, however, management proved to be a capable adversary and ultimately deflected real redress of dam worker’s grievances. The discourse of the strike wove together both the internal politics of a re-emergent independent labor movement and the polemical figure of the renegade labor leader Efígenio Lisboa.
Efigenio Lisboa: The Man Who Stood Up to Itaipú Binacional

After calm had been restored by the military and the continuation of the democratic transition had been assured, labor officials each offered their own interpretation of events and the motives behind the conflict. Not surprisingly, the recriminations offered by company, government, and some labor officials centered on the controversial figure of Efigenio Lisboa, the man many now celebrated as the first person to finally “stand up to” Itaipú Binacional.142

Engineers provided an interesting point of view that highlighted what they saw as workers’ gullibility and lack of sophistication in the face of the charisma of Lisboa. According to Chief Eng. Ramón Burró of C.I.E., the strike had no reason to exist in the first place, owing to the prior fulfillment of benefit agreements by the subcontracted firms. However, Burró stated that, in his opinion, the striking workers had been tricked by the labor leader Lisboa, a man “that had much appeal among them,” into taking “radical and foolish action.”143

The leadership, specifically Cayo Lucio Aguayo of the officially recognized STICCAP, echoed the sentiments of company engineers. In their release to the press, the official leadership of the unions representing Paraguayan workers at the Itaipú hydroelectric dam project lamented the deaths of the two workers and highlighted the established tension between the renegade union headed by Lisboa and the sanctioned unions. Aguayo denounced:

the radical and incoherent attitude of certain union leaders, that through deception and lies that have carried workers into a situation in which none had wanted to go, and that makes them responsible for everything that happened, in addition to anything that could have happened as a result of the death threats that we received even before the strike.144

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142 “Efigenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), fragment, date unknown.
144 “Actitud radical e incoherente,” ABC Color (Asunción), 13 de diciembre de 1989, 11. The Spanish reads: “...la actitud incoherente y radical de ciertos dirigentes sindicales que con engaños y mentiras llevaron a los obreros a una situación en la cual nadie hubiera querido que se llegara y les hacemos responsables de todo lo sucedido, además de todo lo que pueda suceder por las distintas amenazas de muerte que hemos recibido ya antes de la huelga...”
The legal and state-supported union leadership, which had consistently opposed the strike and decried the illegality of the renegade union STICCA, viewed the violence as a continuation and culmination of the reckless bravado manifest long before the initiation of the strike. Specifically addressing the continuing death threats, Aguayo believed the perpetrators to be the “fanatical followers of that madman Lisboa, who doesn’t limit himself to threatening us only, but also our families as well.”

While never minimizing the antagonisms between the two union structures and leadership, Lisboa vehemently denied that he had been the direct cause of the death of the striking workers. Quite to the contrary, he reminded observers that the wounds derived from high caliber bullets only in the possession of the armed forces, not striking dam workers. Thus, Lisboa blamed the Paraguayan military. Highlighting the cowardly nature of the assault, labor leaders held up the fact that, in the case of the death of the Unicon worker Hermenegildo Benítez, soldiers literally and symbolically had shot the Paraguayan worker in the back.

Lisboa interpreted the firing into the crowd as an attempt to assassinate him and to decapitate the union leadership and a militant labor organization that sought nothing less than the “final liberation of the Paraguayan working-class.” Importantly, Lisboa argued that representatives of business, government, and even some sectors of labor, had joined in a coordinated attack against a resurgent, fortified, and increasingly militant working-class movement in Paraguay. In his analysis, these various sectors represented a block of common interests that supported and responded to the demands of capitalism, not labor. Furthermore, Lisboa argued that this block of interests, aligned against the working class, found it easier to launch personal attacks against him and to sully his image than directly to confront the trade unions.

Lisboa meant for his responses to address critics that accused him of seeking personal glory and fulfillment. First and foremost, Lisboa proudly described himself as

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145 “Denuncian amenaza de muerte,” ABC Color (Asunción), 14 de diciembre de 1989, 9 The Spanish reads: “…seguidores fanáticos de ese loco de Lisboa, que no se limita a amedrentarnos a nosotros sino que también a nuestras familias.”
147 “Efígenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown.
148 “Los polémicos caminos de un sindicalista,” La Pluma (Ciudad del Este), date unknown.
a labor leader who had sought only the vindication of workers. Establishing his pedigree as an independent labor leader, Lisboa stated that before, during, and after the murders of the striking workers he had “the dubious privilege to attract the attention of the corporate and government officials, including the C.U.T.” Specifically, Lisboa criticized the bureaucratic leadership of the C.U.T who, he argued, quickly had abandoned their principles and the interests of the working-class in favor of foreign dollars. In contrast, Lisboa described his political philosophy as democratic socialism that sought to establish a balance between labor and capital and to end all forms of exploitation.

The faction STICCA, he argued, received no funds from political parties or from abroad, but did receive widespread international support (solidaridad). Importantly, freedom from foreign funding and influence and control allowed for complete independence of action by the union. While recognizing the organizational support lent by various political parties, including the Worker’s Party (P.T), Partido Radical Febrista (P.R.F), and the opposition P.L.R.A, Lisboa reiterated, “our union bases actions upon the decision of the majority or unanimity of our members, not from external pressure from political groups.”

According to Lisboa, the renegade strike had more at stake than personal glory or simply recuperating benefits and higher pay for dam workers. Rather, the strike sought to break the labor unions free from the corporatist government structures that had limited the establishment of an independent labor movement and which had long followed the prerogatives of capital. In addition, Lisboa argued that Itaipú Binacional had undue power and influence within the halls of the Ministry of Justice and Labor. Specifically, he accused an attorney (asesor jurídico) in the employ of Itaipú Binacional of delaying the paperwork for and ultimately obstructing approval by the Labor Department officials of his legal leadership of STICCA. In the end, Lisboa both wanted to expose Itaipú

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149 “Efigenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown. The Spanish reads: “...el dudoso privilegio de concitar en su contra la opinion de los sectores empresariales, del gobierno e inclusive de la Central Unitaria de Trabajadores.”

150 “Efigenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown. The Spanish reads: “Nuestro sindicato basa su accionar en al decisión mayoritaria o unanimite de sus asambleas, no en la presión externa de sectores políticas.”

151 “Efigenio Lisboa: el hombre que paró Itaipú,” Hoy Noticias (Asunción), date unknown. Lisboa specifically referred to Article 301 of the Paraguayan Labor Code that required that the Ministry of Justice and Labor must be notified in writing within a period of ten days of any modifications to the leadership of the union.
Binacional to the light of day and to establish a truly independent working-class movement in Paraguay.

The recalcitrant position adopted by Lisboa and his followers forced the hand of the General Rodríguez administration and provoked a military response to end the conflict, a resolution that in the end did not favor labor. Furthermore, as the Paraguayan government moved from negotiation to repression and as a result of the sophisticated “divide and conquer” strategy on the part of company officials, the 1989 wildcat strike both lived through and withered without the confident leadership of Lisboa and his council.

To give thanks for the end of the strike, Paraguayan dam workers embarked upon a pilgrimage to the holy city of Caacupé in order to offer prayers to the Virgin Mary. In his open-air sermon (the men could not all fit inside the basilica), Monseñor Demetrio Aquino, the Bishop of the diocese of Caacupé, remembered and honored the two dam workers who had lost their lives and those injured during the strike. While recognizing their courage, however, the bishop admonished dam workers to respect the National Constitution if they wished to complete the democratic transition. According to the Monseñor, the whole nation—not just workers, peasants, or the marginalized of society—must air grievances in such a way that does not jeopardize a peaceful process of transition to democracy. In an obvious reference to Efigenio Lisboa, Aquino asked that workers not be led or deceived by “men who do not seek the common good of all.”

Perhaps it was fitting that the strike, which began in one “cathedral of concrete and steel,” ended in another.

Conclusion

This chapter has reconstructed the events of the 1987 and 1989 strikes against Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms. In doing so, the chapter highlights the internal union politics, company responses to worker militancy, and the larger national contexts of economic development and transitions to democratic rule. Moreover, both labor relations and military repression at Itaipú Binacional emerged from, or in the case of Paraguay, were directly stimulated by, the transition from military rule. As such, these

strikes should be viewed, not as isolated instances occurring in some faraway borderlands, but rather considered in the context of labor movements and military dictatorship. As a result, the chapter demonstrates that these strikes emerged from the space created by political transition in each country. However, the chapter also shows how local strikes, once begun, complicate and push such national transitions to democratic rule.

These strikes and their outcomes were specific to Paraguay and Brazil, in terms of the constraints on formal labor relations and the specific political regimes and historical moments. While this chapter has privileged a narrative of political activity and historical timing, the related themes of identity (race, class, and gender), agency (both social and political), and place (company towns and borderlands) are also important threads. In the Brazilian example, worker militancy as a form of agency was stopped precisely because company and military officials targeted the families and communities of striking dam workers. The fact that such communities, in this case Vila C, consisted of working class residents who were trapped in a company housing division with only one road in and out, clearly demonstrates how dam workers’ political activity was proscribed by both identity and place. In the Paraguayan example, Efigenio Lisboa’s charisma and strong leadership abilities—the basis for his own brand of masculinity—resonated with other men, who were willing to risk their own lives in a life or death struggle in the name of an independent working class. As an “unstable element,” Lisboa was dangerous precisely because he threatened the fragile status quo and tenuous relations that had been established between the military government and the leadership of the national labor confederations and their regional affiliates and Itaipú Binacional in the borderlands.
Figure 6.1: The Brazilian Army Mobilizes, Foz do Iguaçu, October 1987

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 12:280, 2 de outubro de 1987, 3.
Figure 6.2: The End of the Strike, 2 October 1987

Figure 6.3: Efigenio Lisboa

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 10:431, 23 de novembro de 1990, 2.
Figure 6.4: The Paraguayan Military Firing on Strikers, Hernandarias

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 10:386, 15 de dezembro de 1989, 3.
Figure 6.5: The Military, State, and Corporate Response to Labor Strikes at Itaipú

Source: Nosso Tempo (Foz do Iguaçu), 15 a 21 de decembro de 1989, 2.
CONCLUSION

After the completion of the hydroelectric dam, the Itaipú Binacional Entity sold many of the houses and accompanying land in a number of worker communities, effectively severing formal ties to the neighborhoods that it had created. Additionally, large numbers of workers were laid-off to accommodate the reduced needs of the corporation. As company officials and engineers always had stated, the construction of the dam project proceeded on a fixed schedule, with a firm start and conclusion date. As such, the idea of corporate-induced de-industrialization was built into the plan; for the vast majority of workers, employment at Itaipú was understood to be relatively temporary. While many former workers and their families migrated to other regions, some remained to engage in the booming tourism and commerce on both sides of the border zone.

Beyond the production of electrical power, Itaipú Binacional became an international tourist and cultural attraction during this period, complete with a zoological park of rescued fauna, a natural history museum, and a visitor’s center with souvenir shops on each side of the border. Additionally, the reservoir behind the dam allows for boating, fishing, camping, and other recreational activities. The Brazilian side of the border, in particular, grew into a larger and well-developed tourism complex that includes the internationally renowned Iguaçu Falls, often described as one of the natural wonders of the world. Thus, Itaipú Binacional transcended its basic purpose of providing electricity, becoming an engine of regional economic development and national identity while also reaching into the international, technological, and cultural imagination.

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1 Historians of labor in the United States have become increasingly aware of the role that borders and borderlands have played in the transnational movement of capital and labor, particularly in the case of Mexico and the United States. Jefferson Cowie. *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). The Itaipú Binational Corporation also engaged in a process of creation, transformation, and abandonment of worker communities.

2 Such technological and natural wonder has inspired the American composer Philip Glass to write the symphonic and choral work *Itaipú* (1987) that musically traces the journey of the waters of the Paraná River (the world’s seventh largest by volume) from its source in Brazil to its entry into the Atlantic Ocean. See Philip Glass, composer. *Itaipú/The Canyon.* (Sony Music: June 29, 1993).
Although transcendent, Itaipú Binacional still provides an important share of the actual electricity consumed in both Brazil and Paraguay. The following recent event underscores the very real significance of the project to modern Brazil and Paraguay. At approximately 10pm on Tuesday, 10 November 2009, the lights dimmed for several minutes before going out completely in all of Paraguay and in seven southern states in Brazil. As the resident of Rio de Janeiro, Diego Vaz, stated of the event:

The city is all dark. We can't connect to the internet, it is like living on an island. The only way we can learn anything about the situation is by using mobile phones or calling friends who live abroad. What would be the consequences if this happens during the World Cup or during the Olympics? It is total chaos!3

Shortly before the loss of power, a storm passed across São Paulo state, which generated strong winds, heavy rain, and lightning, and led to the downing of several major power transmission lines. Those crucial transmission lines connected Brazil and Paraguay to the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam. Affecting the major population centers in Brazil and Paraguay, some 46 million people found themselves totally in the dark that night, including all of the residents of Asunción, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, the most populous cities of Paraguay and Brazil, respectively. However, by 3am the following morning, electricity had been restored to all customers throughout the region.

Vaz’ comments regarding the blackout draw attention to the reliance that urban Brazilians have on electricity to run modern technology, not to mention street lighting, elevators, public transportation, refrigerators, and air conditioners in the urban centers. The quote also is interesting in other ways: first, the loss of electricity literally disconnected Brazilians from the rest of the world, in the process technologically relegating the country to the status of an “island;” second, references to the upcoming international sporting events draw attention to the fact that much more is at stake. Brazil has been awarded status as host-nation for the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. Furthermore, many have pegged these events, and their successful

realization, as proof that Brazil has achieved its dream of national greatness. When those events commence, a portion of the power used to light the stadiums, to televise to an international audience, to shuttle spectators on the subway, and so forth, will be generated from the Itaipú Binacional hydroelectric dam, which is located hundreds of miles from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

**Nation Building, State-Society Relations, and Labor History**

This study of “Itaipú” is rooted in the process of nation building that occurred in both Brazil and Paraguay in the setting of borderlands. Soon after taking power in Paraguay in 1954, General Stroessner embarked upon an ambitious program of road building that linked the capital city of Asunción with the furthermost reaches of the country, namely the Chaco in the west and the Paraná River in the east, and facilitated his export-led economic program. Upon his election in 1956, Juscelino Kubitschek began a program of economic development that included increased direct foreign investment, import-substitution programs, founding of the B.N.D.E, improvements in infrastructure, and the relocation of the Brazilian national capital to the interior. This plan also sought stronger relations with Paraguay as a geopolitical counterweight to Argentina.

The democratic government of Brazil viewed its strengthened relationship with Paraguay within the context of state-led *desenvolvimentismo*, while the relationship for the Stroessner military regime offered opportunities for *sultanismo*, or the ability to provide material benefits in return for loyalty.\(^4\) The Paraguayan military utilized the same road-building machinery, trucks, and construction materials for their own personal use and business activities while also utilizing the new international infrastructure such as bridges, roads, and airstrips to traffic arms, contraband, and narcotics.\(^5\) Physical integration between Brazil and Paraguay also linked the economy of eastern Paraguay with that of the Brazilian State of Paraná. In Paraná state, the westerly moving frontier of


\(^5\) Nickson, “Democratisation and Institutionalised Corruption in Paraguay,” 239.
agricultural settlement reached the border in the early 1970s, expanding into the much cheaper land in eastern Paraguay, and brought an estimated 300,000 Brazilian colonists into Paraguay. At its height, Brazilians represented sixty percent of the population of the eastern border region of Paraguay and one in ten residents in all of Paraguay were from Brazil. Getting involved in the contraband trade, many Brazilian colonists smuggled their agricultural products across the border for processing in Brazil.

In this study, I show that the historical period from 1957 to 1975 represents the creation of the Alto Paraná borderlands as a modern political, economic, and social entity, at least from the perspective of the national governments in Rio de Janeiro (and later Brasília) and Asunción, respectively. The region altered demographically as seen in the population changes on both the Brazilian and on the Paraguayan sides of the border. The period witnessed the transformation within a span of less than twenty years of the older local communities, such as Hernandarías and Puerto Franco, that now existed alongside new cities such Puerto Presidente Stroessner, essentially rendering once marginal, sleepy riverside villages into bustling, dynamic border towns.

This study also demonstrates that the governments of Brazil and Paraguay placed a rather arbitrary political boundary between the two nations and cultures that was initially foreign to previous formations of the borderlands and their communities. While the respective military regimes had fixed meanings regarding a variety of categories, including ideas about race, class, and gender, residents of the region continued to circulate within such seemingly concrete boundaries, albeit modified to fit the new reality. Expansion of commercial activities, both legal and illegal, spread to the common man and woman who participated in the contrabando hormiga or “ant smuggling” of basic commodities such as flour, rice, and clothing across the border as such informal economic activities provided some income for the poor. Despite corporate and state conceptions of the border and their need to discipline and control, borderland residents

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7 Nickson, “Brazilian Colonization of the Eastern Border Region,” 128.
had their own popular conceptions and understanding of the border, including how to circumnavigate boundaries to their own advantage.

As seen in this study, family structures, community life, local institutions, and work patterns in the older border communities changed over time as the region rapidly developed. Added to the mix is the construction of the world’s largest hydroelectric dam project, Itaipú Binacional, which in the 1970s drew thousands of migrants to the border zone in search of employment and a better life. Governmental, military, and corporate officials understood the formidable challenge and attempted to plan for the arrival of dam workers primarily, and also sought to accommodate other migrants not directly employed by the company or its subcontractors.

As a result, the military (state) and the corporation (capital) envisioned, planned, and built border communities and dam worker communities specifically, while also attempting to regulate and discipline “peripheral” communities of sex workers and the poor. The military regimes, companies, and even the Catholic Church formulated ideas about how single male workers housed on-site and dam workers with spouses inside their new homes (constructed especially for the nuclear family) should live, including appropriate sexuality and behavior for men, women, and children. As shown, the involvement of the corporation and its specialized staff (“welfare professionals”), including social workers, family and sanitary educators, public health officials, dieticians, physicians, and nurses, in the everyday life of the workers and their families was extensive. Furthermore, these professionals joined with the outreach programs of the Catholic Church in order to promote worker health, safety, and foster harmonious relationships between workers, workers and the state, and workers and the corporation. It remains unclear whether such projects were intended to permanently alter the lives of Itaipú dam workers, or just to stabilize dam worker families in the short-term interest of the company.

Gender ideology represented a central characteristic of the corporation’s attempt to mold proper housewives and model husbands. My study connects notions of scientific household management and childcare to the specific case of dam workers and their
families, in the process showing how corporate knowledge gained in prior dam projects dovetailed with international and national preoccupations and concerns which included ideas about family, gender and sexual relations, and public health. I show how the dam worker family became a central concern of the companies, which attempted to instill proper female domesticity in and male responsibility to the home, thereby linking “women’s work” with “men’s work.” Thus, the dam worker home and family became a part of larger narratives of order, progress, modernity, and national development.

In this study, I demonstrate that dam workers and their spouses not only failed to live up to the ideal, but that some workers, such as the *arriero perô* (bold macho) subverted the idealized qualities of a safe, healthy, loyal and responsible worker (embodied by the “worker-athlete”) based on their own understanding of their masculinity. Moreover, masculinity again appears in the transition to democracy, specifically in the case of Paraguay, as the charismatic Efigenio Lisboa led his followers in a dangerous, and ultimately deadly, confrontation against the remnants of the military regime. In this case, gender constructed the agency of the working class militants, and helps to explain their ultimate failure to force Itaipú Binacional and its subcontracted firms to bow to the demands of labor.

In the latter example, Lisboa challenged formulations of the patriotic worker in his quest to champion the cause of an independent working class in Paraguay. Labor militancy sought to force the creation of a “New Paraguay” in a post-military period; however, Lisboa’s vision differed from that of the military and government officials, business and landowners, and the leadership of the fledgling labor movement. As seen in this study, labor militancy actually pushed the democratic transition, thereby exposing the local fault lines of society and national politics. An analysis of the strikes, in addition, allows for a new understanding of how the regional and bi-national corporate setting shaped workers’ actions, particularly their militancy, and how this setting, defined as a

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9 Preliminary research conducted in Hernandarías, Paraguay in 2002 indicated that male dam workers supported two or even three households (spousal and a *casa chica*, or second household) on their incomes that included multiple sets of offspring. However, it is unclear whether or not this was a recent development or had a longer history.
borderlands, affected state and company responses to challenges from labor that occurred in the periphery of power. In each case, the borderlands took on, at least for a time, a central place in national and even international politics and in debates over the nature of democracy and the role and regulation of labor and capital. Thus, dam workers were central to movements for political change in Brazil and Paraguay.

By examining workers at the grass-roots level and by reconstructing worker agency under repressive political intervention, my study revises the scholarly consensus that workers were dominated by military regimes, particularly for Paraguay. For example, scholars of the Stroessner military period have often characterized Paraguayan workers as having been co-opted and dominated by the regime. This is not to say that workers did not suffer under repressive mechanisms of control, surveillance, and discipline at the hands of military regimes and their police apparatus, which operated quite effectively to limit labor mobilization at Itaipú Binacional. While the corporation lauded its own efforts to house and educate workers and their families, they failed to mention the operation of such agencies as the Assessor General of Security and Information and the various agencies of the secret police of the military regimes that existed within and monitored the workers’ communities. In addition, during construction, access to the work site was strictly controlled, helicopters monitored the area, visitors were not allowed to interview or photograph dam workers, trade union activities were banned, and workers who attempted to organize were transferred or dismissed.

Such efforts, however, did not stop dam workers from organizing on both sides of the border. This study demonstrates that Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers in particular

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10 Paul H. Lewis argued that Stroessner’s ruling Colorado Party closely supervised the country’s labor unions and co-opted the executive board of the largest union, the C.P.T. Paul H. Lewis, Paraguay under Stroessner (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 114. Likewise, Carlos R. Miranda argued that after the failed 1958 general strike the regime successfully intervened in the operation of organized labor and effectively absorbed its operation under the Labor Ministry. Carlos R. Miranda, The Stroessner Era: Authoritarian Rule in Paraguay (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 90-91. Miranda, however, goes further by stating that Stroessner and his regime “enjoyed total control of urban and rural workers from the 1960s onward…” and that labor “was of little significance to the politics of Paraguay.” Miranda, The Stroessner Era, 91.

were an active and central component of the broader labor movement in both Brazil and Paraguay, particularly during the period of democratic transition. Utilizing a variety of methods, dam workers contested the fixed meanings of the border and relied on older networks as well as new networks based on working men and women’s lived experiences that subverted the divisions of corporate and military regimes while fostering a dynamic labor movement within the workers’ communities on both side of the border zone. Itaipú hydroelectric dam workers, for their part, developed a culture of resistance to the respective military regimes and drew upon their years of experience in organizing labor resistance, albeit in a proscribed and clandestine form, that was best suited to the changing political climate.\textsuperscript{12}

During the rule of several leaders of the military junta, the Brazilian transition to democracy occurred over the span of a decade that witnessed the end of the economic “miracle,” the rise of an independent urban labor movement in São Paulo, and a reawakening of civil society.\textsuperscript{13} In Paraguay, General Stroessner maintained military power and his downfall only occurred through a coup within his own ruling Colorado Party. I argue that as these authoritarian regimes began to lose their grip on power, labor unrest increased and became more visible and effective, culminating in the “strike of ten thousand” Itaipú workers in 1987 in Brazil and the contentious 1989 strike of dam workers in Paraguay. In narrating these strikes, my study demonstrates that the military, not to mention governmental and corporate officials, would and did intervene against militant labor organization in order to protect capital. However, the shape that that intervention took varied according to the institutional peculiarities and historical contours of the previous years of military rule and prior periods of democratic rule.

\textsuperscript{12} Paul W. Drake argues that Brazilian and Southern Cone military dictatorships failed to break organized labor in the long term because of the experience and organization that workers obtained during the preceding periods of democratic rule. Paul W. Drake, \textit{Labor Movements and Dictatorships: The Southern Cone in Comparative Perspective}. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

\textsuperscript{13} Maria Helena Moreira Alves observes that the metalworkers of São Paulo formulated a “culture of resistance” through organizational power and civil disobedience against the “culture of fear” of the military regimes. Maria Helena Moreira Alves, “Cultures of Fear, Cultures of Resistance: The New Labor Movement in Brazil,” in Juan E. Corradi, et al., \textit{Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
This study acknowledges the larger economic and political changes during the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, but shows how state projects and resulting gender ideologies impacted local communities, workers’ mobilization and militancy, and transformed relationships between men, and between women and men. While corporate officials worked hard to “remake” the working class families residing in the “company towns” of Itaipú Binacional, they often appeared to take a hands-off approach to other communities, particularly sexual communities outside of their direct control. Sexuality, as has been shown in recent monographs on gender and labor, was central to the ways that men and women negotiated their daily lives. Importantly, the study demonstrates how sexuality is critical to understanding how gender acquires its meaning because sexual difference is shaped “by wider cultural meanings and practices constructed through and against ideas about the sensual body and…about heterosexual, procreative sex.”

Here, sexuality is both an ideology and a concrete practice whose boundaries are created through positions of class, thus allowing for a focus on issues of labor and work.

Work categories at Itaipú Binacional were defined as either male or female, which corresponded to cultural and sexual ideals that underpinned such divisions. Since women were banned from construction jobs, women’s participation in the workforce at Itaipú did not create tensions within these structures, nor represented a “paradox” for corporate officials or policymakers of Brazil and Paraguay. When women did work for the corporation, as nurses, welfare professionals, educators, etc., their roles fit nicely into established categories of appropriate gender roles as caregivers and teachers. I argue that female workers at Itaipú Binacional were seen as necessary to the successful completion of the dam project, provided that women remained within certain parameters (housewives and prostitutes) and locations (the home and zones of tolerance). In my work gender and sexuality are important analytical categories that explore the social and cultural structures that shaped and informed everyday experience.

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If anyone manipulated the “spaces between the fictions and realities of work”\(^{15}\) as defined by the corporation, church, and state officials, it clearly was the sex worker. After collecting their pay each Saturday, male dam workers could chose from a variety of entertainment options, including bars, brothels, and movie and gambling houses. As this study demonstrates, the bar/brothel in the form of the whiskerías in Hernandarias or the boates of Três Lagoas, remained a popular destination for male dam workers and their paycheck. Such places were locations where dam workers (and other men) could not only enjoy heterosexual sex, but could socialize with coworkers.

As historian Lara Putnam, in her monograph *The Company They Kept* (2002), stated about her subjects in Caribbean Costa Rica, “Gender was manufactured locally, from imported parts.”\(^{16}\) My study shows how the erotic landscape of the borderlands changed over time, particularly evident in the rise and fall of the zones of tolerance (either sanctioned or de facto) in Hernandarias and Três Lagoas, but also in the “democratization” of the urban, sexual landscape of Foz do Iguaçu. In each case, male migration and the resulting consumption of sexual services acted as a draw for many young women, who also migrated to the borderlands in search of higher earnings. Like in Putnam’s work, I show the various connections and intersections between migration and sexual commerce and gender, community, and work at Itaipú Binacional.

**Conclusion**

Comparisons may be made between my work and Thomas M. Klubock’s *Contested Communities* (1998). Klubock explores how a militant working-class community was established among Chilean copper miners in an isolated company town whose North American administrators sought to reconfigure the meaning of work and domestic life of the men and women who migrated to the mines in search of employment. Klubock shows how the worker community participated in and contested the process of

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internationalization of capital as well as their role in national political struggles, labor conflict, and social life upon a gendered “field of power.”

My study and the subjects herein occupy a much different “field of power,” which at varying times was defined as a frontier, a border, and lastly (at least as far as this dissertation is concerned) as “binational space.” Regardless of the moniker, the borderlands shaped the contours of the lived experience of men and women who migrated in search of a better life, higher earnings, or for the thrill of adventure. At its core, this dissertation is about migration, the movement of poor and working class people from all points in Brazil and Paraguay to a place I define as Alto Paraná and, discursively, as “Itaipú.”

The Alto Paraná borderlands—known variously as the “land without evil,” “emporium of progress,” the “Promised Land,” a “new El Dorado,” or the “paradise of prostitution”—was the location in which military regimes, companies, and welfare professionals, among others, sought to remake the migrant into a modern, urbane, healthy, happy, and productive citizen of the nation according to their own gendered ideologies of “order and progress” and “national development.” Such ideologies, however, operated in a way that included certain groups (skilled workers, housewives, etc.) and excluded or ignored others (“bold machos,” prostitutes, and the poor) deemed in the way of progress. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, men and women developed their own distinct identities and local communities through which they absorbed, accommodated, defied, or rejected dominant, elite ideologies. By restoring dam workers, prostitutes, shantytown residents, the poor, and rural Paraguayans to the story of “Itaipú,” this study complicates overarching national narratives, but also alters our understanding of the meanings and social impacts of dam construction and development projects more broadly in Latin America.
APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.F.L-C.I.O</td>
<td>American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.N.D.E</td>
<td>Administración Nacional de Electricidad</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.N.R</td>
<td>Asociación Nacional Republicana</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.I.D</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.N.D.E</td>
<td>Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.S</td>
<td>Bienstar Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.B.P.O</td>
<td>Companhia Brasileira de Projetos e Obras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.I.P.A</td>
<td>Comisión Interna de Prevención de Accidentes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.G.T</td>
<td>Central Geral dos Trabalhadores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.N.T</td>
<td>Central Nacional de Trabajadores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.P.T</td>
<td>Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.U.T</td>
<td>Central Unica dos Trabalhadores</td>
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