

A Rhetorical Analysis of the *Campesinos Sin Tierra*  
Struggle for Land Reform in Paraguay

by

John Robert Gillette

B.A., New College, 1992

M.A., New Mexico State University, 1997

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This dissertation was presented

by

John Robert Gillette

It was defended on

October 1, 2004

and approved by

Peter Simonson

Carol Stabile

Silvia Borzutzky

Gordon Mitchell  
Dissertation Director

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John Robert Gillette, PhD

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This dissertation analyzes the rhetorical situation of the peasant-driven land reform struggle in the country of Paraguay. While the term “*Campesinos Sin Tierra*” unites the many different groups participating in the struggle, this work specifically identifies the character of many peasant organizations at local and national levels of participation as well as exploring the attitudes and contributions of individual peasants. The struggle is situated within both historical and rhetorical contexts. The historical importance of land tenure practices is recognized and traced from pre-Columbian civilization to the present. The concept of land as a socio-political instrument as well as an economic resource is explored and related to the present politics of land reform. In addition, the nature of peasant organization, protest strategies, argumentation and success are thoroughly investigated and elucidated in this work. Through on-site research, interviews and translation of newspaper accounts and academic students of Paraguayan peasants, the dissertation develops a thick description of peasant perspectives in the struggle. Particular attention is devoted to unearthing argument strategies and the specific language employed by individual peasant protestors, peasant organizations and other groups. An analysis of these argument strategies constitutes the basis for evaluating the struggle as a new social movement in the context of social movement theory. Finally, the dissertation proposes that “rhetoripolitical” practices structure and constrain the argumentative and

protest strategies employed in the struggle and serve to explain its failure as a new social movement. Rhetoripolitics functions as a hegemonic process of argumentative cooptation that both limits protest innovation and safeguards the social order from social protest activity. Rhetoripolitics is discussed as a historical and cultural phenomenon situated within the cultural milieu of Paraguay and the Paraguayan land reform struggle. The dissertation concludes by suggesting that rhetoripolitics could structure the nature of social struggles in other developing nations and place constraints upon the nature of social protest as it has in the Paraguayan case. Rhetoripolitics may function as an important limit to the ability of nations in the developing world to participate in the new social movement phenomenon.

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## Paraguay and the Land Reform Struggle

### 1.1. Introduction

Paraguay is only one of many small, underdeveloped Latin American nations that have rigorously pursued a policy of intensive natural resource exploitation as a means of economic expansion.<sup>1</sup> This policy, pursued intensely by Paraguay in the last 40 years, enabled unparalleled economic gains in the 1960s, 70s and mid-80s. Growth during this period was high and stable reaching an average growth rate of 8.5% in the 1970s before dipping in the 80s (Borda, *Economía* 72). As the Paraguayan government encouraged landless peasants to populate new colonies in the nation's vast tracts of tropical forest, forestry, agricultural and even cottage industry products bolstered the local economy creating a new sense of economic prosperity throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a nation still dominated by an agrarian economy, Paraguayan society has developed a deep social/structural dependence upon land. Paraguay has followed expansionist land-use policies for nearly 200 years creating a culture that depends upon agriculture and resource extraction. This expansionist policy was intensified and institutionalized in the early 1960s by the Stroessner administration with the formation of the *Instituto del Bienestar Rural* (IBR) whose purpose was to select and distribute land to peasants and to aid newly formed colonies with credit and supplies. In addition to the economic benefit resulting from expansion of the agricultural sector, colonization had the benefit of easing social tension in the Paraguayan society as a whole as the Paraguayan population tripled during the period between 1950 and 1992. The need for space, housing and employment was practically and methodically met by distributing land in the open and unpopulated countryside to anyone willing to work it productively.

<sup>2</sup> Agricultural expansion and colonization policies between 1963-1989 resulted in a growth rate that reached 9% annually during the 1970s, dwarfing that of the United States over the same period. This economic expansion was sustained through the 1980s, a period of crisis for many other Latin American societies. However, the end of agricultural expansion with the exhaustion of state land reserves triggered a severe economic reversal that has mired Paraguay in a worsening fiscal crisis that has seen a decline in real GNP of 4.5% over the last three years, spurring social insecurity and protest.

This economic policy benefited Paraguay socially as well as economically. The physical redistribution of citizens permitted Paraguay to avoid both the urban and rural overcrowding issues experienced throughout Latin America. Paraguay maintained a population growth rate of 2.8% throughout this period and reached a rate of 3.2% in the last decade (GTZ 45). Moving people from urban and rural centers to new colonies in unpopulated regions of the country provided employment, improved the economy, and relieved population pressures.

Nevertheless, the supply of land was not inexhaustible. During the mid-1980s land became scarcer and economic expansion stagnated.<sup>3</sup> With the fall of long-time dictator Alfredo Stroessner in 1989, the Paraguayan government chose to abandon an expansionist/internal economic policy for a neo-liberal position focusing on export and competitive trade.<sup>4</sup> In the period following the Revolution

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<sup>3</sup> The success of this expansion is further complicated by the problems inherent in the agro-exportation model. By 1992, cotton was the primary crop on approximately 533,000 hectares of land, affecting 250,000 farming families who depended on the crop as their sole means of support (U.S. Department of State, *1998 Country Report*). At this time, there were twenty-one cotton processing centers throughout the country. A combination of a glut in cotton prices, the advance of the cotton boll weevil and poor weather devastated the industry. At present, an estimated 100,000 families will be utilizing 200,000 hectares of land supporting only twelve cotton processing centers as peasants have attempted to diversify their production without much success (“Algodón” 28). This golden period of new land and new economic opportunities brought new dependencies as well: cotton and soybeans account today for 65% of all exports (U.S. Department of State, *2001 Country Report*).

<sup>4</sup> Alfredo Stroessner Matiauda rose through the ranks of the Paraguayan Armed Forces to become president of the Colorado party (the ruling party in the country since 1947), the Chief of the armed forces and the President of the republic. Stroessner has the distinction of having ruled Paraguay longer than any other person in the country’s history, ruling from 1954 to 1989. Maintaining his power by means of coercion, repression and even torture, he was encouraged and supported with US military and financial backing from 1954 to 1977. Stroessner’s long rule has left an imprint upon the country that some would call indelible. In the twelve years since the fall of the dictatorship, the democratic reform of the society has been obstructed by the resistance of the social, political, and economic legacy of the *Stroneato*. As the late Vice-president of the Republic stated during one of the many chaotic political episodes in Paraguay’s painful transition from dictatorship to democracy, “*Todos somos hijos de Stroessner*” [We are all sons of Stroessner].



of 1989, the economy has only managed to achieve marginal gains.<sup>5</sup> Peasants who had come to expect the government to provide land and technical support to their children had to divide their own parcels amongst their sons. The standard of living quickly fell as rural farmers divided their ten hectare plots among four to five sons creating farms that were too small to support a single family. The problem of *minifundia*, long known throughout Latin America, had finally come home to roost in Paraguay.

Statistics on rural poverty following the expansionary period are horrific. A 1992 census revealed an endemic level of poverty in the country with a concentration in the rural peasant population. The study showed that 64% of all Paraguayans live in poverty for a total of 2,885,379 people.<sup>6</sup> 72% of all rural families live in poverty; more than 1,500,000 Paraguayan peasants do not have access to the basic necessities such as food, clean water, medicine and (most importantly) work each day. In the most remote areas the problem is at its worst. Poverty in the department of *Alto Paraná* reaches a level of 90% of all families (Fogel, *Pobreza* 22-23).

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<sup>5</sup> After the Revolution of 1989, the Paraguayan economy improved dramatically owing to corrections in governmental monetary policy. Paraguay saw its Gross National Product rise from 4,028 billion dollars in 1989 to 6,250 billion dollars in 1991 as a result of these policy changes. However, the economy stagnated between 1991-93 before growing again to 9,612 billion dollars in 1996. Nevertheless, as the agrarian crisis mounted the country has suffered a terrible reversal of economic fortune that has seen its GNP shrink back to 1994 levels at 7.854 billion dollars in 2000 with an additional shrinkage of 3% in the year 2001 (U.S. Department of State, *2002 Country Report*). Calculating for inflation, the Paraguayan economy has grown only negligibly between 1989 and 2001.

<sup>6</sup> A more neutral study conducted in 1992 by the International Development Bank concluded that 66.3% of all Paraguayans live in poverty. Poverty is established at a rate of 129,129 Gs./month or \$71.74 each month. This amounts to a mere \$860.86/year. Indigence was defined by the study at 76.200 Gs./month or \$42.33/month or \$508/year (Borda, *Economía y Pobreza en Paraguay* 682). My personal observations of rural life would place the *average* rural income at \$500/year. This compliments my belief, based on direct observation (while living in the rural countryside from 1993 to 1995) that approximately 95% of all rural families live in indigence, lacking adequate food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

As rural communities felt the material impact of this change in economic policy and began to recognize it as the source of their economic difficulties, it quickly became apparent that the scarcity of land was a lie; there were, in fact, millions of hectares of unproductive land throughout the country.

An agricultural census in 1991 revealed that 9.7 million hectares of land or more than 41% of all arable land in the country was in the hands of 351 individuals alone. Small farms consisting of no more than five hectares comprise 40% of all farms in the country, 78.7% of all farms are less than 20 hectares in size and farms of more than 1000 hectares represent more than 80% of the arable land in the country and the situation is actually getting worse (Fogel, *Pobreza* 39).<sup>7</sup>

Dionisio Borda, a Paraguayan sociologist, points out that poverty is widespread in Paraguay and has intensified in recent years (Borda, “*Pobreza*” 681). While the poverty itself is visible, its growth is not. Borda’s analysis of the Paraguayan economy bears this out. The percentage of the population living in poverty has grown with the emerging national crisis following the fall of cotton prices and the bank failures of 1995. While earlier studies were inconclusive (the 1992 *Facultad de Economía* UNA-BID and the 1994 *Banco Mundial* studies were widely at variance), only recently have realistic estimations of Paraguayan poverty emerged. The private consulting firm, *Consultores Asociados*, combined studies performed by the *Banco Central del Paraguay*, the *Ministerio de Hacienda*, the *Secretaría Técnica de Planificación*, the United Nations, *Salud*

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<sup>7</sup> Since 1981 Paraguay’s GINI index (which is the measure of resource distribution within a population with 0 as equitable and 1 as completely inequitable) for land had increased from 0.921 in 1981 to 0.934 in 1991 (Fogel, *Pobreza* 39).

*Pública*, The World Health Organization and data compiled from newspaper accounts in 2002 to produce the first, truly substantive estimation of Paraguayan poverty (“Grave Deterioro” 14). According to the study, the Paraguayan poverty rate for economically active persons over the age of 18 has increased from a whopping 441,000 or 45% in 1998 to an estimated 1,008,000, or 60% of this population (“Grave Deterioro” 14). One can imagine that these figures must be even worse for the non-working population.

Statistics further demonstrate that Paraguayans living in poverty endure increasingly more difficult conditions. Borda’s study revealed that during the same period (1981-1991) indigence increased from 37.5% to 47.1%, unemployment increased from 6.7% to 12% and sub-employment reached a total of 48% of workers during the same period (Borda, “*Pobreza*” 682). Borda identifies the major factors contributing to poverty in Paraguay as unequal distribution of land,<sup>8</sup> the lack of access to capital by the poor,<sup>9</sup> and grossly unequal income distribution (684).<sup>10</sup>

The concentration of economic resources in the hands of a few elite members of society is the direct result of Paraguay’s colonial past. At first, huge tracts of land were granted by Spain to Spanish nobles, then the entire territory was given to the Jesuits, then back to nobles, then (after the Revolution of

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<sup>8</sup> While UNA/BID figures show that only 2.9% of peasants have no access to land, that figure is distorted by the exclusion of Paraguayan youth under the age of 20 who work their family’s diminishing plots without land of their own.

<sup>9</sup> 60% (167,378 of 307,221) of all agricultural enterprises in the country possess spraying equipment essential for agricultural production. Only 7.4% of all small agricultural enterprises (less than 20 hectares) receive finance assistance from the *Crédito Agrícola de Habilitación* (Agricultural Credit Assistance) through MAG, *El Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería*, or the Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>10</sup> In 1992 the wealthiest 10% of the population controlled 42% of all wealth in the country while the poorest 10% controlled less than 1% (Borda, “*Pobreza*” 684).

Independence) to the Paraguayan government which sold off large tracts of that land to what were in effect, Paraguayan nobles. There is a pervasive, implicit attitude about land in Paraguay that is best expressed by the British philosopher Henry George: “In all times, among all people, the possession of land is the base of aristocracy, the foundation of great fortunes, the source of power” (George 5).<sup>11</sup>

Outraged peasants farmers, known as *campesinos*,<sup>12</sup> protested the economic change and began demanding land from the government and the appropriation of these large land-holdings, known as *latifundia*.<sup>13</sup> Marches of protest, confrontations with government authorities, squatting and land occupation developed as tactics for achieving the articulated needs of what became known as the *Movimiento de los Campesinos Sin Tierra*. Comprised of various unaffiliated groups throughout the country, the first large scale protests began in 1994 with the first *bloqueo de la ruta*, a tactic imported from the Brazilian land reform struggle

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<sup>11</sup> An International Development Bank study in 1992 revealed the imbalance in economic benefits accruing from this land ownership: the 10% of wealthiest families control 42% of all earnings while the 10% of poorest families account for less than 1% of all earnings in the country (Sauma 11).

<sup>12</sup> The term *campesino* has a complex meaning in Paraguayan society. It is normally translated from the Spanish to mean “rural peasant” with negative connotations including “ignorant” and “backward.” While the term does bear these connotations in Paraguayan society, it carries additional, positive articulations to terms such as “honest to a fault,” “simple and pure,” and “innately Paraguayan.” These positive terms rest on the recognition that the Paraguayan *campesino* and his labor has exclusively contributed to the Republic’s economic and military welfare throughout its entire history. The concept of the honest, hardworking *campesino* was celebrated during the Stroessner regime, and the *campesino*’s sacrifices during the War of the Triple Alliance (1863-1870) and the Chaco War (1932-1935) were used to model ideal citizenship.

<sup>13</sup> *Latifundia* find their origin the original colonial land grants known as *hacendados*. The term *Hacendados* refers to the extensive cattle ranches or *Haciendas*. These ranches were the most prized property in early Paraguayan history. The extensive forest cover made it difficult and expensive to clear land for cattle ranching. The original *haciendas* were located in the few natural *pampas* or grassy plains in Paraguay. Peasant land grants were excluded from these productive natural areas (Fogel, *Luchas* 20).

whereby *campesinos* block the highway and resist police and military efforts to remove them.

These tactics have resulted in little success, if success was measured in terms of the goals articulated by the *campesinos* themselves: technical support, guaranteed agricultural commodity prices, and land. Yet, the struggle has resulted in a great deal of publicity and discussion of the issues surrounding the question of land in the Paraguayan society. There are early signs that the *campesinos* have become aware of the “real” effect of their protest strategies. The exigence arising from the failure of more confrontational strategies has resulted in a series of non-confrontational, media events that seek to create public argument over the issue of land as opposed to securing that goal by means of the protest itself. This activity may constitute an awareness of the role of *campesinos* as players with an emerging socio-political identity in the country.

The *Campesinos Sin Tierra* struggle is poised in a moment of transition: after nearly forty years of life under a dictatorship and brutal repression under Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda from 1954 to 1989, the adoption of a democratic system of governance and freedom of the press has created a unique opportunity for social struggle and a new sense of possibility in Paraguay. A rhetorical analysis of the conditions for this transition, the constitution of socio-political identity and the definition of stakes in the public/national argument are worthwhile. Such an analysis would clarify the stakes of the struggle, shed light on the roles of discourse and argument in social struggles, and, eventually, reveal productive tensions between the rhetoric of social movement theory generated

from the experience of industrialized nations and the practices utilized in Paraguayan social struggles. This chapter lays out the rationale for this project, previews its challenges, sets forth an organizational overview, and discusses the nature of peasant struggles in Paraguay, social movement theory, the terrain of struggle, the impact of peasant culture and its resistance to traditional land tenure practices. Finally, I will lay out specific questions guiding this inquiry as well as a methodology and the organization of the work as a whole.

## **1.2. Project Overview**

Small rural farmers known as *campesinos* began a march upon *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*, the Paraguayan capital on February 14, 2001, demanding land reform, technical support for their agricultural initiatives and a fixed price for the year's cotton crop. This march culminated in a protest rally in front of the Congressional building on March 26 ("Gobierno" 1). The *campesinos* hoped to gather small farmers and other groups (such as labor unions) as they marched across the countryside. The media reported that 50,000 participants joined in that protest. The real number was probably closer to 80,000 as the news media habitually under-report protest numbers in the country. The number of participants in this protest exceeded 1% of the entire Paraguayan population or 4.3% of the total working population of the country. This is the equivalent of more than 12 million Americans marching in protest in a single event.

While there are many social struggles in Paraguay, the land reform struggle has the broadest appeal, the largest potential membership, and the longest

tenure of any such struggle in the country.<sup>14</sup> In a country that after a thirty-year period of economic expansion has averaged a negative growth rate over the last ten years, there is a general discontent among the population. The land reform struggle is the most centrist of the disaffected groups because “land” is the symbolic and economic foundation of the nation. Amongst many differing needs within diverse constituencies in Paraguay, each Paraguayan citizen shares an economic and social relationship to the land and its function in the society as a result of a protean colonial system with a long history of structuring Paraguayan history, culture and society.

Since the foundation of the Paraguayan Republic in 1814, the colonization of unexploited territory has been the engine driving this nation’s economy and society. This expansion functioned to spur the society in the same fashion that westward expansion across the North American continent both drove and shaped the American economy and social character. The difference, however, lies in Paraguay’s continued expansion up to the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nearly 200 years of expansion predicated upon the dispensation of land to peasants ended in the 1990s. Furthermore, the government’s decision to choose a new economic path after the overthrow of long-time dictator Alfredo Stroessner exacerbated the

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to the numerous *campesino* groups, there are other groups such as CNT (*Coordinación Nacional de Trabajadores*), the nation’s largest trade union, educators, government employees in specific agencies, indigenous groups, the homeless, and other groups. During a month-long visit in August of 2000, I personally attended 4 peasant protests, 3 protest marches by workers in two different government ministries, 2 teachers protests (including a highway blockade), 1 protest by homeless persons, 1 protest march by the opposition party calling for the renunciation of the president and, finally, the semi-permanent protest of 6 different peasant groups occupying the *La Plaza de la Independencia* in front of the congressional building. All of these protests occurred in the capital; many more occurred in smaller cities throughout the country.

social strife created by the government's refusal or inability to supply land for colonization.

This has resulted in an intensification of land reform protest activity and the self-recognition of peasants as social/political agents within the Paraguayan society as the social and economic pressures driving land reform have continued to intensify. These trends are evident from the increase in number and the progressively nuanced nature of protest strategies that peasants have employed to popularize their cause. Highway closures and land seizures have become popular new methods of resistance in addition to more traditional forms of resistance such as mass marches and protest rallies. Since 1989, the overall incidence of protest strategies has accelerated to the point that the concept of private property has broken down and large landowners have resorted to hiring private defense forces to expel squatters. Political pressure from wealthy agro-industrialists has pushed an "agrarian code" bill to the Paraguayan Senate to force the government to directly confront this lawless practice.

The Paraguayan land reform struggle lacks formal organization, funding, networking, collaboration amongst its members, or even a fixed set of demands. This protest activity differs substantially from the leader-driven, organized groups that have operated as liaisons between government organizations and the public interest. An analysis of this social struggle promises to shed new light on social movement theory as the gaps between different types of protest struggles elucidate insights previously obscured.



The Paraguayan land reform struggle merits scholarly attention in the field of rhetoric because it presents a unique case that calls into question accepted notions of social movement structure as well as social movement success. In addition, an examination of social movements in the developing world can contribute to a broader understanding of social movements as global phenomena. The bulk of the rhetoric of social movement studies has been limited to the industrialized world.<sup>15</sup> Operative definitions, data, and theoretical perspectives have all been predicated upon examples drawn from social phenomena in the industrialized world and industrialized contexts. This focus upon the social struggles in industrialized nations has neglected broader and more provocative social struggles in the developing world. This is an oversight that social movement scholars can begin to correct by accounting for social struggles in the developing world and in such nations as Paraguay.

In this dissertation, I will investigate and describe the Paraguayan land reform struggle in order to provide a detailed example of a social movement in the developing world. I will discuss the structure and practices of the land reform struggle within the context of Paraguay's long history. I will elucidate the rhetoric of the land reform struggle as a public argument in the context of the cultural and economic history of the nation, tracing out the cultural significance of "land" as a term in public argumentation. These public arguments will be drawn from several sources including individual interviews, newspaper accounts, and

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<sup>15</sup> However, it should be noted that a huge body of movement scholarship from other disciplines (such as sociology and anthropology) exists. Some of these works will serve as resources for a rhetorical approach to the subject, such as Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez's *Política Cultural y Cultural Political: Una Nueva Mirada sobre los Movimientos Sociales Latinoamericanos*.

scholarly studies.<sup>16</sup> Finally, I will discuss the nature of success in terms of this struggle and discuss prospects for the future.

### 1.3. The Nature of Social Struggles in Paraguay

February of 2001 saw a number of popular social struggles in Paraguay. On February 7, medium and large-scale farmers initiated a *tractorazo* or “strike with a tractor.” Asking for reductions in energy costs (including gasoline) and mandated rises in market crop prices, these farmers closed *Ruta Cuatro* with their farm equipment to draw attention to their cause. Their successful blockage of commercial traffic on that route gained immediate government interest and resulted in government mediated negotiations of the farmers’ demands.

On February 24, labor unions protested against taxes, governmental corruption, and in favor of raising the minimum wage. Protesters gathered in the park in front of the congressional building and shouted slogans until the municipal police attacked them, wounding dozens and dispersing the crowd. The minimum wage in the country is 350,000 Guaraníes or one hundred dollars each month.

Although these protests shared similar qualities, the peasant land reform struggle differs substantially from similar labor union and medium scale farmer

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<sup>16</sup> I will be using interview material drawn from three separate periods. First, I will draw upon my experience of daily work and life in the seven peasant communities where I served as an agricultural extension agent and volunteer with the Peace Corps (Sept 1993 – Dec 1995). Secondly, I will draw upon the formal interviews I conducted in Asunción, Villaricca, and the Colonia Independencia from June 9, 2000 to August 15, 2000. Thirdly, I will draw upon interviews I conducted from August 2, 2002 to August 28, 2002 in Asunción, the *Asentamiento Capi'ibary* (*San Pedro de Ycuamandiju*), the squatting communities of *Yvyturuzu* (in Guaira) as well as peasants from all over the country who were interviewed at the headquarters of MCNOC in Asunción. Finally, I will draw upon such interviews as have been recorded in the news media and in scholarly work.

protests in Paraguay. This difference is constituted by the unique history of the land reform struggle and the way that history has shaped the terrain of struggle and constrained the public argument.

Many social and political actors in Paraguay have organized themselves in the form of public protests.<sup>17</sup> These protests typically demand economic or political concessions. In the case of the February 2001 *tractorazo*, the protestors' efforts produced a tangible economic and political result: government mediated talks created a mandated minimum price for cotton. Mid-sized farmers who depend upon cotton and soybeans as cash crops will greatly benefit from the increased profits. However, the mid-sized farmer has still not proven that he has a political voice in the country, and it will once again be necessary to block the highways when conditions worsen in order to gain political attention. Demands made by the *gremiales* or labor unions have had the same short-term effects in the past, such as increases in the minimum wage and promises of a reform of or a stricter enforcement of the labor code.

These short-term, immediate gains are the tangible goals of every Paraguayan social struggle save one: the land reform struggle. While it is true that the Paraguayan land reform struggle does have short-term goals including the expropriation of large, unproductive land holdings, and governmental support of small-scale agriculture in the form of technical training, the real terrain of struggle lies in the achievement of cultural recognition for rural Paraguayans that results in social, political and economic re-structuring of the society. This far reaching, albeit implicit, goal of the land reform struggle may utilize the very same

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<sup>17</sup> Appendix A offers a complete list of social organizations referred to in this work.

techniques of public demonstration, and occupation of public or private properties used by other protest groups. The difference, however, lies in the rhetorical orientation of the protest activity. Peasant protests possess the unique quality of appealing to the public rather than the state itself for reform. Peasant protests also utilize a different set of socio-linguistic argument platforms in the construction of land reform appeals than other groups do with their simple displays of force and threats of strike.

Another unique aspect of the land reform struggle is that it engages a truly national social issue. It has mobilized large numbers of Paraguayans in all sectors of society to speak out. Land occupations, highway road blocks, and mass protests are watched, discussed and even supported by many Paraguayans who are not self-identified as *campesinos*. In the eyes of the public, the struggle is not so much for land as it is for recognition. Urban Paraguayans, aware of if not directly involved in the political and economic disenfranchisement of the *campesinos*, regard the peasant struggle for the “right” to land as a struggle over identity. A massively corrupt, self-serving and unrepresentative Paraguayan government that has alienated nearly all sectors of Paraguayan society has historically ignored the identification of social interest groups save only to appeal to them or play them against one another at election time. The land reform struggle represents the first self-identification of a social group in the country that has demanded recognition by the government and has called for the fulfillment of the social contract as laid out in the Paraguayan constitution. In this sense then, the land reform struggle represents not only a collection of special interest groups who stand to benefit

from land redistribution but the struggle shares a wider public desire for the reformation of the state, the resolution of the deeply rooted social inequality that pervades the country, and calls for a redefinition of citizenship and identity in Paraguayan society.

At present, land reform demands have been successful only insofar as they have spurred public debate and have required the Paraguayan government to enter into that public debate. In reality, very little land has actually been occupied or offered to *campesino* groups in order to address their demands. Alain Touraine's interest in public opinion as the target of New Social Movements indicates that there may be wide similarities between such movements and the land reform struggles in Paraguay.

#### **1.4. Social Movement Theory**

In some respects, a rhetorical approach to understanding the Paraguayan struggle for land reform elucidates important aspects of the protest activity that can be difficult to see from other theoretical vantage points. However, the Paraguayan land reform struggle also strains traditional categories of rhetorical analysis. This struggle may or may not actually constitute a New Social Movement, or it may contain elements of both struggles and movements. Furthermore, the status of these struggles as an incipient movement implicates work in many areas of social movement scholarship. While this case has broad implications, I will focus upon the field of rhetoric and, more specifically, rhetorical social movement theory.

Much of social movement theory, including the rhetorical approach to social movement theory, has focused upon the success or failure of protest activity. The effectiveness of public protest has been questioned as early as 1915 by Robert Michels who argued that even apparently successful social movements ultimately fail because they are unable to change the underlying social structure they challenge. He calls this phenomenon The Iron Law of Oligarchy. (Michels 389-90)<sup>18</sup>

Leland M. Griffin's landmark 1952 study, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," reflects the central concern with the issue of success and lays out the basic criteria for the study of social movements:

1. Men have become dissatisfied with some aspect of their environment; 2. they desire change—social, economic, political, religious, intellectual, or otherwise—and desiring change, they make efforts to alter their environment; 3. eventually, their efforts result in some degree of success or failure; the desired change is, or is not, effected and we may say that the historical movement has come to its termination. (Griffin 184)

It is evident that Griffin's definition applies to the Paraguayan case. To use Griffin's categories we would describe the movement in the following manner.

1. This rural peasant struggle is a result of a profound dissatisfaction with the harsh economic conditions of rural life in Paraguay.

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<sup>18</sup> The Iron Law of Oligarchy has also been termed the Michelsian Dilemma. The nature of this dilemma is as follows: it is an historical fact that oligarchies, or small groups of economically privileged members who dominate a society, tend to dominate even modern political systems. In order to change the political and social system, one must change oligarchies, which amounts to nothing more than substituting one small, ruling elite for another. Michels argues that no system of governance can be truly representative and that the Iron Law of Oligarchy demands the substitution of oligarchies rather than a true change in the system of governance. The Michelsian dilemma logically follows from the Law: any minority group that seeks to "overthrow" an oligarchy can only become an oligarchy in itself (Michels 389-90). (See also Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society* 492-563).

2. Peasants wish to implement political and economic change through their protest efforts. Politically, they demand the Paraguayan government directly address the issue of land by appropriating, dividing and re-distributing the unproductive *latifundias* throughout the country. This would result in immediate economic change, as peasants would be able to earn a living by farming their own plots of land.

This application of Griffin's template to the Paraguayan land reform struggle presents a problem as reflected in the third element of this reconstruction.

3. No change has yet occurred. A very small number of concessions have been made to the peasants and some land occupations have been titled to peasant squatters.

From this perspective, the struggle must be considered a failure because what Griffin calls "the desired change" has not occurred as no real economic benefit has resulted from protest activities to alleviate the severe economic problems plaguing the residents of rural Paraguay.

The issue of success is of particular importance to the rhetorical approach because rhetoric has traditionally set forth clear criteria for evaluation of persuasive speech acts. Griffin argues that social movements are evaluated in two ways: achievement of ends and the use of rhetoric to achieve those ends (Griffin 187).<sup>19</sup> Failure to properly employ rhetoric is thus implicitly argued to cause the failure of the movement as a whole. Success equals the effective employment of

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<sup>19</sup> Herbert W. Simons, Elizabeth W. Mechling, and Howard N. Scheier offer a "Rhetorical Determinism Table" that proposes a scheme for relating rhetorical methods and social ends in their article, "The Functions of Human Communication in Mobilizing for Action from the Bottom Up: The Rhetoric of Social Movements."

persuasive techniques that enable the achievement of ends. The persistence of the Paraguayan struggle is an apparent failure based on the achievement of goals. No real change has been effected and yet the struggle continues and even grows.

The Paraguayan land reform struggle is also challenged by Griffin's description of the organizational composition of social movements. Griffin affirms the central role of rhetoric as a means to achieve desired ends and describes the key rhetorical mechanism for the task as the "orator." In this view, social movements work through public arguments conducted between "aggressor orators" or "defendant rhetoricians" and an assumed public audience (Griffin 185-6).

The Paraguayan case defies this rhetorical model, as *campesino* groups are composed of largely illiterate, ignorant peasants who do not even speak the same language as the public (defined as private citizens and politicians).<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the struggle lacks the cohesion necessary for a representative leadership that functions to voice the social struggle's positions. Consisting sometimes of no more than squatting or public disturbances motivated as much by alcohol, indolence or boredom as by principle, it is difficult to describe this

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<sup>20</sup> Paraguay has been defined as a bilingual nation. The native *Guaraní* language and the colonizer's Spanish have co-existed since the conquest. However, to say that Paraguayans are bilingual is not completely true. According to the 1982 National Census 40.13% of all Paraguayans spoke only *Guaraní*, 48.63% spoke *Guaraní* and Spanish and 6.49% spoke only Spanish. Among rural residents of the country 60.25% spoke only *Guaraní*, 31.21% both languages and 1.64% only spoke Spanish. Among urban residents 15.5% spoke only *Guaraní*, 70.82% both languages and 12.67% spoke only Spanish (Melia, *El Guaraní* 496). Belying these numbers is the prejudice toward the use of *Guaraní* as a public instrument of communication. The average urban Paraguayan views the use of *Guaraní* as an instrument of public communication as a sign of ignorance, thus diminishing the average rural Paraguayan's ability to enter into fair, public debate.



struggle as a social cause led by orators who can be judged by the quality of the rhetoric they use to persuade an audience.

In fact, the Paraguayan land reform struggle could better be described as an anti-movement if Griffin's criteria are applied. Rather than being led by orators who employ rhetoric to achieve the ends of the movement, the Paraguayan land reform struggle is prone to subversion, often led or motivated by outsiders who work against the interest of the struggle.

In a case in the district of *Yhu* in the department of *Caaguazú*, twenty-five to thirty peasants invaded and occupied land belonging to Pedro Anciaux in 1996. This land occupation was not motivated by any struggle for leadership. It was led by two Senators and the head of the armed forces in an attempt to push legislation through the Paraguayan Senate. Peasant witnesses identified Antonio Alvarez Alvarenga and Silvio Ovelar as the senators who opened the gates to the property and exhorted the peasants to enter and to take land for themselves. General Lino Oviedo was quoted as encouraging the group, "*Que atropellen la propiedad. Le voy a hacer legal!*" [Go ahead. Invade the property. Don't worry about it. I'll make it legal!] ("Responsabilizan al Gobierno" 12).

An earlier incident more perversely demonstrates the nature of this manipulation. In 1994, Colorado party officials rounded up twenty peasants and brought them to Asunción, the capital. Once there, the peasants were told that there were some bad men who did not want the peasants and veterans of the Chaco War to receive land. This information was provided with a great deal of *parapiti* or cane liquor. After several hours of prodding, the drunken peasants

were taken to the congressional building where opposition lawmakers (*Liberales*) were staging a protest. The *Liberales* constituted, at that time, the only legitimate opposition to the Colorado party and offered the best hope of supporting the land reform struggle's agenda. The *Colorados* pointed out the group as the "bad men." The peasants attacked them, beating them until they dispersed. The *Colorados* disappeared and the police soon arrived to jail the *campesinos*. The *campesinos* were released the next day without being charged because they are viewed as simple people not responsible for their actions. When such cases are evaluated with Griffin's analytical framework, the Paraguayan land reform struggle would likely be judged a failure.

Another approach to the study of social movements is resource mobilization theory. This theory suggests that actors in social movements engage in cost-benefit analyses to determine their actions and that social movements function to organize and mobilize social and political resources to achieve desired outcomes (Zald 58). Resource mobilization not only presumes that actors are rational but that the key feature of social movements is not argumentative but logistical. The essential feature of social movements from this perspective is their organizational dynamic and the efficiency of its structure or pattern of behavior (Buechler 218). Social movements that are efficiently structured are able to mobilize political and social forces to achieve goals are deemed successful.

The Paraguayan land reform struggle would be deemed a failed or a failing movement by resource mobilization theory. There is no pattern to the behavior of land reform agitators. Some invade and take land (whether they are a

peasant in need of land or not).<sup>21</sup> Others march in protests wholly ignorant of the goals of the protest, knowing only that the government is bad that that their friends are also marching to oppose the *sinvergüenzas* who are the cause of all that is wrong in the country. Not all of these social actors would define themselves as members of the struggle or, if they did, they might claim to belong to completely different organizations or offer completely different reasons for their protest activity.<sup>22</sup>

There is no single organization that comprises the land reform struggle in Paraguay; this makes a study of the organizational dynamic of the struggle very difficult. Most protests are spontaneous land seizures or organized political chicanery that often work against the goals of the land reform struggle. The manipulation of gullible, illiterate peasants in order to benefit the political machinations of elite interests in the country is the standard rather than the exception.

An editorial column in the September 22, 1996 issue of the newspaper *ABC color* describes a situation in which peasant farmers who seek to mobilize political resources often inadvertently become a political resource themselves and actually contribute to the problems they seek to solve:

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<sup>21</sup> Personal interview with *campesinos*, Mario Espínola of *Santo Domingo* and Christino Barua of *Nino Ykua*.

<sup>22</sup> Christino Barua, a peasant farmer squatting land in the department of Guairá, reported that an un-named friend had invited him to join a peasant land invasion in that department. Explaining that he already had land, his friend was reported to have said, “*Tranquilo pa! Ndaipori problema, oi yvy ve la mitã oihaixa!*” [No problem! There is enough land for everybody!] (Barua, Personal Interview). Mario Espínola, another peasant in the area, pointed out that many “*sinvergüenza*” [lazy peasants] or “*mondaha*” [thieves] join peasant land grabs in order to obtain land even though they 1) already own land and 2) have the sole intention of selling the land rather than cultivating it (Espínola, Personal Interview).

In this country, equal to the endemic “land problem” in Brazil, it has not only caused violence, terror and loss of human life in the delirious spree of property invasions, the logging of forests, destruction of public property, the theft of cattle and removal of people by the forces of public order, the burning of farm building and imprisonments but has also politicized in the extreme, to the point that not a few politicians and labor leaders have sought political advantage by inciting groups of peasants to the violent seizure of land.

This very same irrational and perverse populism that has brought insecurity to rural property and production, resulting in a loss of investment, unemployment, an increase in rural poverty as recorded in the Agrarian Code that is being studied by Congress. This problem will continue to damage the political work of agrarian distribution and of legislation designed to intervene as well as the state planning that has reached an unparalleled level of development and that, satisfied with itself, will transform the rural countryside into an immense political tool. (Reforma Agraria 8)

Finally, resource mobilization of the poor, who by definition have few resources to call upon, is most difficult. Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward have theorized that social movements representing the poor often have no recourse but to simply withdraw from cooperation with the social order (Piven and Cloward 24). Such withdrawal amounts to a refusal to participate in the normal function of a system that depends upon their participation to function adequately. However, the ability of the poor to elicit a response from institutional authorities is limited by the ability of those authorities to mobilize political and economic resources against the movement. Incarceration, murder, intimidation, and unequal access to representation in a court of law are only a few of the insurmountable resource deficiencies suffered by the Paraguayan peasant.

Traditional social movement theories would judge the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a dismal failure and would even question its definition as a

social movement. I argue that The Paraguayan land reform struggle is a complex social phenomenon situated in a previously unexplored geographical, cultural and linguistic context. The application of social movement theory to the Paraguayan case as a social movement challenges that theory and calls for significant theoretical innovation. The remainder of this section will examine social movement theory's ability to support study of the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a new social movement and as a rhetorical phenomenon.

Bronislaw and Barbara Myszal point to both the failure of traditional social movement theory to address the rhetorical construction of identity and the "new" types of social movements that appeared in the mid to late 1970s as the impetus for new social movement theory. Characterized by Myszal and Myszal as strongly neo-Marxist, new social movement theory cast off presuppositions about the class and political nature of actors. Furthermore, these new social movements appeared not to be leader driven or to be centered around well-defined social conflicts such as class or race.

Alberto Melucci suggests that this "new" type of social movement can be broadly defined as "a form of collective action based on solidarity, carrying on a conflict [which] breaks the limits of the system in which the actions occurs" (Melucci, "Symbolic" 795).<sup>23</sup> He further refines this definition by including the movement's ability to "activate" the conflictual nature of inherent social dualisms in society as a criterion (Melucci, "Symbolic" 796-97). This activation differs

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<sup>23</sup> While this definition may appear excessively broad, Melucci intends it purely as a counterpoint to the excessive empiricism represented in resource mobilization theory. Recognizing the potential problem here, he also qualifies his definition by noting that it is merely an "analytical tool" and not "a metaphysical truth." He goes on to refine this definition later in the same article (Melucci, "Symbolic" 795).

from traditional movements by 1) moving the field of struggle from institutional politics to culture and 2) by achieving a structural complexity which must be understood as both multivalent (demonstrating both synchronic and diachronic socio-political orientations) and profound, constituting a fundamental challenge to the dominance of the socio-political norms and a means of expressing and experiencing “a different way of naming the world” (Melucci, “Symbolic” 801).

Claus Offe offers an even broader definition of new social movements. He suggests that such movements be defined as “the ‘modern’ critique of further modernization [within a society, a] ... critique based on major segments of the educated new middle class and carried out by the characteristic model of unconventional, informal, and class-unspecific mode of action of this class” (Offe 856). The Paraguayan land reform struggle may provide a challenge to Offe’s location of the impetus of such struggles in the empowerment of the middle-class.

While new social movements have received a great deal of treatment and analysis as phenomena situated within socio-political structures, other work focuses more upon the means of struggle including the language and argumentative tactics employed by these movements. These approaches comprise the rhetoric of movement studies scholarship that seeks to investigate the rhetorical complexity that the new social movements exhibit. Richard B. Gregg challenged the simple orator/audience paradigm in his 1971 article “The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest” in which he argued that orators in a social movement may choose to address themselves as well as the “establishment” (Gregg 74). Gregg pointed out that Griffin’s simple persuasory model did not

account for the often-ineffective nature of the rhetorical arguments used to supposedly persuade an audience. Since unreasonable demands and offensive language all operate contrary to the function of such rhetoric to persuade, Gregg pointed out that something more than simple oratory was occurring in protest rhetoric. Noting that protesters failed to “make the kinds of appeals which might gain them a receptive audience,” Gregg reasoned that protesters sometimes communicate with/amongst themselves and not with the government institutions identified as the audience (Gregg74).

Gregg suggests that movement theory developed during the 50s and 60s modeled social movement rhetoric as a “rational discourse” in which actors operate within “moral ideals” and under principles of “rational discussion” (Gregg 89). He contrasts this rational discourse with what he calls the “ego function” of rhetorical discourse, a practice of self-affirmation gained through the rhetorical act (Gregg 74). Gregg concludes that rhetorical theories of movement studies that fail to account for both the irrationality of actors and the ego-function of the rhetorical act are omitting an important aspect of social movement phenomena.

More recently, Arturo Escobar has argued from a sociological perspective that movement theory must account for the “self-understanding” of social actors whose actions are defined by their self-knowledge (Escobar, “Culture” 63). Furthermore, this self-understanding does not exist as broad, categorical identities such as class or race that Myszal and Myszal warn are misleading. Escobar points out that the context for this self knowledge exists within a “submerged social and cultural background” that even the actors themselves might not be

aware of (73). Finally, he points out that the particular form of any given social movement, its impetus and cultural locus are all highly contingent upon local and micro-social factors defining the struggle as a mixture of political, social, economic and cultural issues whose boundaries and arguments are often unclear (Escobar, "Culture" 82).

Touraine has identified movements whose self-reflective character has produced new protest strategies and has argued that such movements form a unique form of social protest as new social movements. New social movements are social movements whose object of struggle is this protean mass of political, social, economic and cultural issues identified by Escobar. Touraine calls this "historical action" or "historicity," the means of control of the production of society rather than the resolution of specific grievances or social injustices (Touraine, *Voice* 145).

The work of scholars like Touraine and Escobar is representative of new social movement analysis that originated in the work of European scholars in the 1980s and quickly spread. The European approach to studying social movements as complicated phenomena has challenged traditional approaches to scholarship and both broadened and invigorated social movement research. No longer tied to an antiquated rhetorical model nor limited by crude definition of social movement (only well-defined, social movements addressing broad social issues) new social movement theory offers expanded opportunities to analyze protest activity.

A key aspect of Touraine and Escobar's theorization of the new social movement phenomenon is that while the social movement engages society-wide



issues of political, social, economic and cultural import, movement struggle is experienced by individuals whose challenge to society is not wholly circumscribed by the movement organization; rather, this resistance begins at the level of everyday life with individuals. That experience exists as residual or emerging practice that can form a point for collective action through the assertion of identity. This results in what Escobar calls the “subjective mapping of experience” in the “broader socioeconomic and cultural context” (Escobar, “Culture” 77).

Touraine explains this articulation between the micro-social knowledge of the individual and the macro-social function of the movement as moving from the self-conception of the social actor as an individual within a mass of de-socialized plebs who is incapable of social action to a member of a collective body as a social movement (Touraine, *Voice* 146). The awareness of a collective body’s capacity for asserting a cultural “counter model” of society constitutes the “historicity” of a movement and can only be achieved when individual actors within the movement make the connection between their local struggles and the contest for control of historicity. Touraine refers to a movement’s awareness of the struggle for historicity as the “highest level of meaning” within a movement (Touraine, *Return* 104).

As Touraine sees it, the function of new social movements is to collectively organize social actors in order to seize the ability to produce and juridicate the political, social, economic and cultural issues that manifest

themselves at the local level. This definition of new social movement paves the way for a more lucid analysis of the Paraguayan land reform struggle.

Arturo Escobar identifies status quo historicity in Latin America as “the Hegemonic discourse [that has] transformed the system thorough which identities were defined” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). Marginal social groups in Latin America have never had the ability to define themselves. What we now have is a vast landscape of identities—“the ‘illiterate,’ the ‘landless peasants,’ ‘women bypassed by development,’ the ‘hungry and malnourished,’ ‘those belonging to the informal sector,’ ‘urban marginals,’ and so forth” out of which the category of landless peasant is only one of a host of “identity groups” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). Touraine’s highest level of meaning for the Paraguayan land reform struggle would constitute a challenge to that status quo historicity and the assertion of rural peasants as an identity group *in their own terms*.

At present, the exigence of the land reform struggle in Paraguay is the economic turmoil generated by the transition from one economic mode of production (the internal, agrarian market) to another (the competitive agro-exportation market). Escobar argues that this change is not merely a change in economic policy but a cultural change as well. Economies possess a “cultural content” and “every new technology inaugurates a ritual—a way of doing things, of seeing the world, and of organizing the social field” (Escobar, “Culture” 69).

The land reform struggle does not merely seek to gain land for landless peasants but seeks to counter the mechanism of social control that dictate the historicity of the society. An application of the new social movement paradigm to

the Paraguayan land reform struggle reveals a complex struggle that is sometimes successful and sometimes misguided. The social struggle's challenge to the emerging hegemony of the free market represented by Paraguay's entry into MERCOSUR and global capitalism is an implicit challenge to the government's authority to make such decisions at all.<sup>24</sup> Touraine's observation regarding the differences between new and older forms of social protest has particular relevance here:

In the olden days, social actors protested against the traditions, conventions, forms of repression and privileges that stood in the way of their recognition. Today they protest with the same vigor, but their protest is directed against the apparatuses, discourses, and invocations of external dangers that stand in the way of the affirmations of their projects, the definition of their own objectives, and their direct engagement in the conflicts, debates, and negotiations they wish for. (Touraine, *Return* 18)

The Paraguayan land reform struggle's inability to gain land concessions from the Paraguayan government does not constitute a failure of the struggle by any means. In fact, the persistence of the struggle in light of its inability to gain these concessions indicates that the struggle is not predicated upon this goal. While the ultimate goal of the Paraguayan land reform struggle may lie in achieving the "highest level of meaning" of this particular struggle in Touraine's view, the practical goals of the peasant members of the struggle may be to find any means of expression at all. The very ability of peasants to construct acts of

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<sup>24</sup> MERCOSUR is an acronym for *Mercado Común de Sur* or Southern Common Market. MERCOSUR is a free trade pact amongst Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay with limited tariff agreements. MERCOSUR is an attempt by the two largest economies in South America (Brazil and Argentina) to gain a competitive advantage within their own geographic region. This union was spurred and inspired by other agreements such as ALALC, *la Asociación Latinoamericana de Libre Comercio* of 1961 and more recent developments such as the Andean Pact of 1969, the European Union 1993 and The North American Free Trade Agreement. Paraguay and Uruguay were invited to join the pact between Argentina and Brazil as natural geographic partners whose small economies fail to threaten their larger neighbors.

protest and to draw attention to their plight represent significant accomplishments in their own right.

There exists no public sphere that solicits and protects public expression in Paraguay. This strongly contrasts with the experience of Western societies in which social organizations, including protest organizations, function as a public sphere that “sluice” everyday concerns into agenda items ripe for institutional revolution (Habermas 367). According to Habermas, modern democratic societies develop a public sphere as the normal result of social evolution. However, Habermas’ ideal conception of social development often sharply contrasts with reality. In their analysis of the social movements of the disempowered, Piven and Cloward describe the inability of the poor to thoroughly conceptualize protest activity let alone to articulate it:

Thus the class struggles that might otherwise be inevitable in sharply unequal societies ordinarily do not seem either possible or right from the perspective of those who live within the structure of belief and ritual fashioned by those societies. People whose only possible recourse in struggle is to defy the beliefs and rituals laid down by their rulers ordinarily do not. (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 2)

In the absence of a Habermasean public sphere, the poor and disenfranchised have resorted to alternative models for public expression and argument. Saul Alinsky in his book, *Reveille for Radicals*, suggests that the apparent weakness of disenfranchised social groups can be effectively employed as a strategy in its own right. He suggests that reaction by the opposition may be more important than action taken by protestors in support of their arguments (Alinsky 150). If Piven and Cloward are right in arguing that the poor have no

real resources with which to negotiate with authorities, via some variation on Habermas' public sphere, then Alinsky's idea may shed some light on the few successful Paraguayan peasant protests that have operated from a position of weakness.

Robert Cathcart describes such a strategy as a dialectical engagement (Cathcart 87). Disagreeing with what he perceived as overly simplistic definitions of social movements, Cathcart suggests that the subject of social movement studies is not merely the social movement itself but a phenomenon resulting from the "dialectical tension growing out of a moral conflict" within society (Cathcart 87). To talk about a social movement without discussing its context and its interlocutors is to misunderstand the phenomenon entirely. Operating under Cathcart's definition of a social movement, the Paraguayan land reform struggle ought to be defined, discussed and judged effective or ineffective in terms of its ability to use arguments in order to resolve the very social tensions that created it. Thus, the success of the Paraguayan land reform struggle may, ultimately, lie in its very non-existence; its widespread presence today may be the greatest indication of its failure.

My analysis of this Paraguayan land reform struggle will apply new social movement theory in order to examine the complex and multiple forces shaping social actors, the competing arguments, the socio-economic and political contexts shaping the arguments and the terrain for social confrontation. I will challenge the notion that the movement has failed while examining the real results of the struggle and its future outlook.

### 1.5. The Terrain of Struggle

As I noted earlier, the Paraguayan society had operated under an expansionist policy that, when halted in the 1990s, created economic and social chaos. The Paraguayan economy began to shrink during the decade and the disparities between the culture of the capital city (where just under half of the population lives) and the rural countryside (where the other half of the population lives) became evident. These cultural differences are marked by many apparent differences, for example: language, cultural practices, and physical appearance.<sup>25</sup> The primary material cause of such differences is a scarcity of land for young peasants whose families have only enough land to support themselves.

Peasant appeals for land, investment in rural development, rural credit, and subsidized crop prices are issues that reveal the existence of two distinct cultures in Paraguay. The nation is united by a system of land tenure and marked by the domination of the rural culture by the European/modern culture, with the resultant economic dependence of the European/modern culture upon the productive capacity of the rural culture.<sup>26</sup> This cultural bifurcation has its origins

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<sup>25</sup> The Paraguayan peasant is culturally and socio-economically differentiated from the Paraguayan city-dweller by a number of traits. He or she prefers to speak *Guaraní* because his or her Spanish is poor. He or she seeks out conversation heedless of social status, speaking with beggars as well as with ministers. He or she drinks *terrerre* with relish and with great frequency throughout the day. He or she prefers to wear *zapatu* or sandals as he or she lives for the most part *py nandí* or barefoot in the countryside at home. The popular expression, “*Xe py nandí*,” “I am barefoot” identifies one as an average peasant. Finally, the Paraguayan peasant has much higher cheekbones, is shorter and has darker skin than the average city-dweller. This is a result of the much greater percentage of native genetic traits in the countryside.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that this rural culture is by no means a pre-Columbian paradise of traditional social and linguistic practices that have endured for thousands years and remain presently inscribed in a romantic struggle with the forces of colonialism and modernism. Very little of the pre-Columbian culture remains. What exists today is a nearly entirely colonized rural

in the system of land tenure, European colonization and the subsequent influence of each in the subsequent development of modern Paraguayan society. Thus, while responding to the economic pressure of a failed/failing social system resulting in the material pressures of a failing economy and a scarcity of available sources of income, the real engine for the Paraguayan land reform struggle is the contest for cultural and economic hegemony via the regulating mechanism of land tenure.

Bartomeu Melia points out the entrenched nature of the colonial past and its bearing upon present-day Paraguayan culture:

*Por el modo como se procesó la nación paraguaya su cultura es necesariamente colonial...Lo que puede llegar a ser trágico y constituirse en amenaza permanente contra el ser nacional es la ideologización unilateral del proceso, silenciando el desequilibrio económico dentro de la nación y el antagonismo de las clases social que precisamente el sistema colonial vino a instaurar y que mantiene hasta hoy. Si el Paraguay no entiende su proceso colonial, está en peligro de volver a ser colonizado siempre de nuevo. (Melia 71-2)*

[As for the mode of Paraguayan national development, the culture is necessarily colonial...What could become tragic and develop into a permanent menace to the national well-being is the unilateral ideology of the process that disguises economic inequality in the nation and the antagonism of the social classes that precisely this colonial system created and maintains today. If Paraguay doesn't come to grips with its colonial roots, it is in danger of falling into a state of constant re-colonization].

Melia traces the seat of colonialism to the cultural ideology of "civilization" which resides in the city and identifies the rural countryside as its opposite and preferred site of "re-colonization." This thematic is popularly understood in

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culture that has been inscribed into the ideology of the urban/modern world as its opposite. I will discuss in detail the inability of the Paraguayan peasant to access any non-colonized social space from which to construct a position of resistance and how that struggle, in the form of public argumentation, identifies, employs and is subverted by cultural values in that struggle.

Paraguay as expressed early in Paraguayan history by Domingo Faustino

Sarmiento in his early post-colonial novel, *Facundo*.

*Se ven a un mismo tiempo dos civilizaciones distintas en un mismo suelo: un naciente, que sin conocimiento de lo que tiene sobre su cabeza remedando los esfuerzos ingenuos y populares de la Edad Media; otra, que sin cuidarse de lo que tiene a sus pies intenta realizar los ultimos resultados de la civilización Europea. El siglo XIX y el siglo XII viven juntos; el uno dentro de las ciudades, el otro en las campañas... (se trata) de la lucha entre la civilización Europea y la barbarie indigena, entre la inteligencia y la material, lucha imponente en America. (Sarmiento 51)*<sup>27</sup>

[One sees two distinct civilizations in the same land: one born with no idea of what it has above its head copying the popular, native force of the Middle Ages; the other that without care for its origins attempts to copy the latest cultural innovations of the European civilization. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the 12<sup>th</sup> Century exist side-by-side; the first in the cities and the other in the countryside... (this describes) the struggle between the European civilization and native barbarism, between mind and matter, the enduring American struggle].

In stark contrast to the thinking of Melia is the critique of the urban/rural dichotomy offered by scholars such as Nestor Canclini and Arturo Escobar who have pointed out the tendency to refer to traditional or modern cultures as “pure objects” of study (Canclini 4). Canclini points out that Latin American cultures exist as “multitemporal heterogeneities” rather than as the crude opposition of “traditional” and “modern” cultures (Escobar, “Culture” 47). The representation of the past is, for Canclini, a “cultural ritualization,” a politicized patrimony, or a

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<sup>27</sup> Melia identifies Sarmiento as a major impetus for modernization in Paraguay, asserting that “*La influencia del las ideas sarmientianianas, y de Sarmiento mismo, en la educación Paraguaya de la postguerra, es un hecho indiscutible*” (Melia, “Nación” 481). Sarmiento developed his modernist ideology as the president of Argentina during the War of the Triple Alliance. These modernizing ideas represented in *Facundo* were further propagated by such figures as José Segundo Decoud who founded the *Universidad Nacional de Asunción* (UNA) upon the principles espoused by Sarmiento. Melia argues that Sarmiento and Decoud mark a split in Paraguayan culture caused by and reproduced today as a neo-colonialist practice 4 (Melia, *Una Nación*, 73-4).



form of political theater that functions to ground and justify an existing socio-political system as a culmination of historical forces (Canclini 109).

Thus, while Melia's work can be interpreted as a reduction of history to an ontological certainty, it is more productive to regard Melia and Sarmiento as media for "cultural ritualization." That is to say that, the division of Paraguayan culture into urban and rural cultures is not necessarily a historical fact but the product of national folklore become fact. In the Paraguayan case, the social elites have purposely propagated the myth of the independent, enduring *mestizo* peasant who sacrifices all for the State in the course of constructing a rhetoric to justify the many military regimes that have ruled the country since the beginning of the Chaco War.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, I don't want to suggest that the study of the Paraguayan land reform struggle will constitute a simple demarcation between a "traditional" peasant culture and a colonizing modern culture. I am careful to avoid the academic tendency that Arturo Escobar warns of, the tendency to reduce the "Third World" to a geographic/cultural region resisting modernity with a "reservoir of 'traditions'" (Escobar, *Encountering* 215). Nevertheless, Paraguay is a unique case in Latin America. Escobar and many others have noted the erosion of urban/rural or traditional/modern paradigms, which have been problematized by urban migration from the rural countryside. Movement from the rural countryside has shifted 60%-70% of the total population of most Latin American nations to urban areas, relegating rural social practices to mere folklore for the vast majority of those populations. Those who live in most of Latin

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<sup>28</sup> The rhetorical construction of the peasant identity is further treated in Chapter 2.

America today are urban immigrants who, long ago, lost their “natural” relations with their own rural culture. Paraguay has resisted this geographic and cultural shift as more than half of Paraguay’s population remains rural to the present day (Escobar, *Encountering* 229).

While I will argue that a deep socio-economic and cultural divide separates rural and urban Paraguayan societies, it is important to note that this division is not an a-historical a priori but social product. The site of the Paraguayan land reform struggle is not a bleak terrain marked by modern and pre-modern boundaries but a series of shifting hybridized ideologies constantly re-inscribed in the feudal model adopted from the colonial practices that originally inscribed the division between urban and rural Paraguayan societies. The struggle for land in Paraguay is in reality an ideological struggle for national identity, for social and political power and the power to write or re-write the long colonial history and present ideology that pits one cultures, essentially two different peoples with a shared history, against each other.

### **1.6. Land, Peasant Culture, and Resistance**

Since the end of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870, Peasants have fought for and received concessions of land from the Paraguayan government. This process has intensified in recent history, particularly during the *Stroneato*. Years of IBR short-tenure land distribution, technical support and agricultural credit created a culture of dependence. According to Carlos Pastore, 50% of all

peasant families live as squatters upon land which they have no legal right to work upon (Pastore 75).<sup>29</sup>

The pressure to take land and its obvious abundance have created in combination with more than one hundred years of government land grants have created a discourse defining the culture of the Paraguayan peasant and his or her relationship to the land. The average number of children in a rural family is 6.5. Young boys are expected to marry and begin their own families on their own land upon reaching the age of 18. A man without land cannot marry. The State granted land to their grandfathers; their fathers were granted land by their own fathers who took land and petitioned the government for recognition of those holdings. Today's young men expect to receive their heritage as well, land. Independence, wealth, and social standing as well as the basic means of production are all identified with land ownership. In fact, veterans of the Chaco War were granted plots of land above all other material rewards in recognition of their service to "La Patria."

Carlos Fernandez Gadea affirms the importance of land to the rural peasant:

*Quiero señalar que el tema de TIERRA, es fundamental en la política agraria de mi país [Paraguay]. No podemos olvidar que existe una VERDADERA LEGION DE SIN TIERRAS, que deambulan por el campo en espera de que el ESTADO pueda hacer efectiva su promesa constitucional, de atender las necesidades primarias de estos sujetos agrarios, de esta población campesina, que es elemento dinámico de la producción agraria. Mientras no hay soluciones a estos problemas, no existirá tranquilidad, no habrá nuevas inversiones, y los niveles productivos como en muchos rubros seguirán bajando por todos estos problemas. (Gadea 1)*

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<sup>29</sup> Pastore's work is based upon data from the early 1970s.

[I want to note that the theme of LAND is fundamental to agrarian politics in my country (Paraguay). We cannot forget that there exists a literal legion of landless poor who wander the countryside in the hope that the STATE will make good on its constitutional promise to attend the primary needs of these agro-citizens who are such a dynamic element in agricultural production. Without solutions to these problems there is no peace and will be no new investments or production level as many crops will continue to deteriorate losing their values as a result of these problems].

This articulation has been made possible through the complex relationship between culture and economy and institutionalized in the form of the IBR.

Economies possess a “cultural content” as Escobar expresses it. “Every new technology inaugurates a ritual—a way of doing things, of seeing the world, and of organizing the social field” (Escobar, “Culture” 69). The period of agro-economic expansion produced a unique rural cultural in Paraguay, a culture dependent on and organized around “land.”

Peasant demands for land reform have been spurred by the end of the *colono* system and they are constrained by a nostalgia for the socio-linguistic, political, and cultural models of the *Stroneato*, the golden age of Paraguayan expansion. Calls for land reform, even though they would appear to challenge a system of social injustice, are always already inscribed in a complex ideology of domination. Peasant demands have been structured by governmental agencies and through the peasant discourse itself that reproduces the social and economic model provided by the IBR. These structures form the Paraguayan peasant identity within the national ideological narrative.

Peasants have been defined in the national narrative as barbarous and childlike according to the state and the public. Protest strategy and peasant

demands can be interpreted as a desire to improve the peasant's self-image, and the peasant's desire to meet the ideal presented by *la mitã Paragua'ý pe* or the citizens of Asunción, the capital. Within the national narrative, the native Paraguayan (defined as the non-Europeanized, *mestizo*) is ignorant and childlike, in need of his *patrón* or local boss.<sup>30</sup> The native Paraguayan is seen as virtuous, honest to a fault, and simple. This attitude is captured in the expression, “*Que Paraguayo!*” This is blurted out to indicate that someone has made a mistake out of pure ignorance. Peasants not only agree with this evaluation of themselves, but, after years of conditioning, are accustomed to following the orders of their *patrones* or any leader who presents himself. The following is the list of demands made by landless peasants in the last 20 years of the struggle. These demands were made during the March 26<sup>th</sup> protest (“Campesinos” 1). They are no more than a call for the reinstitution of the colonization program:

- 1) Land concessions (implicitly, the resumption of colonization)
- 2) Price subsidies (specifically cotton)
- 3) Technical support (which includes technical training in the use of pesticides, crop management practices, and other areas of agronomics).

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<sup>30</sup> Whereas 19<sup>th</sup> Century *caudillismo* was eliminated in most modern Latin American states, the tradition of the strongman or charismatic dictator survived in Paraguay as a cultural practice until the last caudillo, Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda fell from power in 1989. The long history of single party and single-man rule in the country reinforced and institutionalized the practice *clientelismo*, the system of reciprocal exchange of goods and services between individuals of unequal status reliant upon face-to-face negotiations (Powell 412). The foundational study of *clientelismo* was conducted by Mintz and Wolf in 1950. An overview of early scholarship in *clientelismo* has been compiled by Arnold Strickon and Sidney M. Greenfield, Eds. *Structure and Process In Latin America: Patronage, Clientage and Powers Systems*. John D. Martz, points out the importance of *clientelismo* in Latin American studies “...clientelism is viewed as an enduring mechanism of internal control in society. If it is true that each and every political regime is pressed to offer identifiable goods and services in meeting citizen needs, then it must also find mechanisms to assure the maintenance of social and political control. This suggests that the unfailing presence of clientelism, identifiable in all times and settings, underlines the fundamental character of the concept for an understand of Latin American social and political life” (Martz 10)

4)      Infrastructural development

Since March of 2001, peasant demands have expanded to include the following:

- 1)      The removal of Paraguay from MERCOSUR
- 2)      The resignation of President González-Macchi
- 3)      The resignation of presidential cabinet members
- 4)      An end to the state privatization program (ANTELCO)
- 5)      A call for the passage of anti-corruption legislation

The shared goal of each of these demands is the insistence upon the fulfillment of the social contract and the guarantee of each Paraguayan citizen's right to earn a living in a society of laws. To the *campesinos*, this is a call for the Paraguayan government to allocate state resources in a fair and just manner. The cry for land is not made out of mere avarice or even brute necessity from their point of view. Rather, the *campesino* is calling for what he calls his *patrimonio* or his right to a livelihood that the *campesino* has inherited through the sacrifices of his forefathers in the foundation of the Paraguayan nation, the defense of the Republic in war, and the daily contribution of the peasant upon whose labor and industry the entirety of the agricultural economy has been dependent to the present day.

### **1.7. Thesis Questions/Method of Study**

Provided the challenge to the rhetoric of social movement theory that this dissertation project poses, I have developed questions designed to direct this

research. These questions deal with issues specific to the Paraguayan land reform struggle as well as with the rhetorical theory of social movements. After establishing these guiding questions, I will discuss the methods to be employed for exploring these questions.

### **1.7.1. Questions about the Paraguayan land reform struggle**

- 1) What is the historical terrain of struggle in Paraguay and how has that terrain been determined by factors such as class, race, language and culture? What are the ideological structures employed by the struggle? What does “land” mean as an ideological concept in the struggle? What alternative historical structures exist?
- 2) Given that social struggles operate on synchronic as well as diachronic axes, what is the synchronic terrain of the struggle? Is it limited to the borders of Paraguay or are larger, transnational factors involved as well? If so, how do they enable or constrain this struggle?
- 3) How does the nature of protest change as material, political and cultural constraints on *campesino* resistance mount?
- 4) What are the prospects for the struggle to transcend such constraints by transforming the terrain of struggle?
- 5) From several theoretical perspectives, the Paraguayan land reform struggle appears to have been an abject failure. Why is this so? Is such a conclusion warranted?

A host of theoretical issues is opened up by pursuing the questions above. Some of these issues deal with the limits of rhetorical social movement theory derived largely from case studies in industrialized nations to effectively explain the nature of protest in poorer southern countries. A related issue involves the relationship between post-colonial ideologies and social movements. The legacy of colonialism in the United States and Europe strongly differs from resulting sets

of practices found today in modern Latin American social, economic, political and cultural life. The profound differences between the industrialized nations of the north and the poorer nations of the south are both historical and complex. I propose to investigate the impact of these differences on the nature and function of social movements. By investigating the Paraguayan example as a new social movement, I hope to discover explanatory gaps that can be used to generate a productive critique of new social movement theory as a Western theory that has failed to account for the fundamental differences to be found between the industrialized and the non-industrialized nations of the world.

### **1.7.2. Critical Method**

The move from traditional models of rhetorical social movement analysis to the study of new social movements has widened the field of social movement inquiry. However, that field must be further broadened to include the linguistic, cultural and geographic factors that a case like the Paraguayan land reform struggle presents. I propose to apply the work of Touraine, Escobar and other new social movement theorists to the case of the land reform struggle in Paraguay. After setting out the terms of the analysis, I will evaluate how well the Paraguayan case fits the criteria set forth in the theory. In the case that the Paraguayan case does not satisfy the criteria, I will determine why and seek to investigate how the Paraguayan case, despite not fulfilling such criteria, might still constitute a new social movement. At the same time, I will outline the structure, tactics, rhetoric and social practice of the Paraguayan social struggle



using that information to consider new social movement theory. In the case that important elements of the Paraguayan land reform struggle are not accounted for by new social movement theory, I will determine why such an omission exists and what impact it might have upon that body of theory.

I read several different classes of text in this dissertation. Information is difficult to come by in Paraguay. Despite the existence of six different universities in the capital, only recently has anything other than historical work been published. Conditions before the revolution were so bad that the most authoritative newspaper in the country, *Diario ABC Color*, was ordered closed by the dictator and only opened again after the revolution. The very idea of the freedom of information is a new concept in the country. After the revolution, statistical analyses of poverty, income and other demographic data have been compiled, creating a basic resource for some scholarly work (the most notable of which is Ramon Fogel's analysis of poverty in Paraguay).

As a result of the dearth of information on the subject, I apply a three-pronged approach to information gathering for this dissertation. I rely most heavily upon newspaper accounts of public arguments, protests, and land occupations. Of the many newspapers available in Paraguay I refer almost exclusively to *Diario ABC Color*. While there do exist other newspapers in the country, *Diario ABC Color* has taken a critical position towards the Paraguayan government.<sup>31</sup> Unlike other papers such as *Noticias* or *Ultima Hora* that are either closely linked to prominent political figures or which owe their existence to

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<sup>31</sup> Paraguay has many newspapers at present including: *La Nación*, *Noticias*, *Ultima Hora*, *Itapúa Hoy*, *Neike*, *Paraguay Digital*, *Viva Paraguay*, and *ABC Color*.

having accommodated the dictatorship, *Diario ABC Color* has always challenged governmental attempts to limit free speech.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, *Diario ABC Color* is the only newspaper in Paraguay that consistently reports information that is free of direct or indirect government censorship.

However, newspapers cannot adequately represent the peasant worldview nor can I infer from them the available information. For this reason, I have conducted interviews with the peasants themselves. Visiting asentamientos and attending peasant protests has allowed me to sample peasant perspectives on the Paraguayan land reform struggle. This sampling of the peasant's own views on the struggle has been important because the inability of the peasants to represent their perspective has in part fed the struggle. In order to understand that struggle, it is imperative that I understand what motivates the primary actors.

Finally, I rely upon my lived experience with the peasants. I lived for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer working through the Ministry of Agriculture as an agricultural extension agent living in a small pueblo in the rural countryside. My experience of the daily life of the peasant farmer gives me a unique perspective on the social practices and material conditions contributing to that identity and driving peasant demands. In addition to that experience, I have traveled to Paraguay on two separate occasions living for periods of 1½ months and 1 month while performing interviews in the countryside. I interviewed

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<sup>32</sup> From the paper's inception in 1967, the staff have suffered government persecution for its critical treatment of the government. This persecution includes, imprisonment, disappearances, threats, assassination attempts, deportations, and attacks on the newspaper's facilities. Finally, after years of strong-arm tactics, the paper was shut down by order of the Ministry of the Interior on March 22, 1984. The paper remained closed for five years, only re-opening after the fall of the dictator in March of 1989.

peasants in established as well as squatter's communities. I shared not only time and space with these people but their own homes, their diseases, their parasites, their work, their stories and their lives.

### **1.7.3. Chapter Organization**

This section contains a preview of the five chapters of the dissertation. Chapter two explores the material and cultural factors driving the struggle through an examination of the historical origins of protest activity and the history of land tenure in Paraguay. I will identify the key historical precedents in the land reform argument and explore the meaning of these terms in the context of Paraguayan history. I will examine the material impetus of the struggle, and I will demonstrate the relationship of colonial social models upon present-day social perceptions, noting how these atavisms impact today's land reform struggles by structuring the way Paraguayan's think about such pertinent issues as land and citizenship.

I will address the first set of my guiding questions in chapter two: What is the historical terrain of struggle in Paraguay and how has that terrain been determined by factors such as class, race, language and culture? What are the ideologies are employed by the struggle? Is the concept of "land" structuring in terms of any social ideology? Taking care not to restrict myself to interpreting data outside of their context, I will attempt to verify my observations, taking into account how those cultural factors are self-identified by the struggle's members. This historical grounding is essential to the construction of the peasant cultural

perspective on the struggle. I will define key terms in the peasant argument such as *pobreza* or “poverty,” *sintierra* or “landlessness,” *latifundia*, *minifundia*, and *campesino*. Only after we establish the peasant’s perspective on land tenure can we understand the cultural reality shaping the *campesinos sin tierra* struggle.

Chapter three explores the public arguments employed by the land reform struggle and their relationship to the declared causes of the struggle. This chapter will be devoted to discovering and analyzing the sources and characteristics of the arguments employed in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. I will address my second and third sets of guiding questions in this chapter:

2) Given that social struggles operate on synchronic as well as diachronic axes, what is the synchronic terrain of the struggle? Is it limited to the borders of Paraguay or are larger, transnational factors involved as well? If so, how do they enable or constrain this struggle?

3) How does the nature of protest change as material, political and cultural constraints on *campesino* resistance mount?

I hope to examine the production of argument in the Paraguayan land reform struggle by identifying and classifying these diverse arguments in terms of their socio-linguistic, geographic, historical and economic and ideological origins. The existence of many different social actors, social groups and arguments requires that a distinction be made between the arguments offered by peasants themselves and the arguments offered on behalf of the peasants.

In Chapter four, I will evaluate the success of the Paraguayan land reform struggle by engaging the last set of my guiding questions: From several theoretical perspectives, the Paraguayan land reform struggle appears to have been an abject failure. Why is this so? Is such a conclusion warranted? I hope to

answer such questions as: Why ask for land in the first place? What does land mean? Will the acquisition of land actually address the forces motivating the struggle or are there larger issues than property at stake in this struggle?

Preliminary work suggests that the answer to these questions is unfavorable to the peasant cause. Based upon the data I have uncovered, the real motivation for the land reform struggle is severely constrained by the colonial ideology that permits the exploitation of rural labor and which is reinforced by the national narrative. I will briefly explore the results of apparently successful protests by analyzing available data and peasant experiences of land settlement. I hope to challenge traditional notions of success and failure by demonstrating that the Paraguayan land reform struggle thwarts simple attempts to impose traditional criteria for social movement success.

The fifth chapter of this dissertation will discuss implications that the study of the Paraguayan land reform struggle may have for the study of other struggles in the developing world. In addition to an evaluation of the struggle itself, I will evaluate the potential effect of this study upon rhetorical social movement theory. How does the example of the Paraguayan land reform struggle/movement challenge rhetorical social movement theory? I hope to indicate the direction that future rhetorical studies of Latin American social movement theory can take to address the following questions: Can a theory of post-colonial public argument be constructed? Can new social movement theory accommodate this? Do the differences between industrialized and non-industrialized societies affect the fundamental definition of new social

movements? Do high levels of illiteracy present insurmountable obstacles to Touraine's notion of the "highest level of meaning?" Is it even possible that illiterate peasant farmers could conceptualize such a goal, and if not, what is the implication for Touraine's theory in developing nations?

A final point of challenge would be to question the ability of rhetorical social movement theories to account for globalism and societies in transition from non-democratic and state-planned economies to democratic and free market political models. Do anti-globalism struggles truly represent the "highest level of meaning" in these social conflicts, and if so, what mechanisms exist to address so abstract and diffused a challenge?

## **II. The History of the Land Struggle in Paraguay**

### **2.1 Today's Collective Struggles**

On March 14, 2001, fifty thousand rural peasants marched on the national congressional building in the Paraguayan capital, Asunción. This was the eighth of a long line of protest marches (dating back to 1994) engineered by rural peasants in order to bring their plight to the attention of legislators as well as the urban residents of the capital city. This march resulted in a promise by congressional leaders to act quickly on rural and agricultural legislation to relieve the economic hardship suffered throughout the “democratic transition period” that has redefined Paraguayan society since the fall of Alfredo Stroessner in 1989.

These peasants marched upon the capital in order to deliver their demands to their legislators. Presuming that government inaction is the result of ignorance or a failure to recognize the severity of the crisis, peasants sought to deliver their message to legislators in-person. Peasant leaders met privately with senators in order to discuss land reform, agro-technical training, free cotton-seed, government crop subsidies, and the freedom of imprisoned peasant leaders while tens of thousands of their comrades milled around in the plaza and the grounds surrounding the congressional building. Uniformed police moved through the crowd and lines of officers in riot gear formed a human barrier in front of the congressional building itself as well as the nearby Supreme Court building.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Police and other city authorities are provided sufficient time to prepare for protests as a result of the 1997 law regulating demonstrations in Asunción. This edict delimits the time and location of protest in the capital. It also requires protesters to notify the police 24 hours before any demonstration in the downtown area. The police may prohibit any such protest but must provide

Despite the heavy police presence, comprised of approximately 300 officers in uniform and nearly as many out of sight in adjacent blocks, armed with sawed off shotguns and teargas, there was little tension to be observed.

Both the police and the protesters knew how this drama would be played out according to the implicit rules. Protests are relatively common in Paraguay. From January to July of 2002 alone, approximately 100 protests of one kind or another took place on public and governmental property in the capital, while another hundred occupations were distributed throughout the rest of the country.<sup>34</sup> Each side understands its role. Peasants march; the police make their presence known; protest leaders meet with legislators and emerge with a compromise.

During the March 14<sup>th</sup> protest, the senate approved an emergency measure to supply 12.386 million Guaraníes, to placate the three peasant organizations involved in the protest (MCNOC, ONAC, and CPA-SPN).<sup>35</sup> However, only 13.5% of that actual figure was actually transferred to the organizations with the promise that the rest was to come at a later date. This amounts to a total of 1,672,110 Guaraníes for the participants involved in the march. Satisfied with the

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written notification of such a ban within 12 hours of receipt of the organizers' request. The law permits a police ban only if another party already has given notice of plans for a similar rally at the same place and time. In addition, the law prohibits public meetings or demonstrations in front of the presidential palace and outside military or police barracks. This law does not apply to religious processions. (U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights Report: Paraguay 1999*).

<sup>34</sup> The rural uprising against land tenure policy is so widespread that several dozens of land occupations of *invasiones* are occurring at any moment. While they may occur anywhere in the country, *invasiones* have typically been concentrated in departments with the largest latifundial holdings and the best land. For example, in early December of 2003, the department of *Alto Paraná* was experiencing nearly 30 different simultaneous invasions in the districts of *Hernandarias*, *Itakyry*, and *Minga Porá*. With fourteen individual peasant groups invading and squatting on land in *Itakyry* alone (*Dos campesinos* 1).

<sup>35</sup> *La Mesa Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas* (MCNOC), the *La Organización Nacional Campesina* (ONAC), and *Coordinadora de Productores Agrícolas de San Pedro Norte* (CPA-SPN) constitute the three largest peasant organizations in the country and, taken together, constitute the *Campesinos Sin Tierra* as a movement rather than as a single organization.



results of the protest, leaders urged their followers to return to their small, rural farms and to await the promised legislation that would enable them to acquire land and to receive adequate governmental support for their agricultural endeavors.

This may seem like an example of successful protest action, yet if one accounts for the expenditures of each protest participant, the net gain does not outweigh the net loss. Each peasant had to give up at least an entire day of work. Those who traveled from distant departments had to spend up to 18 hours in transit to reach the city. This travel itself is a cost. In addition, peasants had to provide for their own meals. Taking the average value of a day's labor, 12,000 Guaraníes, and adding 10,000 Guaraníes for meals and another 20,000 Guaraníes in travel, a conservative estimate of individual protest expenditures is 42,000 Guaraníes. This is the equivalent of \$9.54. The governmental grant in the apparently enormous amount of 1,672,110,000 Guaraníes translates to \$380,000 dollars or \$7.6 dollars for each of the 50,000 participants. Finishing the calculation, each member of the protest lost \$1.94 for a total of \$97,000 or 426,800,000 Guaraníes.

It is not uncommon for peasants to engage in yearly, nation-wide protests. These protests mobilize significant numbers of peasants and electrify both the rural countryside from which tens of thousands of angry peasants have come to carry a message as well as the urban centers they invade in order to deliver their message to local and national politicians. However, mobilization in itself does not mean success. In most cases, peasant protests amount to little but sound and

fury signifying nothing in spite of their effectiveness at organizing peasants and coordinating individual protestors into in single group capable of putting real pressure on the authorities to take the plight of the landless peasant seriously.

The ultimate ineffectiveness of apparently successful protest strategies is exemplified by peasant protest in the department of *San Pedro* in early July of 2001. On July 9, 2001, peasants erected a blockade of the highway at the Santa Rosa crossing in the department of *San Pedro*. Approximately, 1500 peasants completely closed a highway backing traffic up three kilometers. 200 riot police armed with shotguns, tear gas and fire hoses appeared with a judicial order for the removal of the protesters. Only the intervention of the *El Obispo de San Pedro*, *Monseñor* Lugo, avoided a confrontation with police who were about to carry out an order of removal by force. This protest resulted in the formation of a state governmental office called *La Unidad Técnica de Ejecución de Proyectos* or Technical Entity for the Execution of Projects (UTEP), comprised of governmental ministers, *Monseñor* Fernando Lugo and one of the peasant leaders. Funding for the office would be managed locally by the local government in consultation with *Monseñor* Lugo and peasant leaders. Finally, the national government agreed to forgive the debt of agricultural organizations in the region. The office has no funding and has done little more than promise to aid the peasants in the region. It did not take long for the protestors' demands to be subverted by administrators and politicians. Yet, the piecemeal concession defused the threat posed by the peasants and belied the otherwise successful organizational effort to bring real pressure on politicians to institute social change.

Applying the same “successful” protest strategy, on July 25, Jorge Talavera, a leader of the MCNOC organized and led 400 peasants to block Highway 1 in the department of *Misiones* in the southern part of the country. Talavera met with congressional leaders as the protest blocked traffic along that important route. He demanded that the Paraguayan government free up \$1.5 Million for the purpose of buying land for landless peasants in “*zonas del conflicto*” or zones of conflict. He also asserted that three peasant settlements in *Misiones* required technical assistance as well as credit and support for educators in the community. This protest ended with the promise of Congressional leaders to push legislation already pending in the Senate that would address some if not all of these concerns. However, when it became clear that those Congressional leaders would not support the legislation to release the funds the MCNOC renewed its protest effort by repeating the strategy that had successfully pressured politicians at *Santa Rosa* in *San Pedro* and on Highway 1 in *Misiones*.

These protests took place on and after August 2, 2001 as peasants blocked highways in ten different states. Straining police and military resources throughout the country, the well-coordinated action involved an estimated 30,000 peasants from all parts of the country. The technical feat of organization was orchestrated by MCNOC. One of the organization’s leaders, Belarmino Balbuena, issued a list of demands that typify peasant concerns. The principal demands of this protest were the following:

- 1) *Cumplimiento de acuerdos y compromisos del Gobierno nacional con el campo.*  
[Respecting agreements and promises made by the national government with rural peoples].

- 2) *Apoyo a los proyectos de producción agrícola.*  
[Support for on-going agricultural production projects].
- 3) *Justicia por crímenes cometidos contra campesinos.*  
[The prosecution of crimes committed against peasants].
- 4) *Cese de persecuciones a dirigentes campesinos.*  
[Ending the persecution of peasant leaders].
- 5) *Por mayor presupuesto para la salud, educación, agricultura y obras públicas.*  
[Great budgetary commitments to public health, education, agriculture and infrastructure].
- 6) *Definición y ejecución de una política de desarrollo nacional en base a la producción agropecuaria.*  
[Definition and execution of national politics of development based on livestock production].
- 7) *Abandonar el modelo de transición neoliberal, antipopular y anticampesino.*  
[Abandon the transitional neo-liberal, anti-populist and anti-peasant political model].
- 8) *Contra las privatizaciones, desempleo y corrupción.*  
[Against the privatization of state monopolies, unemployment and corruption].

Although coherent, well-managed and coordinated, these protests dissolved in the face of a large police presence in some protest sites, a lack of institutional support in others, judicial removal orders and strong statements by the president threatening the protesters with violence.

Thwarted by the tactics employed by the state to blunt the force of the peasants' ability to organize large numbers of protestors and to bring pressure to bear upon politicians to act, peasants resorted to another strategy later in the same year. On October 17, 2001, *campesinos* took permanent possession of the plaza in front of the congressional building. They joined others representing several different *campesinos sin tierra* groups. Several occupants had lived in makeshift

tents made of tarps and other scavenged materials for six months in the *Plaza de Libertad* directly in front of the *Congreso Nacional*. The leader of this group, Samuel Frutos, who represents peasant families in the department of *Cordillera* who seek the redistribution of six thousand hectares of land in that state, explained what drives the protesters to occupy the plaza and to live such a precarious existence: “*Esta es la solución que se le da al pueblo; esta es la reforma agraria, esta es la justicia social*” [This is the solution that presents itself to the people, this is land reform, this is social justice]. There is no other solution for landless peasants but to travel to the capital to plead with legislators for land.

Juan Mena represented another faction occupying the plaza. He explained his reasons for protest:

*Hace dos meses que estamos, vinimos en reclamo de tierra. En el año 1999 llegamos a un acuerdo, nos prometieron tierra y como no estaban cumpliendo, venimos para presionar.*

[We have been here for two years; we came to get land. In 1999, we arrived at an agreement, they promised us land but since they haven't followed through with their promise, we came to pressure them.]

Juan Mena began living in the plaza on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August seeking restitution for the more than six thousand landless peasants in the communities of *Altos, Atyrá, Caacupé y Tobatí*. Juan, along with every other individual protestor occupying the plaza, was evicted on Oct 19, 2001 on the grounds that they were violating environmental laws and were damaging the park. These peasants relocated their structures and their belongings to an adjacent cathedral where they made camp within the heart of the capital city some 40 yards from the Congress. No legal recourse was made available to the protesters nor had they received any signs that

legislators had been pressured by their protest. After the clearing of the *Plaza de Libertad* and the removal of the protestors to the adjacent cathedral, the impetus of that particular phase of the movement was lost.

The net result of the 2001 campaign season of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, which functions as an umbrella term for peasant protests, land invasions and other conflicts too numerous to detail, was that no new legislation was passed and dozens more illegal occupations had been initiated by impatient peasants.

The protests I have chosen to discuss demonstrate the degree of commitment, the resources invested and the efficacy of organizational efforts peasants have brought to bear in the course of pressing a case with little gained in return.

It is evident that protest activity is structured through the complex relationship between historical and cultural factors. While it is a truism that history and cultural structure all interaction, creating the context for defining the success, failure and the stakes of a social movement, the Paraguayan land reform struggle offers a particularly interesting case. In this case, the forces enabling and constraining the conflict have defined Paraguayan life and citizenship for more than 500 years. Hence, it is warranted to investigate the historical dimensions of this struggle. Arturo Escobar has pointed out the deeply historical nature of present-day struggles.

*Los movimientos sociales no solo han logrado en algunas instancias transformar sus agendas en políticas públicas y expandir las fronteras de la política institucional, sino que también, muy significativamente, han luchado por ortogar nuevos significados a las nociones heredadas de ciudadanía, a la representación y participación política, y como consecuencia, a la propia democracia. Tanto los procesos mediante los cuales el programa de un movimiento se convierte en política pública, como*

*los de búsqueda de una nueva definición del significado de términos como “desarrollo” o “ciudadano,” por ejemplo....*  
(Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino 18)

[Social movements have not only achieved, in some instances, the transformation of their agendas in public politics and expansion of the frontiers of institutional politics, but also, very importantly, they have struggled to obtain new significance for inherited notions of citizenship, representation in political participation and, as a consequence, their own sense of democracy. Just as these movement strategies have been applicable to public politics they serve as a search for a new definition for the meaning of terms such as “development” or “citizen,” for example...].

Thus, according to Escobar, it is necessary to examine Latin American social movements like the Paraguayan land reform struggle in terms of a historical legacy that defines the very terms of the struggle. Here Escobar implies that social practices such as “*la representación y participación política*” [representation and political participation] obtain a social inertia that constrains the ability of dissenting publics to challenge political and economic norms. Social struggles, thereby, become historical struggles.

Alain Touraine labels the historical nature of social conflicts and the object of struggle for social movements “historicity” (Touraine, *Return* 40). Historicity is “the set of cultural models (cognitive, economic, and ethical)” that members of a society, including protestors, take for granted (Touraine, *Return* 42). Touraine argues that successful social protest activity is a conscious challenge of the “given” nature of historically grounded social practices. For, as he points out, most social conflicts are mere struggles and not true movements since only protestors who are consciously aware of the historical stakes of the

struggle constitute an actual movement as opposed to a mere struggle or collective behavior (Touraine, *Return* 64).

The signification of collective behavior is necessarily far removed from the consciousness of its actors, since it is defined in terms of the functioning of the social system and not in terms of the representations or of the projects of the actors.... (Touraine, *Return* 65)

Understanding the historical conditions of the Paraguayan land reform struggle is crucial to grasp the present-day constraints upon its success or failure as well as its latent social movement potential.

The struggle for the control of and the accessibility of land has been a potent social and political force throughout Paraguayan history. The history of Paraguay has been quite well documented as a series of wars [the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-70) and the Chaco War (1932-35)] and political transitions (the Revolution of 1811, postwar reconstruction, the Revolution of 1904, the Revolution of 1947, the *golpe del estado* of 1954, and the Revolution of 1989). A history of land tenure, on the other hand, while paralleling the political and military history of the nation, differs significantly in some periods. For example, while the Revolution of 1811 freed Paraguay from Spanish rule, land tenure practices didn't change at all. Furthermore, the impact of the Chaco War on these practices is almost insignificant while the period following the War of the Triple Alliance defined a complete turnaround in land ownership practices.

In order to write a history of Paraguayan land tenure, I have divided the historical record into 5 epochs: 1) the Native/Colonial Epoch (1535-1811), 2) the Statist Epoch (1811-1870), 3) the Neo-colonial Epoch (1870-1954), 4) the



Postcolonial Epoch (1954-1989) and 5) the Epoch of Struggle (1989-present).<sup>36</sup>

Each of these epochs is defined by a specific agrarian policy and land tenure regime. At the base of my analysis is the fact that each of these regimes is defined by the coordination of three basic elements: 1) domination of the land market in order to 2) monopolize agricultural and natural resource markets, and 3) ensure the availability of cheap labor for farming and resource extraction. Each regime develops a scheme that adapts the colonial system to the emerging conditions of the developing nation. The initial disequilibrium of unfair land distribution, differing access to capital and socio-political domination of an elite class have been the historical conditions Paraguayan history that have preserved a system that, at its base, has changed little in five centuries.

This historical inquiry is guided by Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's observation that there exists a "consistent bias toward the interests of elites inherent in presumably neutral governing structures, no matter what the mandate of the electorate" (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 3). Tracing the nearly 500 year history of land tenure practices will allow us to map out the means by which the once obvious and inescapable fact of elite privilege has managed to preserve and even disguise itself through ideology.

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<sup>36</sup> I borrow heavily from Carter and Galeano's agrarian history to implement this model. While Carter and Galeano's analysis contributes much to an understanding of an agrarian history of Paraguay, I am suggesting that examining this history as an arrangement of elements of economic production provides an understanding of the historical roots of today's rhetoric in Paraguay's land reform debate. Carter and Galeano divide historical epochs on the basis of political regimes that implement distinct agrarian systems. I would argue that their analysis fails to recognize that these political regimes are *created* by the necessity for a new agrarian system and that it is the agrarian system that supports and deposes political regimes in this fundamentally agrarian economy in which the support of the rural peasantry is crucial for political stability.

The transformation of the instruments of elite class domination from armed repression to an interpellating ideology more aptly describes the terrain of struggle encountered by the Paraguayan land reform struggle.<sup>37</sup> Piven and Cloward discuss poor people's movements, such as the Paraguayan land reform struggle, as "mass movements" characterized by a lack of organization, cohesion, planning, and formal structure (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 5). In the discussion of these "mass movements," it is concluded that the competition between elite class interests and the poor are not dependent upon the quality of organization, the clarity of the message, or the commitment of individual protestors; in fact Piven and Cloward conclude that "elite responses are not significantly shaped by the demands of leaders and organizers. Nor are elite responses significantly shaped by formally structured organization of the poor" (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 36).

This historical inquiry will demonstrate the historical transformation of physical coercion into ideological interpellation. This analysis is crucial to understanding mass movements representing the interests of the poor because history is such a powerful determinant in the social struggles of mass movements that, as Piven and Cloward have concluded that "*protestors win, if they win at all, what historical circumstance has already made ready to be conceded* [author's emphasis]" (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 36).

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<sup>37</sup> The term "interpellation" is here used as Louis Althusser applied the term within his theory of the "hail." The term "interpellation" is derived from the same root as the term "appellation," which means a name. Althusser's point in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is that the state possesses the ultimate power to define the individual perceptions and identity of its citizens (Althusser 127-148, 177-186).

## 2.2 The Native/Colonial Epoch (1535-1811)

Prior to the conquest, the largest tribe of Indians inhabiting the traditional geographic borders of Paraguay (the areas between the *Pilcomayo* and the *Paraná* rivers) was the *Guaraní*. The *Guaraní* Indians were a people defined by their relationship to the land (González 26).<sup>38</sup> A semi-nomadic, warlike people their culture was suffused with practices related to the land they lived upon. The *conquistadores* did not travel up the *Pilcomayo* River to discover a degenerate native people devoid of culture and learning. To the contrary, the *Guaraní* people had developed advanced migratory farming practices, natural medicinal knowledge, cultivated a wider variety of crops than their counterparts in Europe at the time, and practiced a system of egalitarianism within the tribal structure of communal land ownership or *tekoha*, that roughly translates as the place of the people.<sup>39</sup>

The *tekoha* was not delimited by the land itself. A *tekoha* could be any land. The *tekoha* related to the people and designated the area where the *Guaraní* Indians were located at any given time. The *tekoha* would change when the tribe migrated elsewhere. In fact, these migratory/landless practices were rooted in a migratory economy. The *Guaraní* Indians employed slash and burn agriculture as a means of opening up forested areas that were then farmed and abandoned after several years of cultivation. The poor soils of Paraguay were quickly sapped of

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<sup>38</sup> Natalicio González points out that *Yvaga* or Heaven in *Guaraní* was conceived as a forest comprised of fruit-bearing trees and easily hunted game (González 73).

<sup>39</sup> All tribe members within the *Guaraní* society were essentially equal, with no land or significant possessions to differentiate them. Only the tribal leader, the *mburuvicha* or *cacique*, held a title and status in the tribe. This status was granted for his ability to adjudicate disputes and to live a model life within the tribe (Vera 31-36).

their nutrients, while the efficiency of the low intensity farming practices of the native peoples depended upon high quality soils that would sustain high yields with little labor input for two or three years after the forest had been burned off. When the soils degraded, the natives moved on in search of better land. These practices endured for more than 400 years as peasants employed the same practices until the 1990s when population pressures made available land too scarce or costly to find; forcing peasants to begin to change their farming practices.

These communal and migratory practices stood in stark contrast to the European attitude toward land as epitomized by the Papal Bull of 1493:

*Las damos—las tierras—concedemos a Vos y a los Reyes de Castilla y León, Vuestros herederos y sus sucesores; y hacemos, constituimos y deputamos a Vos a los dichos Vuestros herederos y sus sucesores Señores de ellas, con libre, llano y absoluto, poder, y jurisdicción. (Pastore 34)*

[We give you—the land—we grant you and the Kings of Castille and Leon, to your heirs and successors; and we make, establish and authorize your proclamations (as well as those of) your heirs and male successors with free, clear and absolute power and jurisdiction].

This was followed upon by the *Leyes de Indias* that made the case for the Spanish Crown's private ownership of the Americas and that enabled the Crown to bestow ownership of the land upon the first Spanish citizens to inhabit it:

*Por donación de la Santa Sede Apostólica y otros justos y legítimos títulos, somos Señor de las Indias Occidentales, Islas y Tierra firme del mar océano, descubiertas o por descubrir, y están incorporadas a nuestra Real Corona de Castilla. (Pastore 34)*

[By concession of the Saintly Apostolic Seat and other just and legitimate titles, we are the rulers+ of the West Indies, the islands and the mainlands (and) the ocean, already discovered to yet to be

discovered, and they are to be incorporated into our Royal Crown of Castille].

The invasion and occupation of the Americas redefined the very concept of land along cultural boundaries. The natives' communal attitudes toward land quickly conflicted with the private property concept the invaders brought with them to the New World. The *Leyes de los Indias* guaranteed every inhabitant of the Americas the right to obtain land for the purposes of crop production and animal husbandry (Pastore 122). This law clearly illustrates how European invaders first created a land market in order to monopolize agricultural and natural resource markets thus guaranteeing the availability of cheap labor for farming and resource extraction. The *Leyes de los Indias* mark an important phase in the shift from thinking about land as either communal or ownerless to thinking about it as a property and a resource, access to which could and ought to be reserved for the privileged.

The difference between the native concept of land use or *tekoha* and the private ownership of land has been a bone of contention ever since the Spanish colonization of Paraguay.<sup>40</sup> Attempts to incorporate Native Americans into the system of private ownership of land foundered on the fact that Native Americans themselves were property of the *encomiendas* upon which they lived. The principle of private property in no way worked to the benefit of the native

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<sup>40</sup> As Ramon Fogel notes the continued viability of the concept of the *tekoha* in his analysis of the asentamiento *Capi'i Bary* where peasants seized land. According to Fogel, for the peasants of Paraguay the concept of "land" is inseparable from the concept of culture as one of the leaders of the squatter's community of *Capi'i Bary* explains using the idea of the *tekoha*, "*Para nosotros la comunidad o tekoha no es algo que se vende sino el espacio donde la vida se renueva y se afirma un modo de ser*" [For us, the community or *tekoha* isn't something that you can buy or sell but a space where life renews itself and affirms a mode of existence] (Fogel, *Luchas* 192).

population of Paraguay. Forced to work on the *encomiendas* as *braceros*,<sup>41</sup> the native populations soon fled to more remote areas of the country where they were known as the *ka'aguygua* (which translates as the communities of the forest). It was in the *ka'aguygua* where communal land tenure practices survived to the present day. The *ka'aguygua* populations occupied either unclaimed or unoccupied lands in the interior and moved on as colonial authorities expanded their control of the vast territory of Paraguay. The inherent mobility of these populations served them well as they were thus able to combine economic sustainability with enough mobility to stay out of reach of the colonial authorities. At the same time, Spanish peasant populations squatted these same lands and intermixed with native populations. The resulting population is 95% *mestizo*, or mixed Native American and Spanish heritage. The resulting culture is hybrid, mixing Spanish and *Guaraní* language, culture and social practices. Commonly identified as the *campesino* or rural culture, this way of life is strongly identified with 19<sup>th</sup> Century agrarian practices, the dominance of the *Guaraní* language and a penchant for squatting land.

That is not to say that the *campesino* culture of rural Paraguay has preserved the pre-colonial ideology of the Native American culture. In reality, neither of the two distinct cultures that existed at the time of the conquest, the Native American and the Spanish Conquistador, has been recognizably preserved in Paraguay. Nowhere is this more evident than in the complex and conflicting

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<sup>41</sup> *Braceros* were the laborers on the large ranches of the Spaniards. These *braceros* were primarily native peoples living on the land granted by the Crown to Spanish nobles. As dictated in the *Leyes de los Indias*, the native populations of those lands granted by the Spanish Crown became the possessions of the noble who had the right to enslave and force into labor such people.

conceptions of land use extant in Paraguay today. The socialist practices of the *Guaraní* Indians who viewed the land as an instrument for social support of agricultural practices exists in the countryside amongst peasants whose ancestors practiced mobile farming for thousands of years before they modified those practices in the last 400 years to squat on the land of others. As Saro Vera has argued, the Paraguayan peasant's life still preserves some of the real practices of the *Guaraní* Indians, but practice does not equate with ideology.

*El paraguayo, sin embargo, se ha consubstanciado con su tierra; ha mantenido una costumbre específica aún dentro de la alimentación y ha mantenido una lengua específica, propia de la Nación Guaraní. En el Paraguay nada cambió por siglos enteros...Lo que importa es que el paraguayo permaneció en su tierra con un mínimo de mezcla. Los mestizos se cruzaron entre sí, por lo menos, por tres siglos hasta conformar un tipo especial de hombre aún en lo somático; ante todo, una etnia cultural. (Vera 17)*

[The Paraguayan, nevertheless, is a product of his land; he has maintained a specific practice in terms of his diet and has maintained a specific language, property of the *Guaraní* Nation. In Paraguay, nothing changes for centuries at a time.... What this means is that the Paraguayan resides within his domain with a minimum of influence. Individuals of mixed race breed with each other for at least three centuries until producing a special type of man in terms of physique; and more importantly, a cultural ethnicity].

However, even as the peasant continues to live in largely the same way that he or she has lived over the last 500 years, the state has always regulated the use and ownership of land, dictating the nature of the agricultural society in Paraguay.<sup>42</sup> This statist function has always contrasted with the egalitarian

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<sup>42</sup> Even today, agriculture is the dominant sector of the modern Paraguayan economy. It directly accounts for 28% of GDP and occupies 34% of the workforce in the country. Agricultural exports consisting of soybeans, cotton, grains, meat and meat products, lumber, vegetable oil, and *yerba mate* account for 85% of all exports (U.S. Department of State, 2000 Country Report).

attitudes of the *campesino* culture. The privatization of land and its control have traditionally permitted elite groups to monopolize power and to support political and social arrangements that disenfranchise the vast majority of the Paraguayan population. These divisions (as I will discuss later) have traditionally fallen along the spatial, cultural, linguistic, and political axes that have historically separated rural Paraguayans from urban Paraguayans.

Nevertheless, there exists, to this day, a tension between a communal conception of land use and the concept of private land. Land reform efforts are largely an attempt to normalize the casual practice of squatting on vacant or otherwise unproductive lands owned by absentee landlords. The land reform struggle has identified *latifundias improductivas* or large, unproductive land holdings, of more than 5,000 hectares that the peasants feel should be defined as state property and should be redistributed *en toto* to the peasants for the purposes of production and the greater benefit of the other state as a whole. This argument finds its origins in the establishment of private property and the resistance of the Native American cultural legacy of Paraguay.

Perhaps as a result of the persistence *ka'aguygua*, Native American populations in Paraguay have diminished far more abruptly than in other Latin American countries.<sup>43</sup> The racial and cultural integration of the Native American and poor European populations who mixed in the relative isolation of these squatter communities produced a homogenous and unique rural culture that has resulted in a dilemma. When Native Americans were both racially and culturally

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<sup>43</sup> Fewer than 78,000 Native-Americans were identified out of a population of 5.5 million inhabitants in the nation's 1991 census.



distinct from European immigrants, it was easier for Europeans to impose “civilizing practices” upon the “uncivilized” native population. The distinction between *Paraguayos*, as European immigrants with full citizenship, rights and representation before the law and *indios*, as a separate social, racial and, most importantly, political category during the colonial era has now been replaced by a new tension between *Paraguayos*, as citizens embracing a modern vision of the state, and *campesinos*, who embrace s traditional vision of the state, including an agricultural economy, speaking *Guaraní*, living in close association with the land. This history of the fusion of these two groups and lifestyles can be traced back to the origins of the Paraguayan state.

### 2.3 The Statist Epoch (1811-1869)

The very foundation of the Republic of Paraguay in 1811 can be defined as a fundamental land reform. In the year of the revolution, Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the then *caudillo* or sole ruler of the country, defined all Spanish lands “*estancias de la Patria*” (Fogel, *Luchas* 22).<sup>44</sup> De Francia’s legendary one-man rule of Paraguay from 1812 to 1840 earned him the name, *El Supremo*, the Supreme One. De Francia’s complete control of the country allowed him to manipulate land tenure into order to reshape the political terrain of the country after many years of Spanish rule. He expropriated the landholding of religious orders in 1824 and in 1825 he expropriated the landholdings of powerful

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<sup>44</sup> This definition reveals the foundation of power at the beginning of the Paraguayan republic; land is power. After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and later the Spanish, the state had become the owner of 60% of the country's land by the mid-1800s (US Library of Congress 18).

individuals who wanted to join the Paraguayan and Argentine republics under Argentine rulership.<sup>45</sup> After thwarting the threat of Argentine control, he then redistributed land to strengthen popular and elite class support for the revolution (White 58). That land had been previously distributed by the Spanish crown in the form *encomiendas* and was redistributed by de Francia to members of the elite *creole* class as *hacendados* and peasant lots.<sup>46</sup> These measures were deemed inadequate by the peasantry, as de Francia's real intentions were to guarantee the fidelity of the organized elites. Peasants eventually occupied unclaimed land (which fell into state control after the Revolution) in the interior of the country (Pastore 54). This was performed on an individual or familial basis with no organization. Peasants were forced into the practice of illegal occupation as state land ownership climbed during de Francia's reign to reach more than 80% of the country's entire territory.

The reign of Carlos A. López was notable for the re-entrenchment of *creole* power. López came to power after the death of *El Supremo* in March 1841 when the Congress elected him as First Consul. Later, in 1844 López was named President of the Paraguayan Republic. He ruled as Paraguay's second absolute

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<sup>45</sup> A paranoia and a xenophobia about foreign intervention (perhaps collective memories of a brutal colonization) are epitomized in the mistrust Paraguayans display towards Argentines. This fear of foreign (particularly Argentine) intervention/annexation recurs throughout Paraguayan history. Having participated in the War of the Triple Alliance, Argentina as well as Brazil appropriated significant portions of Paraguayan territory after the war. The Argentine legionnaires who remained after the war advocated the absorption of Paraguay by Argentina (a dream of reconstituting the previous colonial possession with its capital in Buenos Aires). Later, the struggle is seen as cultural with writers warning of the imminent *Portenización* (Papaluga 20). More recently, the struggle for control of the Pilcomayo river and its water resources demonstrates the historical character of Paraguayan xenophobia.

<sup>46</sup> The term "*hacendado*" refers to the extensive cattle ranches or *haciendas*. These ranches were the most prized property in early Paraguayan history. The extensive forest cover made it difficult and expensive to clear land for cattle ranching. The original *haciendas* were located in the few natural *pampas* or grassy plains in Paraguay. Peasant land grants were excluded from these productive natural areas (Fogel, *Luchas* 21).

dictator and *caudillo* until his death in 1862. Utilizing his vast powers, several large grants of land were given by the *caudillo* to close family members during this period and 21 native settlements were dispossessed of their land and belongings. An October 7, 1848 decree expropriated all lands, private and communal, of these twenty-one tribes, including 200,000 cattle (Fogel, *Luchas* 24). The natives were compensated for their loss with the proclamation of official citizenship in the Paraguayan Republic.<sup>47</sup> These natives were either actual or potential slave labor for the Spanish *encomiendas*. They were liberated from that state by C.A. López's decree while, at the same time, relieved of all worldly possessions including the land the Spaniards let them manage in order to preserve a labor pool. Whether intentional or not, López's decree mobilized these populations as available labor on the *haciendas* created in de Francia's reign.

The theft of their land and animals necessitated that the natives leave their own lands to work on these extensive ranches and farms, which grew in light of the emphasis López placed on trade with Europe. This provided an immediate solution to the labor shortage that plagued the López administration in its effort to both close the country to immigration and yet grow the economy. López's efforts economically integrated the native population of Paraguay while disenfranchising

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<sup>47</sup> This critical distinction between peasant (*campesino*) and creole (*criollo*) states of citizenship is nowhere better represented in the early history of Paraguay than in this instance. For the Creole citizen, citizenship means protection of one's economic interests under the law as the Creole's economic interests coincide with the state's economic interests. The peasant, however, is a rich source of capital for the state and the peasant's economic interests do not historically coincide with those of the state; consequently, peasants find no protection under the law from dispossession and exploitation as those are the historical interests and function of the state in relation to the peasant class of citizenry. Historically, citizenship has meant little more than an obligation to the state in the form of military, social or economic service.

them politically, thus preserving the power and authority of an elite oligarchy headed by López.

This system also integrated the Spanish peasant and native populations in a manner that is unique in all of South America. Peasants and natives worked and lived side-by-side on *haciendas* where they intermarried and intermingled customs, preserving a significant number of native practices that have evolved into *campesino* culture.<sup>48</sup> Even today, the *mestizaje* or the genetic and cultural mixing of natives and peasants of Spanish extraction in the countryside is nearly complete at 98% of that population (U.S. Department of State, *2000 Country Report*).

C.A. López, like his predecessor, de Francia, found it necessary to exclude foreign appropriation of land in order to maintain control of the country and its agrarian economy. To this end, López prohibited all foreign ownership of land in the country.<sup>49</sup> This had the effect of dispossessing the few foreign land holdings that still existed in the country to the financial gain of López as head of the state as well as preventing foreigners from gaining any financial purchase in the political struggles for control of the Paraguayan elite class which was the key to controlling the country.

The awesome power of the state to simply dispossess rural peoples of their property, the restriction of access to land in order to mobilize the peasant/*mestizo*/native labor market, and the patronizing practice of maintaining control over land and natural resources by distributing land among members of

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<sup>48</sup> I will discuss more about the unique character of the *campesino* culture and its *Guaraní* origins in Chapter three.

<sup>49</sup> The August 1<sup>st</sup> decree of 1854.

the elite are all persistent and defining characteristics of Paraguayan land tenure practices as well as key features of the Statist Epoch. The power of the state as the ultimate arbiter of land tenure is unabated to this day and is echoed in the peasant demands *of the state* that it dispossesses *latifundistas* of their properties. It is important to note that it is well outside of the peasants' mentality that they could, themselves, dispossess these landowners of their possessions. The dominion of the state in these affairs remains unquestioned to this day. Furthermore, the Statist Epoch established the consanguinity of national interest and the control of natural resources. Under de Francia and C.A. López, it became a normal practice for the state to monopolize agricultural and natural resource markets to ensure the wealth of its elite class and the stability of its governance.

We will see these themes repeated in the Neo-Colonial Epoch as the Paraguayan state works to preserve a fundamentally colonial economic system with infusions of foreign capital.<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of this period the loss of control over the land market and the consequent agricultural and natural resource markets fell into the hands of foreign interests almost dissolved the country. From the Revolution of 1904 on, the availability of cheap labor for farming and resource extraction as well as a means for controlling the peasantry became essential to stable governance.

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<sup>50</sup> I will argue later that this very same process repeats in the Epoch of Struggle (1982-present).

## 2.4 The Neo-Colonial Epoch (1870-1954)

After the war of the Triple Alliance, a disastrous war that ended with the loss of fully one-half of the population as well as extensive territory, the Paraguayan government was forced to rebuild a devastated country from the ground up.<sup>51</sup> With everything of value either destroyed or stolen, economic recovery was essential for the country. This rebuilding effort began with the *Ley del 15 de Octubre de 1876* that limited post-war land grants to a single hectare. The intention of this law was to guarantee the availability of peasant labor for the reconstruction of the country. When peasants had their own land upon which they could grow subsistence crops and raise small animals, there was little incentive for the peasant to work elsewhere. Total land grants to *campesinos* between 1876 and 1885 numbered 541 lots, only 400 of which were granted without cost and all of which never exceeded one hectare, hardly sufficient for supporting even the smallest of families.

In addition to labor availability, capital for public works projects was generated from the massive sale of public land made possible by the *Ley de la Venta de los Yerbales del Estado de 1881* and expanded in the *Ley de Tierra de 1883*. The logic of such a concession (the reversal of the Aug 1<sup>st</sup> decree of 1854) was a result of the need for financial backing for rebuilding the country as well as the presence of very many of the legionnaires from Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay who remained in the country after the end of the war. It was a rare

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<sup>51</sup> One estimate suggests that the pre-war population of 560,000 was reduced to 231,000. This would amount to a loss of 58.75% of Paraguay's population by the war's end (Bertoni and Gorham 131).

moment for the historically xenophobic and nationalist Paraguay. After years of resisting foreign influence and even legally barring foreign ownership of land in the country, foreign capital was actively sought in exchange for the only resource left in the country after a devastating war, land. The war had finally opened Paraguay to European influences, including modernization. As Carter and Galeano (53) point out, the country was shattered politically, socially, and economically. The only solution to Paraguay's problems appeared to be the modernization offered by foreigners: their capital and their call for progress and civilization.

The logic provided for the reversal of national strategy was reported in *La Reforma* in 1884:

*El país tenía que empezar por ser ganadero antes que agricultor en la verdadera extensión de esta palabra; como se necesita ser agricultor para llegar a ser industrial. Así se han formado todos los países y la razón indica que el Paraguay ha de seguir el mismo camino. (La Reforma)*

[The country has to begin with ranching before farming in the real sense of the word; just as it is necessary to be a farmer before becoming an industrialist. This is the path that other countries followed in order to develop (into modern states) and that rationale suggests that Paraguay ought to follow the same road.]

Selling large portions of the nation's territory was a risk but one which the Paraguayan government was forced to take. Unable to bootstrap itself to a recovery from the effects of the war and the scarce labor market, Paraguay sought to industrialize by capitalizing on the only viable resource in the country, land. This sale of land was truly massive considering that between 1870 and 1914 twenty-six million hectares were sold to foreign interests. Three corporations

alone controlled five million hectares and employed 9,000 laborers. The largest of these was the deceptively named *La Industria Paraguaya* that purchased 2.5 million hectares and employed 5,000 laborers (Fogel, *Luchas* 26).<sup>52</sup> Between the years 1811 and 1914 the Paraguayan government sold nearly 26 Million hectares of land (Fogel, *Luchas* 27).

In combination with *La Ley de la Venta de los Yerbales del Estado de 1881*, the *Ley de Tierra de 1883* and *La Ley del 15 de Octubre de 1876*, the *Ley de Peonaje Forzoso de 1871* made it possible for foreign companies to force peasants into labor on their ranches, farms and storage and processing plants (Fogel, *Luchas* 27). The new economic system was defined by extensive land holdings, natural resource extraction (primarily *yerba mate*, tannin, and lumber) as well as cattle ranching. In stark contrast to the mixed economy of small and large agricultural units, the post-war system was completely dominated by large companies such as *La Industria Paraguaya*, *Mate Larangeira* and *Obraje Barthe*.

The investment of foreign capital permitted the rapid exploitation of the abundant natural resources of Paraguay for the first time. Land sales and leases to these companies extended economic activity to the furthest reaches of the virgin forests of the nation at a scale never before imagined. Utilizing both forced and unforced labor, these companies opened up remote and otherwise inaccessible areas of the country for colonization.

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<sup>52</sup> By 1930, 19 corporations would possess or control more than half of all Paraguayan territory. One Argentine company, Carlos Casada, would control fully one-seventh of the entire country and, as many other large companies invested in Paraguay, maintained its own railroads, ports, and even issued its own money, completely free from interference by the Paraguayan government (Fogel, *Luchas* 31).



The process began with removing hard-wooded timber, *yerba mate*, and tannin bearing trees. Peasants were offered heavily forested and remote plots of land to colonize by these large foreign companies. Peasants would remove the resources, selling them to the companies at a miniscule return for the work involved. The peasants were encouraged to deforest their lots, planting subsistence crops as the forest receded. Sharecropping arrangements ceding up to 50% of each peasant's crop to the true titleholder of the land were common (Fogel, *Luchas* 28). Since the great majority of land was owned or managed by industry, peasants had no alternative but to continue to work on lands that were provided for them within financial arrangements that benefited the landowners.

When the forest cover had been completely removed and the land degraded to the point that corn, bean and yucca yields significantly diminished, the peasants were evicted from the land, the land was fenced off and cattle were introduced. The peasants were offered plots in increasingly distant and rugged locales to repeat the same process time after time.

Peasants who did not participate as labor in this system found themselves increasingly marginalized and without land for purchase or rent for their sons and daughters. As Carlos Pastore summarizes the period following the War of the Triple Alliance:

*Como a comenzemos de siglo XVII, el desequilibrio entre la producción ganadera y la agrícola produjo un grave deterioro al país (pero esta vez) no fueron trasladados los ganados, como se hiciera tres siglos antes, sino las gentes. La ganadería extensiva desplazó a la agricultura y provocó el exodo de la población rural. La gran propiedad desalojó a los campesinos. (Pastore 257)*

[As the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the disequilibrium between cattle ranching and farming produced a strong disruption in the country (but this time) it wasn't the cattle that were moved, as was done three centuries ago, but the people. The expansive cattle ranches displaced other forms of agriculture and caused the exodus of the rural population. Large land holdings have displaced peasants.]

Peasant appeals for land quickly mounted as they were evicted from the once-state-now-privately-owned lands they occupied. These peasants quickly encountered legal and institutional mechanisms that assured their removal in favor of the new owners of the land (Fogel, *Luchas* 28, Riquelme 1).

The new agrarian/political scheme concretized by the *Ley de Tierra de 1883* resulted in a nationalist backlash as many disenfranchised voices protested the sale of native territory to non-nationals. While elite class interests were clearly allied with foreign capital and benefited greatly (the president of the Paraguayan republic himself was represented on the board of *La Industria Paraguaya*), all other sectors of the society were excluded from the economic benefits. By 1887, real nationalist sentiment began to arise throughout the country. This discontent found concrete expression in the appeals of peasant farmers for the return of their land. Pacific protests that objected to the post-war exclusion of Paraguayan citizens from land ownership escalated into violent social protest by 1900 and a revolution in 1904.

Fallout from this period of Paraguayan history has an important effect upon attitudes about land tenure in Paraguay today. In many cases, peasant land occupations have reflected this nationalist sentiment. Peasants' land occupations have targeted land owned or controlled by foreign agencies, persons of foreign ancestry or landowners with foreign last names. In the case of *Capi'ibary*, for

example, the 5,000 hectare property owned and managed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) as a forestry project was selected in part because of the conspicuously foreign character of its owner/manager. Present day land reform protest arguments that rely upon nationalism and that demand the expropriation of land from foreigners in the national interest conveniently combine the land attitudes developed under de Francia and C.A. López with a backlash against foreign occupation after the War of the Triple Alliance.

In fact, the end of the short period of foreign domination of Paraguay ended when Paraguayan politicians were able to mobilize peasant discontent to forge a revolution challenging not only the foreign-interest dominated political and social establishment, but land tenure practices as well. Sporadic protests by peasants displaced from newly sold state lands were supported by the liberal opposition party, *El Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico* (PLRA). The party in power, the Colorado party or *La Asociación Nacional Republicana* (ANR) was strongly allied with big industry against the interests of peasants and opposition politicians alike. In 1903, a large group of peasants was forcibly removed from a property in the department of *Concepción* (Carter and Galeano 55-6). These peasants had occupied for many years and were forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods. The property had belonged to the state but had been sold and the new owner evicted the peasant squatters. The opposition saw its chance and backed the peasant protests that arose and spread throughout the country.

The Revolution of 1904 was followed by legislation that addressed the land distribution inequities in the country. *The Ley de la Colonización y del*

*Hogar de 1904* was the first to make it possible for peasants to lay legal claim to state lands. The law authorized the creation of agricultural colonies with lots of up to twenty hectares and pastures of up to four square kilometers for each family. These lots were to be paid for over a period of five years by the peasants who worked them. However, this was an impossibility for peasant subsistence farmers who could not raise enough money by means of farming to purchase the land in the short time provided. The *Ley de la Colonización y del Hogar de 1904*, anticipating this difficulty, imposed a 10% surcharge each year beyond the fifth year that the peasant has not fully paid his debt off to the state. At that point, the state had the option to merely rent the land to the peasant at a yearly rate of 10% of the land's value.

Although not functional, the principle of the *Ley de la Colonización y del Hogar de 1904* established an important precedent in the history of Paraguayan land tenure: the government will respond to popular demands in order to legitimize peasant demands for land. Never before had the Paraguayan peasant had a voice in governance nor had he or she imagined that it was possible to challenge the elite control of land. Today's land reform struggle is predicated, in principle, upon the *Revolución of 1904*, and the ability of peasants to argue for change. Yet, adumbrating future failures in the land reform struggle, the peasants would find that the inability to craft legislation themselves would blunt the effect of their concerted efforts. Protests, much like revolutions in Paraguay, have a tendency to pass power from one elite group to another rather than to empower

the masses of disenfranchised peasants who still today constitute a majority of the Paraguayan population.

While claiming to address peasant needs after the revolution, *La Ley de la Colonización y del Hogar de 1904* only made it more difficult for peasants to own land. It was still better to squat on state land than it was to attempt to purchase it. Fewer than 10,000 hectares or 500 lots were transferred to peasants by means of this law between 1904 and 1918 (Fogel, *Luchas* 31). However, the *Liberales* had succeeded in co-opting the peasantry in the process of overthrowing the rule of the *Colorados*. Now, this newly empowered elite group moved to consolidate its power by ridding itself of its dependence upon popular (peasant) support.

The Paraguayan government, having finally abandoned its fear of foreign influence and fully aware of the tight post-war labor market actively encouraged foreign colonization of its territory by those who could purchase land with the *Ley del 6 de Octubre de 1903*. From the period following the War of the Triple Alliance to 1903, 17,000 immigrants were registered in the country; whereas, between 1903 and 1937, 26,000 immigrants entered the country (Palau 152). Drawn by the preferential treatment offered by the *Ley del 6 de Octubre de 1903* of the 11 colonies founded in the country from 1900 to 1920, nine of those were composed of foreign immigrants (Fogel, *Luchas* 29). Encouraging foreign immigration was viewed by the Paraguayan government 'as a better option than granting land to peasants at this time for two reasons. First, these immigrants from Germany, Brazil, Argentina, and other nations represented the modern workforce and modern agricultural practices the government believed were

necessary for recovery from the war. Second, this was a way of importing skilled labor with no cost to the country; in fact, these immigrants paid for their land and brought more capital and possessions with them thus further enriching the country (Fogel, *Luchas* 29).<sup>53</sup>

Eventually, native agricultural colonization numbers surpassed those of immigrant colonization. By the end of the 1920s, 55 more settlements were placed in the remote Paraguayan forests. These settlements were founded with both public and private support, but, and most notably, they were composed in their majority by Paraguayan peasants rather than by foreign immigrants (Carter and Galeano 55). This apparent policy shift in colonization efforts did not signal a change in political or social policy as much as it reflected the recognition of peasant occupations *as agricultural colonies*. This regularization or legalization of the peasant occupations is a recurring theme throughout 20th Century Paraguayan history and must be discussed at this point.<sup>54</sup>

The extra-legal (as opposed to illegal) peasant occupation of land in Paraguay has been both an historical fact and an economic necessity.<sup>55</sup> As a

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<sup>53</sup> The success of these immigrant farmers to this day can be attributed less to their modern farming practices than to the financial and technical assistance and adequate planning of these settlements in stark contrast to *campesino* settlements or *asentimientos* which have always lacked nearly any institutional assistance, such as road development and maintenance, potable water, sanitation, or social and political organization.

<sup>54</sup> Carter and Galeano argue that governmental recognition of peasant occupations has resulted in a more powerful bargaining position for peasants as precedents accumulate but, negatively, that the land granted in such legalizations has been reduced from twenty hectare lots in early legislation to the five to ten hectare lots granted at present (56-6). I would note that land lot grants on the basis of area occupied would be reduced in accordance with two factors: time of occupation and density of forest. My personal experience has led me to believe that clearing heavily forested lots of an acre with several other men and sowing crops would take four months for each hectare. Unless the peasant has occupied the land for several years it will be difficult to clear more than five hectares unless the forest cover is thin.

<sup>55</sup> Paraguayan land tenure practices have always been dominated by *informalidad*, or the practice of effecting land ownership and transactions under circumstances not specifically addressed by

result of historically unequal land distribution, peasants have always occupied land that was not their own. Whether that land belonged to the state, Paraguayan private or foreign private owners, native tribes or other *campesinos* was of little importance. Ever aware of the economic contribution of the peasants to both state coffers and the elite class that owed its wealth to transporting, manufacturing and adding value to primary agricultural products, the state traditionally turned a blind eye to squatting, although conflicts occasionally erupted when peasants occupied land belonging to a member of the elite class or when the owner of such a property had or could purchase political influence.

Throughout the history of Paraguay, most instances of agricultural settlement or *asentamientos* have been legalizations of extant peasant occupations. The constant pressure of the *latifundia* (created after the war), the abundance of state land, and the scarcity and small size of peasant land holdings make land occupation an economic necessity for the Paraguayan peasant. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century policy of economic expansion through agricultural settlement amounted to little more than an orderly label for the haphazard legalization of the *de facto* peasant land occupation program.<sup>56</sup>

While the postwar immigrant settlement programs did reap some benefits, their effect upon the economy of Paraguay was small. A total of 43,000 immigrants were registered between 1870 and 1937. In contrast to hundreds of

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law. The distinction between the extra-legal ownership of land (an ownership not recognized under Paraguayan law) and an illegal ownership of land (an ownership expressly prohibited) has operated as an important distinction throughout Paraguayan history.

<sup>56</sup> More importantly, the revolution of 1904 (catalyzed by the 1903-4 occupation/struggle in *Concepcion*) set a precedent for peasant occupations: land is for the taking if you struggle for it. The peasant's present belief in the right to land ownership as outlined in the 1992 Constitution can be traced to this moment in Paraguayan history.

thousands of peasants, their ability to “modernize” the Paraguayan economy was limited. In addition, there were notable failures including a colony of 888 Linconshire Farmers (1872-73) and the 479 colonists of *Nueva Australia* that finally waned to a total of only fifty colonists (Fogel, *Luchas* 29).

After the Revolution of 1904, peasants viewed themselves in a new relationship to the land and to the society: they were citizens with a role and rights. The primary right was the right to land. Between 1910 and 1920, the first farmers’ organizations formed in the districts of *Limpio*, *Luque*, *Itá*, all districts that surrounded the capital. At that time, *anarcosindicalistas* or anarchist unions dominated the agendas of these first farmers’ groups (Riquelme 2-3). These early farmers’ groups quickly dissolved due to individualist farming and marketing practices of the Paraguayan farmer and political persecution of anarchism with which these early groups were linked (Riquelme 2-3).

Political instability was extreme in the Liberal era following the Revolution of 1904. Twenty-one different governments held power from 1904 to 1922. Political instability eventually evolved into armed political conflict and a civil war that lasted from May 1922 to June 1923. The resolution of political disputes by force permitted a consolidation of power that had never taken place after the 1904 Revolution and was the foundation of a period of stability that lasted until the outbreak of war with Bolivia in the Chaco War of 1932.

In spite of the political insecurity of the period, this instability did not greatly affect the rural countryside. In fact, administrations more concerned with preserving their tenuous alliances focused upon the capital, Asunción, and other



urban centers largely ignoring the countryside. This left the *latifundistas* in a position of nearly complete control over the occupancy of the rural lands they owned and the peasants who worked them or rented them and even gave them control over those peasants who lived adjacent to these massive landholdings. The strong hand of latifundial interests in this political climate was the primary force in the suppression of peasant organization and land occupation in this period.

Despite the new strength of the *latifundistas* and their wealth, the *campesinos*' political position continued to strengthen from 1904 to 1932 when the outbreak of war drew the attention of *campesino* and *terrateniente* alike to the cause of national defense. After having expropriated less than 10,000 hectares between 1904 and 1918, the Paraguayan government expropriated 27,521 hectares between 1918 and 1925 and another 19,145 hectares between 1926 and 1935 (Fogel, *Luchas* 32). While land expropriation grew from 1904 to 1926 it only diminished between 1926 because the 1926 law traded off expropriation for the peasant's right to pay a rent on occupied land. The *Ley de Homestead* (1918)<sup>57</sup> permitted the expropriation of state and private lands in lots of ten hectares under the condition that such occupations were organized and composed of more than one hundred adults (Fogel, *Luchas* 32). While the *Ley Sobre la Creación, Fomento y Conservación de la Pequeña Propiedad* (1926) recognized the fact of peasant occupation and declared peasant squatters legal, unevictable renters if they paid up to 50% of their agricultural harvests to the landowners.

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<sup>57</sup> This law, like every other land reform law, suffered from a lack of funding and clear bureaucratic responsibility and was, therefore, little utilized.

The Revolution of 1904 demonstrated the power in the numbers of *campesinos* in the country but efforts to placate peasant land demands were coupled with strict social and political controls. For, as Fogel notes, government reforms were far from effective owing to the still-functional foreign monopolization of land. From 1920-1935, irregular groups of peasants would rally behind sometimes-messianic leaders to challenge this system through occupations and violence (Fogel, *Luchas* 33).

The diminished number of land expropriations allowed pressure to build in the countryside until President José P. Guggiari responded to the social conflict by dissolving all associations and organizations in the country by presidential edict in 1931. The suppression of organized political and social activity was the eventual key to preventing the peasants from organizing a program of occupation on a larger scale from that point until the Revolution of 1989.

The legal inability to organize was followed by the strong sense of nationalism spurred by the outbreak of the Chaco War in 1932-1935. There was very little opportunity to form political or social opposition to the regime and very little desire to be branded anti-nationalist. In addition, tens of thousands of young, male peasants were drafted into service, physically removing the manpower behind peasant land occupations. However, this sacrifice eventually contributed greatly to the cause of land reform. Paraguay depended heavily upon its rural peasantry to supply the manpower to win that brutal war. As a result, *campesino* efforts in the successful war effort further contributed to the positive image of the peasant and his role in service to the state.

Bolivia's standing army, military equipment and three to one population advantage were offset by the rugged individualism of Paraguayan peasants who were accustomed to deprivation as a way of life. The first skirmishes of the war were fought by peasants armed with machetes and one castoff Argentine Mauser rifle for every three to seven men (Zook 167). In the heat, dense brush, and mud of the Chaco, lightness, mobility, and fortitude were the requirements for success. Paraguay lost an estimated 40,000 men and Bolivia an estimated 60,000. The Chaco War remains, to this day, the bloodiest conflict in all of South America. Recognized after the war as heroes, peasants, nevertheless, returned to the *minifundia* as poor, disgruntled, second-class citizens.

To this day, veterans of the war and their descendants feel strongly about their claims to the ownership of land as promised and sometimes delivered by Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda, 1954-1989. During the Stroessner regime, veterans of the Chaco War were publicly decorated with medals and given land in an attempt to gain popular support for Stroessner's young government. Later this recognition of the sacrifices of the Paraguayan peasant in the war was equated to the peasant's contribution to the state in the process of opening the agricultural frontier. Landless peasants were called upon by the administration to colonize the rugged frontier, contribute to the economy and improve the landholdings of the elite by settling, clearing and moving to a new settlement, thereby creating prime cattle-ranching land out of the forest. Even today, peasants recall the sacrifices of their fathers and grandfathers in the Chaco War and invoke the promises of the state to recognize those sacrifices with support.

Although Paraguay won the war and established a northern boundary on the Chaco desert that was favorable to Paraguay, the conflict was disastrous. Shortly after the war ended, Eusebio Ayala, President of Paraguay (1932-36), was overthrown in a coup in 1936.<sup>58</sup> Colonel Franco came to power, invited by the Army that had overthrown Ayala. Coming to power in what is known as the February revolt, Franco led a coalition of soldiers, veterans, students, and others as the President of Paraguay and the head of the *Partido Revolucionario Febrerista* (PRF). The Franco government made concessions to rural peasants (ex-combatants in his social coalition) by expropriating more than 200,000 hectares of land and distributing it to 10,000 peasant families (Fogel, *Luchas* 33).

Now, the cause of landless peasants was associated with the military contributions of the *Veteranos del Guerra del Chaco*. After the Chaco War, the popular view of the role of the *campesino* in the society was redefined. Just as the society itself became dominated by militarism, so too was instilled the idea of the landless hardworking peasants who sacrificed so much for the country for so little in return. The notion of land as a military prize and the social obligation of the nation to provide for its hardworking children and defenders, was constructed in this moment and endure to this day as powerfully operative terms in the argumentative arsenal of today's peasant struggles.

The *Febrerista* regime passed the *Decreto-Ley Sobre la Reforma Agraria* (1936) that, in the eighteen months of *Febrerista* control, granted a hectareage (now disputed) between 130,000 (Fogel, *Luchas* 33) and 200,000

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<sup>58</sup> He was seen as too conciliatory to the Bolivians after the Chaco War and was overthrown by rightist members of his own cabinet and the Paraguayan Army.

(Barua; Carter and Galeano 57) to peasants. This effectively mobilized the large numbers of only recently demilitarized peasants who had to be dealt with and sided the *Febrerista* regime with the peasants and decidedly against the foreign *latifundista* interests in the country. In fact, land explicitly identified for expropriation consisted of *los latifundios de los enclaves agroindustriales* (Fogel, *Luchas* 33). Thus, for the first time in the history of Paraguay, a law was passed that favored peasants over the transnational corporations that dominated the Paraguayan economy. This was attributable to the social and political instability following the Chaco war that necessitated political alliances with the peasant masses in order to maintain control.

When Franco ordered Paraguayan troops to abandon the advanced positions in the Chaco that they had held since the 1935 truce, the army revolted in August 1937 and returned the Liberals to power. A new president, Félix Pavia, signed a peace treaty with Bolivia on July 21, 1938, fixing the final boundaries behind the Paraguayan battle lines. In 1939 the Liberals, recognizing that they would have to choose someone with national stature to be president if they wanted to hold onto power, picked General Estigarribia, the hero of the Chaco War who had since served as special envoy to the United States. Estigarribia quickly realized that he would have to adopt many *Febrerista* ideas to avoid anarchy. Circumventing the die-hard Liberals in the National Assembly who opposed him, Estigarribia assumed “temporary” dictatorial powers in February 1940, but promised the dictatorship would end as soon as a workable constitution was written. He began a land reform program that promised a small plot to every

Paraguayan family. Granting land to the peasantry solicited popular support for Estigarribia's unstable regime. In fact, the instability of this period (1936-1948) is clearly demonstrated by the necessity that compelled successive and short lived governments to distribute 19,000 individual parcels of land varying between ten and twenty hectares (Riquelme 2-3).

After his death in an airplane crash, Estigarribia was replaced as president by Higinio Morinigo, who ruled from 1940 to 1948 (Lewis 180). While Morinigo continued to grant land to the peasantry the outbreak of World War II eased Morinigo's task of ruling Paraguay and keeping the army happy because it stimulated demand for Paraguayan export products, such as meat, hides, and cotton, and boosted the country's export earnings. More importantly, United States policy toward Latin America at this time made Paraguay eligible for major economic assistance. A surge of German influence in the region and Argentina's pro-Axis leanings alarmed the United States, which sought to wean Paraguay away from German and Argentine influence.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the United States sought to enhance its presence in the entire Southern Cone region and pursued close cooperation with Brazil, Argentina's traditional rival. To this end, the United States provided Paraguay with sizable amounts of funds and supplies under the Lend-Lease Agreement as well as loans for public works, and gave technical assistance in agriculture and health care. The United States Department of State approved of closer ties between Brazil and Paraguay and especially

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<sup>59</sup> The first Nazi party founded in South America was founded in Paraguay in 1931. German immigrant schools, churches, hospitals, peasant cooperatives, youth groups and charitable groups were transformed at this time into centers of political activity. All of these organizations displayed swastikas and portraits of Adolf Hitler (Baruja 14).

supported Brazil's offer to finance a road project designed to reduce Paraguay's dependence on Argentina.<sup>60</sup>

With the financial backing of the United States, Morinigo had enough capital to solidify his rule by satisfying the demands of peasants with the expropriation of nearly 950,000 hectares of land between 1940 and 1947 (Carter and Galeano 57). Yet, playing the same bait and switch game that began with the *Revolution de 1904*, Morinigo ignored the *Estatuto Agrario* established by the Estigarribia regime as *Ley No. 1060 de 1940* and went so far as to sign *El Decreto No. 2947* that formally illegalized “*intruso*” or the peasant squatter (Palau 152). Peasants gained a small amount of land but ended up ceding far more in legal rights to more land. A coup attempt in December of 1946 weakened Morinigo's government, which finally fell in March of 1947 when a civil war erupted.<sup>61</sup>

The demise of the Morinigo government left control of the country in play between the two major political parties: the *Colorados* and the *Liberales*. The *Colorado* party emerged victorious after a bloody struggle lasting six months.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This project culminated in the *Puente de Amistad* that commercially linked Brasil with Paraguay for the first time and created the first major land route for trade between Paraguay and any other country. The vast desert of the Chaco Boreal limited trade with Bolivia to the northwest; trade with Brasil had been limited by the thick forests and deep and fast running Paraná River to the north and east. Historically, Paraguay had utilized the Pilomayo river which defined its southern boundary with Argentina. Without a bridge, ferries and barges were utilized to transfer products either into Argentina or down the Pilcomayo and through the Rio de la Plata which was also controlled by Argentina. The development of the Puente de Amistad was an important step towards Paraguayan economic independence. The site of the bridge is marked by the Ciudad del Este, once named Ciudad Presidente Stroessner but changed after the fall of the dictator in 1989. The city is the heart of economic activity in the country, dwarfing the capital, Asunción in wealth and commerce if not in population.

<sup>61</sup> Alfredo Stroessner Matiauda was the commander of the artillery regiment, General Brúgez, in the crucial battle of this civil war. This was the important first step in an ascent to power that would eventually lead to Stroessner's 38 year rule of the country.

<sup>62</sup> Ultra-rightist Colorados concerned about the weakness of the Moringo administration and the possible outbreak of anarchy and national dissolution favored annexation of Paraguay by Argentina (a strong, stable militarist state at the time). Encouraged by Argentina's support of and aid to Paraguay during the Chaco War, Romero Pereyra sought and received financial support

Instability continued to plague the country even after the conclusion of a civil war that, for the first time since before the Chaco, saw a single party in power. In fact, after the fall of the Morinigo government, Paraguay saw 18 presidents between 1947 and 1953.

## **2.5 The Postcolonial Epoch (1954-1989)**

This instability came to an end with the election of Alfredo Stroessner Matiauda as president of the country in 1954. Stroessner ruled the country as a dictator for 35 years until 1989 when he was overthrown in a coup and exiled to Brazil. The longevity of his administration depended upon a number of factors including foreign aid,<sup>63</sup> economic expansion, brutal repression of opposition, and a new approach to the land tenure inequities in the country. Stroessner paid particular interest to the land reform issue, especially in the early stages of his presidential career. His regime was in serious trouble in 1958 when a guerrilla

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from both Argentina and Brazil that allowed them to emerge victorious in the civil war (Baruja, Paiva and Schaffroth 14).

<sup>63</sup> Stroessner benefited from the United States' position on communism in the 1950s and 1960s. The United States supported authoritarian, anticommunist regimes in order to avoid the emergence of a left-wing regime in Paraguay. Such a regime was perceived to be ideally situated at the geographical center of the South American continent for providing a base of operations for revolutionary political activity in that region. While in Paraguay during his 1958 tour of Latin America, U.S. Vice-president Nixon praised Stroessner for opposing communism more strongly than any other nation in the world. The United States supplied Paraguay huge amounts of foreign aid from 1947 until 1977. Monies supplied to Paraguay by the United States via the Alliance for Progress program accounted for nearly 40 percent of Paraguay's budget during the Kennedy administration. In addition, the United States supplied about \$750,000 worth of military hardware and trained more than 2,000 Paraguayan military officers between 1947 and 1977. Paraguay regularly voted in favor of United States policies in the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Influenced by Paraguay's support for the United States intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, the United States became friendlier to Stroessner in the mid-1960s under President Lyndon B. Johnson. New United States-supported military governments in Brazil and Argentina also improved United States-Paraguay ties. Stroessner, probably the United States' most dependable ally in Latin America, once remarked that the United States ambassador was like an extra member of his cabinet (US Library of Congress).



insurgency, organized and supported by exiled *Liberales* and *Febreristas* who provided small bands of armed men across the border from Argentina. Venezuela generously supported these groups, as did the Cuban government under Fidel Castro. The peasantry, rather than responding to the calls for revolution, supported Stroessner. The *py nandi*, or barefoot ones, were irregular peasant troops critical to countering this threat to the regime's rule. After the peasants proved so useful and with the intention of solidifying his rural support, Stroessner formalized the long practice of governmental land grants to the peasantry with the foundation of the *Instituto del Bienestar Rural* (IBR) in 1963. The IBR is a government agency whose primary mission is to facilitate the transfer of state and private land to peasants who desire to farm that land. With a budget provided by Congress, the IBR funded the negotiation, purchase, or lease of land and the organization, planning, establishment and maintenance of agricultural colonies or *asentamientos*.

The successful function of the IBR formally established the ability and need for the state to “regulate” the land market by transferring both state lands and unproductive private land holdings to the peasantry. Today many peasant protestors call for the government to use the IBR as an instrument of social justice. The continued existence of the IBR in Paraguay encourages peasants to invade and occupy private properties and, after the fact, solicit the support of the IBR. This amounts to asking the IBR to compensate the landowner for the land and redistribute the property to the peasants. The IBR has functioned since 1963 to make the peasantry dependent upon the state for land while, in turn,

guaranteeing the political support of the rural peasantry, who comprise more than half of Paraguay's population.

Thus, it was with the intent of buttressing his popular support and solidifying his tenuous hold on power that Stroessner institutionally formalized the historically informal process of land reform. Up to this point in Paraguayan history, peasants would occupy land illegally, obligate the legal owners of the land to instigate removal tactics, then protest their subsequent treatment resulting in an adjudication by the Paraguayan state. In theory, under the auspices of the Stroessner regime, the IBR would represent the Paraguayan peasant in negotiations with both the Paraguayan government and private landowners in order to regulate and improve the efficiency of land reform in the country. However, under the Stroessner administration, the primary function of the IBR was to initiate state control of an informal sector of the economy. By regulating the land expropriation mechanism, the state could give the *campesinos* enough land to assuage their mounting demands, formally control the price of land, and forestall peasant initiative. In addition, the Paraguayan government's new control over land and its price permitted adherents of the Colorado Party and the dictatorship to expropriate large amounts of land whose titulation was informal (never recognized by the state) or which never received titulation as public commons. The theft of the commons by local politicians permitted Stroessner to undermine the financial support for political opposition, and reward the party faithful with grants of once-commons-land or legal title to land, while opponents

of the dictatorship found their untitled lands confiscated by the state.<sup>64</sup> In many cases, peasants were unduly affected by the land transfers as they were robbed of pasturage for their animals or even robbed of their own land and were thus further impoverished (CIPAE 27-33).<sup>65</sup>

Despite the abuses of land titulation under the Stroessner regime, the distribution of public land played a key role in Paraguay's economic growth over the past 30 years. This intensification occurred in two diametrically opposed strategies. First, the institution of what have been called the *nuevos latifundios*, or new large estates, enabled the speedy modernization and transformation of the *estancias* into agribusinesses that exported cotton, soybeans and cattle. The concentration of state resources to provide land, infrastructure, judicial protection and credit permitted the regime's closest allies to compete on the agricultural world market benefiting the *latifundistas* as well as their protectors, the functionaries of the state (Carter and Galeano 61-2). The second strategy was to redistribute state land that was not easily exploited to peasants. Thus, remote state land holdings without road access, with mountainous features, with sandy or shallow soil unfit for farming or with no tenable access to potable water were expropriated for peasants. The peasants "opened up" these lands, building roads, bridges, and farms without any significant state assistance. This two-pronged approach concentrated the state's resources in the hands of the elite class while

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<sup>64</sup> These land possessions granted by the dictator to his adherents are now referred to as *tierras malhabidas* or ill-gotten land (CIPAE 27).

<sup>65</sup> CIPAE, *El Comité de Iglesias para Ayudas de Emergencias* (a non-profit legal group for the representation of peasants in Paraguay) estimates that between 1989 and 1993 12% of all land conflict in the country was the result of the irregular transfer of commons lands (CIPAE 28).

simultaneously satisfying the demands of peasants for land and exploiting the self-sufficiency of the peasantry.

In addition, peasants were further exploited, as they were encouraged to participate in the crop diversification pioneered by the *latifundistas*. The state, through the Ministry of Agriculture, taught peasants how to plant alternative cash crops such as cotton. With seed, credit and technical support provided by the state and with new land to farm, peasant labor explosively contributed to cash exports. However, the prices peasants received from the *acopiadores*, or cotton cooperatives, amounted to pennies on the dollar of the value the agribusinesses (who owned the cooperatives) were receiving for their products.

Without formal recognition of their exploitation but suffering from poverty, peasant-farmers, helped by the Catholic church, organized alternatives to the statist system of peasant exploitation. Peasant-farmer's organizations reappeared in the early 1960s, followed (1969-1975) by the more formalized *Ligas Agrarias Cristianas* (LAC) or the Christian Agrarian Leagues, *las Juventudes Agrarias Cristianas* (JAC) or Christian Agrarian Youth and *las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEB) or Foundational Ecclesiastical Communities.

These organizations quickly spread to all parts of the country. The founding principle of the *Ligas Agrarias* was to apply Christian ethical principles to the society and its structures. This was an important challenge to the system of exploitation whereby peasants borrowed money from a *patrón* at 5% per month, grew and sold their cotton to the *patrón* at a price he set, and used that money to

pay down their debt at the town store (also owned by the *patrón*). The development of the *almacén de consumo*, or the household store,<sup>66</sup> permitted *el trueque*, or bartering, the extension of informal lines of credit (without interest) but, most importantly, the elimination of the *acopiadores* and local *patrones* who greatly marked up the retail value of the goods and foodstuffs required for survival. These *patrones* were usually the presidents of the *seccionales*, or the *seccionaleros partidarias* who served the regime as the bottom feeders in the state apparatus (CIPAE 28). The communitarian lifestyle, including the sharing of common lands and participation in a buying cooperative, removed tens of thousands of peasants from the control of local *patrones* and, more importantly, from participation in the state economy.

With the accusation that the *Ligas Agrarias* were communist enclaves, they were dissolved in 1976 with physical repression, abductions and assassinations of the leaders of these groups. These repressions are remembered as the *Pascua Dolorosa* or the Sad Easter as the forceful dissolution of these groups took place between April and May of 1976.<sup>67</sup> Even today, peasants talk about this repressive period and the dictatorship's re-invocation of Guggari's

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<sup>66</sup> The *almacén del consumo* is a common feature in Paraguay today. Each Paraguayan peasant stores various items in their own homes that they resell to their neighbors at a modest profit. This permits peasant to cut out the middleman, or the *patrón*, and to benefit rather than pay the retail markup for daily goods.

<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the most memorable event of the *Pascua Dolorosa* was the attack on the Colonia Jejui on February 8, 1975. The colony was attacked at midnight by several battalions of Paraguayan army infantry resulting in an unknown number of dead and more than 600 imprisoned. Thirty leaders, including Catholic priests, were jailed and tortured for a period of six months. The colony's land was later sold by the IBR to a private owner who utilized the 23- hectare lot for raising cattle. Today, *Asociación Campesina San Isidro del Jejui* is representing the colony's survivors in court in a bid to return the land to its rightful owners ("Recuerdan 27 Años " 1+).

emergency decree banning all public organization.<sup>68</sup> Local *patrones* enforced the law ruthlessly and demanded that any group of more than five persons associating publicly could only do so if that meeting included the local *seccionalero*.<sup>69</sup>

Peasant protest was further diminished by an economic expansion that achieved an average growth rate of 8% through the 1980s.<sup>70</sup> A growing economy meant jobs. A peasant who owned only a few hectares of land could supplement his income with *changa* or day labor to improve his family's standard of living. With few peasant protests governmental repression of peasant organization was eased in the early 1980s and small farmers committees were organized and permitted to operate without excessive pressure. This trend was greatly aided by the efforts of non-governmental organizations.

## 2.6 The Epoch of Struggle (1982-present)

Beginning with the softening of Stroessner's rule in the country, peasant protest activity spontaneously re-awakened, on six short years after the massacre of the *Pascua Dolorosa*. The present epoch in Paraguayan history, tracing its origins from the re-awakening of peasant protest in 1982 to the present, inherits a long history of peasant struggles for land. This inheritance exists as a set of linguistic and social practices, established during these struggles, which serve to constrain or enable protest activity today. Present protest activity in Paraguay is

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<sup>68</sup> President José P. Guggari outlawed public meetings in a presidential decree in 1931, a law that was periodically enforced until the Revolution of 1989.

<sup>69</sup> In addition, the peasants greatly feared the *pyrague*, or the peasant spy paid by the government as an informant to root out political opposition in the countryside.

<sup>70</sup> Two factors account for this amazing economic growth rate: the new agrarian economy and the Itaipúa dam project, 1973-1982 (US Library of Congress).

largely dependent upon the historical conditions of its making. More specifically, ideas about land, citizenship, justice, social class and history structure today's struggle and determine the nature and success of peasant protest activity within the broader historical landscape of Paraguayan history.

By the early 1980s, many informal social groups including small farmers' groups, neighborhood commissions as well as church and other community groups existed throughout the country in a climate of rising expectations and economic opportunity. However, a rapid economic reversal as well as other factors contributed to a sudden burst of social discontent. Protest organizations arose out of the cultural memory of the *Ligas Agrarias* and manifested themselves through the informal organizations of the rural countryside. These social groups petitioned for the fundamental right of the Paraguayan citizen to own land, the right to credit, technical assistance from governmental sources, the liberty of association and an end to repressions.

Four basic factors drove these nascent organizations into conflict with the state: the closing of the agro-economic frontier, uncompetitive farming practices and the fall of world cotton prices in an emerging global market, agrarian unemployment as a result of an economic recession, and the increasing cost of land (CIPAE 18).

Despite years of IBR sponsored agricultural colonization projects, the land available to the state for peasant transplantation had been exhausted.<sup>71</sup> There was, simply put, no more land in the hands of politically well-connected commercial

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<sup>71</sup> All of the nearly 132 new agricultural settlements since 1989, none of which were proposed or planned by the IBR, were the products of peasant struggles. The IBR was prompted to assist peasant settlement once those lands had already been occupied (Riquelme 2).

interests that such interests desired to sell. There was no longer anywhere to transplant the peasant population in order to assuage the socio-economic pressure of the *latifundial* subdivision of land and the consequent impoverishment of the peasants.

Paraguay's entry into the world market and the opening of its economy between 1989 and 1992 featured an economic strategy akin to shock therapy, immediately compelling Paraguayan agriculture to modernize in order to compete in the world marketplace. The Agricultural Census of 1991 revealed that only 21% of peasant farms of less than five hectares owned a traction animal and a plow and only 28% of those same farms possessed hand-operated pesticide sprayers (Borda, *Economía* 74).<sup>72</sup> Thus, a great number of peasant farms lacked even the basic necessities for subsistence farming let alone the basic tools of the modern, efficient agribusinesses with whom they compete. In addition, the peasant's main cash crop, cotton, became less and less viable as international cotton prices fluctuated, and exploitation by the country's cotton purchasing monopoly systematically robbed the peasant of any value the crop might have. Yet, without the ability to compete efficiently and to diversify into other products, the Paraguayan peasant was trapped in what Esteban Areco has called *una esclavitud blanca* or a white [cotton] slavery (Areco 17).

A prolonged economic stagnation quickly followed the boom years of the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the completion of the *Itaipúa* dam in 1983 and a

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<sup>72</sup> An independent study conducted in 1983 revealed that although 30% of peasant farms surveyed owned plows, only 33% of those farms owned metal plows, suggesting that only 10% of all peasants owned metal plows. In addition, that study also revealed that only 10% of peasant farms owned an ox cart (the primary means of agricultural transport) (Campos, Nikiphoroff and Silvero 40).



precipitous fall in world cotton prices, the Paraguayan economy shrank and unemployment skyrocketed from 6% in 1983 to 15% a year later (Carter and Galeano 63). Thus, peasant families that maintained their tenuous position above extreme poverty could no longer use *changa* as a means of supplementing a meager farm income and they could not afford to buy land to augment that income and occupy the labor idled by unemployment.<sup>73</sup>

Complicating the economic picture for the peasant was an increase in land value. Average land values rose 66% between 1975 and 1986 and doubled in the rural countryside. Latifundial tendencies strongly impacted the Paraguayan peasant even despite the Stroessner regime's apparently generous distribution of land. Paraguay maintained a population growth rate of 2.8% throughout this period, culminating in a doubling of rural households between 1962 and 1992 (GTZ 48).<sup>74</sup> The little land that peasants already possessed became increasingly inadequate for their needs as their families grew and higher land prices made it impossible to buy more.

The Stroessner regime titled 12,383,885 hectares of land (23,817,737 total hectares or nearly 52% of all the land in the country) between 1957 and 1987

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<sup>73</sup> Even peasants who did manage to find day-labor suffered as a result of stagnating and then falling wages between 1981 and 1984. According to a study conducted in 1985 by CEPAL (el Centro Estadístico Paraguayo) real wage increases made throughout the 1970s were lost in four short years between 1981 and 1984. Changes in real wages were as follows: -1.9% (1981), 0.3% (1982), 0.9% (1983), and -19.1% (1984) (González 23).

<sup>74</sup> Rural paraguay households more than doubled from 205,528 in 1962 to 411,856 in 1992. Note that this number does not include rural to urban flight by which the rural superpopulation relocates in urban centers. Urban households nearly tripled, growing from 122,780 in 1962 to 855,547 in 1992 indicating that large numbers of rural peasants migrated to form urban households during this period (GTZ 64).

(Carter and Galeano 174).<sup>75</sup> Little of this land was titled to peasants as the percentage of all arable land represented by *latifundia* or land holdings of more than 1,000 hectares actually grew from 78% in 1991 to 82% in 1991 (Palau 172).<sup>76</sup> So, the wealthy exploited the political apparatus of the state to their advantage and used the IBR to enrich themselves by obtaining legal title to land of communal, dubious, or state origin. At the same time, peasant *minifundia* grew from 89,658 or 36% farms of less than five hectares in 1981 to 122,750 or 39.9% farms of less than five hectares in 1991. This pattern was repeated in the category of the slightly more prosperous peasants whose land holdings exceeded the minimum for extreme poverty with more than five hectares but less than ten. This stratum of the peasantry also increased under the Stroessner regime. Rural farms of more than five and less than ten hectares represented 19.6% of all farms or 48,881 entities in the 1981 census. Yet, these same farms represented 21.6% of all farms or 66,605 entities in 1991 (Carter and Galeano 174).

Years of economic expansion (1972-1983) had acclimated a peasant society to newly achieved economic expectations. Diminishing economic opportunities drove peasants to invade *latifundias*, occupying land and demanding state recognition of the peasant's right to gainful employment and economic opportunity via land ownership. Between 1983 and 1986 15,000 peasant families were involved in more than 50 land occupations (Fogel, *Luchas* 54). The violent

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<sup>75</sup> The FAO estimated in 1994 that 7.1 million hectares of arable existed in Paraguay of which total slightly more than 2 million hectares was actually under cultivation. A total of 5 million hectares or 71% of arable land was left idle while a peasant population of 2.5 million was utilizing a mere 6.2% of land under cultivation (Fogel, *Luchas* 57).

<sup>76</sup> Fogel reports that the soybean acreage of agro-industrial farms tripled between 1982 and 1989 (Fogel, *Luchas* 53).

repression of peasants that followed as well as an unstable economy provoked a crisis of legitimacy in the government of Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda, who had ruled Paraguay for 35 years. He was overthrown in a military coup that occurred over the 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> of February of 1989.

The real function of this new level of organization was to give voice to the long repressed social disorder in the rural countryside. The effect of the organization was to increase the number of protest activities as well as the scale of each land occupation and protest. Sixty-seven of the 98 peasant land occupations in which CIPAE (*Comité de Iglesias para Ayudas de Emergencias*) extended legal aid involved more than 50 families (CIPAE, *Conflicto* 22). Organizations enabled an enormous increase in protest activity throughout the country. Many years of unfulfilled promises made by the Stroessner regime, the IBR, and the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) as well as the mounting economic pressures forced thousands of peasants to seek economic opportunities beyond their *minifundia*. Shortly after the fall of the dictatorship, there was an increased sense of agency in the rural countryside. It was as if the dictator had been the symbolic obstacle to the realization of the economic freedom peasants throughout Paraguay dreamed of.

New organizations were either constructed and directed by rural peasants or they were created in their interests. Peasant groups and peasant-interest groups were united not by the fall of the dictator and the expectations of political freedom that arose as a result of that fall; rather, peasant groups and peasant-interest groups were united by a long history of land tenure practices that had created a

culture wherein *peasants asked for and received land from the national government in recognition of their economic contribution to the nation's agrarian economy*. Each national revolution, starting with the *Revolución de 1904*, resulted in newly constructed and weak governments that pacified the peasantry and buttressed popular support with land reform. The protest activity that follows the fall of the dictator from 1989 onward follows this historical pattern. It is not so driven by new political freedoms as much as it is driven by a paradigm that has become historically instantiated in social practices that, in spite of the dearth of state land that could be given to peasants, drives peasants to seize and occupy private land holdings in imitation of the paradigm.

Piven and Cloward point out the historical nature typical of social struggles:

Ongoing struggles for power continually stimulate efforts by contenders to promulgate and enforce rules which either proscribe the use of specific political resources by their antagonists, or define conditions limiting their use...Once objectified in a system of law, the rules forged by past power struggles continue to shape ongoing conflicts by constraining or enhancing the ability of actors to use whatever leverage their social circumstances yield them. That is why new power struggles often take the form of efforts to alter the parameters of the permissible by challenging or defying the legitimacy of prevailing norms themselves. (Piven and Cloward, *Breaking* 346-7)

Today's social struggles are largely shaped by past conflicts. The decisions taken, rules made and social practices habituated in the past both enable and constrain present struggles. In the case of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, it is quite apparent that historical definitions of land, land ownership, as well as private and public property practices have shaped the Paraguayan

peasant's notions of land in a manner that is largely universal amongst the peasantry.

The historically inscribed and ideological nature of the peasant struggle for land accounts for the widespread agreement amongst peasants and their supporters about the need for social organizations to address the issue. The real strength of these organizations has been their widespread and collective nature. Land occupations have been largely spontaneous affairs. Groups of peasants associated by family or *pueblo* spontaneously rally together to invade a property. Usually it is only after this initial protest spark that peasant organizations rally to the cause, offering to represent smaller groups in the process of negotiating with state, local and private entities. Prior ideological agreement about the need for struggle allows these small, spontaneous entities to obtain access to other organizations and services via their association with larger peasant organizations. Thus, ensconced within a network of many groups who all recognize the historical impetus for land reform, even small groups of peasants can receive support from non-governmental organizations, ecclesiastical organizations, unions, and political parties (CIPAE 63).

However, the coalescence of many different social organizations driven by a shared historical impetus for changing land tenure practices in Paraguay has also constrained the effectiveness of social protest as well. The ideology of land reform, defined by such concepts as the rejection of foreign ownership of land, itinerant farming practices, state patronage of the peasant need for land, squatting as a social norm and the ethos of land ownership (the one who works the land,

owns the land) offers a broad and sometimes vague platform for coordinating and agreeing upon protest methods, demands, and goals. In the struggle for land reform in Paraguay, there are at least five basic levels of peasant or peasant-interest organization that can be identified as the following: official or state organizations, non-governmental organizations, national peasant organizations, local peasant organizations and informal peasant organizations.

Official or state organizations include the following three government agencies: *El Instituto de Bienestar Rural* (IBR), *Crédito Agrícola de Habilitación* (CAH), and *El Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería* (MAG). The IBR's primary function is to facilitate the relocation of the peasant super population to the agricultural frontier. After the disappearance of that frontier, the IBR was forced into the role of mediator between peasant protesters occupying land and the state, local and private interests attempting to remove them from that land.<sup>77</sup> MAG's primary function is to transfer technology to all sectors of the agricultural economy including peasants. This ministry's efforts have been almost a complete failure. A 1983 study demonstrated that 93.6% of all peasant farms surveyed received no technical support at all in the area of crop management, a number that improves marginally for technical support in the area of animal management at 90% (Campos, Nikiphoroff and Silvero 197-199). The CAH's record is no better. As of 1983, 91% of all farms received no form of agricultural credit. By 1991, after eighteen years of work, that figure had decreased to only 90% (Borda, "Conjuntera Económica" 43). The state representation of peasant interests was a

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<sup>77</sup> All of the nearly 132 new agricultural settlements since 1989, none of which were proposed or planned by the IBR, were the products of peasant struggles. The IBR was prompted to assist peasant settlement once those lands had already been occupied (Riquelme 2).

dismal failure. The real responsibility for the representation of peasant rights in the struggle fell upon others.

Non-governmental organizations have been crucial to the development of peasant organizations at all levels. The most important NGOs are CIPAE and ALTER-VIDA, two NGOs dedicated to the support of rural peasant causes.<sup>78</sup> The primary mission of CIPAE has been to aid peasants with organizational training and free legal defense. ALTER-VIDA's primary mission is to inform and aid peasants in the area of sustainable development. Each of these NGOs has provided financial aid to peasant groups as well as, and more importantly, information for self-organization and mobilization.

Informal peasant organizations are defined as those organizations whose primary function is not the struggle for land reform but that can contribute to the struggle by providing a platform for organizing local communities and or discussion of land reform issues. These organizations sometimes but not necessarily come into service of the struggle. Informal peasant organizations are the most common local organizations in rural *pueblos*, *compañías* and *barrios* that often serve as the most important means of organization at the local level. Such groups have fed the membership of, supported the formation of, worked in

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<sup>78</sup> Dozens of non-governmental organizations are dedicated to the aid of the rural peasant. The following constitute a representative example: *La CODEHUPY está conformada por la Asociación Americana de Juristas; Asociación de Familiares y Víctimas del Servicio Militar; BASE ECTA Base de Educación Comunicación y Tecnología Alternativa; CEJIL; CDE Centro de Documentación y Estudios; CMP Coordinadora de Mujeres del Paraguay; Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos y por Nunca más al terrorismo de Estado; CODEHUCO coordinadora de Derechos Humanos de Cordillera; Coordinadora de Pueblos Nativos de la Cuenca del Pilcomayo; CONAPI Coordinadora Nacional de la Pastoral Indígena; DECIDAMOS Campaña por la Expresión Ciudadana; DNI Derechos del Niño Internacional; Fundación Kuña Aty; FUNPARE fundación para la reforma del Estado; gestión Local; INECIP; Luna Nueva; MOC Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia; Pastoral Social; SEFEM Servicio de Formación y estudio de la mujer; SERPAJ Paraguay; Sobrevivencia-Amigos de la tierra; TierraViva-A los pueblos indígenas del Chaco y Amnistía Internacional Paraguay.*

conjunction with and, in the case of the *comisiones vecinales* or neighborhood associations, sometimes transformed into local and national peasant organizations in the land reform struggle when a local land issue was common to all members of the informal local group. Other informal peasant organizations include *clubes de amas de casa* (mothers clubs),<sup>79</sup> *comités de agricultores* (local farmers' committees),<sup>80</sup> and *clubes de jóvenes* (young peoples clubs).<sup>81</sup>

The informal organizations have, for the most part, functioned on an *ad hoc* basis to solicit the aid of government agencies in order to address the most immediate communal needs of the *barrio*, *pueblo*, or *comanía*. However, in many cases the *comisiones vecinales* have not only fed the ranks of and supported local peasant organizations but, in many cases, have transformed from *ad hoc* organizations to local peasant organizations committed to land reform. González, Casaccia, Vázquez and Velázquez report that many of the *comisiones vecinales*

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<sup>79</sup> *Clubs de Amas de la Casa* were formed in parallel with the *Comités de Agricultores* (encouraged by the church) for the primary function of educating peasant women in areas of health, sanitation, and child welfare. Formally and informally, extension agents from SEAG (*Servicio de Extension de Agricultura y Ganadería*) would organize and provide technical expertise for these groups.

<sup>80</sup> Farmers' committees begin under the auspices of *el Servicio Técnico Interamericano de Cooperación Agrícola* (STICA) as a project of MAG carried out by *Servicio de Extension Agrícola and Ganadería* (SEAG) beginning in 1955. Small farmers groups are organized to aid in the transmission of technical support and credit (González 97).

<sup>81</sup> *Los comisiones vecinales* originated in the *seccionales* (the local political representation of the Colorado party). *Comisiones vecinales* consisted of local political units whose function was to collection petitions for and participate in local public works projects as well as staffing political events and even staffing elections. The *comisiones vecinales* guaranteed fidelity to the Colorado Party (ANR) and permitted local communities to trade that political allegiance for government support and the funding of infrastructure projects in the rural countryside. Participation in the *comisiones vecinales* has been described as "*poniendo su camisa Colorado*," putting on one's red colored shirt to show allegiance to the Colorado Party (whose color is red as opposed to the blue of the opposition *Partido Liberal*).



that transformed themselves into local pro-land reform groups were formally connected with national peasant organizations (73).<sup>82</sup>

Local peasant organizations take two basic forms: groups that have evolved from informal organizations and collections of *minifundistas* who have invaded a property and organize themselves to petition its expropriation and titulation. An example of the former is the case of the communities *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*. These two communities were long established and suffered *minifundización* or land repartition below the level of subsistence. As explained in the words of an individual peasant from *Juan de Mena*:

*Cuando comenzamos algunos de nuestros padres contaban con dos hectáreas en aquel tiempo, y cuando sus hijos crecían y se casaban se quedaban todos en esas dos hectáreas. De ahí comían todos. Y cuando ya no se podía, cuando ya no había alternativas, solamente quedaba luchar...y en este momento trabajamos con el Comité de Agricultores... y ahí nació la idea, en el Comité de Agricultores. Pero, encontramos que no podíamos plantar nada porque no teníamos tierra. (Fogel, Luchas 80)*

[When we started some of our parents had only two hectares (of land) at that time and when their children grew and married they all stayed together (living) on those two hectares. From there (those two hectares) they all ate. And when they couldn't anymore, when they had run out of alternatives, all that was left was to fight ... and in that moment we worked with the farmer's committee ... and the idea came from the farmer's committee. But, we found that we could not plant anything because we didn't have any land].

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<sup>82</sup> Examples of the interconnection of the four levels of peasant protest groups and their variation are the following: *Las Comisiones Vecinales de Limoy* (in the Department of *Alto Paraná*) and *Potrero Angelito* (in the Department of *Canindeyu*) were directly linked to the national protest organizations the MCP (*El Movimiento Campesino Paraguayo*) and ONAC (*La Organización Nacional Campesina*). On the other hand, *la Comisión Vecinal de Minga Porã* was connected to a departmental peasant organization *La Asociación de Agricultores de Alto Paraná* (ASAGRAPA) which was in turn associated with another national organization, *La Coordinación Nacional de Productores Agrícolas* (CONAPA).

Thus, the idea of the struggle for land was given public voice by means of the farmer's committee. The farmer's committee eventually evolved into a *comisión vecinal*, which included all of the members of the community of *Juan de Mena*. The growing insufficiency of the land owned by the peasants to provide for even their most basic needs in both *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* was sharply contrasted by the presence of a *latifundia* of 40,000 hectares consisting of a cattle ranch and forest reserves belonging to the company *Union Paraguayo*, S.A. *Union Paraguayo*'s property lay between *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, another peasant *pueblo* with the same land scarcity pressures.

Each of these communities rented small plots of land from *Union Paraguayo*, for pasturage and cultivation. Peasants would clear the forest and grow tobacco for a period of time until pasture grasses established themselves and the peasants would be moved on to clear another forested plot. This permitted the company to expand the land available for ranching with no expenditure for clearing the land; in fact, exploiting the peasants for the task made it possible for this land clearing to be performed at a significant profit.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> In the "colono" system, *latifundistas*, or large landowners, encourage small farmers or landless peasants to clear frontier land for agriculture and temporary settlement. These landowners take a portion of the harvest as rent or establish steep rents that are paid before planting in order to guarantee payment and place the entirety of the risk of crop failure on the peasant. After a short period, usually one to two years, the peasants are moved on to open up more forest and the old plots are taken over by grasses and converted to cattle farms (Patridge 10). This practice has pervaded the practices of the peasant farmer to the point that even small land owners themselves believe that only newly cleared land, with its high fertility, known as "rosado" can be used for cash crops. Older land, or "*cocue cue*" as it is called in Paraguay, is viewed by the peasant farmer as only capable of supporting low-income crops such as *mandi'o* and *poroto* or cassava and beans. This is a system of exploitation that has been employed since the conquest and which continues to be employed today.

Once they had identified their task and organized themselves, peasants from both *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* initiated occupations of *Union Paraguaya*'s land. By means of coordination with and the support of three non-governmental organizations, *El Centro Paraguayo de Coopertivistas de Cordillera* (CPCC), *El Pastoral Social Cordillera* (PSC) and *El Comité de Iglesias para Ayuda de Emergencias* (CIPAE) the peasants were able to petition the IBR for the legal expropriation of 5,000 of the 40,000 hectares possessed by *Union Paraguaya*. The first forcible evictions of peasants occurred in 1989. With the fall of the dictator in February of 1989, peasants initiated seven months of protest activity in the Paraguayan capital. After being attacked by Paraguayan security forces with dogs and dispersed, public opinion turned in favor of the peasants and action was taken upon their petition as the Congress promulgated *Ley 08/89* in September of 1989 and a Presidential decree for measurement and division of up to 5,000 hectares.<sup>84</sup> A lethargic and corrupt legal system slowed action on the issue until 1992 when all efforts to resolve the dilemma came to a halt with the adoption of the new national constitution. Five thousand hectares was finally divided amongst 600 peasant families from the pueblos of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* in December of 1993 after eight years of struggle.

Yet, the struggle did not end so easily. On November 20, 1995, José Martínez was assassinated in *el Asentamiento Guido Almada I, Distrito de Juan de Mena*. Martínez was a member of *La Organización de Lucha por la Tierra* (OLT) who continued to struggle with *Unión Paraguaya, S.A* in the tit-for-tat

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<sup>84</sup> Fogel notes that the presidential decreed ordered the peasants themselves to pay the costs of travel and support for the state functionaries sent to measure and divide the land (Fogel, *Luchas* 95)

challenges that followed the expropriation of the immediate domain of the land occupation. Access to roads, markets, political actors and other infrastructure required to run the new settlement still remain largely under the control of the *latifundista*. The presumed assassins were armed civilians in the service of *Unión Paraguaya*. Representatives of the new settlements complain that paramilitary groups funded by *Unión Paraguaya* circulate freely throughout the settlements trespassing on private land, erecting checkpoints, asking for documentation and threatening the leaders of the new communities. No official police action has ever been taken upon these reports or the murder of José Martínez (U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1997: Paraguay*). The OLT remains the dominant social organization in the new communities and a permanent fixture in the ongoing struggle to secure not only ownership but free access to land for the peasants of the new settlements born out of the struggle for land.

It is clear that even local peasant groups that are well organized from the beginning tend to evolve from an informal organization based in the community to a regional or national organization with the aid and direction of non-governmental organizations. In the case of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, these communities began in *comisiones vecinales*, which evolved into the OLT over a period of eight years. The OLT is a regional peasant organization that is also a member of *La Mesa Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas* (MCNOC), the largest peasant organization in Paraguay.

The second type of local peasant organization reinforces this pattern. Even without initial organization, peasant organizations that have been formed spontaneously by diverse members of a region without prior organization evolve in the same way. This second method involves an initial invasion of a property, then an attempt to organize and petition for the legalization of that occupation. This process is exemplified by the case of *Capi'ibary* in the Department of *San Pedro*. The peasant organization, *la Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* eventually formed out of the spontaneous invasion of a forest reserve of more than 19,000 hectares owned and jointly managed by *el Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería* (MAG) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The first occupations occurred in January of 1990 (although peasants continued to join the occupation up to and including 1992).

One peasant relates the diverse and spontaneous nature of the occupation:

*Viné a esta ocupación en 1992, pero después de tres desalojos la gente vino de distintos lugares, de La Colmena, Caaguazú, Fina-i, SIDEPAR, la mayoría se trasladó acá porque las tierra no servían, en los asentamientos que abandonaron. De distintos lugares se llegó a este asentamiento. (Fogel, Luchas 104)*

[I came to this occupation in 1992, but after three evictions the people came from all over (to join us), from La Colmena, Caaguazú, Fina-I, SIDEPAR, the majority moved here because their land was no good in the settlements they abandoned. (People) came from all over the place to join this colony].

Peasant organization arises to justify the presence of the peasants and the land invasion itself, not vice-versa.

The first repressions occurred quickly in the same month the occupations began. The Paraguayan infantry supported by local police invaded the settlement

on January 20, 1990. Every single *rancho* was burned as the armed forces invaded the settlement and physically evicted the peasants from the property. Beatings of both men and women, imprisonment of the peasant leaders and the burning death of one child (Aldo Brizuela) were the result. The peasants were evicted again in June of 1990 and also in 1991, 1993, and twice in 1994 (Fogel, *Luchas* 104-107).<sup>85</sup> Three times, the settlement was invaded, the peasants were beaten, the leaders were jailed and the rest were removed to live under tarps along the river *Capi'ibary*, located approximately two miles from western edge of the settlement and five miles from the town of *Capi'ibary*. In September of 1994, the peasants initiated an occupation of the *Plaza de la Independencia* (directly in front of the national congressional building) for ten months and 17 days. This occupation involved at any given time up to 300 peasants living under tarps and occupying the plaza 24 hours a day.

A large part of the problem was that the peasants were invading a forest reserve that was jointly managed by a Japanese agency. The state authorities argued that they could not break a treaty with the Japanese to reforest the reserve. Authorities (primarily MAG) dismissed the peasant claim to the land on the basis of the special status of the reserve as well. As early as 1992, the peasants discovered and pointed out that agents in MAG were planting and harvesting marijuana in extensive cultivations throughout the reserve as well as depredating the reserve of its most valuable lumber in *rollotrafico*.<sup>86</sup> They clamored for

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<sup>85</sup> These events were confirmed in my own interviews with the leaders of the *Asentamiento Capi'ibary* in August of 2001.

<sup>86</sup> *Rollotrafico* is the practice of illegally harvesting valuable lumber from state or private land. In most instances, *rollotrafico* is committed by servants of the state who, in their capacity as

justice but received only detentions and evictions until eighty peasants blocked and surrounded MAG employees *en flagrante* while harvesting lumber with large equipment. Although MAG officials were loathe to surrender their lucrative clandestine harvesting operation, the peasants blackmailed the agency into signing a document in support of their petition for the land, permitting the employees, the equipment and the evidence of wrongdoing to exit the scene.

Not only did the peasants demonstrate that the state was not executing its responsibility for the preservation of the environment but the peasants planted 30,000 tree seedlings in beds for transplantation and made a formal proposal to the Director of *El Servicio Forestal Nacional* (SFN) that they were planning “*un asentamiento agroforestal*,” or an ecologically planned settlement. As proof, they offered the presence of the 30,000 seedlings and suggested that once granted their lots, they would dedicate at least half of that land to a forest reserve, using the other half for cultivation. With the adoption of this ecologically friendly rhetoric the rather disorganized collection of peasants *became la Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* in December of 1992 representing more than 500 peasant families or approximately 3,000 peasants who occupied the forest reserve at that time.

The problem of *rollotrafico* persisted as local political agents as well as employees of the *Servicio Nacional Forestal* quickly filled the vacuum left in the absence of MAG. *Seccionaleros* from the pueblo *Capi'ibary* organized the theft of lumber from the reserve by various groups of peasant occupants. Internal

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caretakers of vast plots of state owned properties, utilize their office to depredate the very forests they have been given the responsibility of protecting. The very fact that this crime has a specific name indicates its widespread practice.

struggles erupted including assassinations of peasant leaders, petitions for enforcement of the rule of law to state authorities and, finally, armed confrontations between the peasants themselves. In the culminating instance, 100 peasants armed with machetes and a few firearms confronted a group of their colleagues whose illegal lumber harvesting undermined their argument for the establishment of an ecologically sensitive settlement.

In July of 1993, the leaders of *la Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* (MCAAC) attended the congress of the *Coordinación Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT) (one of the largest and most important unions in the country) at which meeting they made national contacts (most notably with CIPAE, which began to train them in organizational strategies). In 1994, the peasants received the support of *La Organización de la Lucha por la Tierra* (OLT).<sup>87</sup> Finally, through the efforts of Dr. Digno Britez of CIPAE, *El Servicio Nacional Forestal* (SNC) and the IBR abandoned legal action against the peasants and permitted the measurement and assignation of plots for 585 families over a total of 6,000 hectares renamed *La Colonia Agroforestal de Capi'ibary*. As of August of 2001, the lots remain untitled and the peasants remain squatters on state land (Ruíz, Interview).

*La Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* evolved throughout the conflict, finally resulting in the fracturing of the group into smaller units organized by family and *barrio* in the *asentamiento*. As of July of 2001, those groups and their membership were as follows: *La Organización de*

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<sup>87</sup> In fact, the leader of the OLT, Cesar Melgarejo and six local leaders were jailed in 1994, resulting in the occupation of the Municipal building of *Capi'ibary* and a senatorial intervention that freed the prisoners (Fogel, *Luchas* 106).



*la Lucha para la Tierra* (OLT), with 300 members in *La Colonia Agroforestal de Capi'ibary*; *El Comité de Productores Kokue Poty* (CPKP), with 55 members; *La Asociación Campesina de La Colonia Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* (ACAP), with 100 members; *La Asociación Campesina de Desarrollo Integrado* (ACADEI), with 30 members and *La Asociación de Productores Orgánicos* (APRO), with 8 members (Fogel, *Luchas* 119, Ruíz, Interview).<sup>88</sup>

The evolutionary pattern of the struggle for land in the *Reserva Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* resulted in the spontaneous formation of a unified peasant group and then the fragmentation of that group into smaller, local and national groups. Several of these local groups maintain links to national groups (ACADEI and the OLT are members of MCNOC the largest peasant organization in the country). However, in contrast to the examples of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* (who have adhered unanimously to the OLT), the *La Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* disintegrated with the ending of hostilities. These two cases are paradigmatic examples of successful peasant protest in Paraguay and, for that reason, bear importantly upon the definition of success in future land struggles. First, it is important to note the real difference in the outcomes of these two struggles. In *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, armed confrontations with the *latifundista La Union Paraguaya* remain as threats even to this day; whereas, in the case of *La Reserva Agroforestal de Capi'ibary*, all hostilities ended as soon as the IBR and *El Servicio Nacional Forestal* (SNF)

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<sup>88</sup> Membership numbers represent only heads of households and must be recalculated to include spouses and dependents who also work in the fields and, in some cases, even possess their own land. These numbers should be multiplied by 6 to represent the average number of household members represented by a single *socio* of a group.

retracted their claims to the land. It may be important to note that the difference in the evolutionary trajectories of these two cases may have affected their outcomes.

In the case of *Capi'ibary*, the peasants no longer required organization and discipline to achieve the goal of the struggle. Smaller, more individual goals divided the inhabitants of the settlement. *El Comité de Agricultores Kokue Poty* focused their efforts upon the construction of a food cooperative and a dairy project, while others focused upon well-drilling projects (those who lived furthest from the *Rio Capi'ibary*) and others sought individual privacy (more than 100 families in the settlement belong to no organization whatsoever). Whereas, in the case of *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena*, constant hostilities and threats are traded between employees of *La Union Paraguaya* and peasants, notably the peasant leaders of the OLT.

Important lessons about organization and the long-term nature of the struggle can certainly be learned by comparisons of today's struggles with those of *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena*. The very same struggles have repeatedly occurred in the intervening years. In the past year alone hundreds of peasant occupations have been reported in the media, and there are certainly more that have gone unreported. Similar patterns of invasion, occupation, *desalojo* and resistance over a long-term struggle have appeared in various locations throughout the country.

However, there may be important differences between the struggles in *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena* and contemporary protests. The

1980s and early 1990s were an important and successful period in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Successes like those of *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena* had never before been seen in Paraguayan history and influenced many imitators. However, very few successes have been achieved since that time and nothing on the order of 5,000 hectares of land granted to protesting peasants has been seen since *Capi'ibary*.<sup>89</sup>

Piven and Cloward's analysis of poor people's movements provides an important clue to understanding the striking success of *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena* and the relative dearth of successful protests since. They point out that social protests by the poor consist of little more than the withdrawal of the consent to be governed or, as they put it, "a negative sanction, the withdrawal of a crucial contribution on which others depend, and it is therefore a natural resource for exerting power over others" (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 24). However, the power of this negative sanction is limited by the inability of the poor to withdraw any crucial resources from the society in order to force other social groups to comply with their demands. Simply put, the poor have nothing to bargain with. In the present case, the Paraguayan peasant controls no resource whose withdrawal threatens the stability or integrity of the society; therefore, peasant protest does little but exhaust the limited resources of the peasant. Nevertheless, the protests by the peasants of *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena* did manage to successfully compel the government to

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<sup>89</sup> There are some comparable struggles including, most notably, the Antebi Property which consists of 220,000 hectares that the national government has agreed, in principle, to expropriate but which has been stalled by a lack of political interest and funding. It will take many years before this property is expropriated for the peasants if ever.

respond. How? I would like to suggest that an important exception to Piven and Cloward's *rule of modest resources* (if I may coin the term) afforded these particular protests a unique opportunity to succeed.

Piven and Cloward note that timing and serendipity can be essential to the success or failure of social movements by the poor:

But protest movements do not arise during ordinary periods; they arise when large-scale changes undermine political stability. It is this context, as we said earlier, that gives the poor hope and makes insurgency possible in the first place. It is this context that also makes political leaders somewhat vulnerable to protest by the poor. At times of rapid economic and social change, political leaders are far less free either to ignore disturbances or to employ punitive measures. (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 28)

Thus, the success of the protests at *Capi'ibary* and *Cleto Romero* and *Juan de Mena* could be attributable to the instability of government at the time of the protests. When examined in this light, *el Día de Perros* and the long occupation of the *Plaza de la Independencia* seem to have occurred at time of high instability in the Paraguayan government.

*El Día de Perros* occurred immediately after the fall of the dictator. Still in the infancy of its control and vulnerable to a coup of its own, the public display of repressive techniques strongly identified with the defunct and vilified old regime threatened to undermine the moral authority of the Rodríguez regime. Quickly caving into the demands of the wronged peasants was an expedient decision calculated to differentiate the new regime from the old. Ultimately, the decision had little to do with the plight of the peasants and a great deal to do with the instability of the new government. The success of the *Capi'ibary* protests likely had far more to do with political instability than successful strategy given

the timing of the protest's success. The protests at *Capi'ibary* lasted from 1990 to 1994. This period coincides with the first national, democratic elections in the nation's history in 1993. Juan Carlos Wasmosy won the presidential election on May 9, 1993 by a margin of just over 7% in an election that featured many irregularities. With an estimated one million of the total of two million voters, peasants constituted the most important voting block in the nation. In addition, Wasmosy represented the first Paraguayan president not affiliated with the military in nearly a century, only adding to the instability of his government even after he was elected. A strong case can be made that the peasants of *Capi'ibary* were not repressed in 1993 by the ruling Colorado party in order to cultivate votes for the election of that same year and that those same peasants were granted 6,000 hectares of land the following year in order to buttress support for a civilian president who survived two separate military coup attempts during his five year term.

On the other hand, the expansion of the organizational capabilities of national peasant organizations as a result of the successes of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* on the one hand and *Capi'ibary* on the other may importantly qualify Piven and Cloward's *rule of modest resources* and its important exception in the case of socio-political instability. It is important to note the utility of local organization that *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* received from the *La Organización de Lucha por la Tierra* (OLT) and that *Capi'ibary* received from *La Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* (MCAAC). The MCAAC even sent a representative to the congress of the *Coordinación*

*Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT) in order to seek national recognition, which turned out to be crucial in the negotiations with the IBR and the SNF. It is important to note that with the aide of the CNT and more formal coordination and organization, the protests at *Capi'ibary* were successful in half the time of the protests at *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*. There may be some merit to the idea that organizational skills and tactics made the *Capi'ibary* protests more effective more quickly than the less organized protests by the peasants of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*.

If organization did indeed contribute to the efficiency of the *Capi'ibary* protests, then the land reform struggle is heading in the right direction. The *La Mesa Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas* (MCNOC) and the *Federación Nacional Campesina* (FNC) are two umbrella organizations that have developed the power to call peasants from across the country to protest marches. The effectiveness of these groups was demonstrated in the March 13, 2001 protest that rallied 50,000 peasants to the capital and the August 28, 2002 protests that coordinated roadblocks in eleven different departments.

With this new level of organizational strength, peasant squatters have abandoned the tactic of direct negotiation with government authorities. Even with the aid of NGOs like CIPAE only 50 of a total of 149 cases between 1989 and 1993 resulted in the legalization of the squatting community. In lieu of legal efforts, peasants have adopted a coalition building strategy which allies local groups and causes with national groups and causes. Local groups meet with and

petition with national groups such as the MCNOC and the FNC<sup>90</sup> who then place local demands upon their national agendas when country-wide mobilizations bring legislators and other state officials to the bargaining table in exchange for local group participation in national protest activity.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, a relationship of mutual support has developed into an expansion of the *medida de fuerza* or show of strength, which the peasants of *Capi'ibary* and *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* utilized to little real effect in their struggles. The peasants of *Capi'ibary* endured ten months and 17 days of protest, living under tarps in *La Plaza de la Independencia* in front of the National Congressional Building and the peasants of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* to spend seven months of living under tarps in various plazas throughout the city. However, the achievement of the goals of the protests came not from these physical displays, but from other factors.

Today, peasant protest for land reform takes two distinct forms. Locally, these protests take the form of land occupations and a limited number of protest rallies. Nationally, these rallies take the form of protest marches and roadblocks. In addition, national peasant organizations mobilize many smaller local peasant organizations for shows of strength that challenge the government to act upon demands issued by those same national organizations. However, national peasant

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<sup>90</sup> The MNCOC and the FNC are the two largest national peasant organizations in the country. Many others exist as well including the CNLTV (*Coordinación Nacional de Lucha por la Tierra y la Vivienda*), the MCP (*Movimiento Campesino*), the ONAC (*Organización Nacional Campesina*), the UNC-ONONDIVEPA (*Union Nacional Campesina*), and the CONAPA (*Coordinación Nacional de Productores Agrícolas*).

<sup>91</sup> This has proven a more expedient means of engaging the Paraguayan legislature than the legal route which passess through the mediation of the IBR. The legal system has demonstrated strategic sloth, bogging down legal proceedings to purposely enervate the land reform struggle by taking years to process the appropriate paperwork.

organizations have little to do with initiating peasant land occupations, local roadblocks or the local organizations permanently occupying *la Plaza de la Independencia*. Such protest activity has continued, unabated since the mid 1980s.

There are an estimated 300,000 *sinttierras* in the Paraguayan countryside. Young men and women without an adequate education and without prospects save only the ability and desire to cultivate the earth inhabit these communities. From the peasant's perspective, cultivation of the soil is a right, a responsibility and a way of life. A study conducted by the European Union and the Republic of Paraguay in the Department of San Pedro, denominated Proyecto ALA studied peasant farmers of the region from January 1993 to June 1998 and determined that the peasants participated in an agrarian culture that equipped them with the following skills:

- 1) *Ellos saben manejar una finca de 10 hectáreas con una gran diversidad de cultivos y actividades. ¿Cuántos ingenieros serían capaces de hacerlo tan bien? Conocen aquellos trucos del manejo de pequeñas áreas de tierra para hacerlas producir mucho durante muchos años, cuando la agricultura mecanizada de monocultivo en finca de tamaño parecido desemboca en pasturas pobres...justamente por el mal manejo del los suelos. Con su área reducida, los campesinos acostumbran mantener mayor diversidad en la finca lo cual es provechoso para la rotación de parcelas y para mantener posibilidades de reciclaje de nutrientes: producen más a un costo menor. (Programa ALA 83)*

[They know how to manage a farm of ten hectares with a great diversity of crops and activities. How many engineers are capable of doing so well? They [the peasants] know the tricks for managing small plots of land in order to make them produce a lot over many years, while monocultural, mechanized agriculture in farms of a similar size leaves impoverished pasturage as a result of the poor management of the soil. With a reduced area, peasants are accustomed to maintaining a greater diversity on the farm that



is convenient for the rotation of parcels and for preserving the possibility for the recycling of nutrients: they produce more with fewer costs].

- 2) *Son depositarios de conocimientos milenarios sobre plantas medicinales, árboles del bosque, plantas ornamentales, relaciones biológicas entre diferentes especies (sic), etc... Cuando en el Proyecto ALA realizamos las primeras prácticas de manejo de bosque, donde era prioritario proteger del machete las plantitas pequeñas de especias forestales valiosas del bosque, los campesinos sabían identificarlas mejor que los técnicos entendidos. Ellos conocen de su entorno y conocer el entorno no es precisamente ignorancia. (Programa ALA 83)*

[They are depositories of knowledge thousands of years old about medicinal plants, forest trees, ornamental plants, biological relations between different species, etc.... When we realized the first forest management practices in the ALA Project, it was a priority to protect the valuable seedlings from the machetes (as the planting area was being cleared). The peasants knew how to identify those plants better than the experts did. They know their environment and knowing one's environment is not exactly ignorance].

- 3) *Para manejar los suelos, con las limitaciones técnicas que tienen, han sabido adaptar métodos de mejoramiento gracias a épocas de descanso, cobertura con arbustos, etc.... (Programa ALA 83)*

[In order to manage the soil with the technical limitations they have, they have learned to adapt (soil) improvement techniques discovered during periods of neglect, coverage with bushes, etc...].

The *Proyecto ALA* study concluded that not only were peasants culturally equipped for farming but that farming was more economically feasible than finding employment in other fields. The study discovered that, with proper management, a family of seven (two adults and five children) could generate a total of 10,850,000 Guaranies or approximately \$1,550 each year on the farm (*Programa ALA 94*). This monthly income of 778,000 Guaranies or just over

\$111, which compares favorably to the 1996 monthly minimum wage of 531,000 Guaraníes or nearly \$79 per month (*Programa ALA 94*).

The peasant is not afraid of hard work on the farm with little money. In fact, he or she would make considerably less money by leaving the farm and traveling to the departmental or national capital to look for a minimum wage job that promises 531,000 Guaraníes each month, but which, in actuality, will pay far less. To the peasant, there is no alternative but to struggle for land in order to preserve his or her ties to the family, to the community, and to the land and the cultural practices that it embodies. Nearly every young male and female peasant wants to emulate the lifestyle epitomized by Juvencio Francisco Gímenez A., the owner of a ten-hectare farm in *Ara Pyahu* in the former *Asentamiento Capi'ibary*.

*Hoy día, 2 años y medio después, mi chacra es una finca de aprendizaje, digno de mostrar a cualquier persona, ya sea campesino o técnico de otras instituciones u ONG. Tengo 7 hectáreas desmontadas haciendo chacra sin quema, con curvas de nivel y cultivo en foga las 7 hectáreas. En total tengo 4 hectáreas de naranjo tardío, 3 de reforestación con paraíso gigante, cortina rompeviento con eucalipto y paraíso gigante, una hectárea de rozado sin quema con cultivos de banano, mamón, mango y enriquecimiento con árboles nativos, 2 hectáreas de reserva de bosque natural. Además poseo variados cultivos de subsistencia y de renta. En la parte de animales menores poseo una gran cantidad de pavos, patos, guineas, gallinas, y cerdos. También tengo algunas lecheras, y un pequeño colmenar. Además poseo un horno para aprovechar el corte hecho en las chacras y en el rozado sin quema. También adopté una tecnología de Proyecto Post-Cosheca que es el secadero de granos que está teniendo ahora mismo espigas de maíz. En mi chacra trabajamos todos por igual, mi esposa, mis hijas y mis hijos que desempeñan el trabajo igual que cualquier agricultor. Solamente les cuento como estoy trabajando en mi chacra y estoy feliz con mis 10 hectáreas y no la vendería ni por todo el oro del mundo: AMO MI CHACRA!*  
(Programa ALA 38)

[Today, two years later, my farm is a model farm, I am proud to show any person, whether peasant or extension agent from other institutions or an NGO. I have seven hectares cleared without slashing and burning, with contour farming throughout the entire seven hectares. In total, I have four hectares of late-market orange grove, three hectares reforested with giant paradise trees, windbreaks of eucalyptus and giant paradise trees, one hectare of virgin, unburned soil with bananas, papaya and enriched with native trees, two hectares reserved for natural forest. In addition, I have various subsistence and cash crops. In terms of small animals, I have a great number of turkeys, ducks, guinea hens, chickens and pigs. I also have some dairy cows and a small beehive. I also have an oven for taking advantage of the trimming (of trees) done in the farms and in the virgin, unburned plot (in order to make charcoal). I have also adopted the technology of the Post-Harvest Project, a grain dessicator that has ears of corn it right now. On my farm, we all work as equals: my wife, my daughters and my sons who participate equally in the work like any other farmer. I can only tell you that I am happy on my farm with my ten hectares and that I wouldn't sell it for all of the gold in the world: I LOVE MY FARM!]

Now, while this may be a highly idealized portrait of the results of redistributing land to peasants, it is a fair representation of the goal in the mind of many of the *sintierras* clamoring for land. They feel strongly that, if given the chance to own land, they can prove themselves through hard work and benefit themselves, their families, and their communities, as well as their nation's economy.

A long history of land inequity founded in the initial conquest of the nation has structured the use, distribution, and struggle for land even to the present day. History is essential for understanding this phenomenon. Today's concepts of land and land ownership were established in the past and re-emerge as cultural attitudes today. The peasant belief in the dictum, "he who works the land, owns the land" grows directly out of a

long history of governmental concessions to peasants capped by the three decade long IBR colonization program that ended scarcely ten years ago. While the peasantry is not taught the history of land tenure practices in Paraguay, their culture has adapted to historical changes and instantiated them as real social practices. Today's peasant land invasions are the culmination of a long series of battles for the exclusive control of the majority of arable land in the country. Land ownership is today in Paraguay just as important a marker of wealth and citizenship as it was for the *hacendados* under the colonial rulership of Spain 500 years ago.

### III. Peasant Protest Activity and the Complex Character of Land Reform Argumentation

#### 3.1 Introduction

Today's protest strategies in the Paraguayan land reform struggle have been both enabled and constrained by historical precedents. The way that the peasant looks at land has been historically determined: the expectation that peasants are farmers, the central importance of land ownership in small scale agriculture, and the patronizing relationship between peasant as citizen and the national government as *patrón* are all dimensions of the current situation that carry heavy imprints from the past. The history of land politics in Paraguay has created a set of expectations about land, citizenship and politics in the minds of peasants. Modern peasant protest has manifested itself as a set of demands upon the national government to meet the historical expectations of peasant society about the management and politics of land in the country. Yet, historical reflection alone is not sufficient to draw a complete picture of the nature of the struggle. Any study of peasant protest behavior must address the demands and argument strategies growing out of the historical expectations that were already explored in the previous chapter.

Paraguayan history, culture, and language contribute to land reform arguments. The various protests, marches, land invasions, and demands are in themselves *actions* whose meaning lies in their argumentative content. The answer to the question, "What is the character of land reform struggle?" is public

argument. Another question, “What form or forms does it take?” can be answered in like manner.

This chapter of the dissertation identifies the public arguments employed in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. In this task, it will be important to examine the different sources of argumentation, making distinctions between the peasants themselves and the organizations that represent them. In addition, I will identify the specific material, economic and cultural contexts for these arguments. My analysis of the public arguments for land reform will focus upon six primary areas: 1) argument strategies, 2) the sources of argumentation, 3) the different media for these arguments, 4) the specific content of arguments offered for land reform, 5) the material factors and the cultural context(s) constraining argumentation, and 6) the coherence of the arguments themselves.

The compound nature of peasant land reform protest activity reveals five basic argument strategies in Paraguay: land occupations; protest marches; highway blockades; occupational protests; and verbal arguments delivered to crowds, legislators, and the news media. Each of these forms of protest is commonly used in combination with another. In many cases, different sectors of the land reform struggle use different methods of protest to achieve the same goal. While these forms of protest are varied, it becomes evident that peasant protest has two distinct aspects: the discursive and the non-discursive.

Surprisingly, verbal argument may be less important than non-discursive forms of argumentation. Traditional analyses of protest argument strategies have focused on the verbal elements of protest activities. However, in the case of the

Paraguayan land reform movement, illiterate peasants who often speak only poorly the language of those they confront have consistently employed non-discursive rather than discursive strategies in their protest. Non-discursive protest involves the use of the body to convey a message of protest.<sup>92</sup> For example, the protestor who sets up a tent in *La Plaza de la Independencia* and lives there for five months beneath a banner calling for land reform conveys far more than the mere message of the banner itself. The protestor's determination, willingness to make sacrifice, visible impoverishment, and suffering communicate a clear message to legislators, journalists, and the public. A protestor who participates in a roadblock serves a synecdochical function. He or she represents on the smaller scale of the individual act the critical impact of the land reform struggle upon the greater society, including, but not limited to the economic effect (as commercial traffic grinds to a halt for the five to six hours the highway is closed). Also represented in the act of the roadblock are the determination of the peasantry, the potential for violence in the struggle, as well as the symbolic breaking of the social contract (if the government does not support and uphold the law in the defense of the peasants, then the peasants will not support and uphold the law in recognition of the system of governance). Non-discursive forms of protest are a complex technique for conveying multiple symbolic messages in an effective way for a largely illiterate population.

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<sup>92</sup> Kevin Deluca has pointed out the physical and non-discursive nature of protest activity utilized by such groups as Earth First!, Act Up and Queer Nation. Arguing that physical bodies transcend the traditional limits of rhetorical analysis, Deluca suggests that such argumentation is grounded in a form of argument that is deliberately non-rational and extra-linguistic (Deluca 12).

While peasants employ both discursive and non-discursive arguments, the use of non-discursive arguments is necessary because it is the only route left to the peasant for self-expression. As I will demonstrate, the peasantry is so deeply dominated economically, politically, socially and ideologically, that discursive arguments have been co-opted by the hegemonic regime of the state. Non-discursive attempts at self-expression, on the other hand, present a new challenge to a very old system of domination and provide opportunities for expression that lie outside of the cultural territory colonized by the state apparatus.

This chapter will explore specific argumentation strategies featured in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Part one traces the evolution of argument themes over time, showing how peasant demands and state responses have shifted in response to each other, as well as how major historical events have enabled and constrained specific lines of argumentation in the struggle. Part two elucidates the multivocal quality of the struggle, showing how various actors, operating on national, international, and grassroots levels, articulate distinct arguments and fill unique protest roles. Part three considers how physical sites of protest activity shape arguments in the land reform struggle, while part four investigates the rhetorical ontology of the struggle, focusing on the role of counter-argumentation

### **3.2 The Evolution of Argument Themes**

While the specific arguments offered in the course of the struggle have changed little in the last 480 years, recent argument strategies have emphasized different protest tactics in response to the evolution of exigencies in the rhetorical



context.<sup>93</sup> Three basic argument strategies have defined the land reform struggle since the colonization of Paraguay in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: the social argument, the historical argument, and the economic argument. Each of these strategies is still prominent in today's struggle.

The social argument strategy is premised on the idea that the proper management of the state's resources and the recognition of peasant rights via the enforcement of the *Constitución Nacional 1992* and its legal precedents<sup>94</sup> will result in the settlement of all land disputes in the favor of the peasants. I use the term "social" here to categorize the argument strategy because that term indicates domain of the arguments as perceived by the peasants who employ them.

Arguing for land reform in purely social terms, the peasantry strengthens its argument by attributing the rampant corruption, nepotism, graft, embezzlement and the private use of state property by state functionaries as well as politicians to the breakdown of the relationship of the state to the peasantry.

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<sup>93</sup> One must accept the notion that anti-globalization arguments are in their basic character, no different than nationalist arguments developed after the end of the War of the Triple Alliance.

<sup>94</sup> Article 128 of the *Constitución Nacional de la República del Paraguay 1967* recognized the peasant's right to contribute to the national economy: "*Esta Constitución consagra la Reforma Agraria como uno de los factores fundamentales para lograr el bienestar rural, que consiste en la incorporación efectiva de la población campesina al desarrollo económico y social de la Nación. A este efecto se adoptaran sistemas justos de distribución, propiedad y tenencia de la tierra, se organizaran el crédito y la asistencia técnica y social; se fomentara la creación de cooperativas y de otras asociaciones similares; y se promovera el incremento de la producción, su industrialización y la racionalización del mercado, de modo que permita a la población campesina lograr su mejoramiento económico, como garantía de su libertad y dignidad, y como fundamento del bienestar nacional*" (*Constitución*). [This Constitution consecrates agrarian reform as one of the fundamental factors for achieving rural wellbeing, which consists of the effective incorporation of the peasant population in the social and economic development of the nation. To this end, fair systems of distribution, ownership and land occupation have been adopted; credit and technical and social assistance have been organized; the creation of cooperatives and other similar associations have been promoted; and the improvement of production, industrialization and management of the market have been promoted in a way that allows the peasant population to realize economic gains, as a guarantee of liberty and dignity and as a foundation for the national wellbeing].

Peasants argue that the IBR ought to function properly as the defender of the peasant right to land ownership. In their view, not only the IBR, but the *Banco de Desarrollo Rural* (BDR) and MAG should also identify and support peasant needs. This line of argument receives support from the notion that the implicit social contract between the peasantry and the rest of the Paraguayan society is abrogated by government corruption. The implicit social contract is as follows: if the peasants demonstrate responsible execution of their duties to the state as they did in the Chaco War and the War of the Triple Alliance and at present with their economic contribution to the state, the state will take responsibility for caring for the needs of the peasants, principally, supplying them land. The peasant believes that “*los Asunceños viven del sudor de los campesinos*,” an image the peasant takes pride in (a common expression of the peasantry is *hay que trabajar para vivir*)! Peasant distaste for government officials is evident in such labels as “*chupadores del sangre del campesino*” and *jataivy guasu*, phrases that translate as “bloodsuckers” and “ticks.”<sup>95</sup> *Asunceños* say the same thing with shame of knowing that their relative prosperity is derived from the shameless exploitation of the peasantry. An uncaring and unresponsive government is labeled as *sinvergüenza*, *cara dura* or *irresponsable* by peasants who have historically endured their second-class status in the Paraguayan society.

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<sup>95</sup> The devaluation of non-peasant workers as a means of contrasting and reinforcing the strong work-ethic of the peasants is seen in many forms but name-calling is certainly the most prevalent. Agronomists with *el Servicio de Extensión de Agricultura y Ganadería* (SEAG) are viewed as lazy because they explain farming but fail to “get their hands dirty.” Denigrating nicknames take the form of nicknames for the agronomists. I worked with two agronomists in the the Department of Guairá whose nicknames were *Para Nada* [good for nothing] and *Ingeniero Tavy* [Blockhead Engineer]. Foreigners are called *gringos* (Peace Corps Volunteers are referred to as *El Cuerpo de Paseo*, [the group that passes through]) and light skinned, urban Spanish-speakers are referred to as *Asunceños*, meaning people who don’t work for a living but who live off the labor of the peasants.

Even when the government offers aid to the peasants it is usually an empty promise. Both parties, government officials and peasants alike, understand that the second-class status of the peasantry permits this practice of lying to the peasant when confronted. This is reported by a group of peasants who were occupying land in *Colonia Nañemaitei* in 1990:

*“Nosotros fuimos engañados por las autoridades y los diputados que participaron en el desalojo realizado. Ellos nos prometieron y nos hicieron firmar un documento en donde supuestamente se aseguraba que nuestros ranchos no serían destruidos”* [We were tricked by authorities and the politicians who participated in the eviction that occurred. They promised us and made us sign a document in which it was supposedly guaranteed that our shacks would not be destroyed] (CIPAE 66). Afterward, the shacks were destroyed and the peasants were not permitted to return to the site.

The peasantry labels government functionaries who lie to peasants in order to dismiss them as *“irresponsable”* (the term “responsible” refers not only to one’s ability to keep a promise made, but it also implies knowing one’s place in the social hierarchy and accepting the responsibility of filling that position in an unstable society which requires each Paraguayan to play his or her role lest the whole society fail). Often, the peasant’s preoccupation with the fulfillment of governmental responsibilities rests upon his strong belief in the task of societal maintenance and role definition rather than upon personal gratification or enrichment. This attitude is typified in a letter sent to the Paraguayan *Cámara de Senadores* on July 4, 1989 by peasants of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*:

*Que nuestro problema plantea una cuestión social grave y de urgente solución, dado que nuestras familias subsisten en condiciones de extrema precariedad general que se agudiza con la carencia de tierra y el transcurso del tiempo, configurando ello una situación que reclama también soluciones Justas enmarcadas en principios de Justicia y equidad social, consagrados en la Constitución y las Leyes. (Fogel, Luchas 229)*

[Since our problem is a serious social question, it requires urgent resolution, given that our families eke out a living in extremely precarious conditions that worsen with the scarcity of land and the passage of time, creating a situation that also requires just solutions underlined by the principles of justice and social equality, consecrated in the Constitution and the law].

This social argument strategy is a direct response to the Paraguayan disappointment with democracy. This letter is a reflection of the high expectations that followed the overthrow of the dictator, General Rodríguez's decision to yield power to a democratic government in 1990, the drafting of a new constitution in 1992, the election of a democratic government in 1993 and continued reform. However, without the bogeyman in the form of the dictator to blame for all of the nation's social ills, it has slowly become apparent to all Paraguayans that government corruption is endemic. In the wake of the dictatorship, rather than reform the corrupt political structure that enriched Stroessner and his lieutenants, the government was colonized by political bosses who fought and still fight to defend their turf. Controlling individual ministries or subdivisions of ministries, these politicians and government servants utilize state funds and institutions to enrich themselves and maintain control over their institutional domains.

Social argument strategies in the Paraguayan land reform struggle are calls for the fulfillment of implicit and explicit social contracts, largely made possible

by the dialectical swing from a culture of repression under the 35 year *Stroneato* to the openness promised by a democratic system. Social arguments are calls for social equity and justice in a social and political system that has long been accustomed to ignoring the material needs of the majority of its population for more than 500 years.

Social arguments offered by peasants for agrarian reform emphasize the natural circumstances of the peasant as a citizen farmer and member of the body politic. However, the reality is that land ownership has been the historical privilege of the elite class. Even to this day, land functions as a resource base for the political elite in Paraguayan society. Peasant farming has traditionally been tolerated through a practice of benign non-enforcement of private property law. This has permitted peasants to survive their second-class status while making significant contributions to society in the form of labor and agricultural production. The peasants' long historical experience of squatting, first in the *ka'aguygua* and in informal *asentamientos* before the war and their struggles for land in the era of the great foreign oligopolists has provided a rich storehouse of memories that serves as a basis for contemporary protest arguments.

Squatting existed until the end of the War of the Triple Alliance and the Chaco War, when foreign interests purchased government and private *latifundia* and insisted on evicting the peasants who squatted that land.<sup>96</sup> The peasantry as well as those members of the elite who were dispossessed of their lands viewed

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<sup>96</sup> The *Ley de Peonaje Forzoso de 1871* forced peasants off their own farms in the post-war labor shortage. This was followed by the *Ley de la Venta de los Yerbales del Estado de 1881*, which permitted the sale of land to foreigners. That law was significantly expanded in the *Ley de Tierra de 1883*. These laws established penalties for squatting, forcing more peasants off the land and into the labor market.

these land sales as a loss of the cultural patrimony. The domination of the Paraguayan territory and economy by large foreign corporations such as *La Industria Paraguaya* introduced an attitude of isolationism and even xenophobia into a nation that had been isolated by practice under de Francia from 1812 to 1840 and isolated by law under C.A. López from 1844 to 1862. The sudden capitulation to foreign domination, from which Paraguay did not completely recover until after the Chaco War (1933-1936), was a wound to the national pride still felt today.

Today, foreigners still own large parcels of land and the peasants feel a strong sense of national outrage that foreigners can deprive Paraguayans of access to their patrimony, land.

*Los privilegios de los extranjeros siguen vivos y cada vez más fuertes en nuestro país. Hasta en la escuela se prestan para campañas en contra nuestra. Algunas maestros dicen que en el Paraguay los campesinos no queremos trabajar, y por ese motivo, el gobierno, preocupado por el sistema agrario o la problemática agraria, permite la llegada del los extranjeros. Podemos decir también que los privilegios para los extranjeros constituyen un atentado contra la soberanía nacional. (...) Cuando los descalzos, pobres, sin dientes, con hijos barrigones, y delegados se juntaron en Juan E. O'Leary para reclamar tierras, ocuparon la propiedad de Englewart, alemán (...) allí llegaron las fuerzas armadas. Fuerzas policiales y del ejército con uniforme de combate actuaron allí, y ya se conocen las consecuencias, con la muerte de Francisco y Aurelio. Cuando fueron creadas estas fuerzas, sus funciones eran distintas: resguardar la soberanía nacional y el orden público. Ellos fusilaron a campesinos paraguayos porque estos querían trabajar. El campesinado no puede hacer otra cosa, porque no tiene profesión. Sí no tiene tierra, no puede trabajar, y puede (sic) morir de hambre junto a su familia. (González 246)*

[The privileges of foreigners continue and grow each day more powerful in our country. They even stretch to the schools where they campaign against us. Some teachers say that the peasants in Paraguay don't want to work, and, for that reason, the government,

concerned about the agrarian system or the agrarian problem, has allowed the entry of foreigners. We can also say that privileges for foreigners constitute an assault upon the sovereignty of the nation ...When barefooted, poor, toothless, skinny (peasants) with swollen-bellied children gather in Juan E. O'Leary to reclaim land, (or) they occupy the property of Englewart, (a) German...the armed forces arrive on the scene. Police and army forces with combat equipment take action there, and the consequences are already known with the deaths of Francisco and Aurelio. When these forces were created, their functions were distinct: to protect the national sovereignty and the public order. They fired at Paraguayan peasants because they (the peasants) wanted to work. The peasantry cannot do anything else because they have no other skills. If they don't have land, they can't work and they will die together with their families].

This argument descends from the historically nationalist and even xenophobic attitudes developed by an occupied Paraguay after the War of the Triple Alliance. The belief that the peasantry has been and continues to be displaced from their rightful lands is a universal attitude among both Paraguayan peasants as well as their countrymen in the cities. It is noteworthy that every single Paraguayan peasant I have ever spoken with has remarked upon the wealth of the nation's land resources and the lamentable greed of foreigners who have stolen that land from the Paraguayan people. Another important feature of this line of argument is that it absolves the Paraguayan government of responsibility for appropriate land distribution. The government land policy is not perceived as adversarial, but as enabling foreign immigration and investment out of a concern for the agrarian wellbeing. I have even heard the repressive tactics of the police and military in support of the property rights of foreign land owners described as misguided not evil. Amancio Ruíz, a victim of some of the most brutal police tactics of the post-dictatorship during the *desalojos* at *Capi'ibary*, refused to

ascribe a motive to the government's longtime refusal to support the peasants' right to occupy land in *La Reserva Agroforestal de Capi'ibary*. In response to the question, “¿Porque el gobierno no apoyó a la petición de los campesinos de *Capi'ibary para tener su tierra propia en esa época?*” [Why did the government not support the peasants' petition for their own land during that period of time?], he responded, “*No sé.*” [I don't know] (Ruíz, Interview).

While the Paraguayan peasant truly has trouble imagining how he or she can be so thoroughly disenfranchised, immigrants have found Paraguay's traditionally private society, lack of government administration, lax banking laws and susceptibility to bribes quite attractive. From disaffected Nazis like Joseph Mengele to Mennonites, Taiwanese, Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, Brazilians and Australians, Paraguay has become a haven for those with a penchant for cheap land and few laws. The steady influx of foreign capital has been a boon to the national economy and a point of friction with the peasantry who see their historical right of access to land for the purpose of agricultural production further eroded. The peasant views access to land as a right earned by the desire to work the land, with such labor making an economic contribution to the nation. In terms of rural social values, the peasant can make no greater contribution to his or her nation than to work his or her own land independently. This belief is a strong counterpoint to the memory of foreign possession and extraction of national resources that began after the War of the Triple Alliance and continues to this day.



This argument is famously reflected in Article 114 of the *Constitución Nacional* 1992 of Paraguay:<sup>97</sup>

*La reforma agraria es uno de los factores fundamentales para lograr el bienestar rural. Ella consiste en la incorporación efectiva de la población campesina y al desarrollo económico y social de la Nación. Se adoptarán sistemas equitativos de distribución, propiedad y tenencia de la tierra. (Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya, 120)*

[Agrarian reform is one of the fundamental factors in the achievement of rural wellbeing. This consists of the effective incorporation of the peasant population and the economic and social development of the Nation. A fair system for the distribution, ownership and titulation of land will be adopted].

With the formation of the IBR and the eastward agricultural expansion that occurred between 1963 and 1985, there was little reason to employ this line of argument. However, since the stagnation of the Paraguayan economy beginning in 1982, and rising unemployment, this argument has become far more effective.<sup>98</sup> It is important to remember that the audience for peasant arguments is not solely comprised of civil servants but the urban population of the country as well. Urban residents have tended to respond to arguments that touched upon their own interests and not to those arguments that treated issues unique to the peasant experience. This anti-foreign and nationalist argument stratagem has a broad appeal in the country because it is strongly grounded in the nation's history.

Broad based argument strategies have proven critical in recent national political struggles. The union of the urban population and the peasantry has been instrumental in supporting what would have otherwise been merely rural uprisings

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<sup>97</sup> It first appeared in the *Constitución Nacional de la República del Paraguay* 1967.

<sup>98</sup> 1982 signalled the end of construction on the Itaipúa Dam project and the artificial augmentation of the Paraguayan economy with international loans that were distributed throughout the economy to Paraguayan contractors.

in the coup attempt of 1996 and later during the *Marzo Paraguayo* of 1999. In a more recent case of rural uprising without urban support, a massive peasant demonstration with the intention of marching to the capital of Asunción was attacked by the Paraguayan Armed Forces on July 18, 2002 in order to prevent that mass of peasants from igniting protest in the capital and potentially receiving support from urban Paraguayans (many of whom are peasants who moved to the capital in search of employment. Ultimately, each attempt to link rural protest to urban centers and the sympathetic population living there has failed.

Gaining momentum as a potential tool for uniting urban and rural populations are economic arguments that invoke the preservation of social agreements and norms, potentially even norms shared by all Paraguayans; however, the actual arguments employed in the land reform struggle have stressed the peasant's contribution to the national welfare rather than the government's failure to live up to its obligations within the social contract. Social arguments offered by peasants in support of agrarian reform and land reform have emphasized the natural circumstances of the peasant as a farmer and contributor to the national economy rather than more universal, pan-national themes.

As articulated in the Paraguayan land reform struggle, the economic argument for land reform has always made the point that agricultural expansion is a way of life representative of rural Paraguayan culture. One group of Paraguayan farmers expresses the economic necessity for land reform in this way:

*En nuestro group también hemos visto que yvy tujá, yvy'i (tierra vieja, minifundio), son la realidad. Por ejemplo, en la zona de Cordillera, hay gente que tiene 5 Has., y viven allí de cinco a diez o quince miembros de una familia, sin ningún apoyo técnico o*

*crediticio. Por este motivo ya no pueden desarrollarse como agricultores en su profesión. Por eso much gente emigra al extranjero, o form los cordones de la miseria en las distintas ciudades. (...) Se pretende llamar reforma agraria a la entrega de tierras que se vino haciendo. (...) Nosotros diremos (...) que no se cumplió con la misión encomendada por el Estado paraguayo para que el I.B.R. sea el instrumento de la reforma agraria en todo el país. (...) Por esto la gente se organiza y toma tierras. Y sobre ellos se lanza a los cuatro vientos acusaciones de todo tipo, diciendo que aquí comenzó la guerrilla y la subversión. (González 247)*

[In our group we have also seen the (the problems of ) old land and small plots, they are a reality. For example, in the Cordillera area, they are people who have only five hectares of land with which to support five, ten or fifteen family members without any technical or credit assistance. This is why they cannot become better farmers. For this reason, many have emigrated to foreign countries, or have formed lines of misery in different cities...the provision of land that has been done has been called agrarian reform...we say...that the mission entrusted by the Paraguayan state to the IBR as the instrument of agrarian reform for the whole country has not been completed...This is why people organize and take land. And they are attacked from all sides with types of accusations, saying that here starts guerrilla warfare and subversion].

Unable to survive in the precarious conditions of their lives as farmers on ever diminishing plots with ever growing families, peasants make the case that they do not want to seize land but that they have to. When they do, peasants take care to avoid the idea that they are confronting the state. In fact, the peasants feel that they are assisting the state to finish the job that the IBR couldn't finish. Peasant protests for land as well as land invasions and occupations are remonstrations for social justice *within the boundaries and practices of the state* from the peasant's point of view.

For the Paraguayan peasant, economic livelihood is intimately linked to the idea of land ownership. Thus, peasants argue for the national expropriation of

land for redistribution to the peasantry in order to address the economic ills of the nation. The assumptions of this argument are that the forcible expropriation of land is a necessity of life for peasants suffering under the impoverishment that results from *minifundización* or diminishment of peasant land holdings with the growth of demand in each generation of rural farmers and that the Paraguayan economy is largely dependent upon the agricultural production of the peasantry.

Leon Lugo Irala, of the *Asentamiento El Triunfo, Repatriación* explains his economic relationship to the land in this way:

*Mi capital es mi finca, nuestro trabajo, en su integralidad, que mantiene la economía de la familia, asegura el futuro de mis nietos y el mio también. Mi finca esta hecha para darme productos a corto, mediano y largo plazo. Estos árboles en crecimiento son mis ahorros, que podré utilizar luego en cualquier momento si fuera necesario. Tengo la producción a mediano plazo como la mandarina, naranja y yerba mate, que pronto va a producir. Yo me considero rico en mi finca, con mis árboles, mis cultivos, mis animales, y especialmente mi familia, que siempre nos ayudamos en todo. (Programa ALA 19)*

[My capital is my farm, (and) our work, in its purpose, is to maintain the household economy, assure the future of my grandchildren as well as my own future. My farm is designed for short, medium and long-term production. Those trees growing there are my savings and can be used at any moment if becomes necessary. I have medium-term production such as, nectarines, oranges and *yerba mate* that are going to produce soon. I consider myself rich on my farm with my trees, my crops, my animals and especially my family, and this always helps us in everything].

A peasant with sufficient acreage becomes a self-sufficient, self-made entrepreneur whose “capital” is land itself. Like a good entrepreneur, the good farmer has a good business plan and contributes to the nation’s well being by creating wealth.

Further refining that position, peasant arguments point out that the economic expansion of the 1970s and early 1980s was a result of expanding the agricultural frontier (most economists argue that it was largely the result of the construction of the \$18 billion *Itaipúa* dam project) and that “*latifundias improductivas*” are a disservice to the state.<sup>99</sup> Paraguay, as a small, poor country surrounded by larger neighbors with larger populations and a variety of natural resources must depend its only natural resource, the *rosado* (virgin land that has a dark, red color and is highly productive for agriculture) in order to compete with those other nations.

A final economic argument employed in this line of reasoning is that Paraguay’s present economic problems are largely the result of the government’s lack of support for the peasantry. Given access to land, and sufficient technical assistance as well as fair rules for international competition,<sup>100</sup> the peasantry will gladly fulfill their role as the base of the Paraguayan economy and the foundation of the Paraguayan society. This argument is a direct response to the modernization efforts of the Paraguayan government, its entry into MERCOSUR and its opening to international trade since the end of the Stroessner regime. The neo-liberal economic position of the government has focused upon infrastructure and support for agroexports such as cotton and soybeans. The peasantry has

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<sup>99</sup> As defined in Article 116 of the *Constitución Nacional 1992*.

<sup>100</sup> The FNC has made price supports for cotton and an agricultural exemption from MERCOSUR the basis of its national campaign following the cotton crisis of 1993.

historically targeted local markets with traditional crops including *mandi'o*, *ka'a he'ẽ*, *avati*, and *kumanda* [yucca, sugar cane, corn, and beans].<sup>101</sup>

The peasantry has countered the government's argument by arguing that the peasant actually has natural advantages in agricultural production: cheap labor, native knowledge, and a will to work. Candido Barreto of the *Asentamiento Kira'y* made this point in a meeting of peasant leaders with agricultural agents:

*Porque el clima depende del hombre, del uso que le da a los recursos. Su manejo está en nuestras manos, nos educamos para cuidarles y tenemos la oportunidad de recuperarlos de a poco, ya que todo es un proceso. Todos debemos mirar y concientizar a nuestras familias, a los vecinos, a nivel nacional.* (Fogel, *Luchas* 100)

Because the climate depends on mankind, the use of which provides (natural) resources. Their management is in our hands, we educate ourselves to care for them and we have the opportunity to recuperate them little by little, since everything is a process. All of us ought to take a look and make our families, neighbors and (people) at the national level aware.

*Anteriormente medio con vergüenza decía yo que era agricultor. Pero ahora lo cuento con orgullo. Porque un agricultor está casi en mejores condiciones que un ingeniero, que es un mensualero. En cambio un campesino con sus 10 hectáreas mucho más puede capitalizar con una diversificación correcta, para tener un buen nivel de vida. El campesino puede lograr a largo plazo altos ingresos por hectárea en el sistema agroforestal. Por tanto es un orgullo ser agricultor, si sabemos manejar nuestra tierra – bosque – madera – chacra y también las malezas.* (Fogel, *Luchas* 100)

[Before, I would call myself a farmer half in shame. But now I say it with pride. Because a farmer is almost in better shape than an agronomist, who is salaried. Instead, a peasant with his ten hectares can capitalize much more on correct diversification in

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<sup>101</sup> With intense government management since the 1970's cotton has become the single most important crop for peasants, who grow it as their only source of income. Government support of this crop has been unwavering in the face of a drastic decline in world cotton prices and falling yields (more will be discussed concerning cotton in chapter four).

order to achieve a better life. The peasant can achieve, over the long-term, high income from each acre in an agroforestry system. Meanwhile, it is an honor to be a farmer, if we know how to manage our land — forest — lumber — farm and also the weeds].

Given proper support, the occupation of farmer can be something that not only makes a significant contribution to the national economy but it is also something one can be proud of. This economic argument strategy assumes that the reason peasants are not perceived as contributors to the national economy is because they have not received proper attention. Given that attention, every peasant farmer can make a contribution like Candido Barreto has. These three argument strategies, the social, the historical and the economic, have evolved as the struggle has shifted over time. Simple demands for land have transformed into long lists of broader demands, which, while always including the transfer of land from the hands of the elite class to the peasantry, also includes demands for social and political as well as land reform.<sup>102</sup>

The most recent and intense phase of the land reform struggle in Paraguay has transformed in a relatively short period (1989 – 2002) from an unorganized and spontaneous grab for land after the fall of the dictator to a series of social protests mobilizing peasants more effectively than they have been mobilized since the Chaco War. With a new level of organization and sophistication, national peasant organizations are now articulating demands for political change unthinkable a mere thirteen years earlier when the country was still ruled by the most ruthless and longest tenured dictator in South America in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A chronology of argumentation can be constructed that

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<sup>102</sup> The earliest argument in the land reform struggle was the physical argument made by squatters and squatting communities, “the land is ours because we farm it.”

demonstrates a progression from NIMBY struggles to a real concern with the general principles of governance of the nation including many themes not directly related to land reform, including 1) the favorable mediation of land disputes, 2) the promulgation and support of asentamientos, 3) the legalization of land invasions, 4) the outright granting of land to peasant groups, 5) demands for changes in agrarian policy including technical support, price supports, and credit, and finally 6) political demands for democratization, anti-globalism, anti-privatization and a change of government. The struggle can be measured in three stages: Early, Middle and Late.

In the initial phase of the struggle (post-Stroessner), NIMBY movements were constituted by peasants petitioning for land. Particular struggles such as the conflicts in the asentamiento *Capi'ibary* and the struggle in the asentamientos of Juan de Mena and Cleto Romero typify this class of protest activity. At this point in the struggle, the only consciousness of land reform as a social issue of national breadth was exhibited by regional peasant organizations whose function was to coordinate the protest activity initiated and sustained by the local groups. Argument strategies employed at this time were typified by the social, historical and economic categories of argumentation and constituted mere calls for land. By 1994, the first national protests were initiated. The identification of land reform as a nation-wide social concern and the failure of the IBR to foster development in the asentamientos that had been granted spurred new arguments. Calls for land grants were paired with demands for services, including access to education, sanitation, and technical support. The formation of the first truly



national peasant organizations permitted the coordination of the separate demands of many different local peasant groups. The MCNOC, in particular, brought local groups into dialogue with NGOs and international representatives of radical ideologies in order to reorganize the struggle for land reform.

The late phase of the land reform struggle has been exemplified by the sharp division between local and national peasant organizations and the ideological drift from the original NIMBY motivations for land to more abstract goals. In the face of the government's inability to follow through with signed agreements and promises of land concessions, new rural legislation and the extension of ministerial level services including sanitation, technical training, law enforcement, and others to the rural population, peasant demands have taken on a fiercely moral tone by calling for an end to the corruption, party politics and social inequity the national peasant organizations see as the impediments to enacting the accords already agreed upon. The land reform struggle has shifted from the mere demand for land, employing traditional arguments to a demand for cultural and structural changes in the government. Since 2001, the movement has emphasized demands for changing the leadership of government ministries, the structure of rural credit financing and even the position of the presidency itself, viewing these goals as necessary for land reform. In this late phase of the land reform struggle, national peasant organizations have defined the agenda and have moved to incorporate local peasant groups and local protest activity into their national organizational structure.

The union of national peasant organization leadership and landless rural peasants has enabled the development of new arguments and protest tactics and constrained peasant self-representation in the struggle. In its most recent phase, the land reform struggle has seen a pronounced disarticulation of peasant protestors from the leadership of the protest organizations that ostensibly represent them and the intellectuals who support protest as a means of social reform. Consequently, peasant protest activity has often distinctly contrasted leadership ideology. This organizational gap can be discerned along synchronic and diachronic axes as there are distinct spatial as well chronological disarticulations in the function of organized protest. A focus on the various actors involved in the struggle can help to elucidate this disarticulation as well as the origins of competing arguments and ideologies within the struggle.

### **3.3 Actors and Sites of Argument**

While the non-discursive or physical forms of argument utilized in the land reform struggle in Paraguay are often the most sensational, verbal argument is, in almost all cases, combined with physical argumentation. These two forms of argument strategy are interdependent and yet, often work in a uniquely disarticulated manner in the Paraguayan case. It is not always evident that the body of verbal arguments and the body of physical arguments are coordinated or even articulated in a way that either the protestors themselves have planned or can explain. Any functional description of the Paraguayan land reform struggle requires an analysis that identifies each of these forms of argumentation, discusses

the curious disarticulation of the two and explains the relationship between the them.

The disarticulation of these two forms of argument is either synchronic (spatial) or diachronic (temporal). Synchronic disarticulation occurs when the different parties or actors participate in different aspects of the protest activity. In Paraguay, it is not uncommon for different groups of peasants or peasant groups and their representatives to employ the physical and the verbal components of protest activity sometimes even hundreds of miles apart. During the August 2, 2001 protests in which 30,000 peasants participated in 10 roadblocks distributed throughout the country, Belarmino Balbuena, the head of the MCNOC, and other peasant leaders met with a congressional delegation to issue a list of demands.

Diachronic disarticulation of peasant protest activity occurs most often when spontaneous peasant activity results in acts of physical protest that are later organized and represented in a verbal manner. This is a common occurrence in the case of spontaneous land occupation. In the case of *Capi'ibary*, peasants “heard” that there was land available for the taking, joined group of squatters, and later formed an association for communicating with the local and national authorities in the form of verbal demands justifying the occupation (Narciso Ruíz interview).

The disarticulation of verbal argumentation from physical argumentation is a defining feature of the land reform struggle in Paraguay. Among the factors that bifurcate the peasants’ argumentative media are geography, education (particularly illiteracy) and culturally determined leadership/organizational

methods. Yet, perhaps the most important factor that distinguishes this dualistic character in the struggle is the ontology of the struggle itself: three very different sets of social actors are participating in the struggle with distinctive social ontologies. The different sectors involved in land occupations, protest marches, and demands for reform have demonstrated little ability to coordinate their personnel, resources, methodologies and even arguments. All too often a functional division of labor reigns in the land reform struggle: intellectuals write in the press, national peasant organization leaders remain in the capital city, meeting with politicians, making arguments and issuing demands, while landless peasants grimly man their road blocks or march through the streets only moments away from another confrontation with riot gear armed police, military and paramilitary forces.

These three groups, while all commonly devoted to the land reform struggle, have vastly different experiences of that struggle and make different contributions to the success or failure of that struggle as well. Alain Touraine has pointed out that intellectuals, while espousing the cause of participatory democracy, often fail to make tangible contributions to this cause. He argues that “A larger number of intellectuals have turned into ideologues of democratic institutions and have identified them with general principles rather than with social forces or with specific social problems” (Touraine, *Return* 144). This insight has relevance in the Paraguayan case, as Paraguayan intellectuals discuss land reform quite often. Forums on the issue are common and speakers from other nations are invited to discuss the future prospects for rural development in

Paraguay and cases in their own nations. Peasants never attend these meetings.<sup>103</sup>

One can almost always find a public discussion of the “*problema de la tierra*” in the capital city. Furthermore, editorials in newspapers and magazines are filled with editorials about the “*problema del la tierra*.” However, it is important to note that none of these editorials are written in a language that even some of the peasants could read, if they read newspapers or magazines or even if they could read. In addition, the rarefied air of these discussions not only neglects the participation but the very existence of the peasantry. In a July 28, 2001 discussion entitled, *Reforma Agraria en Nunavut*, which focused on the establishment of the territory of Nunavut in Canada, the intellectuals gathered seemed puzzled when I asked the question, “How might this offer a legal precedent to the problem of the *sinttierras* in Paraguay?” They did not see the connection.

Peasants themselves hold meetings to organize roadblocks, invade properties, and protest their inability to purchase land without input from members of the socio-economic elite, or, for that matter, often without input from clergy or their own leaders. Peasant leaders, while they travel to visit asentamientos or protests in the countryside, are situated in the national capital, live in nice homes and achieve a standard of living that their clients, the peasantry, can only dream of.

The structure of protest activity itself reveals the different experiences of the struggle for each of these social sectors. The two most common patterns of

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<sup>103</sup> Upon seeking out the presence of peasants and/or peasant leaders at half a dozen such events held in Asunción, I was disappointed to discover not a single person with even a rural background in attendance.

protest involve 1) a local occupation by peasants that national peasant leaders hear about and extend assistance to and which intellectuals can potentially aid with pro-land reform articles in the press that sensitize the public to the issue<sup>104</sup> and 2) national marches organized and funded<sup>105</sup> by the national peasant organizations that distribute funds to local peasant groups to assist the mobilization of smaller organizations to participate in national protests. Intellectuals, again, support the peasants in the struggle but without ever participating in a protest or meeting with protest leaders. In either case, there is a significant difference in the participation of each of these social groups in the course of protest activity. Peasants organized by national groups often cannot identify or simply do not understand the demands (issued by peasant organization leaders in the Capital) of the protest. Conversely, national peasant organization leaders often do not understand or have no stake in the local struggles that they represent. The intellectual class has a better understanding of national and international politics than they do the lives of a peasantry whose homes they have never visited and whose language they often do not speak themselves.

These differences in practice and experience of the struggle culminate in the very different types of argument offered by each of these sectors of the land

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<sup>104</sup> It is important to note that the contribution of intellectuals to the Paraguayan land reform struggle, while asserted to be in the interests of the peasants, often serves quite the opposite purpose of exploiting the public's attention in order to publish articles in the press. Intellectuals do not visit the countryside, have little understanding of the peasant perspective and are often misinformed about even the facts of the struggle. Nevertheless, the public discussion of land reform in the public press does aid the cause of the peasants by lending the credibility of intellectuals to the cause.

<sup>105</sup> Some national peasant organizations (the FNC and the MCNOC) have received cash payments for terminating peasant protest activity. This money is used (in addition to enriching peasant leaders) for paying the cost of transportation and feeding peasants who are invited to asked to join protests.

reform struggle. I will define the arguments offered by each group and discuss the context for each. The first is the *international*, comprised of international political, journalistic as well as academic sources of argument. The second is the *national/popular*, comprised of peasant organizations, trade unions, interest groups and other associations of national breadth. The last source of argument for land reform is the, *local*, which is typified by individuals and families of peasants as wells as local associations such as farmers' committees, neighborhood committees and cooperatives.

Each of these sources of argument must be understood and accounted for if one is to develop a picture of the public debate concerning land reform in Paraguay. The disarticulate nature of the struggle owes itself to the fact that each of these groups participates in the struggle with different resources and through different media. This results in a clear division of labor amongst three separate groups: physical protest falls to the peasants at the local level while verbal confrontation in the form of public argument falls to leaders of the national organizations. Paraguayan intellectuals such as journalists, the representatives of NGOs, and international organizations such as Amnesty International critique the government and promote reform at abstracted levels of academic conferences, books and editorials in the press.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Some of the more visible groups in Paraguay include: The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), El Banco Mundial, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), El Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID), Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), La Fundación Moisés Bertoni, Comité de Iglesias para Ayuda en Emergencias (CIPAE) and Alter Vida.

Thus, the Paraguayan struggle for land reform, while sharing the goals of reform and protest, is constituted by groups of vastly different social actors utilizing distinct social/cultural resources to articulate different arguments. I will examine each of these classes of argumentation in some specific detail as I identify the actors utilizing them.

### **3.3.1 International Actors**

International arguments for land reform find their primary expression through the agency of journalists, Paraguayan intellectuals, and NGOs who promote reform as a solution to the widespread poverty in the country. These arguments are found in journals, magazines, newspapers, television interviews, academic conferences and reports. These public arguments for land reform are centered around a resistance to modernization/globalization and the perceived foreign influence upon the nation's course of development. Many of the journalists and intellectuals who promulgate these arguments have been trained in universities both within and beyond Paraguay and have developed a global perspective of the nation and of its social problems. An example of this broader perspective is evident in the following example taken from a popular liberal magazine as it summarizes the international argument:

*El debate que puede sernos útil trata acerca del modelo de globalización que estamos presenciando y sufriendo. Porque nadie que piense en la igualdad como valor positivo puede estar en contra de la globalización del bienestar de la gente, de la globalización de los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales, de la igualdad de oportunidades, etc.... El punto es, precisamente, que el actual modelo de globalización está produciendo exactamente lo contrario. Aumenta la brecha entre ricos y pobres, tanto al interior de los países como entre las naciones, coloca en*



*igualdad de condiciones a los Estados con los inversores aumentando en forma increíble el poder de estos últimos, degrada el medio ambiente y la calidad de vida, etc....* (Mosqueira 1)

[The debate that can be useful to us deals closely with the globalization model that we experience and suffer. Because no one who thinks about equality as a positive value can stand against globalization for the well-being of the people, for the globalization of economic, social and cultural rights, for equal opportunity, etc.... The point is, precisely, that the actual globalization model is producing exactly the contrary effect. It is increasing the gap between the rich and the poor, within as well as between nations, equally promoting those states whose investors have increased their power to an incredible degree, degrading the environment and the quality of life, etc...].<sup>107</sup>

Paraguay is a country with a long history of suspicion of and resentment for foreign commercial investment. The legacy of Paraguay's nearly complete capitulation to the foreign investors (primarily composed of the war's victors) who disenfranchised the Paraguayan people of their political and economic rights after War of the Triple Alliance remains in the popular consciousness.

Paraguay's speedy entry into the global market after the fall of the dictatorship in

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<sup>107</sup> There is widespread agreement amongst all sectors of the land reform struggle on the class characteristics of the struggle. Peasants, heads of social organizations and international groups all reach the same conclusion as the World Bank in its *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty: Voices of the Poor*. The report was developed through interviews with the poor themselves in developing nations. "... Opportunities are unevenly distributed, and that those who started with advantages had been able to exploit them, while the poor found it difficult or impossible to do so. In terms of security, conditions for poor people had become worse in most countries and at most sites. Heightened insecurity variously affected livelihoods, property, and personal safety. In discussing institutions, poor people did not give high ratings to government officials and political leaders, and NGOs were mentioned less and less highly rated than might have been expected. Poor people indicated repeatedly, and in many contexts, that they trust and rely on their own local, informal institutions for support in crisis and in daily life, and rank them high in importance even while recognising their limitations. The message from the poor is that outside organisations and development policies designed for their benefit have been less significant than is usually assumed by those who work in development agencies. The reasons for the lack of opportunities, increased insecurity, and flat or downward trend in wellbeing differed by region. There were, however, common themes: people said that they miss out on many opportunities because of the need to have connections. and because of their lack of information, assets, credit, skills and business acumen. Repeatedly, their message was that .it is the rich who benefit. from policy changes. Particularly in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Latin America, poor people spoke about macro-economic and political change" (World Bank 45).

1989 has staggered the once internally directed economy and rekindled a historic xenophobia inscribed by nearly 500 years of continuous colonization.<sup>108</sup>

The conclusion reached by Paraguay's intellectual left resonates with the national popular sentiment that globalism has severely damaged a once vital internally oriented economy and has distorted the traditional relationship between the peasantry and the urban population of the country. The fact that peasant farmers cannot compete within the global market is accepted as a *fait accompli*. From their perspective, poverty and indigence are the result of losing agricultural employment in the new global market where it is now cheaper to import food products than to grow them. For the intellectual and political left, Paraguay's entry into the global capital market impoverishes not only the majority of Paraguayans (the largest sector of the country's economy is agricultural) but the nation as a whole.<sup>109</sup>

*Decimos que es un modelo también sectario porque no busca ni le importa el desarrollo de todas las regiones del mundo (ni de los países) por igual. Parte de la base de que todas son iguales. No toma en cuenta las asimetrías y diferencias. Así, el país o la región que no reúne las condiciones mínimas, queda al margen de la actividad financiera, de las telecomunicaciones, del transporte y del comercio. Al gran capital no le interesa desarrollar regiones ni*

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<sup>108</sup> This colonization began with the subjugation of the native peoples by the Spanish. It was continued as the neo-colonial practice of Indian and peasant subjugation to the political and social order of the criollo governments that followed independence. This was followed by the economic conquest of the country after two economically disastrous wars (The War of the Triple Alliance 1865-1870 and the Chaco War 1932-1935) and the more recent plunge of the nation into a global capitalist market in which Paraguay possesses no competitive advantage.

<sup>109</sup> While the United States imports about \$40 million per year from Paraguay, U.S. exports to Paraguay approached \$450 billion in 2000, according to U.S. Customs data. More than a dozen U.S. multinational firms have subsidiaries in Paraguay. These include firms in the computer, agroindustrial, telecom, and banking and other service industries. Some 75 U.S. businesses have agents or representatives in Paraguay, and more than 3,000 U.S. citizens reside there. U.S. economic influence continues to expand as in November 1998, U.S. and Paraguayan officials signed a memorandum of understanding on steps to improve protection of intellectual property rights in Paraguay, and in 2001 Paraguay improved enforcement efforts against contraband and piracy activities (US Department of State, *Background Notes: Paraguay 2001*).

*países. Quiere sacar el mayor provecho posible de lo que ya existe.* (Mosqueira 1)

[We call this a secular model because it ignores and devalues the equal development of all of the world's regions (or even nations). Whereas, it is fundamental that at the bottom, all are equal. It (the globalization model) fails to take asymmetry and difference into account. Thus, any nation or region that cannot meet the minimum requirements remains at the margins of financial activity, of telecommunications, of transport and commerce. The world's investors are not interested in developing the world's regions and individual nations. They want to extract as much profit as possible from the opportunity that exists].

For the left, global capitalism is nothing less than a new form of imperialism or colonialism:

*Uno de los argumentos más comunes que escuchamos es que la globalización no es nueva, que se inició cuando Marco Polo llegó a la China (dicen unos), con el Imperio Romano (afirman otros) o con el descubrimiento de América.* (Mosqueira 1)

[One of the arguments most often heard is that globalization is not a new phenomenon; rather, it began when Marco Polo arrived in China, according to some. Others point to the Roman Empire or to the discovery of the Americas].

Identifying the global capitalist economic system as neo-colonialist and relating that neo-colonialist regime to land tenure practices stems both from Paraguay's specific experience following the wholesale distribution of land to foreign interests following the War of the Triple Alliance as well as international trends.

These arguments are articulated as a part of the land reform struggle at the international level through conferences on poverty, land reform, the rights of Native Americans and others. For example, in the formal proclamation of the *Primer Encuentro Internacional Campesino* of 1996, we see the explicit articulation of this economic model, colonialism and the peasant struggle for land.

Note the similarity of the language and argument to Mosqueira's argument, even though the two are causally unrelated:

*1.1 A nivel mundial, el modelo económico neoliberal prevaleciente, junto con sus relaciones sociales e interestatales, es la mayor causa del empobrecimiento de los campesinos y de los pueblos rurales en general. (La Via Campesina 1)*

[1.1 At the global level, the neo-liberal economic model is dominant with its social and international network as the main cause of the impoverishment of peasants and of rural peoples in general].

*1.2 Este sistema económico trata a los pueblos y a la naturaleza como medios para obtener el fin, el cual es la acumulación de las riquezas en las manos de una pequeña minoría... Los que sufren más los impactos negativos son los pueblos más pobres. Los efectos negativos de este modelo económico se sienten de una manera más aguda en el Tercer Mundo. (La Via Campesina 1)*

[1.2 This economic system treats the environment and people alike as means to an end, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of small minority.... Those who suffer the most from the negative impact of this system are the poorest communities. The negative effects of this economic model are felt most severely in the Third World].

*2.2 La tenencia de la tierra, la riqueza y el poder es incrementada efectivamente en las manos de los grandes latifundistas y las corporaciones transnacionales. Los programas de ajuste estructural (PAES) dejan a los gobiernos nacionales incapaces de desarrollar políticas efectivas para promover la democracia y el desarrollo sostenible. Las políticas que favorecen a los monocultivos agrícolas para la exportación toman prioridad sobre aquellos que podrían servir para promover la seguridad alimenticia de los niveles regionales y nacionales, así como también para promover su producción sostenible. (La Via Campesina 1)*

[2.2 Land ownership, wealth and power are effectively concentrated in the hands of the great latifundistas and transnational corporations. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) leave national governments incapable of developing an effective politics for the promotion of democracy and sustainable development. Agricultural monoculture targeting exportation is

politically favored over those (agricultural programs) that could be used to promote *alimentary security* at both the regional as well as national level which would also support sustainable development].

Thus, the concentration of land, in the form of latifundia, is the primary means of controlling resources in developing nations. The profit-taking model of agro-business with its high input, high production, low cost agricultural commodities both prevents the peasant from competing in the market and robs the peasant of access to the land to supply his or her own family with food.

Globalization impoverishes the poor by excluding them from the means of production (seen here as the combination of land but, also very importantly, access to markets) is also a cultural scourge: note how both Moisquera and the *Primer Encuentro Internacional Campesino* documents point out the difference in values between a globalist economy that reduces people and land to resources as opposed to an implied, native model of valuing individual human beings for an intrinsic worth that cannot be measured in economic terms<sup>110</sup>.

Again, the conflation of the economic changes promoted by global capitalism's rapid implementation in Paraguay and the social changes resulting from the new system of economic organization are seen as parallel to the introduction of colonialism to the Americas. The colonialist reference in the anti-globalist argument reinforces the international-local connection in a way that is not directly apparent to the struggle's participants. It is difficult for any participant in the struggle to see how changing Paraguayan national fiscal policy or opening Paraguayan markets to competition ultimately prevents peasants from

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<sup>110</sup> It must be noted here that there are no sufficient grounds for arguing the existence of a "natural," a-historical and pre-Columbian economic model that valued human dignity above that of the capitalist model.

accumulating enough capital to buy land for their children and, thus, reproduce their way of life. However, the neo-colonial argument that neatly conflates globalism and colonialism allows participants to draw a picture of a struggle between poor landless peasants fighting better equipped police and military forces in an exact parallel to their ancestors' struggle against the *Conquistadores* 500 years ago.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, these arguments are often less than representative of the interests or experiences of the Paraguayan peasant in whose name most of these arguments are made. Consider Gladys Benegas' impassioned argument for the defense of the resources of the poor including genetic materials:

*15. La cumbre de Doha confirmó la ilegitimidad de la OMC [Organización Mundial de Comercio]. La supuesta "Agenda de Desarrollo", sólo defiende intereses transnacionales. Mediante una nueva Ronda de negociaciones, esta institución avanza en su objetivo de convertir todo en mercancía. Para nosotras y nosotros los alimentos, los servicios públicos, la agricultura, la salud, la educación y los genes no deben ser tratados como meras mercancías, y las patentes no deben ser utilizadas como arma contra los países pobres y los pueblos. Rechazamos cualquier tipo de comercio y patentes sobre la vida. (Benegas 28)*

[15. The summit at Doha confirmed the illegitimacy of the WTO [World Trade Organization]. The supposed "Development Agenda" only defends transnational interests. By means of a new round of negotiations, this institution advances its goal of converting everything into market terms. For we, our foodstuffs,

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<sup>111</sup> Such a picture oversimplifies the complexity of the situation and papers over problems including the hybridization of Native American and European/colonialist cultures. Peasants are no more Native American Indians than Midwestern farmers in the United States even though the Paraguayan peasant has preserved some of the linguistic and social practices of his or her native ancestors. The rhetorically constructed nature of peasant identity is nowhere more apparent than in the perjorative view that peasants themselves hold of the few Native peoples who remain in Paraguay. Ironically, the peasants highly value any Native American linguistic or social practice that they identify as their own, while, on the other hand, reviling any such practices espoused by Native Americans with purer bloodlines and more traditional culture. The popular expression "*Que indio*" is a common expression of disgust for a person who is without manners, culture or education of any kind and possesses the character of an enormous insult.

public services, agriculture, health, education and genes ought not to be treated as mere commodities, and patents should not be used as a weapon against poor countries and peoples. We reject any type of commerce and patents over life].

This is a good example of the abstracted level of argumentation that international actors employ in the course of arguing for reform. These are arguments that would be wholly unrecognizable to any peasant and which, in their scope and specific examples, fail to make a contribution to a useful public discussion of land reform in Paraguay.

A final source of international argument comes from the Catholic church. Catholicism is perhaps the most widespread and important social institution in the country following only the government; 98% of all Paraguayans are Catholic and nearly 100% of peasants are Catholic.

Liberation Theology has been introduced into the country and has been disseminated through the mass media in national newspapers, periodicals and transmitted via radio and television as well as through the media of the sermon and study groups. Individual peasants as well as peasant organizations routinely look to church leaders to defend their rights. A high percentage of peasant leaders hold important positions as lay clergy in their local churches.<sup>112</sup> Liberation theological arguments for land reform parallel those made by other international organizations. An excerpt follows:

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<sup>112</sup> In the *Colonia Independencia*, where I have spent more than three years living as a Peace Corps volunteer and as a researcher of the land reform struggle, 100% of the leaders of the local farmer's committees have also served as lay clergy in their communities at one time. I believe that this is a result of the peasant's faith in the Church and in the value of the education provided by the Church to its lay clergy. It only makes sense in the peasant mind for the community member who has been educated to represent the community.

Two types of large landed estates survive to this day from the colonial period: the *hacienda* (or *fazenda*, in Portuguese), raising cattle and a diversity of crops for local use or sale; and the plantation, raising a single exportable crop. Initially, Indians were given as slaves to the landholders. Later, the “freed” natives were tied to the landowners through debts brought on by a subsistence wage system. The shortage of good land off the estate made it easy for the landlord to attract or coerce labor onto his estate.

This pattern continues today with an underclass largely descended from the Indian and African slaves, along with other dispossessed groups. The haciendas and plantations are noted for their inefficient husbandry. Landowners face few social or economic pressures to become good managers, and often live in the cities leaving the estates to be run by overseers. Consequently, the landowners often do not make large profits, but that is not their objective. Their primary concern is the maintenance of the two paramount features of the status quo, which go hand in hand. First, labor is very cheap, because workers have no alternative place to employ themselves, even though massive tracts of good land are held nearly idle by the land barons. Second, the cost of holding on to huge estates -- i.e., the taxes charged by the public for the privilege of retaining possession -- are low or effectively nonexistent. Strong incentives for good stewardship are as absent as the landlords.

There is also little incentive for productivity; most of the population has no share in the fruits of the land or the profits of the estates. The colonial system of land tenure discourages the creation of capital, with most of the surplus from the land going to purchase luxury goods that are produced at the expense of more useful manufacturing or more often are imported, thereby straining the country's balance of payments.

Indeed, the primary purpose of holding vast amounts of land, as Andre Gunder Frank writes in *On Capitalist Underdevelopment*, “is not to use it but to prevent its use by others. These others, denied access to the primary resource, necessarily fall under the domination of the few who do control it. And then they are exploited in all conceivable ways, typically through low wages.” (Andelson and Dawsey 2)

Although this argument differs from others by not explicitly identifying globalism as the culprit for the economic woes of the peasant, it identifies neo-



colonialism as a historical phenomenon and exposes its classist character.

However, as much of the intellectual participation in the land reform struggle, it fails to recognize the real circumstances of peasant life. It offers no solution to the problems experienced each day by peasants, nor makes demands of any sort.

In fact, the contribution of intellectuals to the Paraguayan land reform struggle constitutes the weakest of the interest groups promulgating arguments in support of the struggle. In all, there are three primary liabilities in the argument of Paraguayan and other intellectuals: they don't unify the struggle; they don't create a need for action; and they are not answerable.

The arguments offered by intellectuals don't unify the struggle because they are not heard by the peasants themselves nor do they reflect any of the real conditions of the struggle. These arguments are most likely to be heard or conducted in the presence of those least affected by and least interested in the outcome of the struggle. In addition, these arguments don't create a need for action. The abstract level of the argumentation, definition of problems and issues such as "globalism," "poverty," and "the developing world" defines the problems in such a broad scope that they are truly insurmountable. Furthermore, discussion of the issue in these terms distances the discussion so far from the lived experience of the peasantry that it is difficult to make concrete connections to any particular protest, struggle or conflict. Finally, these arguments issue no demands nor do they offer any solutions or suggest possible outcomes. These arguments remain within the rarefied air of academics and intellectuals who do not

participate in discussion with nor are they read by the politicians and peasants who are the actual actors involved in the struggle.

### 3.3.2 National Actors

Access to the media is one of the primary reasons for the top-down approach to land reform reflected in the arguments offered by international arguments as well as in those arguments offered by the leaders of national organizations in the country. Eladio Flecha, leader of the *Federación Nacional de Campesinos* (FNC) exemplifies this form of argumentation in the name of peasants who call for land reform in Paraguay:

*... el campesinado en este momento se va dando cuenta que como país dependiente, la base del imperialismo es la existencia de latifundios, entonces la postura antiimperialista de los compañeros campesinos y para golpear la base misma del imperialismo, se debe atacar los latifundios.* (Flecha 1)

[... at this time peasants understand that imperialism is the foundation of national dependence; therefore, in order to take an anti-imperialist position and to attack imperialism, the latifundia must be attacked].

It is evident in the language of peasant leaders like Flecha, that they have been strongly influenced by the anti-globalist arguments offered by international organizations as well as by the political and social left in Paraguay. There simply are no organic sources of anti-colonial or anti-globalist arguments in the experience of the Paraguayan peasant. This leadership rhetoric is strongly distinguished from the language and reasoning of the average peasant. As the Paraguayan land reform struggle has evolved, leadership rhetoric and peasant

rhetoric have diverged. It is important to note that the conflation of globalism and colonialism and the identification of the foundation of globalism in the *latifundia* is exactly the same argument made thousands of miles away at the *Primer Encuentro Internacional Campesino* in Mexico. In fact, speaking about the Third Congress of the *Federación Nacional Campesina*, Flecha acknowledges that influence:

*Y para nosotros es de suma importancia la profundización de los debates entre los 400 delegados presentes y allí colaboró fundamentalmente...la participación de los delegados internacionales a través de la experiencia que ellos tienen, en la lucha contra el neoliberalismo y el empobrecimiento de los sectores populares en otros países.* (Flecha 1)

[And of the greatest importance to us (*La Federación Nacional Campesina*) is the deepening of those debates among the 400 delegates present and there to establish a fundamental collaboration...(with) the participation of the international delegates through their experience in the struggle against neo-liberalism and the impoverishment of the working class in other countries].

Finally, Flecha employs the familiar language of Marxism, another international import:

*La Federación Nacional Campesina, es una organización que a pesar de su característica, se define como una organización de clase, una herramienta de lucha, una herramienta de presión, autónoma, democrática, combativa y clasista. Dentro de esos criterios se desarrolló el III Congreso Ordinario y pudimos profundizar los debates políticos e ideológicos dentro de nuestra organización campesina y creemos que los dos sectores productivos de nuestro país, son los campesinos y los obreros, sobre los cuales descansa la economía del país.* (Flecha 1)

[The National Federation of Peasants is an organization that, in spite of its nature, defines itself as a class organization, a tool for struggle, a tool for pressure, autonomous, democratic, combative and class consciousness. Within these criteria the Third Ordinary Congress has developed and we have deepened our political and

ideological debates within our peasant organization and we believe that the two productive sectors of the nation, the peasants and the workers, are the foundation of the country's economy].

While the national popular and the international sources of argument share much in common, in fact, many of the arguments employed by national organizations within Paraguay are directly imported from international sources, the difference in the two argument fields lies in the specific character of the national popular arguments. National peasant organizations actually employ arguments distinct from international sources and, when they do employ internationally generated arguments, they often demand much more than a general rejection of the global capitalist economic model; they demand specific concessions that would contribute to that end.

There is an obvious tension between the international brand of the land reform argument and the national popular themes of protest. As James Petras has pointed out in the case of non-governmental organizations that support populist reforms such as land reform, there is a struggle between the national organizations and the NGOs over the focus of collaborative work. National popular organizations “focus on local projects rather than structural changes (land reform); the emphasis on self-exploitation and survival strategies (self-help) instead of comprehensive, publicly funded health, education, and housing programs” (Petras). At the level of the national popular, the struggle is not solely ideological but pragmatic as well. The representation and participation of the peasants themselves tends to ground the idealist component of international

arguments that so quickly cast blame on the industrialized world and its global capitalist model.

The very purpose of national peasant organizations is to bridge the gap between a peasantry ignorant of its rights and an intelligentsia that not only can posit a structured program of rights but that has access to the public media and even to the government itself. While arguments for a fair and equitable distribution of land in a country where 98% of all arable land is owned by less than 1% of the population might seem self-evident, it is important to note that Paraguay is one of only three Latin American nations to have never enacted an agrarian reform policy in its entire history.<sup>113</sup> There is simply no precedent available to the peasant for securing his or her rights.

In fact, the national popular land reform argument is quick to foreground its inclusive and dialogic nature as the mediator between international sources in the land reform struggle and the peasantry. Note that even as Flecha is defining the struggle in a Marxist terminology that no peasant in the country could understand he is quick to note that the conclusions of the conference were reached through a discussion including all 400 members of the Congress and that the result was collaborative in nature.

The spirit of collaboration was implemented in the first and most important result of land reform arguments at the level of the national popular, the

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<sup>113</sup> Only Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina are the only three Latin American nations that have never enacted a national agrarian reform. Argentina and Uruguay have been exempted from the pressure by the presence of a substantial middle class comprising mid-sized farms and have thus avoided the *latifundial* pressures and associated class conflict that have so often supplied the impetus for land reform initiatives in the region (Kay 3). Paraguay has opted for settlement programs to relieve the social pressure for land reform, which worked for several hundred years until the recent spate of invasions began in 1989.

*Constitución Nacional 1992* of Paraguay. Peasant groups (Mainly from San Pedro de Ycuamandiyu, but from other areas as well) wrangled a seat at the constitutional convention by exploiting their relationships with workers' unions and the new sense of openness following the end of the Stroessner regime. Represented by the *la Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT) in the *Convención Nacional Constituyente*, peasant groups gained major concessions as interest groups were convened to write a new *Constitución Nacional* in December of 1991. The process culminated in the *Constitución Nacional 1992*, which was ratified by the Paraguayan Congress on July 20, 1992.<sup>114</sup> The *Constitución Nacional 1992*, while modeled upon and heavily influenced by extant Latin American constitutions and a neo-liberal and globalist vision, did represent the voice of the peasantry however problematic that representation was.

Peasant participation was made possible by the rhetorical posture of the new regime that recognized and defined institutions for addressing the needs of the peasantry in particular.<sup>115</sup> It is important to note that no peasant nor peasant organization themselves sat on the commission but that peasant groups approached *la Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), the nation's largest trade union, to form an alliance and to represent the rights of both workers and peasants. The union accepted this offer, identifying an alliance with the largest group in the country and a group that also contested the privileges of capital and

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<sup>114</sup> The creation of the Constitutional Commission in December of 1991 was the first moment in Paraguayan history that could be said to have translated the mandate of the people into national law. Previous constitutions of 1940 and 1967 were nothing more than political tools designed to support the dictatorships of Estigarribia and Stroessner, respectively.

<sup>115</sup> Having overthrown Stroessner in 1989, the Rodríguez government appealed to a broad coalition of anti-Stroessner sectors including the largest, the peasantry. In addition, Paraguay has a long tradition of coalition building by means of including the peasantry during periods of great political instability following revolutions, particularly following the Revolution of 1904.

business as an important ally in the struggle to define the law in the Paraguay that emerged from five hundred of years of elite political control.

The language of the *Constitución Nacional 1992* captures the spirit of the moment after the fall of the thirty-eight year dictatorial regime of Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda. It is a document explicitly intended to express the rights of individual Paraguayans as well as of social sectors such as the peasantry. It also outlines the responsibility of the government in the protection of these rights, and in the case of the peasantry, the right to a fair and rational agrarian system:

*Artículo 114: La reforma agraria es uno de los factores fundamentales para lograr el bienestar rural. Ella consiste en la incorporación efectiva de la población campesina al desarrollo económico y social de la nación. Se adoptaran sistemas equitativos de distribución de la propiedad y tenencia de la tierra. Se organizan el crédito y la asistencia técnica, educacional y sanitaria, se fomentará la creación de cooperativas agrícolas y de otras asociaciones similares y se promoverá la producción, la industrialización y la racionalización del mercado para el desarrollo integral del agro. (Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya 120-3)*

[Article 114: Agrarian reform is one of the basic factors for achievement of rural wellbeing. This consists of the effective incorporation of the rural population in the economic and social development of the nation. This will require the adoption of a fair system of distribution of ownership and management of land. This will also require the provision of credit, as well as technical, educational and sanitary assistance; in addition, the formation and support of agricultural cooperatives and other similar associations will promote production industrialization and rationalization of the market, which is integral to the development of agriculture].

The *Constitución Nacional 1992* also directly addresses the land reform struggle. In this document, we see a smooth fusion of the internationalist rejection of latifundia as the tools for disenfranchisement of the peasant populace

and the peasants' own relationship to the land as a tool for rational exploitation, or a means for survival. The *Constitución Nacional 1992* states:

*Artículo 116: Con el objetivo de eliminar progresivamente los latifundios improductivos, la ley atenderá a la aptitud natural de las tierras, a las necesidades del sector de población vinculado con la agricultura y a las previsiones aconsejables para el desarrollo equilibrada de las actividades agrícolas, agropecuarias, forestales e industriales, así como el aprovechamiento sostenible de los recursos naturales y de la preservación del equilibrio ecológico. La expropiación de los latifundios improductivos destinados a la reforma agraria será establecidos en cada caso por la ley, y se abonará en la forma y en el plazo que la misma determine. (Conferencia Episcopal Paraguaya 123-4)*

[Article 116: With the objective of the progressive elimination of large, unproductive land-holdings, the law regards the natural state of the land, the needs of that sector of the population dependent upon agriculture and the available knowledge for balanced development. This development will take the form of the sustainable development of natural resources and the preservation of ecological balance. The expropriation of large, unproductive land-holdings for the purpose of agrarian reform will be established in all cases by the law and will be realized in the form and in the place that the law deems appropriate].

Thus, much more specifically than a mere ideological rejection of the *latifundia*, the *Constitución Nacional 1992* identifies a peculiar Paraguayan practice, the historical tradition of squatters' rights tied to productivity. Land is not truly perceived as private but as a national trust whose function is to contribute to the national wellbeing through economic production. “*Los latifundios improductivos*” [unproductive landholdings] contrast the “*aptitud natural de las tierras*” [natural character of the land] which is to serve “*las necesidades del sector de población vinculado con la agricultura*” [the needs of



the sector of the population dependent upon agriculture] in order to contribute to the nation.

This is an ancient land tenure practice that has been repeated throughout Paraguayan history. Peasant land invasion had been tacitly tolerated from 1535 until 1870 in order to stimulate the economy. Stroessner's institutionalization of the tacit practice in the form of colonization codified an explicit social practice in the national popular consciousness: land will always be available to those who wish to work hard and contribute to the good of the nation. This is exactly the sentiment found in article 116 of the *Constitución Nacional 1992* of Paraguay.

These two articles in the *Constitución Nacional 1992* have been the heart of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. They have been used to provide a legal basis for challenging private landowners whose landholdings exceed their ability to claim to be utilizing the land as a national, agricultural or forestry resource. This has led to land occupations which, following the Brazilian strategy of the CST (*Campesinos Sem Terra*), have coordinated large occupations of land in which hundreds of peasants enter private land and quickly establish crops, upon which basis they can claim to be making effective use of the land and gain constitutional immunity from prosecution. After the occupation has been established, political pressure is applied at both the local and national level to legalize the holding and grant title to the land for the campesinos.

### 3.3.3 Grassroots Actors

On August 2, 2001 an estimated 30,000 peasants blocked highways in ten different states issuing a list of demands:

- 1) *Cumplimiento de acuerdos y compromisos del Gobierno nacional con el campo.*  
[The recognition of accords and promises of the National Government with the people of the countryside (including agreements for land reform and technical services for peasants as last promised by congressional leaders on March 14, 2001)].
- 2) *Apoyo a los proyectos de producción agrícola.*  
[Support for agricultural production projects (through the auspices of MAG as well as local projects appealing for government aid)].
- 3) *Justicia por crímenes cometidos contra campesinos.*  
[Justice for the crimes committed against peasants].
- 4) *Cese de persecuciones a dirigentes campesinos.*  
[An end to the persecution of peasant leaders].
- 5) *Por mayor presupuesto para la salud, educación, agricultura y obras públicas.*  
[A greater portion of the budget committed to health, education, agriculture and other public projects].
- 6) *Definición y ejecución de una política de desarrollo nacional en base a la producción agropecuaria.*  
[The definition and execution of a national politics of development based upon agriculture and animal husbandry].
- 7) *Contra el modelo de transición neoliberal, antipopular y anticampesino.*  
[Abandonment of neo-liberal, antipopulist and antipeasant governance].
- 8) *Contra las privatizaciones, desempleo y corrupción.*  
[An end to the privatization of state monopolies, unemployment and corruption].

These demands were delivered to members of congress by Belarmino Balbuena, the leader of the national peasant organization MCNOC, in the company of several leaders of large, local peasant organizations. No peasants, outside of the leadership of the organization, participated in the formulation of the demands or

their delivery.<sup>116</sup> Most of the peasant participants in the bloqueos would understand and agree with demands 1-5 but would have great difficulty understanding, let alone, deliberating upon demands 6-8. Yet, the average peasant protestor put his or her life on the line for all of these demands.

There is a large social difference between the leaders of peasant organizations and the many ordinary members of such organizations. Peasant leaders congregate, hold meetings, eat and communicate with the press and the authorities of the state, apart from other peasants. This is not so radically different from the experience of social movements in the United States and Europe, where the important leaders of social movements become alienated from the ordinary members of those movements as movements evolve and bureaucratic structures separate leaders from the rank and file.

Robert Michels has theorized that such behavior is common within political organizations. Michels invokes what he calls the “iron law of oligarchy” to describe this behavior. Arguing the “society cannot exist without a ‘dominant’ or ‘political’ class,” he suggests that “the majority [within any organized group] is thus permanently incapable of self-government” (Michels 390). These oligarchic tendencies within the MCNOC are not unique to that organization and, if they

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<sup>116</sup> I spent the entire day of August 2, 2001 interviewing Balbuena, other leaders of the organization as well as peasants participating in the protests as they moved through the MCNOC headquarters and on to vehicles where they were transported to several of the many protest sites throughout the country. As I spoke with the non-leadership members of the organization it became obvious that decisions about the nature of the protest and the language of the formal documents presented to Congress were completely in the hands of the leadership who debated the issues in *Guarani* in the rear courtyard as I interviewed the peasants who milled around in the front courtyard. Even arguments made to interviewers such as myself and the news media were concentrated upon the leadership who spoke good, clear Spanish. Only after I introduced myself in *Guarani* and chatted for a while with peasants in that language did I get the opportunity to interview peasants who were not members of the leadership. The peasants thought it very curious that I, an American, would spend my time chatting with the lowest members of the organization rather than with the leadership.

prove widespread, call into question the ability of the MCNOC or the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a whole to represent the peasantry or even to succeed as a movement.

These bureaucratic and oligarchical structures are not immediately evident even in the largest of peasant land reform organizations such as the MCNOC.

Ostensibly, all members of the Paraguayan land reform struggle and of the MCNOC are peasant farmers. However, in reality, the peasant leaders I had the opportunity to speak with and to visit on their farms fell into two categories: active and inactive members. Active members were those peasants who were active in peasant organizations—visiting the main office in the capital city, attending meetings, attending training or visiting their *socios* or other members of the group. As a result of this work, they don't have time to work at home on their own farms (often a twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week responsibility). Returning home from time to time, the active members of peasant organizations depend on their *socios* who work in *minga* to maintain the farms of active members. This, however, most certainly results in a drop in income that must be supplemented by other means, presumably with a salary from the organization itself or from donations from the active socios. Inactive members spend the vast majority of their time on the farm and have little to no time to devote to organizational activity. Attending rallies and protests only when called upon, the average member of the land reform struggle must rely upon his or her representatives to inform him or her of the issues concerning the struggle.

The oligarchical character of the MCNOC became quite evident when I interviewed that organization's leader, Belarminio Balbuena. The odd mixture of social informality and peasant deference to leadership makes organizational oligarchy a less than obvious, if universal phenomenon amongst the peasantry.<sup>117</sup> The first time I approached MCNOC's headquarters in Asunción (a small home in the middle of an ordinary neighborhood with a front and back patio) I merely clapped my hands as I entered the front patio of the house (a traditional method of entry to a rural homestead) and a young woman came out to inform me that "*Oke hina el karai*," the *señor* was sleeping. I politely explained my desire to interview Sr. Balbuena and the young woman awoke the leader of tens of thousands from his nap on the back porch to sit, talk and drink *tererre* with a stranger.

Sr. Balbuena was well accustomed to interviews, speaking with strangers and articulating himself in both Spanish and *Guaraní*. Other peasants attending the interviews I conducted with Sr. Balbuena declined to speak in his presence. After conducting interviews throughout the country for 2 ½ months and listening to peasant arguments, it became evident that individual peasant arguments differ quite substantially from the arguments offered by the leadership of peasant organizations.

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<sup>117</sup> While working with one *comité de agricultores* in *La Colonial Independencia*, I encountered the same phenomenon. The leader of the comité was known as *José Aguara* or José the Fox. He was untrustworthy and actually disliked by the other members of the comité who elected him their leader, year after year. After inquiring, I discovered that he was chosen solely on the basis of two traits: "*one'e porã la castellano ha oikua la kuatiane'e*" [he has good Spanish and he knows how to read]. The peasants didn't trust him but felt that *la mitã paragua'ype*, people from the city, would respect him.

In an interesting contradiction, the individual Paraguayan peasant is ordinarily invisible in the course of public land reform argument.<sup>118</sup> This exclusion applies equally to the ability of an ordinary peasant to communicate his or her views on land reform to a journalist as to the leader of the peasant organization of which he or she is a member. Individuals are subordinated to the organization itself as represented through the person of the leader or leadership of the group. Michels' iron law of oligarchy contributes to an explanation of how individuals within a group are systematically silenced. On another level of analysis, not only do organizational practices constrain the broad participation of peasants in their own organizations, but Paraguayan culture itself contributes to the phenomenon.

In the mind of the Paraguayan peasant, it would be a contradiction to define a category of the land reform argument labeled "peasant arguments" which differ from those arguments offered by peasant leaders and peasant organizations in the name of individual peasants who are occupying land and manning roadblocks, the physical component of protest activity. The rule of the *ñembotavy* rules peasant attitudes, "*Lo mbarete oreko kuera la yvy ha xe, ha xe ñembotavy. Xe da rekoi la yvy.*" [The powerful have the land and me, I am only an ignorant peasant. I don't have any land] (Rogelio Martínez, Personal Interview). *Peasants believe that their lack of education limits their ability to contest at the level of argument.* Individual peasant arguments for land reform that differ from those of the national peasant organizations do exist. They are, in fact, copious, too

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<sup>118</sup> The exception to this rule is found in those cases of successful physical protest that result in peasant deaths when the immutable fact of their lives and deaths becomes evident.

numerous for this work to list. Comprised of an assortment of individual and particular land disputes, many peasant demands fall into the (Not In My Back Yard) NIMBY category of social struggle. However, and at the same time, peasants demonstrate a national level of consciousness about the land reform issue. Peasants simultaneously articulate their own land concerns and those of other peasants throughout the nation. Amanzio Ruíz, a land-squatter, member of the MCNOC and participant in the struggles for land in the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary*, puts it this way, “*Todos somos pobres. Lo que tenemos, tenemos porque luchamos. Es así en todo el país*” [We are all poor. What we have, we have because we fought (for it)] (Ruíz, Personal Interview).

Alain Touraine argues that this distinction between the articulation of the struggle by intellectuals as opposed to members of the movement themselves constitutes an important break in the nature of organized social conflict. Touraine posits the difference between mere social struggles and real social movements (where social movements are uniquely capable of achieving real, lasting social change) as an issue of agency: in social struggles, actors participate in the society's decision making process; in social movements, actors “seek to transform the relations of social domination” that structure the conflict and its outcome (Touraine, *Return* 64). In the case of a social movement, the role of the intellectual is to foment self-analysis by presenting an image of the group to itself for judgment (Touraine, *Return* 97). By making the social actors in the struggle more aware of themselves and their stakes in the struggle, namely their relations to state and society, the intellectual “should produce intelligibility among actors

and thus increase their freedom” (Dubet and Wievidrka 59). The goal of the intellectual is to create, within the membership of any social movement a capacity for self-analysis that focuses upon “historicity,” or the set of social relations that structure the conflict (Touraine, *Voice* 143, 149). For, as Touraine qualifies his analysis, “The main condition for social movements to take shape is the consciousness that we are entering a new type of social life” (Touraine, “An Introduction” 780)

The radical differences between peasant perceptions and representations of the conflict and perceptions and representations of the conflict by intellectuals becomes important in light of Touraine’s distinction between social struggles and social movements. Given the fact that peasants are the primary actors in the conflict, protesting, marching, and invading and occupying property, we should question, not the contribution of intellectuals to the society, but their contribution to this particular conflict. It would seem that, given the need for coherence and concerted action, the contributions of intellectuals could and ought to take on a central role in the land reform struggle.

Intellectuals perceive the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a historical opportunity to challenge the status quo. Writing articles, attending lectures and speaking to groups constitutes a real and even concerted effort to challenge the historicity of the conflict at its highest level of meaning in terms of “citizenship,” “good governance,” “participatory democracy,” “rural interests,” “elite social domination,” “globalism” and finally, “social reform.” All of this is ostensibly correct. However, Touraine’s point is that the conflict will never rise above the



level of struggle unless its primary actors, the peasantry (estimated at a much as 55% of the entire population), are informed of the real stakes of the struggle.<sup>119</sup> Since intellectuals don't directly or indirectly communicate with peasants, they simply do not contribute to the construction of a real social movement in Touraine's terms.

Given that the intellectuals do not contribute to peasant perceptions of the conflict, where do peasants develop their argumentative strategies? Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht have collected research demonstrating that protest strategies can develop as intermovement links within a single country (McAdam and Rucht 61-62). In the absence of an intellectual current motivating the primary actors in the Paraguayan land reform struggle, it is important to look at the movement in terms of the experiences of the primary actors themselves.

The single largest factor shaping peasant attitudes towards the struggle is a historically situated language and culture that is shared by the approximately 2.5 million peasants in Paraguay. The most natural peasant arguments for use in the land reform struggle are cultural in nature and express peasant values. They are expressions of the daily rules of life that have defined rural Paraguayan culture for hundreds of years. However, as arguments based within the peasant experience they are ineffective as public arguments. The targeted audience for these arguments, the urban Paraguayan population (including politicians and government servants), does not participate in or have an understanding of the subsistence agricultural lifestyle of the peasantry. Since this audience has little to no understanding of the cultural logic of such peasant arguments, thus, effective

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<sup>119</sup> Rachel Neild estimated the peasant population at 55% in 1991 (Neild 40).

communication with a targeted audience tends to be limited. Three examples of such peasant arguments include the 1) *lo jataivy guasu*, 2) *lo sinvergüenza*, and 3) *hay que ser responsable*.

***Lo Jataivy Guasu*** (the blood suckers). This argument points out the traditional exploitation of peasants who have been too ignorant to take ownership of what is theirs, namely Paraguay. Peasants have historically not understood their rights and have been guided by *la mitã paragua' y pe* or *Asunceños*, city dwellers, to the detriment of their own interests. *Lo jataivy guasu* is a popular phrase that compares the systematic exploitation of the peasant to the *jataivy* (tick) that lives on the cow that works to feed both animals. The tick does nothing but benefit from the work of the cow. The peasants see themselves as the cow and see the urban population as ticks that feed on their sweat and blood to enrich themselves at the expense of the peasant who works in the field as the middle men sit in air conditioned offices. The peasantry is aware of the “free ride” and exploitation by means of usury, monopolization of land, transport and other means of production. The urban public, however, views the peasants as lazy, uneducated masses who require shepherding. This argument fails because the urban populace does not see the deplorable conditions the peasantry suffers as a result of their exploitation as cheap labor for the *latifundias*.

***Sinvergüenza a*** (person with shameless behavior). This argument boils down to the belief that land rightfully belongs to those who work it (*los responsables*). From the peasant's perspective, the function of the government is to give land to those who work so that all Paraguayans can benefit (the peasant

does this knowing that he or she is robbed of much of the value of his or her labor upon which the city-folk for their livelihood but such is the food chain). The peasant is happy to maintain the status quo, to sell his or her cheap labor to the greater benefit of others. However, to violate the social contract, that is, to not provide land to the peasants whose sweat, blood and sacrifice have built the society that the urban population dominates is to bring shame upon themselves for their unethical behavior. This argument fails because the popular image of peasants as ignorant, illiterate and lazy supplies rationalizations for their impoverished condition. Urban Paraguayans don't have to face the fact that their prosperity is premised upon the misery and destitution of millions of peasants.

*Ser responsable* (Be responsible). The implicit social contract for the peasant is that of debt-obligation. Peasants send their sons to military service to pay their debt to the state and each peasant is willing at any time to contribute what he or she can to the state when needed.<sup>120</sup> “*Hay que ser responsable!*” is the cry of self-identification for the Paraguayan peasant. Only a man or a woman who works hard can expect support from his or her community as well as the nation. The lessons of the Chaco War and the War of the Triple Alliance are important here. The nation has the right to call upon its citizens to make extreme sacrifices and they have. More than half of the entire Paraguayan population died in a futile defense of the nation led by a foolish egomaniac with great aspirations. During the Chaco War, under-armed peasants managed to defeat a much larger

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<sup>120</sup> A famous instance of this occurred during the Chaco War when the Paraguayan army was forced to fight a better equipped Bolivian force. The Paraguayan government called upon the peasantry to contribute horses to the cause. Of their own free will, the peasantry supplied the Armed Forces with more than 100,000 horses as a contribution to the nation.

and better equipped Bolivian force under inhuman conditions in which more casualties were attributed to dehydration than to combat.<sup>121</sup> Peasants expect land and other concessions from the government because they have already earned them. They have proven their worth to the nation as laborers and expect the state to reciprocate. This argument fails because urban Paraguayans do not understand the transparently clientelistic character of rural Paraguayan society. They believe that such overtly clientilistic obligations are an artifact of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and not a modern social practice. While clientelism thrives in the urban Paraguayan culture as well as the rural, the lack of subtlety in the rural version of this social practice marks it as quite a different thing in the eye of the urbane Paraguayan citizen. Thus, the public demands of peasants for the reciprocation of a social contract, a crude and transparent form of the clientelism with which the urban Paraguayan is familiar, is misunderstood as merely *aprovechoso* or opportunistic.

The arguments offered by individual peasants in the personal interviews I conducted have little connection to the daily lives of urban dwelling politicians and bureaucrats to whom they have been addressed.<sup>122</sup> Peasants offering such culturally grounded arguments appear merely incoherent or wholly ignorant of the nation's economic necessities from the point of view of these urban Paraguayans. Contributing to the inability of the peasants to directly communicate their own arguments is the fact that the most effective arguments that could be offered by the peasants, to address non-rural Paraguayans, such as *latifundia*, government

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<sup>121</sup> Only one in seven Paraguayan infantry soldiers went into the field of battle with a rifle.

<sup>122</sup> I collected interviews in three separate periods Sept 1993 – Dec 1995; June 9, 2000 – August 15, 2000; and August 2, 2002 to August 28, 2002. Interviews were primarily conducted within three different departments: Asunción, Villaricca, Capi'I Bary and the Colonia Independencia.

corruption, and the need for agricultural credit, infrastructure and other forms of economic support have been co-opted by the national peasant organizations who express these arguments more articulately and in good Spanish.

Linguistic and educational barriers also problematize peasant communication with non-rural Paraguayans. Most peasants are primarily *Guarani* speakers and often only speak Spanish as a *jópara*.<sup>123</sup> This prevents them from accessing almost all public information which is available only in Spanish. Most Paraguayan television and radio transmissions are in Spanish as well as books, magazines and newspapers. In addition, the low level of education and high illiteracy rate of peasants contributes to their inability to develop a sufficiently complex understanding of their situation. Given the lack of educational investment or opportunity for peasants to obtain the mental training or theoretical tools for recognizing the condition of their lives, the structure of their relations to the state and the complexities inherent in the prospect of land reform, it is understandable that their attempts to communicate those concepts are often less than coherent.

Furthermore, given the peasant's own dearth of confidence and/or lack of experience in the arena of competitive argument, when peasants are exposed to public arguments in favor of land reform, those arguments quickly colonize the peasant consciousness. This occurs regardless of the ability of those arguments to conform to the perceived reality of the peasant's life or circumstances. With no other way to express him or herself, the peasant will repeat arguments without

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<sup>123</sup> *Jopará* is the hybrid language that mixes Spanish and *Guarani*. The *jópara* is contrasted with the *Porteno* spoken in urban centers.

fully understanding them.<sup>124</sup> It is enough for the peasant to know that these arguments are in support of his or her position. Thus, the peasant is alienated from his or her own real, lived experience of the very conflict over land that he or she ostensibly is driving. The peasant rejection of MERCOSUR, state privatization and globalism are examples of the displacement of the peasant as a self-conscious actor in the struggle.

Another constraint on the ability of peasants to participate in the construction and delivery of arguments in the course of public protest is that they are out of the decision making loop and are often the last to know the positions and arguments of their own national organizations as well as the counter proposals offered by the government. Living in isolated communities, often hundreds of miles away from the capital city, the peasants themselves do not participate in the daily activities of the national struggle. A national protest activity may occur over the course of three days; after which, the peasants disband and return home as negotiations may be carried on by their leaders and ostensible representatives for several more days to weeks.

Important factors limiting their participation in the deliberations that follow the actual protests are primarily a result of the substandard state of rural

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<sup>124</sup> This mimicry is a survival technique developed by a peasantry that has endured hundreds of years of dictatorial regimes and the repression of free speech. Peasants have learned to identify the political and economic opinions of the dominant classes and reproduce them when asked for their opinion. Some linguistic clues provide insight into this class of speech. Political speech is referred to in *Guaraní* as *a-ne'embeque*, or slow speech. It is understood that political discussion employs a process of conscious reflection and code/creed switching. The ability to cause one's speech to shift from one ideological position to another, that is to say from approval of one political party to another, is referred to by the peasants as *a-cambia la camisa*, or the changing of the shirt (this refers to the recent practice of distributing T-shirts with colors representing the country's political parties: red for the ANR, blue for the PLRA, rainbow for the PEN, etc...). Peasants are well adapted to identifying and mimicking the ideological positions of their interlocutors, including peasant leaders, intellectuals and even other peasants.

transportation, the inaccessibility of communication technology, the physical distribution of peasant households and costs.

No communication links exist which connect the rural countryside with the capital. While some phone service is available, that service is sporadic, outside of the locality of the peasants themselves (phone offices are located in larger municipalities separated from the *asentamientos* and *compañías* where the peasants actually live by rudimentary roads.<sup>125</sup> Travel on such rural roads is seasonal. Road conditions are poor and roads often lack bridges, pavement, or even basic maintenance restricting their use to the dry season.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the constant demands of the farm permit peasants only allow extended travel outside of the primary growing season, spending more than three days away from the farm not only is unusual for a peasant but can create an economic liability with livestock and crops to attend.<sup>127</sup> Travel is expensive. The *pasaje* or ticket cost from rural settlements to the capital is a multi-step process performed with great

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<sup>125</sup> It is remarkable to note the growth of cell phone access in Paraguay. In fact, some peasant leaders do possess phones. This is seen primarily as a security precaution rather than as method of structuring the dissemination of information from the national to the local peasant organizations. Several factors limit the use of cell phones as an answer to the communication problems isolating local peasant organizations and individual peasants from close contact with national peasant organizations as well as with other local organizations: 1) cost (phone service costs roughly \$30/month or \$360/year while the average peasant family earns between \$800-\$1000/year. A cell phone could cost as much as 45% of a peasant's yearly income); 2) peasants are often uncomfortable with technology and the presence of a phone doesn't mean that it will be cared for or even used at all; 3) Coverage is sporadic and often not available in the Paraguayan countryside.

<sup>126</sup> While living in Paraguay, I was many times forced to travel ten to fifteen kilometers through mud that reached my knees in order to seek bus service. In fact, the hike into and out of the asentamiento *Capi'ibary* is five kilometers through sand, across a stream with no bridge that becomes impassable after a rain and up a fifteen degree slope in either direction for 2 ½ kilometers.

<sup>127</sup> Although most of the country is north of the Tropic of Cancer, the growing season is interrupted by one or more frosts each year. With a growing season of approximately 10 months, peasants are only free from the constant demands of subsistence farming for about 2 months of the year.

expense to the peasant.<sup>128</sup> Initially, the peasant pays for passage from the *compañía* to a transportation hub (usually a small urban center within 1-4 hours of the *compañías*), then from that hub to the capital, then, within the capital, for bus service to the peasant's destination. I have estimated the total average cost to a peasant making such a journey at 1 ½ to nearly 2 day's labor<sup>129</sup> or 15,000-19,000 Guaraníes<sup>130</sup> without including the cost of food and drink in the calculation. In addition, transport price hikes far exceed inflation and impact peasants disproportionately as long distance travel (from the colonias to the capital) experiences the largest cost increases.<sup>131</sup>

There are also cultural barriers that make travel difficult for the culturally isolated peasant. A peasant who speaks little Spanish and who has been raised in the rural countryside may never have traveled outside of his or her *compañía* or asentamiento before. In addition, fear of embarrassment or loss in the process of conducting business and getting directions in Guaraní constitute a significant obstacle for the average peasant. Finally, travel to the Capital city of Asunción inhabited by more than 1,000,000 people presents the difficulty of orientation to

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<sup>128</sup> When traveling with peasant leader Amanzio Ruíz, I discovered that Amanzio was losing time for working on his farm. Upon returning to *Capi'ibary*, he informed me that he could not guide me through the asentamiento because he had work to do. I offered to help him but he declined stating that I had important work to do as well, to tell the story of the peasants to the people of the United States. It is common for peasant leaders to receive an *abono* from the community they represent. This *abono* serves to pay for the cost of travel, food and lodging as well as the value of the time the farmer has lost working on his own farm (approximately 10,000-12,000 Guaraníes or about \$2.00/day).

<sup>129</sup> Daily labor wages are 10,000-12,000 Guaraníes each day, for 10 hours of labor. 8,000 Guaraníes/day is not unheard of in the rural countryside where labor is abundant and employment is scarce.

<sup>130</sup> The initial stage of travel will cost 1,500 to 2,500 Guaraníes each way. Travel from the hub to the capital will cost between 12,000 to 15,000 Guaraníes. Local bus service within the capital costs 1,500 Guaraníes. Such a trip will cost 15,000 to 19,000 Guaraníes each way.

<sup>131</sup> Pasaje increased by 10% for medium distance travel (less than 100 kilometers) and by 15% for long distance travel (between 100 to 200 kilometers) ("Empresas Brasileñas" 18).



the peasant. Having lived all of one's life within the same small area does not enable the peasant to culturally or physically navigate the barriers imposed by such things as pedestrians, buildings, traffic and other physical facts of urban life that are unknown to rural culture.<sup>132</sup>

Finally, the peasant is disinclined to participate at all in the *one'embeque de lo mburuvicha kuera* [the discussions among the leaders]. The peasant culture is defined by a top-down leadership model, within which dissent is discouraged and self-censorship is prevalent. Individual peasants rarely speak up in groups. A collectivist mentality pervades peasant organizations, protests and events in which all members must follow their orders *desde arriba*, "from above." The contradiction exhibited in the function of a group designed to express the needs of peasants to the Paraguayan society, which, in turn, prevents individual members from expressing themselves can be found in the words of the peasants themselves:

*Estamos analizando los problemas que existen en la aplicación de la reforma agraria. El campesinado es un sector muy grande de nuestro país. Al hablar de reforma agraria se habla del campesinado, en general; se habla de la política misma hacia el sector campesino. Pero lamentablemente, los que debemos hablar de reforma agraria no tenemos la palabra, y nosotros somos los que sabemos donde no aprieta el zapato.* (González 242)

[We are analyzing the problems that exist in the application of agrarian reform. The peasantry is a very large segment of the nation. To speak of agrarian reform is to speak about the peasantry in general. One may also include the political treatment of the peasantry here. But regrettably, of those who should be talking about agrarian reform, we lack the words and we are those who understand where it hurts].

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<sup>132</sup> I once traveled with some peasant leaders I was working with in the *Colonia Independencia*, Guairá to an agricultural conference held in Asunción. The peasants were reluctant to spend the amount of money that it required to travel by bus across the city (550 Guaraníes/trip or about \$0.25). Unable to conceptualize the urban as opposed to rural distances, involved in traveling through the Capital, he insisted that we walk in order to save money.

While arguments that are offered by the peasants themselves, expressed in their own language (either *Guaraní* or *jópara*), and grounded in their own, lived experience of rural life are available, the arguments that are truly operationalized in the land reform struggle are those of the national peasant organizations which have monopolized the best individual peasant arguments and ignored the rest. This is owing to the success of the sensationalized public demands made by national peasant organizations as opposed to the more reasoned analyses of NGOs, academics and other internationally oriented groups or the nearly impenetrable linguistic and cultural barriers between peasants and their urban Paraguayan audience. Even when the same argument is being made, the discourse of a peasant leader interviewed at a roadblock captures the public's interest much more than a fair analysis of the rural economy published by a Paraguayan academic, or the muted voice of the real peasant who, humbled before the news cameras, mumbles a few inarticulate words in *Guaraní*. On the other hand, national peasant organizations often take credit for and eventually come to represent local groups of peasants who, as *Guaraní* speakers, are more than willing to allow the sophisticated, Spanish speaking leader of a national organization to speak on their behalf to the media or to the Congress.

It would be erroneous to arrive at the conclusion, as James Petras has, that the success that national peasant organizations have played in shaping the national debate on agrarian reform has emerged from the peasantry organizing from below (Petras 2). For, while local peasant organizations may have provided the impetus for the mobilization of peasants in the past, this is not the case today. Over time,

the value of local participation or organization from “below” has become less and less important to the struggle as the roles of protester and leader have ossified in accordance with Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels 389-90). Beginning with the formation of the *Ligas Agrarias* in the 1960s, and culminating in the dominance of two organizations in the land reform struggle: the MCNOC and FNC, the importance of the national peasant organization has increased as the site of the struggle and, as a result, the arguments for the struggle have changed over time to reflect the character of this new site of struggle. Today, the land reform struggle has less to do with peasants and more to do with the organizations that represent them.

Despite the fact that I have collected more than 100 interviews with peasants over a period of two years, I have been forced to come to the conclusion that an in-depth discussion of the individual attitudes, opinions and verbal arguments of the peasantry themselves has little bearing upon the actual verbal arguments employed in the struggle for land reform in Paraguay.<sup>133</sup> Far more important and effective for the land reform struggle have been the non-discursive arguments offered by the peasantry. The next section explores this physical dimension of protest activity by highlighting the various sites where the struggle unfolds.

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<sup>133</sup> This will be discussed further in chapter 5 when a model will be introduced to describe the phenomenon.

### 3.4 Shifting Sites of Protest Activity

It is an oversimplification to suggest that peasant land invasions are the only form of resistance to legally recognized land tenure practices in Paraguay. Struggles over land possession have taken four primary forms, each with its own specific historical trajectory and historical context. Although the problem of *minifundia* and the consequent pressure to invade and occupy latifundia is the most dramatic land tenure challenge, in reality, only 66% of all land tenure challenges in a study performed by CIPAE between 1989 and 1993 constituted land invasions and occupations (CIPAE, *Conflicto* 17).<sup>134</sup>

At least three distinct geographic shifts have occurred in the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a historical struggle. The earliest form of the struggle was land occupation or squatting, a traditional practice predating colonial rule as a socio-agricultural practice. While protests erupted from time to time between the foundation of the Paraguayan state in 1811 and the mid 1960s, they were sporadic in nature and often motivated by political forces external to domain of the struggle, peasant life.<sup>135</sup> The site of struggle between the foundation of the republic and 1963 was the individual squatter's plot/*latifundista's* ranch. The cause of the struggle was the *loteamiento*, or the legal titling of land that was occupied by peasants but owned by another. Peasants have always squatted land in Paraguay, but after the two failed wars, massive government land sales

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<sup>134</sup> In the same study, CIPAE discovered that 12% of these land conflicts were conflicts over access to campos comunales while 11% were conflicts over *colonización* and *loteamiento* with the remaining 11% constituted by other types of land conflicts (CIPAE, *Conflicto* 17).

<sup>135</sup> The Revolution of 1904 is a good example of the political rather than social impetus driving land reform as, in the case of 1904, the desire of the Liberales to overthrow the Colorado government.

transferred huge tracts of land where the passive ownership practices of the Paraguayan government were quickly exchanged for new, foreign owners jealous of their investments and quick to remove squatters from their new possessions. Another wave of government land sales in the 1960s (primarily to Brazilian and Argentine interests) provoked large-scale evictions of peasants who had occupied their plots for generations. This is a practice that persists to this day. Fully 50% of peasants own no title to their land (Palau 153). Peasant land struggles amounted to the largely individual efforts of peasants to resist their eviction from land with the support of Paraguayan security forces. The peasants lost nearly all of these battles and were forced to relocate to other, less habitable areas where absentee landlords neglected to defend their property.

After the foundation of the IBR in 1963, the site of the struggle shifted from simply squatting on land in the countryside to more organized forms of protest directed as appeals to the IBR and to the Paraguayan government. Peasants petitioned the government for the right to participate in agricultural colonization as small landowners. Peasant organizations created at the level of the neighborhood, *companía*, or even family would organize to petition the government for such land grants. In fact, of the approximately 132 *asentamientos* that have been founded under the mandate of the IBR since 1989, none were initiated by the IBR itself. All of the 132 established settlements since 1963 were initiated by peasants who squatted and/or petitioned for their establishment (US Library of Congress).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> These numbers can only constitute guesses, as the IBR was notorious for its poor records. It is likely that there are, in fact, many IBR settlements for which no paperwork exists and others that

Beginning in 1963, peasants merely petitioned for the establishment of new *asentamientos*. Often identifying idle *latifundial* land, peasants filed the appropriate paperwork with the IBR as well as with the appropriate local authorities in order to expedite the expropriation, individual right to purchase, or loan for land purchase of the property. After 1963 and the establishment of the IBR, the site of the struggle clearly shifted from squatting on the land itself to the buildings and offices of government institutions and politicians.

Attempts by peasants to organize themselves on a larger scale and to shift their land reform tactics from the political and governmental institutions of power to the geography of the rural countryside where they were most comfortable were not successfully carried out until the fall of the dictatorship in 1989. The first attempt at national organization through the auspices of the Catholic Church in the form of the *Ligas Agrarias* (1969-1976) was brutally repressed by the Stroessner administration after seven short years. In 1989 however, the fall of Stroessner's 35 year-old regime left a power vacuum in the rural countryside just as the peasant land demands exceeded the availability of state land reserves for the IBR's colonization program. In the chaos immediately following the coup, peasants rushed to seize land in truly huge numbers. Overwhelmed by the scale of the invasions and disoriented by the coup, local and national authorities could not respond quickly and decisively enough to dislodge the peasants' initial

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only exist on paper. The casual attitude of the IBR was motivated by corruption; a significant portion of the IBR land grants were distributed to members of the Colorado Party, the Paraguayan government and Paraguayan Armed Forces. One director of the IBR is quoted as saying of the record keeping, "*Se dice que 8 millones de hectáreas de tierra públicas fueron entregadas. Esto es probablemente un poco exagerado, pero no lo sé*" [it is said that eight million hectares of land was distributed (by the IBR). This is probably a little exaggerated, but I don't know] (Neild 41).

occupations. The peasantry had, for the first time in Paraguayan history, organized themselves and seized the power to define the site of struggle: the unproductive *latifundia* in the rural countryside throughout the country.

In response to the footholds established by peasants who squatted land in the thousands between 1989 and 1994, local authorities had to resort to other means than the traditional practice of violent eviction by local police with the support of the Paraguayan military. In the unstable socio-political environment following the coup, authorities could no longer explicitly exert brutal force to evict peasants. The use of such force re-invoked the specter of the Stroessner dictatorship implying the use of arbitrary force and illegitimate rule. With Stroessner recently overthrown, the authorities could not risk exposing themselves to the same fate by repeating Stroessner's brutal methods.

Thus, local authorities and individual landowners resorted to the tactic of the judicial order for eviction. These legal orders transformed what would have otherwise appeared the continuing oppression of landless peasants into the eviction of illegal squatters. In addition, the shift of the site of struggle from the squatter's camps to the courtroom clearly benefited wealthy landowners and politicians who controlled judicial decisions with their economic and political influence.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> The rhetorical shift from the use of force upon peasant squatters to the legal definition of squatting as an illegal activity has been enshrined in Article 116 of the *Constitucion Nacional 1992* which clearly provides the courts the right of determining the resolution of land disputes and the treatment of *latifundios improductivos*: “Seran establecidos en cada caso por la ley y se abonara en la forma y el plazo que la misma determine” (Art. 116). [They (the principles for appropriating unproductive *latifundios*) will be established in each case by the law, whose result will be appropriate to the circumstances as required].

In response, peasants took to the streets in the form of protest marches and dared the police to physically challenge their presence in the streets of the cities of Paraguay. This final and decisive shift of the site of the land reform struggle moved the locus of activity from the courts to a public venue where government security forces have unsuccessfully challenged peasant protests in Asunción and other large cities throughout the country. Prior to the coup of 1989, peasants were too intimidated by the brutal posture of the Stroessner regime to gather in public and appeal to the populace. Beginning with the public occupations of plazas in Asunción as early as March of 1989,<sup>138</sup> these activities evolved into the first truly national peasant protests of 1994, which signaled a permanent shift of the site of the struggle from the rural environs of peasant land invasions and the halls, offices and backrooms of politicians, bureaucrats, and judges to the public spectacle of nationally coordinated protest marches, road blocks, and urban land occupations centered upon Asunción. National peasant organizations are permanently housed in the capital where peasants from all parts of the country travel in order to participate in the primary venue for the land reform struggle, protests mounted in Asunción and its environs.

### **3.5 The Rhetorical Ontology of the Struggle**

In order to understand the non-discursive nature of peasant protest activity in Paraguay, one must examine the relationship between the Paraguayan peasant

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<sup>138</sup> On June 14, 1989, the 500 peasants struggling for the expropriation of Juan de Mena and Cleto Romero protested in front of the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería* from 9:00 to 3:00 represented the first public protests following the coup that overthrew President Stroessner on February 2, 1989.



and the Paraguayan society. The origins of the land reform struggle, while historically complex, lie in a rupture in the system of signification within the Paraguayan society. A semio-structural rift has developed between the daily conditions that the peasant farmer finds him or herself in and the ideological description of peasant life within the society. These ideological expectations are defined in language and social practices such as stories, songs, turns of phrase and representations of peasant life in the media.

This song from the *Chokokue Purahei* or the Song of the Peasant illustrates the national image of the Paraguayan peasant:

*Ei... yvypóra che rekópe oime che kéra yvoty.  
Ei... ha che páype ahavi'u añañua ipoty kuru.  
Ko'ãga, che karretape araha mba'e repy, che syva ry'ái poty.  
hi'ánte! tekove oisambyhýva ñande retã raperã  
vokóike, hesaho ñanderehe cho kokue tyre'y eta  
uperõ omimbíne jaipotáva yma guive, ñande escudo moñe'ê hára.*

[Oh, I am a man of the earth caressed by dreams that bloom.  
Oh, I awaken to protect it and see it flower.  
Now, I travel in my ox cart selling the flower of the sweat of my brow.  
May it guide the nation!  
Sometimes I think about the hardships suffered by each of us in lonely misery.  
And then with its beautiful world with its desire for justice and peace.  
But it will make the arms of our civilization shine brilliantly].

The peasant is represented as the hard working economic and ethical foundation of the republic. The peasant lives by the sweat of his or her brow (a marker of honesty and perseverance) and understands his or her place in the society. The work ethic and anonymity of the peasant is the essential component of an honest and hardworking Paraguayan society as a whole.

This image of the peasant as the economic and ethical base upon which the society is built originates in the sacrifices made by the peasantry during the War of the Triple Alliance and the Chaco War as well as the subsequent economic systems of Indian slavery, the *hacendados*, the *colono* system and sharecropping. To this day, the largely agricultural economy of Paraguay has depended upon the labor of the peasantry.

The glorification of the contribution of the peasantry to the nation was a central ideological feature of the militaristic regimes that succeeded the Estigarribia regime after the Chaco War. The image of the noble peasant came to metonymically represent the nation as a whole. Military ceremonies, land grants and other symbolic activity promoted the peasant as the basic component of Paraguayan society. That this image is still viable is evident in the currency that features a noble peasant armed only with a machete. This figure appears as ready to work on his rural farm as he is to defend the nation when called upon.

The irony of this representation is that the peasantry was nearly as economically exploited after the Chaco War as before. The rhetoric ennobling the peasant's sacrifices and glorifying the peasant's economic contribution to the nation is sharply contrasted by the actual life of the rural peasant. The peasant, who has sacrificed to the nation and who makes his or her economic contribution to the nation, receives absolutely nothing in return in the form of education for his or her children, land of one's own, healthcare for his or her family, infra-structural improvements for the marketing of farm products, credit, technical assistance or even fair prices for his or her labor or farm products.

Peasants who complain about this circumstance are deemed lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy, uncivilized, incapable persons who have failed to achieve the peasant ideal (an ideal that nowhere exists in reality). Thus, peasants are defined by a set of cultural norms that have been created outside of their own life experience and they find themselves in the untenable position of having to reconcile one's supposed heroic peasanthood with the harsh reality of a life defined by ignorance, illiteracy, powerlessness and poverty.

The semiotic keystone of socio-economic participation in Paraguayan society and the peasant identity is land and land ownership. Historically, Paraguayan (and even foreign) landowners have experienced both full participation in the society as well as economic independence by means of the wealth generated through land ownership. The owners of large tracts of land have only been able to exploit the peasantry that was landless and, thus, dependent upon the *haciendas* and, later, *latifundias* for employment. Hundreds of years of exclusion from and exploitation at the hands of landowners have created a rural ideology of land identity that equates full citizenship with land ownership. Thus a peasant is, in essence, *one who does not own land*. The only means that a peasant has of fulfilling the socially prescribed role of the heroic peasant is to own land. In the peasant's own thinking, land ownership divides peasants who contribute to the society from those peasants who merely depend on the society to provide them with work.

Excluded from full participation in the dominant Paraguayan socio-economic system and constrained by an argument field that defines peasants as

lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy, uncivilized, incapable persons, the peasants are forced to find an alternative means of describing their difficult and contradictory lives and the status of secondary citizenship that they endure.

In order to describe the peasant's identity and, thereby, the source of peasant argumentation, an ontology that explains the mediation between the social actor's real conditions of existence and the ideology provided to that actor to interpret it must be developed. A first step in developing such an ontological explanation involves coming to grips with the social system that gives meaning to a peasant's life. This system has two principal parts: language and social practices. While many theorists have described the social construction of reality, fewer have dealt with the ways in which those realities function as a critical tension between perception and reality. Linguistically, Jacques Derrida has described that tension as a series of "ruptures," gaps in the system of signification or the inability of language to carry out the role of mediation between real experience and interpretation.<sup>139</sup> Points of rupture occur, according to Derrida, when actors become aware that their language no longer represents primary experience.

Michel Foucault's work, on the other hand, describes the intricate web of social and linguistic systems that work to prevent such an event from occurring.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida explores the purely symbolic/linguistic aspects of the traditional materialist critique of representation. The author demonstrates the capacity for representation to break down as a linguistic/symbolic function with out reference to the material or the object of reference itself. This work has made an important contribution to the sophistication of analyses of culture whose simple materialist critique has, under the label of vulgar Marxism, been too easily dismissed.

<sup>140</sup> Michel Foucault introduces the concept of the *episteme* in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, a concept which describes the multiplicity of social forces employed the process of culture

Foucault's "episteme" or what Lyotard and Thebaud have called a language game is a system of language and cultural practices that shape and constantly reshape the social actor's experience of his or her world. Thus, the peasant's daily response to his or her life-conditions is mediated by an ideology or a system of socially legitimated ideas transmitted over time in the form of arguments and key terms that the social actor uses to interpret his or her world and one's relationship to that world. Ordinarily, a social actor faced with a material hardship describes that need in terms provided by the episteme or the hegemonic system and addresses the need by means of actions legitimated by that same system. Describing or addressing material concerns outside of legitimate language or actions will be defined as deviant behavior and social actors engaging in such behavior will be physically and ideologically constrained by "legitimate" social authorities empowered in the name of the society.

Within this semiotic framework, protest activity for the Paraguayan peasant becomes almost impossible. Faced with the harsh economic realities of landlessness and starvation, the peasant has only recourse to a rhetoric provided by the State to describe his or her plight: poor peasants are lazy and rich peasants are noble. Given that this makes no sense from the peasant's own perspective, there exist linguistic and social practices that reinscribe conformity for the peasant who questions the rationality of the system by providing a rationale for suppression. There are five basic tropes that perform this function: the

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formation. These processes are later exemplified in the author's in-depth analyses of human sexuality and of madness in *The History of Sexuality* and *Madness and Civilization*.

*ñembotavy*, the *opa rei*, *la ley de lo mbarete*, *lo ate'y*, and *La mitã o-ke se hape ari*.

The term *ñembotavy* is a term meaning “to make oneself stupid.” A peasant who challenges authority in Paraguay will often be told that the “problem” is his or her own fault. This is a powerful accusation as peasants have been conditioned to accept the blame as, *Xe ñembotavy* or my mistake. This is a disempowering term for the peasant. It invokes the technological and cultural gap between the conquistadors and the native Americans at the time of the conquest. Today, this trope functions to reify the domination of the white, Europeanized *Asunceño* as opposed to the backward, illiterate, *Guaraní* speaking and ignorant peasant. Invoking the colonial dyad (*conquistador/indio*) defines peasants as uncivilized and uneducated and infantilizes them as persons who are too uneducated even to make decisions for themselves.

The term *opa rei* is best translated as a combination of the fait accompli and the preservation of an inequitable status quo. A peasant who asks for social or political change will often receive the reply, *opa rei el asunto!* or the thing is done. The phrase *opa rei* is used to describe any set of circumstances in which peasants have been exploited socially or economically without any recourse to challenge the status quo. The peasant is forced to say *Opa rei, no más!* or That’s the way things have always been! The *opa rei* is an explicit recognition of the peasant’s lowly, disempowered status in Paraguayan society.

The term *ley de lo mbarete* refers to the privileged class in Paraguayan society. It also refers to the “law of the jungle” as *mbarete* means “power” or

“strength” in *Guaraní*. A common answer to the question, “Why do the peasant protests fail?” is, “*Imbarete los autoridades!*” or “the authorities were strong.”

The peasantry uses the term *lo mbarete* to describe the elite social class whose members control the fate of the peasants, literally deciding in some cases whether the peasants live or die. The *ley de lo mbarete* dictates that the peasants cannot challenge their domination by *lo mbarete*.

The terms *ate’y*, and *La mitã o-ke se hape ari* translate literally as “lazy” and “he who wants to sleep by the road.” However, these phrases have a broader meaning in terms of describing the peasant character in Paraguay. Peasants often identify themselves as *ate’y* or explain their inability to improve their lives by attributing their problems to *Xe a-ke se kuri hape ari* [I was sleeping by the road]. Peasants view hard work as the only means of self-improvement. The peasantry has accepted the image of the drunken Indian (a figure also invoked here in the United States), traditionally offered as a rationale for the inequitable distribution of power and wealth in the nation. Peasants have been conditioned to view themselves as men and women who cannot fully adapt to civilized society or to manage its vices. Invoking the phrases *ate’y*, and *La mitã o-ke se hape ari* describe, not only the culture gap between the Europeanized urban centers and the rural countryside, but evidence the power of the former to dictate the identity of the latter. The myth of the drunken peasant who can be found sleeping in or beside the road and who is presumed to be too uncivilized to work hard and make a contribution to the society is just that, a myth. This distorted image of the selfish, drunken peasant who has caved in to the pressures of poverty and

ignorance is a fiction. It is the antithesis of the ideal heroic peasant who supports and grounds the whole society through sacrifice and hard work.

The Paraguayan peasant lives a daily identity conflict. On the one hand, he or she works hard, makes great sacrifices and endures working conditions inconceivable in the industrialized world. On the other hand, the peasant has ideologically charged terminology to describe his or her plight: “*Lo mbarete oreko kuera la yvy opa mbae. Ha xe; ha xe ñembotavy. Xe da rekoi la yvy.*” [The powerful have the land, and me, I am only an ignorant peasant. I don’t have any land] (Rogelio Martínez, Personal Interview).

In the context of these ideological constraints, social protest emerges as individual or collective expression of a social actor’s or a social group’s life-conditions by “non-legitimated” means. These non-legitimated means of social protest take the form of marches, pickets, rallies, sit-ins and even editorials and other publications that form a body of counter-cultural activity that can be characterized as defiant, impolite, and even violent and deviant at times. Social protest activity is typified by the unwillingness of the participants to define their life-conditions through legitimated, uncontroversial means of language and expression.

The site of this ideological struggle in social protest is two-fold. First, the protesters must find a way of expressing their life-conditions outside of the dominant ideology or dominant language/argument structures that fail to adequately express/resolve their distress. Secondly, protesters must legitimate that non-hegemonic position and resist the socio-political and economic pressures



brought to bear upon the protesters in an attempt to de-legitimize their rhetorical stance.

The function of governmental and civil authorities is to protect the viability of the material system of relations by forcing protesters to participate within the normal parameters of the social system (usually defined as economic activity). This is accomplished by transforming the social argument into authorized terminologies and keeping discussion constrained within prescribed argument fields.

Robert S. Cathcart describes this as the first move in what he calls the social process of reciprocity or dialectical enjoinders in the moral arena (Cathcart 87). Cathcart suggests that social struggles can be conceived in terms of Burkean dramatism:

On the one hand, for a movement to come into being there must be one or more actors who, perceiving that the “good order” (the established system) is in reality a faulty order full of absurdity and injustice, cry out through various symbolic acts that true communion, justice, salvation cannot be achieved unless there is an *immediate corrective* applied to the established order. On the other hand there must be a reciprocating act from the establishment or counter rhetors which perceives the demand of the agitator rhetoric, not as calls for correction or re-righting the prevailing order, but as direct attacks on the foundations of the established order. (Cathcart 87)

In the Paraguayan case, there is great pressure on the protesters to abandon their “illegitimate” self-description and activity. Non-hegemonic self-description and social action are a direct challenge to the dominant ideological concepts of a society. Ideas about citizenship, expression, rights, laws and every other aspect of

society are predicated upon an economic and material reality that are intertwined and cannot easily be changed nor challenged.

On a material level, a protest march by the peasantry can be defined in the interest of the society as economically unproductive, which diminishes the peasants' own productive capacity and that of other workers who are made idle by a lack of primary materials for their own work. On a more abstract level, everyone in the society is potentially affected by a peasant who fails to engage in economically productive activity because that peasant, as a producer of primary materials, will not be able to employ others in the production of the products of consumption that peasant eventually must forgo in the process of protesting rather than earning capital.

Linguistically, the social movement is pressured by various means including the media, negotiations with industry and government, and legal and social precedent to define itself in the terms that socio-cultural precedent dictates. Public authorities commonly deride peasants as drunken, stupid louts who, incapable of organizing such large numbers of individuals, are controlled by others. In contrast, the peasants work hard to define their protest marches and roadblocks outside of those economic terms, for example, by framing their protest messages with an idiom of human rights. With this move, peasants elevate their resistance beyond mere demands for land concessions, adding an additional layer to the struggle that presses to define the meaning of their protest activity in a bid to control the "historicity" of society. According to Touraine, such a maneuver contains the seeds of social movement, since in his scheme, the difference

between mere action and the meaning attributed to action underlies the important distinction between mere social struggles and real social movements.

A social movement thus defined is in no way a response to a social situation. On the contrary, it is the social situation that is the outcome of the conflict between social movements fighting for control over cultural models, over historicity...a social movement is a conflictual action through which cultural orientations, a field of historicity, are transformed into forms of social organization defined by general cultural norms and by relations of social domination. (Touraine, *Return* 66)

In the attempt to redefine themselves as more than drunken, stupid louts incapable of organizing, peasants seek to change the cultural models upon which the Paraguayan society has been constructed.

Arturo Escobar identifies the real target of social movements in much the same way as the “Hegemonic discourse [that has] transformed the system thorough which identities were defined” (Escobar 65). These definitions circumscribe and constrain the ability of these identity groups to participate in a public argument over the validity of social norms. Escobar points out that labels such as “the ‘illiterate,’ the ‘landless peasants,’ ‘women bypassed by development,’ the ‘hungry and malnourished,’ ‘those belonging to the informal sector,’ ‘urban marginals,’ and so forth” disqualify such groups from participation in the process of social deliberation (Escobar 65).

The attempt by peasants to apply non-dominant ideological, linguistic and physical approaches to a social conflict is countered by institutional authorities who attempt to rhetorically circumscribe those definitions of the activity in order to safeguard the function and dominance of an extant socio-economic regime. Hence, peasants who rejected attempts to negotiate with President González-

Macchi on his terms during the national protests of June of 2002 were defined as lazy, defiant, or self-interested all terms designed to inscribe them in an economic system. A description of peasants in purely economic terms echoed the hegemonically inscribed nature of the arguments offered by the president and clearly favored the dominant commercial interests that backed him. The successful attachment of such labels to protests groups would reduce any action taken by the protesters as the action of an angry mob rather than the action of a group of people who legitimately disagree with a status quo represented by the position of the presidency.

### **3.6 The Role of Counter-argumentation**

Since the emergence of the national peasant organization and the institution of mass protests, the key site in the Paraguayan land reform struggle is the interaction between peasant protestors and the state. The dynamic of this interaction unfolds communicatively on both verbal and physical levels. An examination of state counter-argument strategies and peasant responses will illustrate the disarticulation of protest activity as the struggle evolves over time.

#### **3.6.1 Government Counter-arguments and Peasant Response**

While traditional arguments (the historical, the economic and the social) have long constituted the central text for demanding land reform in Paraguay, government authorities have developed a number of counterarguments that have

required an adaptive response on the part of peasant protestors. Two examples of this adaptation strategy are the ecological caretaker argument and the political argument.

In two notable cases, peasants have attempted to squat land that had been or was designated to become an ecological reserve. In such cases, the Paraguayan government has argued that such land was reserved for the purpose of ecological preservation and thus removed from the exigencies of economic production. Peasants are widely perceived as practitioners of slash and burn agriculture and are held responsible for the country's high deforestation rate.<sup>141</sup> In the case of *Capi'ibary* (1989-1994), this was clearly a fiction promulgated by functionaries of MAG who enriched themselves by exploiting lumber from the reserve. The more recent and still emerging case of *El Parque Nacional de Yvyturuzu* presents a more complex situation.

*El Parque Nacional de Yvyturuzu* was established as a national park on land already occupied by as many as 30,000 residents or about 5,000 peasants families. The 24,000 hectare area was designated a forest reserve in 1991.<sup>142</sup> The first wave of colonization of the area occurred in the early 1960s. Conflicts have already begun and may intensify with the introduction of permanent forest rangers

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<sup>141</sup> "Paraguay has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. Every year, 10% of the remaining forest cover is lost, threatening the future of unique ecosystems" (USAID)

<sup>142</sup> The west half of the *Yvyturuzu* reserve, constituted by the *Cordilera Yvyturuzu* and its immediate foothills, was sold to German colonists and politically organized as the *Colonia Independencia* in the 1920s. After the Germans had exploited the best land and the soil lost its fertility, the land was either sold to peasants in irregular agreements without titulation or it was squatted by peasants who were willing to occupy the large, semi-arable tracts left by the Germans. This land is only semi-arable as its soils are shallow, sandy, rocky or so hilly as to risk severe erosion.

whose powers include the power of arrest if a peasant fells a single tree within the park boundaries.

In both cases the peasants have argued that they are the natural caretakers of the Paraguayan countryside as the traditional denizens of that region of the country. The argument was articulated by a member of *La Colonia el Triunfo* of the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary*:

*Así en El Triunfo tenemos en cuenta nuestro territorio que es nuestra comunidad en su conjunto, nuestra gente, para nosotros el objetivo es el hombre y no la plata, el territorio, nuestra gente, los bienes y otros valores culturales, defendemos nuestras costumbres, entonces la comunidad prácticamente actúa como un ejército en defensa de todo eso que hace a la comunidad en su conjunto. (Fogel, Luchas 193)*

[Thus it is in El Triunfo that we take into account that our nation/land is a whole community, our people, for us the objective is the man and not the money; the land, our people, goods and other cultural values, we defend our customs, hence the community functions like an army in defense of everything that makes a community in its complexity].

*En este contexto parece ganar más fuerza una propuesta agroecológica, y en el caso de la colonia no plantean simplemente la oferta tecnológica referida a algunos rubros sino al sistema productivo en su conjunto que tiene tres componentes básicos: hortalizas, frutas, y animales menores y lo que es más importante sin el uso de agrotóxicos. La producción agroecológica de la comunidad tiene Mercado diversificado, ya que comercializan en la feria de Ciudad del Este, en la feria de Minga Guazú y están negociando acuerdos con supermercados de la zona. (Fogel, Luchas 193)*

[In this context, an agro-ecological proposal would seem to have more weight, and in the case of the colony this is not simply in reference to technology specific to some crops but a system of production that, as a whole, has three basic components: vegetables, fruits and small animals, and above all abandoning the use of agrochemicals. (Such) an agriculturally productive community would have a diversified market (strategy), already they have sold products in the market of the *Ciudad del Este*, in the

market of *Minga Guazú* and they are negotiating accords with supermarkets in the region].

As we can see, this is a much more sophisticated argument that has combined elements from the traditional historical, social and economic arguments of the past. The argument becomes clearer when it is broken down into its three constituent parts:

1) The core argument for the peasantry is the notion that the peasants have historically functioned to maintain the traditional balance of nature; this balance entails the peasantry taking extracting natural resources only as they need them (a rational land exploitation). They see this as a sustainable practice, which, if passed on from one generation to the next, serves to reproduce their culture and to provide their children with livelihoods as well.<sup>143</sup>

2) Even those peasants who do not practice sustainable agriculture only require training, which the state should provide.

3) Latifundia function with the sole purpose of resource extraction for sale of timber, *yerba mate*, coffee, soybeans, or cattle in the international market. In addition, other non-rational uses of the land are the cultivation of marijuana and the depredation of the old stands of timber known as *rollotrafico* are other commercial practices engaged in by *latifundistas*.

The peasants argue that all of these latifundial practices deface and degrade the land without rational exploitation. They even admit their participation in the process. As a peasant attending an agroforestry training in the *Asentamiento Mandu'ara* explains:

*Qué fácil era aplicar la chacra sin quema. Era solamente necesario el machete y algunas jornadas más de trabajo por*

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<sup>143</sup> In the peasant mind, culture and land are conflated concepts that harken back to the pre-colonial native concept of the *tekoha* (Fogel, *Luchas* 19). While it would be naïve to attribute any causal and ideological link between the *tekoha* and the concept of private property, one can argue that the cultural residue of the *tekoha* has probably survived in the quotidienne social practices of the mestizo peasantry as a form of resistance to and in tension with the dominant land tenure practices.

*hectárea. Sembrar entre los yuyos cortados y picados finamente era muy simple. Lo que pasa es que nunca hemos probado hacer esto. Estamos acostumbrados al uso del fuego para limpiar con mayor facilidad. (Programa ALA 55)*

[It was easy to apply farming without burning. All that was necessary was a machete and a couple of days of work for each hectare. Planting between the cut down and chopped up weeds was very easy. What happens is that we (the peasants) have never tried this (farming without burning). We are accustomed to using fire to clean (a forested plot) with the greatest of ease].

However, the peasants of *El Triunfo* argue that while the peasants may have burned the forests, they were not doing so by choice. A leader of *the Colonia El Triunfo* argues that the peasants were not culpable:

*Y ese se sigue usando en nuestro sistema tradicional, las colonias campesinas no tienen autonomía, no tienen autoridad propia, los que Mandan son los que viven en los centros urbanos, dos or tres tipos, aunque haya 1.000 familias no tienen la más mínima autoridad en su pueblo, en su lugar. Por eso proponemos un modelo nuevo, respeto mutuo, para eso hay que tener una herramienta de poder. (Fogel, Luchas 194)*

[And this is what is done in our traditional system. The peasant colonies don't have autonomy; they have no authority of their own. Those who give the orders live in urban centers, only two or three individuals, and even though there might be one thousand families (in the colony), they have the least amount of authority in their own town, in their own place. This is why we propose a new model, (based upon) mutual respect. In order to have this, one must have the instruments of power].

The peasants of *El Triunfo* argue that they have been coerced into ecologically irrational farming methods. The belief that the peasant only knows how to deforest is premised on the knowledge that native farming practices employed slash and burn agriculture (*Programa ALA 55*).

Peasants argue that granting peasants lots of “ecologically reserved” land from the hands of state authorities or private companies will only preserve that



land. Rational exploitation is for the peasantry a circular argument defined as extracting from the land only what you need to survive just as the peasants claim they themselves do. Irrational exploitation is, by implication, the extraction of natural resources for any purpose other than mere survival and perpetuation of the peasant culture. This includes any industrial application, absentee management, and non-agricultural resource extraction.

The evidence provided for this conclusion is ample from the peasant perspective. It is common for the peasant invaders of *latifundia* or state land to discover large plantations of marijuana cultivated either by the land owners themselves or by government servants responsible for management, supervision or compliance with legal resource extraction practices. A peasant encounter group member expressed the peasant viewpoint concisely, “...*muchas tierras no están trabajadas agrícolamente. Son utilizadas para la extracción de Madera, para especulación y también para plantar drogas...*” [much land is agriculturally fallow. They (these unexploited lands) are used for logging, real estate speculation and they are also used to plant drugs] (Gonzales 248).<sup>144</sup>

I interviewed another peasant who claimed that all of the ecological damage caused to the forests of Paraguay has been the result of latifundistas and not the peasantry. He claimed that only large landowners could afford to deforest

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<sup>144</sup> This research seminar brought together many incipient social groups (at both the national and regional level) including *La Comisión Central de Horticultores* (CCH); *Servicio Arquidiocesano de Comercialización* (SEARCO); *Cooperativas Ojopoin y Lima*; *Consejo de Comités de Agricultores-Area Defensores del Chaco*, *Diócesis de San Pedro*; *Comité de Agricultores*, *Coordinación Zonal San Ignacio*; *Organización Campesina del Norte* (ONC); *Movimiento Campesino Paraguayo* (MCP), *Organización Nacional Campesina* (ONAC); and *La Unión Nacional Campesina Onondivepa* (UNC). This seminar entitled, “*Seminario sobre Organizaciones Campesinas*” was conducted by *El Centro Interdisciplinario de Derecho Social y Economía Política* (CIDSEP), from November 21-22, 1987 in Ypacarai.

huge tracts of land. In contrast, “¿*Que puede hacer un pobre campesino con una azada y un machete? No puede echar 100 hectáreas del monte en mil años!*”

[What can a poor peasant do with a hoe and a machete? You couldn’t clear 100 hectares of forest in a thousand years (that way)] (Colman, Personal Interview).

Arguments representing the peasant as the ecological caretaker of the forests did not exist until foreign interest in ecology redescribed the forests as something positive to be preserved. The ecological argument was an essential modification of the land reform struggle’s argumentative strategy. When *latifundistas* and state entities argued that they were caretakers of the ecology, peasants were forced to abandon historical and economic arguments in order to address this new discourse.<sup>145</sup> The development of this line of argumentation was not easy for the peasantry. It is the first demonstration of their ability to recognize the importance of argument itself in the struggle. In order to adopt this argument, the peasants had to arrive at the conscious conclusion that argument itself rather than historical truth would decide the outcome of their struggle. This consciousness of the importance of argument became even more visible as the impetus of the movement shifted from local and regional peasant organizations to national organizations who were not as restricted in their argument by education and cultural background.

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<sup>145</sup> The idea of preserving the environment is quite foreign to the average Paraguayan peasant. For the majority of Paraguayans, even to this day, the forest is a *maleza* to be beaten back, with every trace extinguished. An example of this is the Paraguayan practice of house cleaning which includes removing all trees from within ten to fifteen yards of a home and then, each morning, meticulously sweeping the entire dirt area surrounding the house in order to remove any trace of organic matter. This starkly contrasts our own North American ideas of property adornment with grass and trees. In fact, the peasants prefer to plant non-native trees shrubs in pots or as flower gardens near their homes because native species, no matter their beauty, are considered weeds.

Ramon Fogel noted the important role that NGOs have had in facilitating the modification of peasant argument strategies by assisting in peasant organizational and communication efforts. Fogel noted that in the case of *Capi'ibary*, in particular, NGOs assisted peasants in the formation of their own argument strategies:

*La génesis del conflicto se da cuando grupos campesinos toman conciencia de la necesidad de actuar para apropiarse y usar una fracción de tierra controlada por otro; en esta fase el grupo se transforma en actor con capacidad de formular sus demandas y movilizarse en su prosecución. En esta fase es importante el apoyo de grupos externos, tales como el CIPAE; este apoyo es crucial en la fase de maduración del conflicto en la medida que se perfilan mayor las posiciones de intereses y el diseño de estrategias. (Fogel, Luchas 188)*

[The conflict originates when peasant groups become conscious of the need to take action in order to appropriate and use a parcel of land controlled by another; in this phase, the group is transformed into an actor with the capacity to formulate its demands and to mobilize itself toward that goal. In this phase, the assistance of external groups such as CIPAE is important; this assistance is crucial in the mature phase of the conflict in the way they outline the positions and interests and the design of strategies].

With the establishment of the national peasant organization as the primary vehicle for the land reform struggle in Paraguay, a steady re-articulation of arguments has occurred. Organization within the national peasant groups as well as assistance from NGOs have improved peasant to peasant communication and enabled a shift from the strategy of NIMBY struggles that employed traditional argument strategies. These shifts include arguments addressing the political regime and the international economic system into which Paraguay was being integrated.

Stymied by the government's tactic of reaching verbal agreements with national peasant organizations and paying off peasant leaders in order to dispel the physical threat posed by large, national peasant protests, peasant organizations have modified their tactics. These organizations have recognized that reaching agreement for land reform results in little when the root causes of the struggle lie in the corruption of government administrations and in government policies largely designed to disenfranchise peasants by refocusing the economy on agro-exporters (largely *latifundial* agricultural enterprises) and industry. National peasant organizational leaders identified the pressure of international and foreign bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and MERCOSUR as root causes of the social inequities creating the *latifundia*. The removal of the protections once afforded peasants and their products in the internally oriented agricultural market of Paraguay were at the root of not local problems but national problems involving the political structure as well as economic problems owing to global capitalism.

However, improved organizational and communication practices have led not only to adaptive argumentation strategies in the area of verbal contestation, but to a greater capacity to engage in non-verbal argument strategies as well.

### **3.6.2 Police Repression and the Rhetorical Valence of Physical Protest**

The most striking conclusion of this study of the Paraguayan land reform struggle is the relative success of non-verbal forms of protest as opposed to verbal forms of protest. With an increased organizational capacity since the inception of

widespread, mass protests in 1993, national peasant organizations like the MCNOC and the FNC have employed non-verbal protests strategies to gain major concessions from the Paraguayan government and have developed a successful non-verbal strategy in the process.

Traditionally the struggle has employed land occupation as its primary form of non-verbal or physical protest. However, the most successful physical argumentation strategy has resulted from confrontations with the police and military in the course of protest marches and roadblocks. The history of the Paraguayan land reform struggle has been a series of failures punctuated by stunning victories resulting from an excessive application of force by government authorities. There is a direct correlation between protest incidents resulting in the death of peasants and government concessions to peasant demands in the face of public criticism of repressive tactics. The best known of these incidents are the *Día de Perros*, in the case of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, the series of *desalojos* and the escalation of physical protest strategies in the case of *Capi'ibary*; the deaths of protestors in the *Plaza de la Independencia* in the case of the *Marzo Paraguayo*; and the death of Calixto Cabral in the case of the 2001 state privatization protest.

Saul Alinsky codified the protest strategy that the peasants have employed, in their case unconsciously, as “smashing the plan” in his influential social protest primer, *Reveille for Radicals* (Alinsky 150). Alinsky points out that in cases in which the protestors are far weaker than the opposition, it is important to realize that the opposition strategy is predicated upon the anticipated

reaction of the protestors. His theory of “smashing the plan” is premised on the idea that successful protest from a position of weakness is possible if protests can resist the urge to react to the opposition’s strategy. He urges protestors to “follow a plan of your own” in order to confound the opposition and to obtain a sense of agency in the course of a conflict (Alinsky 150).

Alinsky’s prescription to take actions in order to illicit a reaction has notable explanatory power in the case of physical protest in Paraguay. Rather than following the formula of 1) protesting, 2) making demands, 3) receiving assurances, 4) and disbanding all in response to governmental actions, peasants have resorted to sit-ins, roadblocks, extended protest marches and occupations of public areas all without responding to government orders to clear such areas and disband. In not responding to government demands in predictable ways, the peasants have taken control of the situation and forced authorities to react to the continued presence of the peasants rather than the other way around.

The most notable examples of this strategy occurred in the cases of the “*Día de perros*,” June 23, 1989, the armed confrontation of peasants with *rollo traficantes* in *Capi’ibary* in 1991, and the death of Calixto Cabral in *Nueva Londres*, near *Coronel Oviedo* during a June 4, 2002 protest. In the case of the “*Día de perros*,” peasant protestors from the asentamientos *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* were attacked by police and dogs as they marched to confront legislators in the congressional building. This repressive action was viewed unfavorably as news and photos of the attack were widely available in the media. The Rodríguez administration’s use of force was a tactic inherited from the

repressive practices of the Stroessner administration. The public, flush with the idea of liberation from the dictatorship and sharply critical of all repressive practices, responded dramatically to the event. Under the dictatorship approximately 3000 people were murdered for their political beliefs.

Paraguayans, even 13 years after the overthrow of Stroessner, have responded strongly to oppose government repression, which they see as a return to dictatorship.<sup>146</sup> In the words of one of the participants:

*Lo de los perros fue cuando salimos de la Catedral para dirigirnos al Congreso para realizar ahí las gestiones...El azuzar a los perros contra nosotros fue un grave error de Rodríguez, aunque ellos negaron enseguida, dijeron que no tuvieron nada que ver, que los perros eran de la Chacarita. Todos rechazaron esa represión. Los legisladores se asustaron y vinieron a apoyarnos automáticamente; los que estaban dudando de nuestra causa se convencieron. Al final solo tres legisladores votaron en contra. Con la ayuda de los perros la ley de expropiación enseguida pasó al Ejecutivo y el Presidente la promulgó. (Fogel, Luchas 94)*

[The event with the dogs occurred when we left the Cathedral in order to travel to the Congress for our protest.... The setting of the dogs on us was Rodríguez's big mistake, even though they (the Rodríguez Administration) quickly denied involvement (they said they had nothing to do with it), claiming that the dogs were from *La Chacarita* (a shanty town beside the Congressional building). Everyone was appalled by this act of repression. The legislators were scared and quickly came to our aid; those who doubted our cause were convinced. In the end, only three legislators voted against (us). With the help of the dogs, the law of expropriation was quickly offered to the Executive Branch and the President approved it].

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<sup>146</sup> The Oviedo rebellion of 1995 and the *Marzo Paraguayo* of 1998 are two of the most famous instances in which the Paraguayan public rose up in solidarity to oppose a return to a dictatorial regime and repression. In 1995, President Wasmosy was forced to flee to the US Embassy when General Lino Oviedo refused to step down and moved to overthrow the government. Paraguayans took to the streets to resist Oviedo in a show of solidarity against the reinstatement of a military regime in the country. In 1998, eight student and peasant protesters were killed and more than 100 injured as protesters were fired upon by police and military barricades separating protesters from the Congressional building. General Oviedo was accused of ordering that attack as well as the assassination of Vice President, Argana in support of then President Raul Cubas. The public rose up against Oviedo and Cubas forcing both to flee the country.

The legislators quickly caved into peasant demands because public favor had shifted to their cause. The squatter communities of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* were allocated 7,000 hectares<sup>147</sup> of land by the Paraguayan Congress under *Ley 08/89* on September 5, 1989, little more than two months after the incident (a miracle of efficiency by the standards of the Paraguayan Congress).<sup>148</sup>

In the case of the *Asentamiento Capi'ibary, San Pedro*, peasants occupied land that was managed by the *Ministerio de Agricultura* (MAG) as the *Reserva Forestal Capi'ibary*. The peasants argued that their farming practices were more sustainable and more economically productive than MAG's exploitation of the forest reserve.<sup>149</sup> While charged with the duty of protecting and preserving the environment, MAG agents actually engaged in depredatory practices, including *rollo trafico* (the illegal harvest and sale of hardwoods) and the planting of marijuana in the reserve. The peasants pointed these practices out to local authorities as well as the Congress to no avail. It was not until the peasants physically imposed this argument that it was heeded. The peasants were evicted

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<sup>147</sup> This figure was later reduced by Executive Order No. 395 on October 5, 1989 to 5,000 hectares.

<sup>148</sup> The legalization of land occupations take on order of seven to ten years of legal wrangling if they occur at all. The squatter community of *Nueva Germania, San Pedro* spent 14 years appealing for the legalization of their land occupation to no eventual result.

<sup>149</sup> While the idea of exploiting an environmental reserve may appear oxymoronic the practice is common and is referred to as *clientelismo del Estado*, or the occupation of government posts for the purpose of personal enrichment. In Paraguay, a long history of small public salaries and the responsibility for managing land, money, personal paperwork, and deeds has created a culture of corruption. Public servants both expect and are expected to enrich themselves by directly selling their services (nearly every public servant expects a *croqueta*, or bribe, even for performing only the services the State already pay them for. *Croquetas* are also taken for illegal activities as well, such as expediting paperwork, falsifying information, and overlooking prejudicial information), selling access to government resources (police protection, heavy machinery, and forests) or by selling government assets as if they were their own (gasoline, machinery, foodstuff, land, and lumber). It is important to note just how normal and acceptable corruption is in dealings with servants of the state.



twice in 1990, in 1991, in 1993, and twice again in 1994 (Fogel, *Luchas* 104-107).<sup>150</sup> When the peasants resisted the forced *desalojos*, they were beaten, the leaders jailed and the rest of the peasants removed from the property to live under tarps along the river *Capi'ibary*, located approximately two miles from western edge of the settlement, or to the town of *Capi'ibary*, located some five miles to the west of the settlement.

In an escalation of the physical protest strategy, the peasants initiated an occupation of the *Plaza de la Independencia*, directly in front of the national congressional building, in September of 1994. This occupation lasted ten months and seventeen days, involving up to 300 peasants at any given time, living under tarps and occupying the plaza 24 hours a day. Having learned their lesson from the *Día de Perros*, the authorities resisted the urge to forcibly evict the peasants from the plaza.

Finally, the peasants forced the government's hand as nearly 200 peasants blocked the exit of trucks loaded with illegal timber of exiting the reserve and then hid in the forest with machetes and hoes to surprise the Engineer in charge of the illegal project when he returned to remove the evidence of his crime. The peasants forced him to sign a document from the Vice-ministerio de Recursos Naturales recognizing the peasants' claim to 5000 hectares of the Reserve (Fogel, *Luchas* 107). Later, more than 100 peasants again surprised and threatened more MAG agents who were forced to flee for their lives (Fogel, *Luchas* 112).

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<sup>150</sup> These events were confirmed in my own interviews with the leaders of the *Asentamiento Capi'ibary* in August of 2001.

With the physical threat to their lives, authorities had no choice but to confront the peasants with physical repression or to concede the land to the peasants. The instability of the new Wasmosy regime, weakened as a result of its conflict with the Armed Forces, could not risk the destabilizing effect of a public confrontation with the peasants. With no palatable alternative, MAG could only save face with a magnanimous concession to the demands of the poor peasants who, as it turned out, were in dire need of land after all. A public repression of the peasants at that time would have been propitious for the coup plotters in the Paraguayan Armed Forces who later in 1995 and again in 1996 attempted *coup d'état* against the Wasmosy regime that failed primarily because the plotters could demonstrate no compelling moral reason for unseating president Juan Carlos Wasmosy. In all likelihood, such a bloody confrontation would have precipitated an early and more successful *coup d'état*.<sup>151</sup>

In the case of Calixto Cabral, a peasant participating in organized protests demanding the destitution of President González-Macchi and the repeal of *Ley 1.615*, the legitimacy and integrity of the state almost collapsed.<sup>152</sup> After several

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<sup>151</sup> Lino Oviedo later attempted to destabilize the Wasmosy government in just this way in the case of peasants who were protesting for land in the district of *Yhu* in the department of *Caaguazú*, 25 to 30 peasants invaded and occupied land belonging to Pedro Anciaux in 1996. This land occupation was not motivated by any struggle for leadership. It was led by two Senators and the head of the armed forces. Peasant witnesses identified Antonio Alvarez Alvarenga and Silvio Ovelar as the senators who opened the gates to the property and exhorted the peasants to enter and to take land for themselves. General Lino Oviedo was quoted as encouraging the group, "Go ahead, don't worry about it. I'll make it legal" ("Responsabilizan al Gobierno" 12).

<sup>152</sup> The reform of the state via *Ley 1.615* legalized the sale of national industries, which would have resulted in the dismissal of tens of thousands of employees from the inefficient State monopolies such as telephone, electricity, and cement as well as a banking reform that would have eliminated the *Banco de Desarrollo* which exists as an important source of credit for medium and large scale agricultural production (including co-operatives uniting many smaller farms) in the rural countryside. In an alliance with the *Central Union de Trabajadores* (CUT) the (*Mesa Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas*) MCNOC and the (*Federación Nacional*

weeks of protests including marches and roadblocks, peasants from many different areas of the country nucleated in a march whose destination was the capital. On the day of June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002, an estimated 5000 peasants were marching in a group organized in the Department of *Caazapa* when they were blocked by a police barricade outside of the departmental capital of *Coronel Oviedo*. It was reported that attempts by police to impede the peasants' advance upon the national capital by threats were ignored and the police fired upon the peasants as they re-boarded vehicles of transport, crossing barricades that police had abandoned in the face of so many vehicles. One peasant was killed and another gravely injured as the police opened fire, dispersing the protest.

In the several weeks of protests prior to this confrontation, the leaders of the MCNOC, the FNC, and the CUT had repeatedly met with Congress and representatives of the executive branch to no avail. Days before a deadly clash between military troops and the peasants, Marcial Gómez of the FNC pointed out the physical nature of the argument made by the protesters, “*Si el Gobierno reprime a los luchadores sociales va a ser como tirar nafta al fuego, esto quiere decir que habrá una explosión social en nuestro país*” [If the Government represses the social protesters, it would be like throwing gasoline on a fire; this is to say that there would be a social explosion in our country] (“*Campesinos Endurecen*” 1+). Here Gomez makes explicit the non-discursive force of the protests by noting that while the peasants may not be the equal of the state in

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*Campesina*) FNC formed a political alliance in an attempt to force the executive branch to freeze the legislation, which was promulgated by executive order.

terms of the discursive contest, the strength of the peasants' position lie in the extra-verbal nature of the protests.

Immediately upon receiving news of the clash and the death of Cabral, protest leaders announced an end to the dialogue with the Executive branch they labeled, "*el Gobierno criminal*" ("Campesinos Echan" 1+). President González-Macchi announced an indefinite delay in the privatization program in response to the public pressure generated by the confrontation in Nueva Germania and the death of Calixto Cabral ("Campesinos" 1+). Quick government action defused the crisis and prevented a "social explosion" of the sort predicted by Gomez.

This protest is typical of the mixed results of physical protest strategies employed in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. While the results of physical argument have proven successful in a number of protests, many other cases exist in which protesters have been murdered, forcibly evicted, and beaten in confrontations with police, military and paramilitary groups opposing land reform. Peasants engage in physical forms of protest at great risk to their physical wellbeing.

Examining the different, specific forms of argumentation as well as the origins and structures of the arguments employed in the Paraguayan land reform struggle constitutes an important step in the process of defining that struggle. An investigation of the specific argument strategies, the sources of argumentation, and the means for expressing these arguments has revealed that they are complex phenomena in their own right. Examined as a whole, the Paraguayan land reform struggle is a complex matrix of historical arguments, competing interests and

social hierarchies. The struggle has not been constituted by the participation of a single interest group, the use of a single line of argumentation, nor an agreement upon a single economic benefit. The polyvocal nature of the struggle has featured many different specific arguments for land reform and different material factors enabling and constraining argumentation have had a demonstrable impact upon the coherence of the struggle as a whole. While the ability of the struggle to bring together different groups, interests and arguments under the rubric of land reform is unquestioned, it remains to be seen whether the argumentative strategies employed in the struggle will guarantee success. The next section will address the question of success by examining the goals of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, definitions of success, and real outcomes of the struggle.

#### **IV. Success or Mere Struggle?**

The Paraguayan land reform struggle is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The study of the struggle is complicated by its protean nature. It is difficult to answer even simple questions, such as what qualifies as successful land reform protest? Does the answer include the concession of land? Even in cases where the peasants do receive land, does this change the real conditions of the struggle? On the other hand, protest demands for agricultural credit, cotton seed, and debt forgiveness have been conceded to protestors, almost on a yearly basis. Do these constitute real gains? Are participants in land reform protest struggling for land, or are they perhaps seeking other goals that may be less immediately apparent?

As I noted in the previous chapter, there are four distinct interest groups comprising the Paraguayan land reform struggle: the peasantry, national peasant organizations, Paraguayan intellectuals and international interests including NGOs and the Catholic Church. Given this diversity of stakeholders, it is not surprising that the struggle has variously been defined as a conflict over the redistribution of land, ethnic and cultural recognition, environmental conservation, modernization, and anti-colonialism and anti-globalism. The many participants, sympathizers and beneficiaries of the struggle have varying ideas about the very nature of their collective venture. A brief discussion with a rural peasant will reveal that the peasant who either participates or sympathizes with the struggle will tell you that the root of the struggle is respect, “*hay que trabajar*

*para vivir y lo mburuvicha kuera do ombiapoi kuera!*” [We have to work just to survive while the bosses don’t work at all!] The same discussion with a national peasant organization leader will reveal that the root of the struggle rests in the importance of organizing in order to gain land concessions. That same discussion with a representative of the church or an NGO will reveal yet another view, that the land reform struggle is really a contest over neo-liberalism and the establishment of democracy. Finally, an educated member of the Paraguayan urban middle-class is likely to see the struggle as a fight for social justice and economic redistribution.

This radical ambiguity is the direct result of the ideological rootlessness of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. As Piven and Cloward point out, in inequitable societies such as Paraguay there is no vantage point from which the poor peasant can express him or herself in order to challenge the status quo.

Thus the class struggles that might otherwise be inevitable in sharply unequal societies ordinarily do not seem either possible or right from the perspective of those who live within the structure of belief and ritual fashioned by those societies. People whose only possible recourse in struggle is to defy the beliefs and rituals laid down by their rulers ordinarily do not. (Piven and Cloward 2)

This conundrum is manifest in the Paraguayan case. Those who are most directly affected by the land reform issue in Paraguay, the peasants are those least capable of organizing and confronting the state in order to plead for redress of the issue.

As a result, peasants have not been able to adequately represent themselves as actors in the struggle. As Piven and Cloward note, “Still, neither the frustrations generated by the economic change, nor the breakdown of daily life, may be sufficient to lead people to protest their travails. Ordinarily, when people suffer

such hardships, they blame God, or they blame themselves” (Piven and Cloward 12). Add to this lack of analytical capacity for articulating their situation and the barriers of race, class and language that isolate the Paraguayan peasant from the Paraguayan state, and the difficult challenge facing peasants becomes clear.

The Catholic Church, NGOs, national peasant organizations and intellectuals have all attempted to contribute to raising the peasant’s consciousness of his or her own circumstances. For as Piven and Cloward have also pointed out, “For a protest movement to arise out of these traumas of daily life, people have to perceive the deprivation and disorganization they experience as both wrong, and subject to redress” (Piven and Cloward 12). The Catholic Church, NGOs, national peasant organizations all have their place in this process. However, these contributions have a mixed record of effectiveness.

Fogel noted that in the case of *Capi’ibary*, NGOs were essential in the process of raising peasants’ self-awareness:

*La genesis del conflicto se da cuando grupos campesinos toman conciencia de la necesidad de actuar para apropiarse y usar una fracción de tierra controlada por otro; en esta fase el grupo se transforma en actor con capacidad de formular sus demandas y movilizarse en su prosecucion. En esta fase es importante el apoyo de grupos externos, tales como el CIPAE; este apoyo es crucial en la fase de maduración del conflicto en la medida que se perfilan major las posiciones de intereses y el diseño de estrategias. (Fogel, Luchas 188)*

[The conflict originates when peasant groups become conscious of the need to take action in order to appropriate and use a parcel of land controlled by another; in this phase, the group is transformed into an actor with the capacity to formulate its demands and to mobilize itself toward that goal. In this phase, the assistance of external groups such as CIPAE is important; this assistance is crucial in the mature phase of the conflict in the way they outline the positions and interests and the design of strategies].



This holds true for the case of all external participants involved in the struggle. By external, I mean those participants who do not directly experience the socio-economic deprivations driving peasant participation in the struggle. The Catholic Church was certainly the first external group to organize and raise the consciousness of peasants. The work of the Catholic Church in this area began in the mid 1960s and did not end until the *Pascua Dolorosa* of 1976. After that particularly brutal repression, the Catholic Church implemented its liberational theology in smaller groups.<sup>153</sup> Yet, the effectiveness and influence of the Catholic Church, international organizations (who sometimes offered training to peasants) and NGOs are limited to the incipient stages of the Paraguayan land reform struggle.

As the struggle matured, national peasant organizations gained control of the struggle with their uncontested ability to claim the right of representation for the peasant masses. Today, the function of NGOs, the Catholic Church and other international organizations are subordinated to the national peasant organization, which now mobilizes these groups as resources in the struggle.

However, in the process of the *concientización del campesino*, raising the consciousness of the peasant, real questions linger about peasant self-representation. That the Paraguayan land reform struggle can exist at all after

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<sup>153</sup> This teaching was primarily in the form of the *catequización*, the religious training received by individual peasant leaders who lead their local congregations as *catequistas*, or lay clergy. The great shortage of Catholic clergy in Paraguay has led to the practice of teaching the catechism to the leaders of peasant communities. In turn, the *catequistas* lead weekly church meetings and classes on church doctrine, in place of Catholic priests who appear monthly in the communities to lead Mass and to give Confession. This gives the Catholic Church direct access and ideological influence over the entire peasant community as well as its leaders. This has been used by the Catholic Church to promote the doctrine of Liberation Theology, as well as land reform and democratization in peasant communities throughout rural Paraguay.

more than 500 years of oppression and socio-cultural domination of the Paraguayan peasant is remarkable. What is remarkable, however, is the idea that the Native American turned *mestizo* peasant can imagine, let alone express, another socio-economic system, another way of living, and mobilize in several social and international sectors to pursue that vision. With previous chapters having elucidated the multifaceted nature of the Paraguayan land reform struggle and explored its historical context, next it is appropriate to engage normative issues and ponder to what extent the struggle can be considered successful given the serious constraints placed upon the main actor in the struggle, the peasant.

At first glance, it would appear that the Paraguayan land reform struggle is not a social movement at all. From this vantage point, it is a collection of atomized, unrelated, co-opted or unreflective violent protest activity not constitutive of a social movement. However, Leland Griffin warned about the tendency of critics to “atomize” social movements in the course of their study (Griffin 187). In contrast, Griffin advocates a “dynamic” analysis of the social movement that adequately presents the inherently synthetic nature of these movements (Griffin 188). Furthermore, resource mobilization theorists also resist the tendency to atomize these social struggles by applying techniques such as a “rational actor model” that views individual protestors as “individuals capable of weighing the relative costs and benefits of movement participation and opting for participation when the potential benefits outweigh the anticipated costs” (Buechler 218). Resource mobilization has rejected atomizing techniques for an

analysis of social movement at the level of the group, emphasizing structures, patterns and organizational dynamics (Buechler 218).

Yet, merely discussing the relations between the different interest groups constituting the struggle may elucidate a site of struggle but not its nature.

Alberto Melucci and other theorists of the new social movements suggest that this “new” type of social movement is inherently less organized as “a form of collective action” (Melucci, “Symbolic” 795). The new social movement is not defined by its character to organize as much as it is defined by the effect of the struggle, which “breaks the limits of the system in which the action occurs” (Melucci, “Symbolic” 795). This sort of struggle does not merely seek to address grievances but goes further to press for profound change “constituting a fundamental challenge to the dominance of the socio-political norms,” which ultimately constitute a means of expressing and experiencing “a different way of naming the world” (Melucci, “Symbolic” 801).

In a similar vein, Alain Touraine argues that social conflicts take on an ideological dimension when protestors thematize their status as social actors as an essential component of resistance. The ideological component of the struggle is essential to both Touraine’s definition of the social movement as well as to his criteria for the success of such a movement. On the one hand, Touraine classifies social “struggles” as mere conflicts resulting from “institutional pressures, or social and economic demands within a society” (Touraine, et al. “Anti-nuclear” 4). Real social movements, on the other hand, link the atomic element of the struggle, in such a way that constitutes collective “actors in the class war for the

control of historicity,” or the means by which a society creates and controls social values, norms and practices (Touraine, et al. “Anti-nuclear” 4).

Touraine places the emphasis of a real social movement on the consciousness of individual protestors and views the protest organization as a means of building consciousness. He illustrates this in his study of the anti-nuclear movement in France during the mid 1970s. Touraine’s “sociological intervention” sought to transform the individual, NIMBY protests against nuclear power into a real social movement that would challenge “those apparatuses which have acquired the power to impose patterns of behavior upon the people according to their own interests,” including the centralized and hierarchical energy bureaucracy that forced its policies on the French citizenry using techniques of police control and surveillance (Touraine, et al. “Anti-nuclear” 4). Unfortunately for Touraine, the movement failed, participation ebbed and there was no successful challenge to the authority permitting the nuclear program to continue. Touraine re-conceived the anti-nuclear movement as a mere struggle whose organizational structure was exploited more by those with NIMBY interests opposing the construction of a nuclear plant in their own communities or exploited by those who opposed specific politicians or the political process in general (Touraine, et al. “Anti-nuclear” 22). Touraine attributed the failure of the anti-nuclear movement to attain the status of real social movement to its inability to move beyond the idea of merely preventing the construction of nuclear power plants to the idea of challenging the very process by which the determination to construct such plants was made.

I would like to adopt Touraine's emphasis upon ideology and individual protestor consciousness as elements differentiating successful from unsuccessful movements or real social movements from mere struggles. As a consequence, I will not focus on the formal structure of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, its physical constitution or its ability to gain concessions in accordance to its demands in order to analyze its nature or to define its success. As Piven and Cloward suggest, despite the abundance of scholarly work focused upon the organizational nature of social movements, the key feature of social movements (at least social movements composed of the poor and the disenfranchised) is the varied nature of protest activity and not the structural integrity of the movement.

Whatever the intellectual sources of error, the effect of equating movement with movement organizations—and thus requiring that protest have a leader, a constitution, a legislative program, or at least a banner before they are recognized as such—is to divert attention from the many forms of political unrest and to consign them by definition to the more shadowy realms of social problems and deviant behavior. (Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's* 5)

What then is there to examine if we downplay the significance of the structural element of the Paraguayan land reform struggle? The Paraguayan case (and possibly other instances of protest activity in developing nations characterized by great socio-economic disparities) presents an interesting challenge to the prevailing criteria for success of collective protest. Studies of the structural and institutional facets of collective protest have equated organization with efficiency and effectiveness. A move beyond the exclusive structural emphasis in social movement analysis enables a more nuanced examination of the success of this and perhaps other movements of similar character.

Because Touraine's definition of the social movement is linked to the successful conduct of collective protest, it is important to discuss success as a criterion differentiating mere struggles from true social movements. Accordingly, an evaluation of the success or failure of the Paraguayan land reform struggle will shed light on the collective ideology of the struggle and its ability or inability to conduct a collective conflict at the level of historicity.

Criteria for the success of a social movement have been variously defined. The most basic criteria for success have been 1) is the movement sustainable and 2) does the movement achieve its goals? Such criteria flow from instrumental views of rhetorical practice and outcome-oriented approaches to the study of movement phenomena such as Resource Mobilization. (See Griffin; Zald). Other, more complex analyses of the success of the social movement include Touraine's idea of collective protest achieving the highest level of social meaning in the struggle for control of historicity and Habermas' analysis of the collective social movement's role in defending and enlarging the "public sphere" (Touraine, et al. "Anti-nuclear" 4; Cohen and Arato 527). The Paraguayan land reform struggle as well as other social movements in underdeveloped nations find it extremely difficult to meet the criteria for success set down by theorists such as Alain Touraine and Jurgen Habermas. The nature of Paraguayan society militates against the very existence of a public sphere and the illiterate condition of the Paraguayan peasant complicates greatly the task of self-reflective identification of the social movement's macro-social goals by protest actors.

This leaves us with the most basic criteria for evaluation of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Can such a struggle, located in a developing nation and composed largely of illiterate peasants be evaluated in terms of sustainability and goal achievement? Let us examine this question by considering the struggle's record of institutional success; whether or not the acquisition of land as a concession from the state constitutes an actual or false perception of success; and finally, whether or not land grants and other protest demands are appropriate goals for the struggle.

#### **4.1 Institutional Successes in the Struggle**

Collective protest has yielded some spectacular concessions from the leaders of governmental institutions. The struggles in the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary* gained 5,000 hectares of land; in the separate communities of *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, 5,000 hectares was gained; 3,000 hectares were gained in *El Asentamiento Zapattini Cue* and the 2001 protest march prevented the privatization of the state telephone monopoly ANETLCO, saving thousands of jobs. Yet, even with such concessions, the exigence driving protest activism in Paraguay persists and may have even intensified.

A discussion of either the sustainability or the successful conclusion of the Paraguayan land reform struggle is problematic. It is easy to point out that the future offers little opportunity to satisfy the abundant need for land on the part of the estimated 300,000 landless Paraguayans. The point was passed long ago

when a mere redistribution of state land reserves would have satisfied peasant land requirements. Furthermore, given the population growth rate,<sup>154</sup> any mere distribution of land for the purpose of occupying idle rural laborers would quickly succumb to *minifundial* pressures.<sup>155</sup> Future subdivision of the land would reconstitute the initial dilemma and multiply the number of land-seeking peasants in 35 years by a factor of ten.<sup>156</sup> It would be more appropriate to discuss the longevity of the Paraguayan land reform struggle in terms of the informal social precedents and the formal legal achievements the struggle has established to enable future protest activity.

Informally, the greatest achievement of the struggle has been the tacit acceptance of protest activity. The persistence and ubiquity of the land reform struggle has conditioned Paraguayan national institutions such as the national security forces and the presidential, congressional and ministerial arms of government to accept some protest activity as “normal.” Prior to the first successful struggles in *Capi'ibary*, *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero*, peasant attempts to organize met with brutal repression and made public protest activity a

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<sup>154</sup> The Paraguayan population growth rate was a whopping 2.8% between 1950 and 1992 and accelerated to 3.2% between 1982 and 1992 (GTZ 45).

<sup>155</sup> The average rural family in Paraguay is composed of 8-10 children and two adults. The generational redistribution of land requires that an initial land parcel of ten hectares be re-divided into five two hectare parcels in order to endow a peasant's sons with land. The subsistence nature of peasant farming practices disallows the possibility that a peasant can accumulate enough capital to purchase more land. This re-division of land occurs each 15 to 30 years as each successive generation of peasant farmer matures and requires land to practice farming. No conclusive studies of Paraguayan *minifundia* exist but I estimate that the average peasant parcel in a *minifundial* land endowment system would shrink by 60% every 35 years or just less than 2% each year. In combination with the huge gap between inflation (averaging 18%/year) terms of trade deficits peasant farmers experience a cost of living increase each year in addition to a 2% loss of land area each year. This is an absolutely untenable economic situation.

<sup>156</sup> In 35 years, two adult generations of Paraguayans would be seeking land because land grants would have been completely exhausted by subdivision leaving. Given an estimated total of 300,000 *sintierres* and an equal number of landed peasants at present, thirty-five years would produce three million landless peasants by 2039.



risky and dangerous proposition. The resistance of the brave peasants to the repressive tactics of state authorities in the land struggles at *Capi'ibary*, *Juan de Mena* and *Cleto Romero* beginning in the late 1980s clearly demonstrated to state authorities that the repressive model once successfully employed by the dictator Stroessner to crush the *Ligas Agrarias* in the *Pascua Dolorosa* would no longer work.

Following upon the implicit tolerance of protest activity, the Paraguayan land reform struggle has achieved success in the establishment of legal protections for protest activity. The most effective of these protections involves securing the legality of the movement in the *Constitutional Nacional 1992*. The *Constitución Nacional 1992* states:

*Artículo 114: La reforma agraria es uno de los factores fundamentales para lograr el bienestar rural. Ella consiste en la incorporación efectiva de la población campesina al desarrollo económico y social de la nación. Se adoptarán sistemas equitativos de distribución de la propiedad y tenencia de la tierra. Se organizan el crédito y la asistencia técnica, educacional y sanitaria, se fomentará la creación de cooperativas agrícolas y de otras asociaciones similares y se promoverá la producción, la industrialización y la racionalización del mercado para el desarrollo integral del agro. (Conferencia 120)*

[Article 114: Agrarian reform is one of the basic factors for the achievement of rural well-being. This consists of the effective incorporation of the rural population in the economic and social development of the nation. This will require the adoption of a fair system of distribution of ownership and management of land. This will also require the provision of credit, as well as technical, educational and sanitary assistance; in addition, the formation and support of agricultural cooperatives and other similar associations will promote production, industrialization and rationalization of the market, which is integral to the development of agriculture].

*Artículo 116: Con el objetivo de eliminar progresivamente los latifundios improductivos, la ley atenderá a la aptitud natural de*

*las tierras, a las necesidades del sector de población vinculado con la agricultura y a las previsiones aconsejables para el desarrollo equilibrado, así como el aprovechamiento sostenible de los recursos naturales y de la preservación del equilibrio ecológico. La expropiación de los latifundios improductivos destinados a la reforma agraria será establecidos en cada caso por la ley, y se abonará en la forma y en el plazo que la misma determine. (Conferencia 123)*

[Article 116: With the objective of the progressive elimination of large, unproductive land-holdings, the law regards the natural state of the land, the needs of that sector of the population dependent upon agriculture and the available knowledge for balanced development. This development will take the form of the sustainable development of natural resources and the preservation of ecological balance. The expropriation of large, unproductive land-holdings for the purpose of agrarian reform will be established in all cases by the law and will be realized in the form and in the place that the law deems appropriate].

Articles 114 and 116 of the *Constitución Nacional 1992* have been the heart of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. They have been used to provide a legal basis for challenging private landowners whose landholdings exceed their ability to claim to be utilizing the land as a national, agricultural or forestry resource. This has led to land occupations that have employed the strategy of large, spontaneous land invasions. Peasants enter private land and quickly establish crops, upon which basis they can claim to be making effective use of the land and gain constitutional immunity from prosecution. After the occupation has been established, political pressure is applied at both the local and national level to legalize the holding and grant title to the land for the peasants.

Sometimes this strategy has been effective, and sometimes it has failed. When it works, the government either negotiates a price with the owner of the land or expropriates the property outright in the interests of the state. This is an

unjust process because these *latifundistas* or large landowners are themselves usually involved in governance and any such conflict of interest is resolved in the interest of the land owner.<sup>157</sup>

Ordinarily the Constitution is overlooked and another law is emphasized,

Article 142 of the Paraguayan *Código Penal* (1997):

*El que individualmente o en concierto con otras personas, ingresara a un inmueble ajeno, sin el consentimiento del titular, en violencia y clandestinidad y se instalará en él, será castigado con pena privativa de la libertad de hasta dos años o con multas.*  
(Fogel, *Luchas* 134)

[He who individually or in concert with other persons who trespasses a private property without the consent of the titled owner, in violence and secrecy and takes possession of such property, will be punished up to two years of imprisonment or with fines].

At best, even when the peasant is granted possession of the land, the owner is commonly rewarded with an outrageous compensation for land far beyond its market value. At worst, peasant petitions are rejected and the matter is turned over to the local authorities who are completely subject to the influence of the wealthy land owners. The usual result is that a local judge signs an order of eviction and the peasants are evicted by the local police with the occasional support of national troops when the occupation is too large to handle safely with police alone.

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<sup>157</sup> It is a noted practice of corrupt politicians to accept cheap land deals in the names of close family members in exchange for political influence. Thus, these large landowners are often the ministers of government themselves who are responsible for interpreting the law. In a recent investigation of the president of the *Cámara de Diputados*, Carlos (Cale) Galaverna was found to be a man of modest means; however, his brother in-law was discovered to be in possession of a 5,000 hectare tract of forested land whose origin could not be explained.

It is obvious that even the *Constitución Nacional 1992* itself is not actually a document that empowers the peasants and the movement; it is a document that recognizes the political pressure for land reform but that chooses to defer the responsibility for that reform to some future and vaguely described action. Article 116 is exemplary:

*Serán establecidos en cada caso por la ley y se abonará en la forma y el plazo que la misma determine. (Conferencia 123)*

[They will be established in each case by the law, whose result will be appropriate to the circumstances as required].

Both the Catholic Church and the Paraguayan intelligentsia have challenged the ambiguity of this text. The Catholic Church pointed out that such ambiguity maintained the socio-political status quo of the nation and demonstrated little effort to provide a guideline for social development that Paraguay so desperately required in its transition to democracy.

*Una inspiración, al mismo tiempo neoliberal y estatista, hace que contemos con un ley fundamental, que no reconociendo con claridad las tendencias asociativas y operativas propias de nuestra gente, sobre todo las de los campesinos, mantienen la política social y económica sin definiciones precisas sometidas al vaivén de las circunstancias y de las interpretaciones contradictorias, lo cual puede conspirar contra el adecuado desarrollo de nuestra sociedad. (Conferencia 53)*

[An inspiration, neo-liberal and statist at the same, that makes it necessary to depend on basic laws that don't recognize with clarity the associative and functional tendencies of our people, especially those of the peasants, they define political and socio-economic themes without precise definition and submit these (issues) to vagaries of circumstance and contradictory interpretations, which can work against the adequate development of our society].

Juan Carlos Mendonca, a professor of law at the *Universidad Nacional de Asunción* argues that of all of the defects of the *Constitución Nacional 1992*, the

worst is “*el ambigüedad que padece el proyecto*” [the ambiguity the project suffers from] (Mendonca 20). To make his point, Mendonca points out that the definition of “*latifundias improductivas*” is very problematic from a legal standpoint:

*Nos quedamos sin saber que es “latifundio” para el Proyecto,: si cualquier extensión de tierra improductiva, por minúscula que sea, o solo aquella porción de tierra que excede el límite de extensión establecido por la ley, aunque sea productivo. Sabemos que la norma jurídica, como enunciado prescriptiva, es válida o no es válida, sin estar sujeto al valor de verdad—puede ser verdadero or falso....* (Mendonca 40-41)

[We remain without an understanding of what a “latifundio” is in the Project: whether (it is) any area of unproductive land, of small size perhaps, or only the portion of the land that exceeds the size limit established by law, whether or not it is productive. We cannot understand how a juridical norm such as prescriptive explanation is valid or invalid without being subjected to the test of truth—whether it is true or false...].

Thus, the Constitution excludes the peasants themselves from participation in land reform by explicitly stating that any application of constitutional law will be performed by the juridical structures already in place. Rather than empower projects like the Paraguayan land reform struggle, the *Constitución Nacional 1992* actually makes it illegal for them to make interventions on their own; rather than guarantee rights, this document serves as an indefinite deferment of rights. Without setting forth any specific institution or mechanism for implementing the law, there is no practical application for that law!

The best the members of the struggle can do is to force the issue by organizing, supporting and aiding land occupations and thus creating the impetus for an application of the law. This tactic often fails as the gap between

constitutional justice and a judicial system financed by frontier cattle barons collide. Here is a typical example:

On November 11, three armed civilian security guards reportedly killed Gumersindo Pavón Díaz, a peasant laborer, on land that had been expropriated in 1996 from a businessman who had rejected the Government's offered price and was seeking judicial redress. Rural peasants responded violently, burning down buildings owned by the real estate company that operates on the land. Landowner Roberto Antebi stated publicly that the security guards had found Pavón Díaz trying to steal a horse, and that the shooting was accidental. The authorities arrested one of the guards; two remained at liberty. The cases were pending at year's end. (U.S. Department of State, *1998 Country Report*)

This example illustrates vividly how dependence upon the judicial and political system of the government for fair representation or for progress on land reform is extremely precarious. At the moment, Paraguay is being shaken to the core by conflicts between the judicial, legislative and executive branches at the highest levels of government. This instability in governance is so acute that the assassination of the vice-president, and the impeachment of the president for implication in that murder come as little surprise. Paraguay's fragile, newly democratic political system has difficulty functioning at the highest levels of government and cannot be expected to do so at the local level. In realistic terms, this makes the legal strategy of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, realistically, a dead end. In fact, the passage of the new Agrarian Code has reinforced and further constrained the legal rights of the peasants to invade and occupy land declared illegal and unproductive under the auspices of the Constitution. Under the new code, the conditions for violation of private property and the punishment

for trespassing is clarified, not the right of peasants to identify and petition for the expropriation of *latifundial* land holdings.

In addition, the *Ley de Marchodromo* was passed in 2000. The Protest Law sets specific limits on the time and place for legal protest:

*El derecho a la manifestación en el microcentro de la ciudad será permitido recién a partir de las 19:00 hasta las 24:00 horas en días laborales, y en días domingos y feriados, desde las 6:00 hasta la misma hora del día siguiente. Los lugares permanentes para reuniones públicas se establecen en sólo tres plazas: Uruguay, Democracia y Armas.* (Riquelme 1)

[The right to protest in Downtown (Asunción) will be permitted from the hours of 7:00 PM to 12:00 Midnight on working days and on Sundays and holidays, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 the following day. The fixed sites for public meetings have been established in only three parks: *Uruguay, Democracia* and *Armas*].

Peasant organizations argue that the restrictions of the law limit the two most important aspects of their protest activity: 1) the ability to demonstrate to the public via disruption rather than in small, inconspicuous plazas with little visibility; and 2) the ability to demonstrate to the public at an appropriate hour.

As Quintín Riquelme notes, “¿Quién escuchará nuestros reclamos a las 19:00 horas?” [who will hear our protests at 7:00 in the evening?] (Riquelme 1).

Thus, the achievements of the Paraguayan land reform struggle in the form of longevity have been tempered by the measured responses of the Paraguayan State. Nevertheless, the right to public protest has been secured, even if it has been secured within strict limits. The sustainability of the movement will be discussed at greater length in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

## 4.2 More Land = Hollow Victory?

As the evaluation of the Paraguayan land reform struggle in terms of success or failure cannot be solely determined on the basis of institutional response to protest pressure, let us now examine the struggle's potential for the successful achievement of its stated goals.

Even when peasants organize an occupation, successfully lobby for political action, receive a favorable ruling and actually get legal title for the members who occupy the land, they do not achieve a victory. One must ask, "what happens after peasants are granted land?" A recent study noted that while land redistribution had an impact on farm output, it had a limited impact on household income in six Latin American countries including Paraguay (López and Valdés). Why is this? Joseph Stiglitz of the World Bank argues that "successful agricultural production requires not only labor and land, but also capital and know-how (technology). Poor tenants are often lacking in all three and simply granting them land does not resolve the other two gaps" (Stiglitz 3).

Thus peasants are provided land but little else. I have personally seen peasants with nothing more than a machete, a hoe, 10,000 Guaranies (\$1.50) and the clothes on their backs leave to prepare plots of land for their families. Yet, the conditions of their lives do not improve. Settlers face colonization of hostile forest without potable water, sanitation, or basic public services including medical, educational and infrastructural support.

Rogelio Martínez, a very poor man with eight children and no land of his own, exemplifies the challenge faced by peasants who choose to make a life in a



new *asentamiento*. His father-in-law allowed him to farm on one-and-a-half hectares of his own land. Rogelio was granted a plot of land through the IBR. With 100,000 Guaraníes, a machete, a hoe, food and other necessities, he set out with several other men to occupy an *asentamiento* in *San Pedro de Ykua de Mandijy* in the northern part of the country. He explained to me how difficult it was to clear the forest. He spent weeks clearing and burning trees. For a while they survived using the food they brought with them, and by killing and eating the wildlife of the forest. However, another challenge was water. Wells in the area require pumping equipment, as their average depth is some 30 meters or 80-90 feet (too deep to be safely dug by hand). There was no potable water source and the men had to send out one of their number each week to retrieve water. Passage to and from the settlement was difficult. There were no roads in the settlement itself and one had to walk a great distance to reach a road. Even then, the road was unimproved. When the roads became impassable in the rainy season, they resorted to drinking rainwater they collected but suffered hunger because they could not supplement their rations. The entire settlement was abandoned after three months. It was simply impossible to establish an agricultural settlement without more support (Rogelio Martínez, Personal Interview).

In the case of Rogelio and his companions, they were lucky because they did not have to submit their families to the same conditions they suffered. However, in most cases, the entire family experiences the deprivation of opening up the forested frontier without proper roads, medicine, food, water, or access to education. Even in long established settlements, these deprivations continue.

When I visited the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary* in 2001, it had existed as an established agricultural settlement that was benefiting from the assistance of the IBR for six years. Still, the number of deficiencies was astounding. There were no improved roads in the site, only *carreteras* or sandy paths worn down by the passage of *carretas* or oxcarts. The residents still traveled to the river with their oxcarts to fill water barrels from the river. While CORPOSANA had constructed a water tower and a deep well to provide potable water on the site, the pump house had long sat in a state of disrepair as the peasants refused to pay the *coima* or bribe asked by officials to properly maintain the facility. Access to the main road was along five miles of sandy *carretera*. It is remarkable to note that all traffic and all supplies enter the settlement by this means. In addition, the path is intersected by the river *Capi'ibary* (from which the settlement draws its name), which floods and cuts off access to the settlement for a significant portion of the year.

The settlement is not unlike others in that the presence of a school is notable. It might strike the reader as odd that, in a largely illiterate population, education is viewed not only as a necessity but a right. Peasants fiercely defend their ability to educate their children, even if that education fails to pass the *sexto curso* or sixth grade. There are several very nice, one room schoolhouses serving the *Asentamiento of Capi'ibary*. However, these schools were constructed by the residents themselves and the salaries, the *rubros*, of the *maestros*, or teachers, are paid by the community and not by the state.

The peasants of the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary* as well as several hundred official, unofficial and even illegal agricultural settlements live a life of struggle that last well beyond their initial protests for land. Their very existence in such precarious circumstances constitutes a daily struggle. This is a cycle of existence that appears to offer little hope for change. Life in the Paraguayan *campo* is hard. I have personally seen children scarred by frequent attacks of leishmaniasis. The average peasant suffers from permanent parasitic infections. Forest dwellers deal with the common presence of piques, botflies, malaria (on the northern frontier), hemorrhagic dengue fever, yellow fever, and malnutrition. 50% of all peasants are suspected of being infected with the always-fatal *Chagas* virus. Their homes are infested with the vector insect, an assassin bug that prefers to live in the walls of the traditional mud and bamboo batten constructed huts that many peasants still live in today.

Given all of these hardships, the peasantry fights for land and a right to earn their living under these conditions. They do this with little help from the state and its specific departments who do little more than prey upon the ignorance or the naiveté of the peasant. For example, Paraguay, at present, offers the cheapest electricity in the world. With the construction of two of the three largest dams in the world in that country, the *Itaipúa* and the *Yacretá* dams, on the Paraguay River, the state has promised to provide electricity to every resident of the nation, including the peasantry. However, it has been common practice for state electricity workers to charge peasants for the erection of power lines and individual service that, in many cases, has already been paid for by the state. In

addition, when leaders representing the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary* confronted officials of the IBR to ask for the provision of public utilities including electricity, they were told only that, “*Los campesinos deben ampliar sus tierras para enfrentar los desafíos del Mercosur*” [The rural poor had better expand their landholdings in order to compete in MERCOSUR] (“No Hay Condiciones” 4).

When determining the relative success of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, one must take into account the long-term effects of the movement. This requires addressing the question, “Does attaining land improve the peasant’s lives?” Even when peasants do acquire land, it comes with a heavy price, enormous physical challenges and deprivations. In many cases, the peasant who protests for land has, in a sense, only begun his or her struggle. While there are some settlements proximal to extant public resources such as water, electricity, and medical services, most are not. The bulk of land settlements in Paraguay are far from the centers of civilization in the country.

Take for example the case of the emerging struggle of *Yvyturuzu* in the state of Guairá. Approximately 5,000 peasant families there are fighting to attain permanent possession of land that they are presently squatting. At present, there are more than seven miles of unpaved and road (impassable during the rainy season) leading into the region. It requires two hours to travel into town (when the roads are passable). The single bridge along that span is destroyed each time heavy rains fall. Other areas have no bridge and no egress during the rainy

season. There is a single nurse in a nearby community who serves the needs of all of the estimated 30,000 residents. There is no potable water in the region.<sup>158</sup>

Finally, because the roads are so poor, most peasant families rely upon local *patrones* (bosses) and *acopiadores* (cotton processors) to pick up and ship their agricultural products. Nearly everyone plants cotton. Without any resources of one's own, the Paraguayan peasant is trapped in a system of cotton farming that Esteban Areco has called "*la esclavitud blanca*" or cotton slavery (Areco 4).

New and old settlers of occupied lands endure great hardships that do not ease over time. While some public services are provided to peasants, they find it difficult to thrive in a system that benefits capital at the expense of labor.

Government loans are made available to peasants to plant government-supported cash crops. Cotton is the most important cash crop in Paraguay. More than 300,000 rural families comprising approximately two million persons depend upon this crop. Thus, at least 2/3 of the 2.5 to three million rural peasants in Paraguay are directly dependent upon the cotton crop while the remainder is indirectly dependent upon that crop to generate and distribute income in the rural countryside.

Participation in cotton farming, as with any other enterprise, requires capital investment. The primary reason peasants turn to cotton is because of the availability of credit. The great majority of small farmers obtain loans through a

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<sup>158</sup> As a Peace Corps volunteer in the area (1993-1995), I constructed and taught the construction of wells and well sanitation. Peasants were unable to finance the required costs to initiate and maintain these wells. When I first returned after seven years, none of the more than twenty sanitized wells I had established remained operational. Christino Barua, a local peasant I trained in well construction, explained "*Opa rei. Xe ñembotavy xe ra'a.*" [I ran out of money. I am just a poor, stupid peasant].

local *patrón* who charges at least 5% interest per month over the primary growing season (which for cotton is seven months, amounting to 35% interest). More recently, MAG has provided credit at rates varying between 18% and 25%. In addition, the middleman, either a *campesino's patrón* or an *acopiador*, will set his price in an oligarchic system that assures his profit at the expense of the peasant. While international cotton values in 2002 hovered around \$0.75/kilo, peasants are likely to receive only 800 Guaraníes per kilo or \$0.114/kilo of cotton sold from the farm.

Cotton farming is inefficient and unprofitable for the Paraguayan peasant. Most peasants make an investment equal to 120% of the value of the cotton crop produced! Compounding this loss is the fact that debt payments of up to 35% on the principle and inflation between 10-20% further erode the peasant's economic situation. Cotton is the primary crop on approximately 533,000 hectares of land, affecting 250,000 farming families who depend on the crop (for the most part) as their sole means of support (U.S. Department of State, *1998 Country Report*).

I discussed cotton profits with twenty two members of the farmers' *Comité Ko'e Rory* of Santo Domingo, La Colonia Independencia, Departamento del Guairá. Working out the average input and production of each step in the process of cotton production, the committee developed an analysis of cotton production in the region. The average cost of inputs per hectare of cotton production during 2001 were as follows:<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> These cost estimates were reached by the farmer's committee of *Ko'e Rory*, by averaging the cost of rented and purchased materials as well as the value of labor (which was calculated at 15,000 Guaraníes/day). Labor, while performed by family members themselves is valued as *changa* or wage labor. Thus, the value of any labor performed on the family farm is calculated as

1) *El arado* (soil preparation) \$20. Planting cotton in eastern Paraguay (where the rich clay soils produce high yields) requires mechanized plowing using a tractor rather than the use of oxen and a plow.<sup>160</sup> The high cost of soil preparation results from the need of many peasants to rent equipment from a local *patrón* whose monopoly permits him to overcharge the peasants.<sup>161</sup>

2) *La siembra* (planting) \$8. Not only do many peasants lack the equipment to safely distribute the seed, but they often must plant twice as poor germination rates and adverse weather often necessitate replanting a portion of the crop. Poor germination rates are the result of peasants being provided the worst quality of seed or even expired seed while being charged full price.<sup>162</sup> Planting requires three adult laborers working one full day and reseeding requires one adult laborer working one day.

3) *Semilla* (seed) \$25-\$40. The need to replant as well as the poor germination rates of the low quality seed provided to peasants often requires peasants to double their planting investment.<sup>163</sup> Poor germination rates require

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the value of the labor that a peasant or any member of his or her family could earn by engaging in wage labor off the farm.

<sup>160</sup> It is important to note that only 60% (167,378 of 307,221) of all agricultural enterprises in the country possess spraying equipment and only 61% possess animal traction equipment essential for agricultural production (Fogel, *Pobreza* 684).

<sup>161</sup> Only 7.4% of all small agricultural enterprises (less than 20 hectares) receive finance assistance from the CAH through MAG (Fogel, *Pobreza* 684).

<sup>162</sup> In addition, the timing of cotton planting is very precise. Cotton must be planted in a two-week period between late September and early October in order to take advantage of the end of the winter drought and late October rains. If the rains are late the seed dries out in the heat of the fields. The seed cannot be planted in the rain, as the clay soil does not permit work under those conditions. Finally, if the seed has been planted or replanted too late, the May/June rains will ruin the crop at harvest.

<sup>163</sup> In addition to the direct cost of seed, many peasants pay the price for handling the pesticide covered seeds with their bare hands. Peasants cannot afford the additional expense of planting equipment and recruit their own children, as young as 3, to work in the field by placing seed in holes prepared by the parents with hoes.

peasants to place 5-7 seeds in each prepared hole in order to allow 2-3 plants to germinate.

4) *El Raleo* (plant thinning) \$8. As a result of planting and replanting and the use of 5-7 seeds placed in each hole, each planting must be inspected and when more than two plants have germinated the excess sprouts must be removed by hand. Three adults working one day are required to carry out this task.

5) *El Aporque* (hilling up the plants) \$5. After the plants have been thinned, the farmer needs to push soil up around the base of the plant to prevent its being blown over and to promote root development. Two adults are required in a full day of work to perform this task.

5) *La carpida* (weeding) \$20-\$35. This is the most difficult aspect of planting cotton. Peasants carry out weeding manually, that is, by removing each weed or potential weed with a hoe by hand. It takes three working days for one peasant to hoe one hectare of land. Depending on the amount of rain during the season the number of *carpidas* can vary between three and five per season.

6) *Venenos* (pesticides) \$45. As of 1994, the cotton boll weevil became the 105<sup>th</sup> and most problematic of the many pests that attack the cotton plant in Paraguay. Peasants are required to apply pesticides at least three times each growing season. Depending on the climate and the conditions of nearby crops and forests, that number can reach five required pesticide applications each season. Pesticides to combat more intense insect infestations are produced in



Brazil and sold in Paraguay. The most common of these cotton pesticides is an organophosphate labeled *Azodrine* that possesses an LD 50 of only eight.<sup>164</sup>

7) *Aplicación de venenos* (pesticide application) \$8. This is very dangerous work as well. Uneducated peasants don't adequately understand the dangers of pesticides and don't protect themselves during the application of the poisons. I have personally seen peasants apply pesticides in bare feet while drinking *yerba mate* with their free hands.

8) *La Cosecha* (harvest) \$40. The harvest was described to me by one Felix Bénitez as "*Ipohyitei*" [extremely hard work!] (Bénitez, Personal Interview)! The Bénitez family offers a good example of the amount of work that harvesting cotton requires. The Bénitez family consists of Felix, the father, Elodia, the mother, and three children ages twelve, eight and six. The entire family works for six straight days, sunup to sundown, during the first harvest. Even the smallest of children is to be found in the fields with a sack tied around his or her waist. Children are very helpful during the harvest because they can more easily reach the *capullos* or bolls closest to the ground. The second harvest follows some three weeks later. This harvest is not as intense but requires some 2-3 days of intensive labor. The final harvest occurs six weeks after the initial harvest. This requires approximately one day of familial labor.

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<sup>164</sup> The LD 50 scale measures the relative toxicity of a pesticide using lab animals to produce a figure calculated as the number of micrograms per pound of body weight will be required to kill half a population. *Azodrine*'s LD 50 of 8 means that a mere 1,200 micrograms can induce death in a 150 lb. person. While the likelihood of ingesting this much pesticide without drinking it is low, it must be noted that *Azodrine*, as an organophosphate is stored in the human fat tissues and accumulates in the body. Thus, accumulating the 1,200 micrograms (or less to induce sickness) is not out of the question as the average farmer applies 2-5 liters of the product on the average farm over a period of many years.

9) *El Arranque y Quema* (removal of the crop) \$15. As cotton has many insect pests (105 different species of insect prey on the crop in Paraguay), each plant must be pulled from the soil and burned at the end of the season. Cotton pests often reside in the plant's *capullo*, *tallo*, and *raíces* during the cool season to await next year's crop. A failure to properly sanitize each field will result in an infestation the following year. This is difficult and time consuming as the cotton plant has a tap root that can extend as much as five feet into the ground. Given that nearly 4,000 plants occupy each hectare, this is a labor-intensive activity. The *arranque y quema* requires three adults working for two days to properly perform this task.

The total investment in a year's crop is approximately \$194.00 per hectare. Given an average yield of 1,000 kilos per hectare (as estimated by the FNC) and an average price of 800 Guaraníes per kilo, on average, a peasant will generate 800,000 Guaraníes per hectare of cotton or \$114.38 per hectare. Deducting costs of \$194.00 per hectare, each peasant loses \$79.62 per hectare. With an average of 2.5 hectares of cotton planted per peasant family, this results in a net loss of \$199.05 each year. Finally, we must include the interest to be paid on an average principal of 800,000 Guaraníes borrowed either wholly or in combination from the CAH or the local *patrón*.<sup>165</sup> An average of 25 percent interest on 800,000 Guaraníes produces a loss of 200,000 Guaraníes or \$28.57.

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<sup>165</sup> It is a common peasant practice to borrow money to cover living expenses as well as the material costs of cotton production. Thus a peasant will borrow 800,000 to 1,000,000 Guaraníes and receive little more than 800,000 to 1,000,000 Guaraníes in return, just enough to recover his or her debts.

Added to the net loss for the year, the average peasant family accrues a loss of \$227.62 per year on each cotton crop.

Why would farmers work in such a way as to lose rather than earn capital in the planting of cotton? There are four primary reasons: 1) government support of cotton farming with investment capital and public propaganda, 2) cash payment for the crop, 3) success in the past, and 4) a spirit of independence.

#### **4.2.1 Government Support.**

The Paraguayan government has promulgated cotton production for many years. Nearly the entire function of the MAG is devoted to cotton production. The entire *colono* system was premised upon cotton farming. Beginning with the foundation of the IBR in 1963 the Paraguayan government's systematic acculturation of peasants into the culture of cotton farming resulted in a nation that by 1992 was devoting nearly half of its labor force directly or indirectly to the production of cotton (US Library of Congress). The Paraguayan government has taken drastic measures to support an industry that has always produced yearly infusions of capital in this cash-starved country that runs yearly trade deficits and whose first freely elected president was the owner of a cotton processing plant and, as a consequence, one of the wealthiest men in the nation.<sup>166</sup>

To this day, the Paraguayan government spends an outrageous amount of money to subsidize the cotton industry. In 2001, MAG requested 25 million

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<sup>166</sup> In the 1992 election, two of the three most legitimate nominees for president were owners of huge cotton processing cooperatives. The *Partido Colorado* candidate and eventual winner of that election, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, and the *Partido Encuentro Nacional*, Guillermo Caballero Vargas, were two of the most influential of the cotton magnates in the country.

dollars to finance the 2002-2003 cotton season.<sup>167</sup> The CAH reported a loss of 20 million Guaraníes or nearly 3.5 million dollars in unpaid debt that year (“CAH recupera” 1+). Between March of 1999 and December of 2001, the González-Macchi administration was forced to restructure 90 million dollars of peasant debt that could simply not be paid back by peasants who make no profit on the crop (“Ultimatum al Gobierno” 1+)

Government propaganda motivates peasants to plant this crop and hides the enormous theft of labor that enables a system of virtual “cotton slavery” (Areco 4). The *acopiadores*, or cotton factories, use media campaigns, free liquor, seeds, and insecticides that are, in some cases delivered right to the peasant’s own farm. Finally, when the cotton is ready to be marketed, the *acopiadores* will pick it up from the farm or contract local *patrones*. This is made economically feasible by the enormous profit realized on each individual farmer’s crop. Cotton, from the peasant’s perspective, is not only the only crop that guarantees cash payment each season, but it is the only crop for which guaranteed financing is available and which investors will deliver, literally, to the door of the peasant’s home.

#### **4.2.2 Cash crop farming.**

For many years, peasants lived a life of relative self-sufficiency in the Paraguayan countryside. Squatting land and occasionally working on the

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<sup>167</sup> This money will be used to purchase boll weevil traps (\$5 million), cotton seed (\$5.1 million), insecticides (\$7.5 million) with the remainder devoted to salaries, incentive programs, other materials and loans (“Se Reducen” 23).

*haciendas* or other *latifundial* enterprises, the peasants have become integrated into and dependent upon the Paraguayan market system.

Throughout its history, Paraguay has been peopled by distinct racial groups: *los indios*, *los mestizos* or *campesinos*, and *los blancos* or *creoles*. The separation of these distinct peoples was socio-economic as well. *Indios* and *campesinos* rarely owned land, farming only subsistence plots that they squatted. Out of necessity, they led simple lives of moderate deprivation. As peasant Mario Espínola explained, “*Ndaipori monga’a karia’y guare. Ni cinco Guaraníes ore reko ko’a tiempo ve! Lo karia’y o-mbiapo heta la karu hagua ha ndaipori ve!*” [There was no money for anyone. At that time nobody had even five Guaranies! The people worked hard just to eat and nothing was left over!] (Espínola, Personal Interview).

Since the introduction of the colonization programs of the 1960s and the promotion of cotton in concurrence with those programs, the peasant’s economic reality has changed significantly. As will be discussed later in greater detail, today’s peasant farmer is trapped in a cash-crop/debt cycle that requires him or her to cultivate crops that will produce a cash payment to pay off at least a portion of the last year’s debt.

#### **4.2.3 Past success.**

Farmers could count on much higher yields in the past. While today peasant farmers can only expect an average yield of 1,000 kilos per hectare, farmers in the recent past have experienced far higher yields up to and including

1,800 kilos per hectare.<sup>168</sup> The system of colonization permitted the utilization of previously unfarmed forest to be opened up for cotton farming. In peasant farming practices, *la quema* (slash and burn techniques) permit farmers to enrich the soil with the organic matter of the burned forest material in addition to the nutrients already in the soil. Typically, the cotton yields in *rosado*, first year slash and burn farming, vary between 1,500 and 2,000 kilos per hectare.

As long as the frontier remained open and peasants could colonize forested land, farming cotton remained profitable. However, since the closure of the open frontier, peasants have been forced to maintain the utility of their small farm holdings well beyond their ability to maintain productive agricultural yields. Even peasants who do occupy forested land find that their crop yields fall significantly after the first three years. After the first three years, when cotton yields vary between 1200-2000 kilos per hectare, average yields fall to 1000-1200 and then to 500-700 after five years (*Comité de Agricultores Ko'e Rory*, Group Interview).

The Paraguayan Ministry of Agriculture has forecast an average price of 850 Guaraníes per kilo of cotton in the country ("Desarrollo Humano" 11). At the present exchange rate of 7,000 Guaraníes per dollar, that yield produces a value of \$0.1214 per kilo for a total of nearly \$121.40 per hectare. Higher average yields and an average price of \$0.375/kilo in 1995 and \$0.428/kilo in 1996 produced

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<sup>168</sup> MAG estimates 1,200 Kilos/H ("Algodon" 28) while peasant organizations such as the FNC estimate average yields of only 1,000 kilos/H ("Campesinos no Aceptan" 18). In the northern departments of eastern Paraguay (*San Pedro, Paraguari, Concepcion, Amambay, Canindeyu, Cordillera, and Caaguazú*) the soils are silicate as opposed to the basaltic soils of the southeastern Paraguay and provide far lower cotton yields. It is important to note that the bulk of all occupations and *asentamientos* have occurred in north east of the country. *El Diario ABC Color* reported average cotton yields of only 800 kilos per hectare in the department of *Paraguari* in 2002 ("Preocupa Situación" 20).

\$533.25/hectare and \$449.4/hectare respectively in those seasons (Kevin Burns 3; “No Hay Condiciones” 4). With an average investment of \$844.95/H, the realized benefits of cotton production were -\$311.70/H and -395.55/H respectively. With an average of 2.5 hectares per peasant family losses amounted to \$779.25 and \$988.875 each year, especially since it requires a nine month period of intense labor to bring the product to market.

The reduction of loss each year is a result of the Guaraní’s decline in value versus the dollar.<sup>169</sup> The Guaraní’s loss of 390% of its value against the dollar between 1995 and 2002 while wages grew by a mere 50%, means that the real loss of peasant input in cotton farming has fallen. Still, it remains important to note that peasant inputs exceed production in cotton. It is still a losing enterprise.

#### **4.2.4 A Spirit of Independence.**

The Paraguayan peasant has a fiercely independent spirit. The ownership of land and the ability to earn one’s own living largely outside of the society of influence trading offers a powerful incentive for the Paraguayan peasant to plant cotton. While, on the one hand, planting cotton requires the peasant to commit to a subordinate economic relationship with respect to his lenders and cotton purchasers, it removes him or her from a clientelist system. Growing cotton enables the peasant farmer to earn his or her own living, to break away from a dependency upon *changa* and the concomitant debt that an employer accumulates as a result of offering work to a laborer.

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<sup>169</sup> The *Guaraní* has lost 390% of its value to the dollar between 1995 and 2003, moving from a rate of 1,800 Guaranies to the dollar in 1995 to a rate of 7,000 Guaranies to the dollar in 2003.

In Paraguay, labor has both social as well as economic components.

Socially, an employee is indebted to an employer for offering work. This system of debt-obligation is well explained by Saro Vera in Darwinian terms:

*El Paraguayo, si no puede mandar, encuentra una linea de parentesco con el poderoso. Si no la encuentra, se amigara con el compadre. El Paraguay es el país de los compadres. Es que el ciudadano común necesita de este respaldo porque no la ampara ningún derecho. Solamente es objeto de obligaciones y expuesto al capricho del hombre de poder. El paraguayo nunca tuvo voz y, mucho menos, voto efectivo. Se lo ha convertido en esclavo dorado por la ficción libertaria del contrato social de Rousseau. La tiene en la medida que un compadre lo ampara. Con mucha razón el Paraguayo deseará el poder.... (Vera 67-68)*

[The Paraguayan, if he cannot lead, finds a line of communication with power. If he doesn't find it, he makes an alliance. Paraguay is a country of alliances. The average citizen needs this support because no rights will protect him. He is only subject to obligations and exposed to the caprices of men of power. The Paraguayan has never had a voice nor, much less, an effective vote. He has been converted into the gilded slave by the liberatory fiction of Rousseau's social contract. It has him to the degree that a friend can help him. It is with reason that the Paraguayan wants power...].

Growing cotton offers a way to get out of the system of debt/obligation incurred through *changa*. Withdrawal from an unfair system of exploitation is the peasant's goal. The peasant doesn't need protection if he or she has his or her own farm, own money and own laborers. As Vera explains, the ideal for the Paraguayan peasant is to become one's own boss, thereby accruing both the economic as well as the social benefits that such an arrangement permits:

*Nadie tiene derecho a imponerse a nadie. Todos son dueños de sus propios actos. Cuando alguien pretende inmiscuirse en el procedimiento del otro, este le dira: "pea ningo che problema. Eyehecha ndé ne probléma reve ha che, che probléma reve." (Este es mi problema. Yo con el mio y tu con el tuyo). (Vera 34)*



[No one has the right to impose himself upon anyone else. Each person is responsible for him or herself. When someone intends to involve himself in the conduct of another, this is said: ("This is my problem. I will deal with mine and you will yours")].

Thus, cotton farming presents a two-horned dilemma to Paraguayan peasants. On the one hand, it offers enormous social freedom: freedom from the local clientelistic system, including the diminution of the local *patrón*'s power. On the other hand the peasant is literally trapped in a system of production that provides just enough cash to survive until the next loan becomes available. Each peasant lives with nearly a year's worth of floating debt that is shifted from one year to the next.

Clientelism has functioned for many hundreds of years, enslaving the Paraguayan peasant in a socio-economic system whose most visible feature was social.<sup>170</sup> The most visible feature of this new form of slavery is economic, earning the name cotton slavery. The future of cotton slavery is uncertain. A single year's failure to produce a sufficient crop (at least 1,000 kilos/hectare) doubles a peasant's debt and denies him or her access to governmental loans. Trapped in this system, the peasant who cannot receive government loans (at an average of 22%) must turn to a local *patrón* who will charge 5%/month or 45% over the nine months it takes the cotton crop to mature.

If actual day labor wages are calculated, it becomes obvious that cotton farming is far less profitable than working on the *haciendas* and other *latifundias*. An alternative to cotton is *changa* or wage-labor. A peasant can earn approximately 15,000 Guaraníes each day for his or her labor by working on

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<sup>170</sup> Clientelism, or *clientelismo*, is the system of reciprocal exchange of goods and services between individuals of unequal status reliant upon face-to-face negotiations (Powell 412).

*latifundial* farms or ranches. If a peasant were to spend merely six months in *changa* each year (assuming only an average of two working days each week for a total of 104 working days each year), he or she would earn 30,000 Guaraníes each week, 120,000 Guaraníes each month and 1,440,000 Guaraníes or \$205.71 each year. This is much more efficient than the labor-intensive use of an entire peasant family by planting 2½ hectares of cotton.

What is the actual value of peasant labor in cotton farming? By subtracting the material expenditures (seed, plow rental, capital interest and pesticides), approximately \$126.07, from total cotton production expenditures of \$194.00, we arrive at a total labor value of \$67.93 per hectare or \$169.825 per 2½ hectare cotton crop. Given the average rural family of eight (two adults and six children) and estimating that each family is required to produce an average of four adult units of work each year, the value of a year's labor per active family member is only \$42.46. This starkly contrasts the value of wage labor at \$205.71 each year. Finally, cotton production requires daily labor for the full period of nine months (let us estimate that an average of only four days of labor each week are required to produce cotton). This estimate produces a total of 144 days of labor for a daily rate of \$1.18. Daily wage labor, by comparison, produces a daily wage of 15,000 Guaraníes or \$2.14.

Thus, not only has the system of production managed in effect to lower the peasant's daily wages from the average daily wage of \$2.14/day to \$1.18/day, but it has succeeded in displacing almost the entirety of the inherent risks of farming from the cotton industry to the peasant. Cotton slavery places peasants in a far

more precarious position than landlessness. The peasant who owns his or her own land is heavily indebted and required to assume the risk of yet another cotton crop in order to salvage some of that debt. There is no alternative to cotton for the peasant.<sup>171</sup> The Paraguayan government has long issued bonds to subsidize the cotton industry and has also absorbed the responsibility of guaranteeing peasant debt. However, rather than forgive that debt, recent administrations have merely extended the payment period, in effect increasing the debt load of the peasant. Thus, peasant debt rises as the government extends payment periods and the cotton factories, their investors and owners become wealthy in a system that exploits peasants even more than the wage labor contracts recognized by the *hacendados* that have been the primary means of peasant exploitation from the time of the conquest until the early 1960s.

The irony of cotton slavery is that it is made possible by the individual peasant ownership of land. Furthermore, the individual ownership of land is a powerful incentive for peasants to willingly subject themselves to this form of exploitation. Eladio Flecha, president of the FNC, points out the power of cotton and land ownership as a single phrase, “*Si no hay algodón, el campo se empobrecerá y no habrá otra alternativa que llegar a la capital para realizar manifestaciones por tiempo indefinido*” [If there is no cotton in the rural Paraguay, it will become impoverished so there is no other alternative but to travel to the Capital to protest (for land and cotton subsidies) for as long as it

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<sup>171</sup> A lack of capital, technical knowledge, and market freedom for planting alternative crops makes change impossible for the Paraguayan peasant.

takes] (“Habr  Ocupaciones” 8). The concepts of land and cotton production are, today, intimately related in the mind of the Paraguayan peasant.

#### **4.3 Land and Land Reform, the Wrong Goal?**

Land ownership is only one challenge facing Paraguayan peasants. Larger issues of political and economic dependence remain unresolved even for those peasants whose struggles bring them ownership of small farms. In light of this fact, it appears land scarcity is a symptom of a more profound problem of Paraguayan rural and peasant society, the problem of dependency.

Throughout the entire history of the continent and to the present day in Paraguay, systems of patronage at all levels have removed individual Paraguayan peasants from the country’s social, political and economic processes. It must be clear by now that obtaining land by means of corrupt state institutions will not solve the problems of the peasants of Paraguay. The problem of land is only the most visible inequity in a culture of inequity. Despite the work of the Paraguayan land reform struggle and its successes over the last twenty years, suffering has only worsened. At the present moment small farms consisting of no more than five hectares comprise 40% of all farms in the country and farms of more than 1,000 hectares represent more than 80% of the arable land in the country and the situation is actually getting worse (Fogel, *Pobreza* 39). Since 1981 the GINI

index for land had increased from 0.921 in 1981 to 0.934 in 1991 (Fogel, *Pobreza* 39).<sup>172</sup>

A census conducted in 1992 revealed an endemic level of poverty with a concentration in the rural peasant population. The study showed that 64% of all Paraguayans live in poverty for a total of 2,885,379 people. Poverty in the countryside was best demonstrated by the proportion of all families in poverty. Seventy two percent of all rural families live in poverty, and more than 1,500,000 Paraguayan peasants did not have access to the basic necessities of life every day. In the most remote areas (the primary sites for land distribution) the problem is at its worst. Poverty in the department of *Alto Paraná* reaches a level of 90% of all families (Fogel, *Pobreza* 22-3).

The solution to Paraguay's problems does not appear to be in land reform, or at least in land reform as it has been implemented and practiced in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Land grabs as a protest strategy often entail dramatic displays of political resistance, yet such episodes fall short of qualifying as comprehensive solutions to the myriad political, economic, and social problems facing Paraguayan peasants. Even when land concessions are made to the peasants, it amounts to a temporary solution. As explained by Amanzio Ruíz of the *Asentamiento de Capi'ibary*, after eight years of struggle and sacrifice by peasants for land that 5,000 families presently occupy, "We are in a permanent state of vigilance. We only have this land without title. We have no security"

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<sup>172</sup> The GINI index is a means of measuring the degree of difference between two variables. It is used by economists as a common measure of resource distribution within a population with scores of zero indicating that the society equitably divides wealth and a score of one reflecting a completely inequitable society.

(Amanzio Ruíz, Personal Interview). Land titulation is a fiction in Paraguay.

Only through a constant process of defense of one's rights as a community and as individual peasant citizens can land rights be secured. As illustrated by the case of the land struggle in *Yvyturuzu*, even those land claims that are old can be challenged in a country where land appears to be little more than a socio-economic spur for the extraction of more peasant resources.

The social, economic and institutional factors that prevent any poor Paraguayan from improving his or her situation are not altered by the acquisition of a small plot of land. It should be obvious at this point that the real beneficiaries of the land reform struggle are not the peasants. The real beneficiaries of these social struggles are the middlemen, brokers, investors, cotton cartels, and others who benefit from extracting labor from the peasantry and evading the inherent risks in the process by sustaining a system of cotton slavery.

Any criterion for evaluating the success of the Paraguayan land reform struggle must not overlook the regressive political and economic effects of the concessions made by peasant to secure land ownership. In societies with great socio-economic disparities, the imperturbability of hegemonic systems that have operated for, in some cases, hundreds of years overlooks the co-optational nature of goal setting and demand creation. The selection of goals that offer symbolic independence from a hegemonic system that still interpolates subjects politically, socially, economically and culturally is not a successful strategy. The failure to question the premises of demands like land may be an insuperable problem in developing nations. Movements composed of illiterate citizens who accept as

truth the ideological regime that subordinates them will have serious difficulties in both satisfying the masses and achieving goals that will truly alleviate the social conditions that motivate those masses to rebel.

#### 4.4 Revisiting Criteria for Protest Success

In the case of developing nations, achievements in the areas of self-representation and nuanced strategy formation should be hailed as criteria for the success of social movements. Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino have pointed out that while social struggles throughout Latin America have achieved varying degrees of success in terms of political and social organization, real advancement has come in the area of self-representation as an essential foundation in the democratic process:

*Los movimientos sociales no sólo han logrado en algunas instancias transformar sus agendas en políticas públicas y expandir las fronteras de la política institucional, sino que también, muy significativamente, han luchado por ortogar nuevos significados a las nociones heredadas de ciudadanía, a la representación y participación política, y como consecuencia, a la propia democracia. Tanto los procesos mediante los cuales el programa de un movimiento se convierte en política pública, como los de búsqueda de una nueva definición del significado de términos como “desarrollo” o “ciudadano,” por ejemplo....* (Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino 18)

[Social movements have not only achieved, in some instances, the transformation of their agendas in public politics and expanded frontiers of institutional politics, but also, very importantly, they have struggled to obtain new significance for inherited notions of citizenship, representation in political participation and, as a consequence, their own sense of democracy. Just as these movement strategies have been applicable to public politics they serve as a search for a new definition for the meaning of terms such as “development” or “citizen,” for example...].

This link between the ideology of collective protest and its actual practice becomes an important factor in understanding the Paraguayan land reform struggle. If the function of the struggle is to articulate and represent the culture and ideology of its membership, then the struggle's relative failure to obtain concessions that both matter to the struggle's membership and actually address the exigencies motivating the struggle, can be better explained. In this light, the apparent failure of the Paraguayan land reform struggle to constitute itself as a coherent movement that can pressure authorities into granting concessions is eclipsed by a successful campaign to inject a previously excluded language, culture and ideology into national political and deliberative discussion.

Alberto Melucci has pointed out the fact that new social movements are difficult to evaluate and understand in terms of conventional analysis because "The meaning of the action [of a social movement] has to be found in the action itself more than in the pursued goals: movements are not qualified by what they do but by what they are" (Melucci, "Symbolic" 809). For Melucci, identities and methods are imbricated within social movement organizations. There is an intimate connection between the structure and methodology of a social movement organization's protest tactics and the culture of its membership. Evaluating the effectiveness of such organizations in terms of their organizational accomplishments is wrongheaded:

They don't have big leaders, organization seems quite inefficient, dis-enchantment has superseded great ideals. Many observers consider these realities, which don't challenge the political system and are not interested in the institutional effects of their action, as



residual, folkloristic phenomena in the big scenario of politics.  
(Melucci, "Symbolic" 810)

Melucci argues that organizational and political efficiency are not nearly as important to the nature or success of new social movements as the message and methods of such organizations, which function to "present to the rationalizing apparatuses questions which are not allowed" (Melucci, "Symbolic" 810).

Another misunderstanding that arises from the strategies employed by new social movements is that traditional analyses of their rhetorical effectiveness do not adequately reflect the goals of such strategies. Richard B. Gregg's critique of protest rhetoric of the 1960s as embodying an "ego function" that "seems purposely to ignore the styles of communication that might result in meaningful communication with the establishment" is a good example of this sort of misunderstanding (Gregg 87). Gregg described movements such as the Black Power movement and the Women's Liberation Movement as employing a rhetoric whose primary function was "self-directed and not other directed" and to "constitute self-hood through expression" (Gregg 74). This was problematic for Gregg because successful rhetoric employed appeals addressed to identify audiences for the purpose of moving such an audience to accept a rhetor's argument. By dismissing the "ego function" of protest rhetoric as an impediment creating clear channels of communication between protestors and their opponents, Gregg ignored the potential value of a self-representative protest strategy.

Melucci has argued that new social movements employ non-traditional protest strategies in successful ways to address new sets of goals. Abandoning a rhetorical model that accepts the existence of interlocutors equally capable of

addressing one another in the process of argumentation, new social movements question the premises that ground society and serve as starting points for public deliberation:

But beyond modernization, beyond cultural innovation, movements question society on something “else”: who decides on codes, who establishes rules of normality, what is the space for difference, how can one be recognized not for being included but for being accepted as different, not for increasing the amount of exchanges but for affirming another kind of exchange? (Melucci, “Symbolic” 810)

The advantages of such a rhetorical analysis are apparent. In order to determine whether or not the Paraguayan land reform struggle has been a success or a failure, specific criteria have to be established. Significant questions have been raised in this section about the level of self-awareness of the Paraguayan peasant. Not only have concerns been raised from a theoretical perspective, speculating that the struggle may have failed to raise its primary participant to an appropriate level of social and political awareness, but the very goals of the movement have been called into question. How can the struggle be called successful when successful protest ultimately results in cotton slavery for the peasant? Finally, the cycle of *minifundización* would seem to doom the struggle to failure as each successive generation of the peasantry grows both in its numbers and its hunger for finite land holdings in a small country.

Before completely writing off the Paraguayan land reform struggle as hopeless, another question of importance arises, “What factors inhibit the success of the struggle?” Both Melucci and Touraine have suggested that unsuccessful social struggles like the Paraguayan land reform struggle fail to realize their potential to challenge the “rules of normality” or the historicity of the society.

The next section will examine the circumstances preventing the Paraguayan land reform struggle from achieving a higher, and more abstract level of struggle in the mold of the new social movement.

## V. Peasants, New Social Movements and Rhetoripolitics

### 5.1 Introduction

Amanzio Ruíz was a man in his thirties when I met him. He had three children and a wife waiting for him at home when we first spoke at the headquarters of the MCNOC. He was eager to return home to work. He had been away from home for about a week, organizing peasants and attending meetings in anticipation of a nationwide protest. I traveled with him to his home in the *Asentamiento Capi'ibary*, the site of one of the more famous peasant land reform struggles and a victory and inspiration for many landless peasants in Paraguay.

It was a five-mile walk from the main road to his house, so we stopped at an *almacén* on the way, where I bought a coke. He looked at me and asked why I put that into my body explaining that we would have everything that we would need to eat and drink when we arrived at his house. He was obviously proud to be a landowner and expounded on the many varieties of fruit that grew wild on the trees in *Capi'ibary*. I was impressed with his respect for nature and even more impressed with his work ethic.

When we arrived at his house, he quickly went to work, building a shower for his wife and children. I offered to help, but was told to go talk to the neighbors and to learn about the struggles of the peasants so that I could tell others when I returned to my own country. He finished building the shower as I returned and promised to take me into his fields and to show me the community projects the next day.

The community had invested in a cattle barn and, with government support, had developed a small herd of skinny cows. Amanzio talked about the necessity for more investment and about the hard labor of cotton farming and the hope for a big harvest in the coming year. It was hard to ignore the ubiquitous smoke and the clear-cut acreage visible throughout the *asentamiento*. The peasants had obviously deforested about half of what was once a 5,000 acre forested reserve to make *carbon*, or charcoal that sold for about a \$0.10/lb. Literally, tens of thousands of mature trees had been felled and burned to make way for the cotton that Amanzio and his compadres would begin to plant in November.

Amanzio's ten-hectare lot would provide *carbon* for several years until the trees are all felled. The cotton will grow well for the first three to five years, after which, production will decline without inputs of fertilizer or disuse of the land. When I asked him about the soil, he indicated that he understood that it was fragile, explaining that many of the peasants who received land from the government in the *asentamiento* left as *cocue cue* or unusable, worn out land nearby where the soil had turned sandy as a result of intensive farming and was filled with nothing but weeds that the cows wouldn't eat. "*¿Que pasará en diez o sea veinte años, xe ra'a?*" [What will happen in ten or twenty years, my friend?], I asked him. He replied, "*Vamos a procurar tierra nueva. Siempre hay más tierra.*" [We will get new land. There is always more land].

This final chapter synthesizes a number of different elements employed in the analysis of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. By summarizing the context of the Paraguayan land struggle, examining the ability of the peasant express him or herself in the context of the land reform struggle, and situating the struggle within the context of the rhetorical social movement theory such lines of inquiry will yield a rhetorical model for protest struggles. Extrapolating from the Paraguayan example, such a model will shed light on the nature and success or failure of the Paraguayan struggle and may be applicable to other struggles in the developing world as well.

## **5.2 Conditions of the Struggle**

The key factor in any social movement is the movement's ability to identify real objectives that address the social problems generating the impetus for the movement. The purpose of a social movement is to *change* society by means that lie *outside* of the natural roles of citizens in a society. Thus, citizens participating in a social movement have come to an agreement that the *social system* cannot address their problems and that extraordinary actions must be taken to foment change in the existing order. Protest functions as an instrument for pressuring the social system to accept change.

The real dilemma of the Paraguayan peasant is that little has changed despite more than sixteen years of protest. Thus far, the Paraguayan land reform struggle has achieved very limited successes. Clearly, appeals for land, for honesty and leadership as well as government support for the cotton industry have failed to spur radical changes in land tenure policy. Peasant demands, even when

protest activity has successfully forced the society to accede to the demands of the protesters, have only reinforced the status quo. The Paraguayan peasant and his or her identity has been so deeply interpolated into the expansionist agrarian model of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s that the goals of the movement are nothing short of a call for the re-imposition of that system of socio-economic domination.

Land ownership, while the ostensible goal of the struggle, functions as a constraining ideology that prevents the peasantry from envisaging a new socio-economic model. Land is a powerful ideograph that has symbolized power since the original *encomiendas* of the conquest. Each successive Paraguayan socio-economic system, until the early 1960s was premised on land ownership.

Ironically, just as peasants began to make some small gains in land ownership with the establishment of the IBR, land started to evolve into a means of control. Poor peasants have not benefited from land ownership even though they have, in many cases, obtained land and the economic freedom that land ownership symbolically represents.

As Paraguay modernized and moved from an internal economy to an export economy, its entire economic structure began to change. Under the hegemony of the *latifundios*, even as recently as the 1950s, denying peasants land was an economic strategy that forced down labor costs by compelling peasants to choose between service on a *latifundio* or starvation. There was no other choice than to serve a *latifundista* by colonizing and preparing inhospitable forest for cattle ranching and other resource extraction techniques. The resources were then sold to internal or nearby markets such as Sao Paolo and Buenos Aires. This

system was predicated upon the exclusion of peasants from land ownership in order to compel their labor in these industries.

In the newly emerging export market, including beef but also soybeans and most importantly cotton, the technique of labor compulsion changed. In the 1950s *latifundistas* who rented land to peasants discovered that they could make more money by permitting peasants to grow their own cotton than by employing peasants on large cotton farms. A large farm with a large cotton crop assumes a great deal of risk. *Latifundistas* who once fiercely opposed occupying peasant labor by distributing abundant state land, now strongly advocated the distribution of land for the purpose of distributing risk. *Latifundistas* who once had to openly exploit peasants to work their plantations and ranches in order to turn a healthy profit could make more money with less risk as *acopiadores*, local buyers and middlemen for international cotton markets. Buying and re-selling peasant cotton at huge profits allowed these large landholders to reduce the intensity of their large-scale forestry, ranching and agricultural enterprises as the limited labor resources of the peasantry were better applied elsewhere.

An additional benefit to this economic shift was that the open exploitation of the peasantry created an unruly populace and potentially destabilized governments that required peasant support in order to remain in power. Exploited peasants were poor workers; while, on the other hand, peasants who had been granted land were hard working and self-sacrificing.

The economic shift was completed as the strong military government that emerged in the mid 1950s freed itself from the dominating influence of foreign



*latifundistas*. Since the end of the War of the Triple Alliance, in which the country accumulated huge foreign debts, and the end of the Chaco War, Paraguay had been economically dominated by large foreign corporations. By 1930, foreign corporations owned fully one half of all Paraguayan territory, including private highways, ports and even issuing their own currencies (Fogel, *Luchas* 31). Shifting labor patterns depleted these corporations of a source of labor and, thereby, their ability to generate capital and power in the country. This strategy can plainly be seen as early as 1950 in congressional resolution No. 1.757 signed into law by Roberto L. Petit:

*Ciudadanos extranjeros ocupan clandestinamente dichas tierras, con considerable cantidad de ganado vacuno...que pastan en esos campos, para luego ser pasados a territorios extranjeros eludiendo el pago de los derechos fiscales, y con el siguiente perjuicio para la economía del país...que existen miles de compatriotas que desean repatriarse y para los cuales deben habilitarse nuevas colonias agrícolas y ganaderías en todos los lugares aptos del país y de conformidad con las disposiciones legales vigentes.* (Fogel, *Luchas* 35)

[Foreign citizens clandestinely occupy these lands with a considerable quantity of cattle...that graze in those fields for the purpose of being transported to foreign lands eluding the payment of export duties and causing damage to the country's economy...while there exist thousands of countrymen who wish to relocate and those who could establish new agricultural and ranching colonies where appropriate and in conformity with the laws of the nation].

Thus, the strategy of agricultural colonization constituted a socio-economic revolution whereby a new elite class composed of entrepreneurs, middlemen, the owners of freight companies, shipping contracts and cotton gins displaced an older elite class either composed of or dependent upon the domination of foreign corporations and their control of the peasant labor market.

Selling the idea of independence through ownership of land, the new elite deeply interpolated the peasant into the new economic model, working toward the establishment of agricultural colonization of state lands to support cotton farming by individual peasants.

Today, with the closure of the agricultural frontier and a new scarcity of land, the peasantry is mounting stronger and stronger protests for the redistribution of the large land tracts that have remained under-utilized within the new economic system while their owners have made their money either directly or indirectly through cotton farming (and, more recently, through the *Itaipúa* and *Yacreta* dam projects). Peasants, although living in a system of exploitation in which they lose money by growing cotton each year, march in the streets demanding land re-distribution, cotton subsidies, as well as political and social change.

The peasantry is caught in an extraordinary dilemma; they can only articulate demands for the reconstitution of a system that ruthlessly exploits them. Peasants are over-determined within a socio-economic system that defines the very language they have available for explaining their condition. Tommy Stromberg describes the weakness of challenges to a hegemonic state in Paraguay in his analysis of the April 1996 coup attempt:

Civil society in Paraguay is very limited and fragile, with only sporadic signs of organization and of articulation of demands. It lacks continuity and, thus, also the ability to put pressure on the political institutions. Another deficiency of Paraguayan politics is the absence of a strong party on the left of the political landscape. Political apathy is prevalent in Paraguay since people in general perceive the democratic institutions, together with the armed

forces, as one single apparatus, instead of as tools for political participation. (Stromberg 4.1.1)

The position of the political left is very weak in Paraguayan politics if it exists at all and the Paraguayan land reform struggle represents the most resilient counter-political movement in the society since the Civil War of 1947. The post-Stroessner political environment has made strides toward democratization; yet, there remains a lag between the institution of a structural democracy and a civil conception of democratic representation. State reforms have not yet fundamentally transformed the political practices that are largely imbedded in the minds of the Paraguayan people themselves. Yet, as Stromberg points out, the distance between the idea of democracy and its actual practice is only growing:

In order to consolidate democracy, the civil society would have to attain a greater level of participation in state affairs.... Paraguay demonstrates a case where, in terms of origin, the institutions are daily becoming more and more legitimate, while, in terms of results produced (social deterioration) democracy is becoming less and less legitimate. The obstacle to civic development is the miserable economic conditions of much of the citizenry. They are not in a position to benefit from civic education since their needs are of a much more immediate character. (Stromberg 4.1.1)

The absence of a civil society and the presence of the state in daily life has facilitated a top-down model for dissemination of information and state ideology. This is most evident in the constant peasant demand for greater representation/participation in the neo-liberal economic model that is succeeding the neo-colonial practices of the past. Given the present peasant experience with cotton, one would think that peasant demands would be directed at liberating peasants from cotton slavery. Quite to the contrary, peasant demands reinforce their ties to that crop and the exploitative practices that accompany it. Rather than

arguing against the logic of the market, i.e. that peasants lack the technological sophistication to compete in a world economy, peasants demand greater participation in agricultural markets with technical assistance rather than suggesting alternatives to that neo-liberal economic policy.

The politics of neo-liberalism were popularized by the fall of the dictatorship (1989), the free elections of 1992 and Paraguay's entry into MERCOSUR in 1985. The Paraguayan government's ideological commitment to MERCOSUR was convenient since many wealthy Paraguayans were already gaining their living with export-oriented agriculture. However, just as in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the owners of *hacendados* exploited peasant labor in order to both maximize personal gain and monopolize wealth, the merchants who control the price, transport and handling of agricultural products produced by peasants exploit peasant labor to maximize personal gain and monopolize wealth today. The whole of Paraguayan society, including peasants, has been inundated with promises of wealth and glory following the integration of Paraguay into MERCOSUR and, thereby, the world economy.

The peasantry has been specifically targeted with much of this propaganda in order to obfuscate the real relationship of the peasantry to the world economy, an exploitative relationship that centers around the utilization of cheap labor. Within a larger economic system and its concomitant competitive pressures, peasants are not viewed as private citizens, but as a pool of labor, property of those who wish to compete in the new markets that MERCOSUR offers. Looking

toward a more competitive Paraguay, one that could compete in MERCOSUR and beyond, Daniel Campos explains what must be done with the peasantry:

*Este proceso de modernización trata de esta manera de adecuar las potencialidades institucionales del Ministerio de Agricultura (MAG) a los nuevos desafíos de la globalización de las economías y la mayor exigencia de competitividad y eficiencia en los mercados regionales, específicamente en el MERCOSUR. Dentro de este contexto, el MAG reconoce la necesidad de replantear el modelo de desarrollo rural campesino que estuvo vigente hasta el año 1989. Este reconocimiento es debido a que en el modelo anterior no se han contemplado los aspectos ambientales, culturales y racionalidad de la economía campesina con su potencialidad para ser transformada y reactivada a través de un proceso de reconversión productivo con mayor competitividad y eficiencia en articulación a los mercados comunitarios, districtales, departamentales, nacionales y regional-internacionales (MERCOSUR). (Campos 135)*

[This process of modernization attempts to utilize the Ministry of Agriculture to address the new challenges of globalization of the economy and the greater need for competitiveness and efficiency in regional markets and, especially, in MERCOSUR. Within this context, the Ministry of Agriculture recognizes the necessity of re-establishing the model of rural development that has been in place since 1989. This recognition is required because the older model had not considered environmental and cultural aspects as well as the rationalization of the peasant economy with its potential to be transformed and reactivated through productive change with greater competitiveness and efficiency in relation to local, district, state, national and regional-international (MERCOSUR) markets].

Intellectuals, like Campos, form one important source of land reform arguments; however, Paraguayan intellectuals represent the international aspect of the struggle and function primarily to translate the ideology of globalism to the Paraguayan peasant without an adequate concern for the effects of such an economic transformation upon the peasantry and without regard to the participation of the peasantry themselves in the decision to “*transformar y reactivar*” [transform and start the recovery of] the peasant economy. In these

terms, as Paraguay modernizes, the peasant economy must modernize as well and the Ministry of Agriculture is one of the primary tools for that task *because the peasantry cannot manage themselves*.

Intellectuals like Campos justify this paternalistic attitude with the logic of economic necessity. As the primary governmental representative throughout the countryside, MAG and the agronomists who administer the ministry's programs have the responsibility not only to carry out the program explained by Campos above but to educate the peasants about the necessity and the benefits of modernization. Thus, through propaganda spread directly via the practice and advertising of the national agricultural strategy as well as the indirect effect of other government programs that promote intensification of cash crops, by providing "free" seed or low interest loans, peasants have come to identify their plight with their lack of a competitive advantage and a real need to embrace globalism.

Even those internationalists who explicitly favor peasant demands in the land reform struggle have adopted the neo-liberal position. For example, Carlos Fernandez Gadea, the sitting president of the Paraguayan supreme court, while arguing for the redistribution of land in Paraguay invokes a neo-liberal rhetoric:

*Quiero señalar que el tema de TIERRA, es fundamental en la política agraria de mi país [Paraguay]. No podemos olvidar que existe una VERDADERA LEGION DE SIN TIERRAS, que deambulan por el campo en espera de que el ESTADO pueda hacer efectiva su promesa constitucional, de atender las necesidades primarias de estos sujetos agrarios, de esta población campesina, que es elemento dinámico de la producción agraria. Mientras no hay soluciones a estos problemas, no existirá tranquilidad, no habrá nuevas inversiones, y los niveles productivos como en muchos rubros seguirán bajando por todos estos problemas. (Gadea 1)*

[I want to note that the theme of LAND is fundamental to agrarian politics in my country (Paraguay). We cannot forget that there exists a literal legion of landless poor who wander the countryside in the hope that the STATE will make good on its constitutional promise to attend the primary needs of these agro-citizens who are such a dynamic element in agricultural production. Meanwhile, without solutions to these problems, there is no peace and will be no new investments or higher levels of production as many crops continue losing their values as a result of these problems].

In Gadea's description, the land problem is not a question of fair distribution, but rather is a question of efficiency of use. The Neo-liberal position subtly shifts the exigence for land reform from a humanist perspective grounded in the real misery of the peasantry to an economic perspective grounded in a view of land as just one element in a system of economic production. Note here how the peasantry is defined *en masse*. Furthermore, peasants are objectified as "dynamic elements" whose integration into the economic system is necessary to optimize the modernization, efficiency and competitiveness of Paraguay's economic project. Nowhere in Gadea's argument is there a notion that peasants might have a hand in the project of defining themselves or the Paraguayan economy: it is a *fait accompli*.

Still, as Chapter Three demonstrated, there are many different sources of arguments in the Paraguayan land reform struggle. All sources of argument in the struggle, including positions offered by the intelligentsia and local peasant organizations, have been co-opted with the adoption of neo-liberal economic policy. The subversion of peasant demands is not just a matter of the ventriloquizing of peasants by intellectuals and government officials. The peasants themselves are interpolated in a hegemonic system whose economic,

social and political premises are counter-productive to the peasant cause. Peasant demands call for the re-imposition of the very socio-economic system that has been responsible for their impoverishment and virtual slavery, primarily through their dependence upon mono-cultivation and the cultivation of cotton.

The position of the FNC demonstrates just how deeply the rhetoric of neo-liberal modernization has penetrated national-popular argument sources. While the FNC criticizes the monopolistic and exploitative practices of *La Cámara Algodonera del Paraguay* (CADELPA), at the same time, the organization places demands upon the government that its peasant members commit more deeply to the cotton crop.

In a press release at the beginning of the (2001-2002) *Zafra Algodonera*, or cotton harvest, the FNC clearly points out the monopolistic practices of CADELPA and the collusion of the state in supporting the exploitation of the peasantry, “*El Estado se convirtió en un instrumento de los empresarios agroexportadores*” [The State has become a tool of agricultural capitalists] (“Campesinos Repudian” 12). According to the release, the policies of the Paraguayan state, including the Ministry of Agriculture have maintained a system of inequality that “*sólo trajo enormes beneficios y grandes fortunas a los capitalistas nucleados en la Cámara Algodonera del Paraguay* (CADELPA)” [only brings enormous benefits and great fortunes to the capitalists who form the Paraguayan Cotton Board. (“Campesinos Repudian” 12).

On the other hand, the FNC President, Eladio Flecha, stated only four days later that the government’s unresponsiveness to the FNC demand for free cotton



seed for its members would result in conflict: “*Si no hay algodón, el campo se empobrece y no habrá otra alternativa que llegar a la capital para realizar manifestaciones por tiempo indefinido*” [If there is no cotton, the rural countryside will be impoverished and there will be no other alternative but to travel to the capital to protest for as long as it takes] (“Habra Ocupaciones” 8) In response to the demands, on December 15, 2001, Luis González-Macchi absolved the agriculture sector, including peasants, of 90 million dollars of agricultural debt according to *el Ministerio de Hacienda*, Francisco Oviedo Brítez (“Ultimatum al gobierno” 1+).

This apparent victory is marred by the simple fact that forgiving this huge amount of accrued debt amounted to a state subsidy for cotton production. Eliminating the debt (much of which was owed by wealthy farmers and even wealthy cotton processors) allowed CADELPA to maintain a system that exploited more than 300,000 peasant families who, once again, turned to cotton as a way of life, thus beginning the debt-cycle once again.

In fact, many of the apparent victories of the peasantry, in the form of concessions wrung from the Paraguayan government, including land, free cotton seed, free pesticides, technical assistance, and debt forbearance, amount to important infusions of capital into a dysfunctional economic system. Because the average peasant actually loses money each year that he or she produces cotton, debt is a serious problem with the system. When peasant debt grows to levels that prevent the peasants from borrowing more capital, the system is endangered. The real exploitative mechanism in the Paraguayan system of cotton slavery is the

ability of the cotton processors to shift the burden of investment risk to peasants. This is, essentially, why land ownership does not benefit the peasant in the end. The ownership of land provides an incentive for the peasant to assume debt and the high risk of crop failure in a world market buffeted by swings in cotton prices.

The problem with this system is that the peasant who assumes debt is only one failed cotton crop away from bankruptcy. Unable to pay off one year's worth of debt, in addition to the accumulation of debt from previous years, the peasant suddenly can no longer assume the entirety of the risk in the system of cotton production. In an economic system where such bankruptcies are commonplace, the entire edifice would collapse without the constant infusion of government funds. Governmental concessions to peasant demands for land, credit or free agricultural products amount to subsidies for the cotton processors. They do not solve the problem of the debt cycle for peasants but only serve to dampen the fluxuations in the cycle, making them bearable for the peasant. They also re-inscribe the peasant in an inferior role within the paternalistic relationship between state and citizen. Most peasant demands are, thus, not true demands that challenge the system of cotton slavery and peasant exploitation by seeking alternatives to the system; rather, they are merely calls for infusions of capital into a system that continues to ruthlessly exploit the peasantry.

Important questions arise from the conclusion that the land reform struggle fails to redress inequities of the poverty, powerless, exploitation and land scarcity that peasants experience everyday. How has the peasant's self-perception of his or her situation functioned as a cultural constraint on the success of the struggle?

What are the prospects for the struggle to transcend such constraints by transforming the terrain of struggle? Finally, one must ask, What happened? How can a social struggle that originated in the real experience of peasant exploitation become handmaiden to the very system of exploitation and inequity the struggle was designed to challenge?

The answer to these questions rests heavily upon the nature of peasant self-awareness. Indeed, for a social struggle to articulate the identity and needs of its membership, the individual members of the struggle must first understand themselves and their needs. Peasant self-awareness of needs and identity bears importantly upon the ability of a social struggle to obtain concessions that matter to its membership and to represent its membership in the course of public argument. The misidentification or misunderstanding of peasant identity and needs on the part of the peasants themselves would seriously handicap the emergence of such a social movement as theorists like Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, and Arturo Escobar have identified.

### **5.3 Obstacles to Peasant Self-representation**

The Paraguayan peasants view of the world and of their place in it is shaped by an array of ideologies. Neo-colonialist economic practices, neo-liberal politics, globalism, traditional *Stronismo*, as well as rural culture, native linguistic and social practices, all present themselves as vocabularies for representation of the peasant. Alain Touraine has noted the unique degree of influence that the

state exercised over the Paraguayan population under Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda:

*Estuve en 1983 o 1984, no recuerdo. Vine poco tiempo después del cierre de la Facultad de Sociología de la Universidad Católica. Me llamaba mucho la atención el alto grado de control que ejercía el Gobierno sobre la población.... Este era especial. Este contraste yo no encontraba por ejemplo ni en Chile de Pinochet ni en Argentina de Videla ni en Brasil de los militares. En esos lugares había represión, pero no control absoluto como aquí. El Paraguay de Stroessner es el único caso -y yo lo mencionó a menudo- de un régimen de tendencia totalitaria y no sólo autoritaria, de naturaleza fascista. (Olazar 2)*

[I was in (Paraguay) in 1983 or 1984, I don't remember. I had come a little after the closure of the School of Sociology of the Catholic University. The high degree of control that the government exercised over the population caught my attention.... This was special. This contrasted (with other cases) for example in the Chile of Pinochet nor in Videla's Argentina nor in Brazil under the military. In those places there was repression but not absolute control like here. The Paraguay of Stroessner is the only case—and I mention it often—of a regimen with a totalitarian tendency and not only authoritarian, but of a fascist character].

The influence of the Stroessner regime cannot be easily dismissed. When accused of being a *Stronista*, the late vice-president, Luis Argaña said, “*Todos somos hijos de Stroessner.*” [We are all children of Stroessner]. Argaña's insight was that, even after the fall of the Stroessner regime, the average Paraguayan was conditioned to accept rulership from above and was not yet capable of participating in a democracy.

In fact, the trajectory of the Paraguayan land reform struggle illustrates just this point. The peasants have been bombarded on all sides by propaganda in support of Paraguay's entry into global markets. Not only have peasants fully accepted the necessity for modernization and transformation of their lives,

economies, and futures, but they have also adopted a language for self-representation provided to them by neo-liberal and globalist ideologies. Peasant demands to be trained in modern agricultural methods, to be provided the most potent pesticides in order to increase yields, and to be permitted access to markets, all guarantee the peasant dependence upon cotton and other primary crops as well as the system of virtual slavery that such practices reinforce. However, and more importantly, peasants have conceded the right to define themselves within the emerging economic order as self-representing agents. They have traded away a negotiating position capable of shaping the economic future of the country for short-term goals such as land and technical assistance.

Unfortunately, the Paraguayan land reform struggle has been completely co-opted by the neo-liberal rhetoric of modernization. However, the mechanism by which this is carried out is not simply a *de facto* shift from one economic system to another. It is highly dependent upon the promulgation of a state ideology and statist influence over public opinion as the mechanism for defining peasant identity. Already primed to receive ideology and language from their leaders as a result of the 35 year long *Stroneato*, peasants even more so than the average Paraguayan are ready to accept leadership and ideas from above. The importation of globalist and neo-colonial ideologies and vocabularies utilize the control mechanisms of the dictatorship (which have endured to this day in the conservative Paraguayan society) to re-inscribe the peasant as an economic subject.

As Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate and one-time Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist for the World Bank, unintentionally argues, moving into a new system of economic relations is more about redefining individual and state identities than it is about actually transforming practices:

Development represents a transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional ways of thinking, traditional ways of dealing with health and education, traditional methods of production, to more “modern” ways. For instance, a characteristic of traditional societies is the acceptance of the world as it is; the modern perspective recognizes change, it recognizes that we, as individuals and societies, can take actions which, for instance, reduce infant mortality, increase life-spans, and increase productivity. Key to these changes is the movement to “scientific” ways of thinking, identifying critical variables which affect outcomes, attempting to make inferences based on available data, recognizing what we know and what we do not know. (Stiglitz 2)

While Stiglitz and other proponents of the market transformation of developing societies argue that economic innovation offers opportunities to redress the unresolved inequities of older economic systems, Arturo Escobar argues that the problem lies not in the inequities themselves, since these are merely symptoms of the real problem: the inability to construct an inclusive society. Escobar identifies the problem directly: “The Hegemonic discourse [has] transformed the system thorough which identities were defined” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). Marginal social groups in Latin America have never had the ability to define themselves. Groups identify themselves using the language provided by the state: “the ‘illiterate,’ the ‘landless peasants,’ ‘women bypassed by development,’ the ‘hungry and malnourished,’ ‘those belonging to the informal sector,’ ‘urban marginals,’ and so forth” out of which the category of landless peasant is only one of a host of “identity groups” (Escobar, “Culture” 65).

Importing economic discourses that define the Paraguayan peasant as a “small farmer” using “traction technologies,” or “capital averse” strategies becomes detrimental to the peasant who becomes disenfranchised within such a discourse. Economies, Escobar argues, possess a “cultural content” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). “Every new technology inaugurates a ritual—a way of doing things, of seeing the world, and of organizing the social field” (Escobar, “Culture” 69). Adopting a global economic system, as Stiglitz suggests, doesn’t just exchange one set of economic exigencies for another, but it restructures the entire culture. The radical economic shift that Paraguay has experienced from an internally directed agricultural economy in 1989 to an outwardly directed economy predicated upon the export of primary products and the import of technology has systematically excluded specific economic groups from society. In the case of the Paraguayan peasant, the re-definition of peasant identity in purely economic terms was coupled with the derogatory view of the peasant as the lazy, uneducated, uncooperative drunkard. These traditional peasant myths functioned to exclude peasants from the economic discussions that emerged after the *coup d’etat* of 1989. The Paraguayan peasant with his or her *sombrero piri* [traditional straw hat] and *py nandí* [bare feet] is, by definition, unable to compete in a world market predicated upon mass production and mechanized farming.<sup>173</sup>

Neo-liberal rhetorics have openly benefited the Paraguayan elites and have re-inscribed the disenfranchisement of the peasantry following earlier systems of control imposed by dictators and administrations in turn for nearly 500 years.

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<sup>173</sup> *Sombrero piri* is also the name of a conservative faction within the Partido Liberal that claims to represent the peasantry.

There is little doubt in the minds of most Paraguayans that the government and its rhetorics by no means serve the interests of the peasant majority. The term “*mondacráticos*” is a *jópara* term meaning, “thieving rulers” that would be recognizable to every Paraguayan citizen. Lino Oviedo, the ex chief of the armed forces and self-proclaimed defender of peasant interests has called the political arrangements following the *coup d’état* of 1989 a “*pacto de mondabilidad*” [thieves’ agreement] (Oviedo 263). He points out that the culture of iron-fisted rule is revealed by the alliances formed within the Paraguayan government in which, even under supposed democratic rule, the most important positions in government are filled lackeys of the ex-dictator, an arrangement he questions. “¿A usted le parece razonable esa unión de ‘luchadores’ con ‘dictadores’, con los hijos mimados de Stroessner?” [Does this union of the opposition with dictators, with those raised by Stroessner, seem reasonable to you?] (Oviedo 263)

Why don’t peasants present a modern image of themselves to the public? The problem is, as Escobar has pointed out, marginalized social groups are labeled by the society in ways that systemically exclude them from public life. Touraine’s concept of “historicity” can be usefully applied to the ability of the *mondacráticos* [thieving rulers] to control “the set of cultural models that rule social practices” defining both the public conversation about the Paraguayan economy and, at the same time, the identity of the Paraguayan peasant as a subject of that economy (Touraine, *Les Sociétés* 8).

The ability of the peasant to participate in the historicity of the Paraguayan society has been seriously diminished by the profound penetration of the market



system into all sectors of society. The entry of a developing nation such as Paraguay into the world economy is a strategy that only furthers a relationship of dependence that defers and disguises social problems by reframing them.

*La ruine du populisme, liée a la pénétration des marchés intérieurs par le capitalisme étranger ou a des crises internationales graves fait passer au premier plan le problème de l'accumulation capitaliste, donc de la répression des demandes populaires. On voit donc apparaître, en liaison avec le capitalisme étranger, parfois contre lui, un Etat qui referme le système politique mais que augmente considérablement son propre rôle économique. C'est alors qu'on peut sortir de la situation de dépendance pour entrer dans celle de capitalisme périphérique ou tardif. (Touraine, Les Sociétés 53)*

[The failure of populism, tied to the penetration of internal corridors by foreign capitalism or by severe international crises has permitted in the first case, the problem of over-accumulation and, thereby, the repression of popular demands. One sees appear then, in relation with foreign capitalism, sometimes against it, a state that closes-up the political system in a manner that considerably augments its own economic role. This then is what one can make of the situation of dependence resulting from entry into peripheral or late capitalism].

Touraine's argument that real social movements seize historicity is seriously problematized by the adoption of neo-liberal and globalist ideologies by the peasants themselves. Rather than looking to recover old practices, peasants and the organizations that represent them have chosen to seize upon "improved" social and economic practices as means of empowerment. In such a position, the peasant is trapped between an old system of political domination by the oligarchic elites and a new regime, a powerful central government that restricts political participation in the name of the economy. One master, who was very visible under the *Stroneato*, gives way to a new one that is diffuse, exercising power through exploitative market mechanisms.

Entry into the world economy by means of arrangements such as MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) de-centers power, while in no way diminishing the domination of the peasantry. During the *Stroneato*, it was clear who was a member of the ruling elite and who was not. Decisions as well as blame originated from and returned to this group. Resistance and change could be directed towards the oligarchs. In the past, under this economic system, invading and appropriating land was a direct blow to the power of the oligarchs, whose real economic power lay in the control of land as the primary means of agricultural production in the country. Today, the peasant occupation and seizure of land results, not in a blow to the oligarchy; rather, it results in yoking the peasant to a system of production that ends up pitting the poor from many nations against one another in a losing contest to produce cheap cotton as well as other agricultural products.

The neo-liberal economic reforms in Paraguay, as well as in other developing nations around the world, have disenfranchised citizens and alienated them from the historicity of the process, the ability to participate in economic, social and cultural self-definition. The bulk of the protest demands offered by the Paraguayan land reform struggle seek only to accommodate peasants to the emerging economic hegemony of MERCOSUR and global capitalism. It should be obvious that this economic reorganization can only result in the re-incorporation of peasants into a system of inequality. Even when apparently substantial concessions of land are made the lack of social services and the “natural” pressures of the market conspire to re-inscribe the land-owning peasant

back into a historically grounded system of cotton slavery. Furthermore, the failures of land reform as a method of wealth redistribution are attributed to the failure of the peasants themselves to compete in the market as economic subjects; this scapegoats the peasant as the weak link in an economic system that serves its own peculiar logic to the detriment of human beings.

Thus far, the Paraguayan land reform struggle has failed to recognize the real needs of the small-scale, rural Paraguayan farmer. Compromises and short-term gains have made no impact upon the larger issue of the self-identification and self-governance. Poor peasants have not benefited from and have, in fact, become dependent upon the movement's politics of opposition. The failure of the land reform struggle to address the historicity of the struggle has 1) hidden the real site of contestation, historicity, the power to define the national economic system and individual identity, 2) rationalized the spread of a market capitalism that has permitted the Paraguayan elite class to maintain its monopoly over cultural and economic development. In effect, the rhetoric of the new economic system has denied the responsibility of the state to shelter its individual citizens; rather, it has appropriated the ideology of the dictatorial regime it followed by asserting that individuals are defined by their ability to contribute to the state and to the "national economy."

#### **5.4 Is the Paraguayan Land Reform Struggle an NSM?**

The preceding discussion would seem to suggest that the Paraguayan land reform struggle has failed, but before it may be informative to examine, in more

depth, its character as a new social movement before passing final judgment. An examination of the Paraguayan land reform struggle as a new social movement may suggest how the Paraguayan struggle can productively evolve into an effective challenge to the status quo as well as suggest possibilities for struggles in other regions of the world that face similar problems. Scholarly work on the rhetoric of social movements may be helpful in this task.

Leland Griffin implied in his groundbreaking work “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements” what Robert S. Cathcart so tersely summarizes: “A social movement does not appear on the scene fully developed” (Cathcart 269). Griffin merely pointed out that an effective study of social movement phenomena would require “description, analysis, and criticism of the inception, development and consummation phase of the rhetorical movement” (Griffin 188). Cathcart refined the idea that social movements develop over time, asserting that there lies a great difference between mere “non-institutionalized collectives” and “the emergence of a “group that can successfully challenge” the status quo (Cathcart 269).

It is clear that the Paraguayan land reform struggle constituted a mere “non-institutionalized collective” for many years. Peasant land squatters who organized after-the-fact of their land grabs constituted nothing more than discrete pockets of resistance that shared a common socio-economic motive for protest. The protests did little to foment “group” consciousness or organization. Furthermore, those discrete, local struggles did not conceive of representing themselves as a “challenge” to the status quo. Such early land grabs were motivated more by seizing the momentary opportunity presented by the power

vacuum that formed between 1989 and 1992. Those years constituted a window of opportunity between the end of the *Stroneato*, and the stabilization of government under General Andres Rodríguez, after the adoption of a constitution and the establishment of a line of succession.<sup>174</sup>

Not until 1994, when the first truly national peasant protests were organized, could Cathcart's definition of a social movement apply to the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Since that time, the struggle has been clearly defined in organizational terms. The cooperation of the MCNOC and the FNC has facilitated the bulk of organized peasant protest activity. While it is still the case that illegal land occupations and invasions spontaneously occur in a random and disorganized manner throughout the country, the MCNOC and the FNC have taken initiative to channel these spontaneous rural protests into organized marches consisting of tens of thousands of peasants. The efforts of these two organizations working in concert with one another have far outweighed non-institutional forms of protest in numbers, visibility and effect, and have come to symbolize the Paraguayan land reform struggle as an institutional alliance between these two groups.

Another important question regarding the constitution of a "group consciousness" involves the question of intentionality. Michael Calvin McGee has pointed out that the overzealous study of social movements has the potential to report otherwise unconscious mass behavior in response to social pressures as meaningful social protest behavior. He points out the following dilemma:

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<sup>174</sup> Rodríguez announced in 1992 that he would give way to democratic elections in 1993, thereby stabilizing the government.

There is no doubt that “social movement(s)” exist in human experience, but there is serious disagreement about *how* they exist. The critical problem for theorists is determining whether ‘social movement’ is *directly* or *inferentially* in human experience. If a thing is directly in experience, it is a “phenomenon;” if it is inferentially in experience, it is an interpretation, a “set of meanings.” (McGee 233)

Scholars of social movements must take care not to impose their own meanings upon the subject of inquiry or to go so far as to ascribe social intention to mere mass response. One cannot simply assume that the subject of a social movement study is actually a movement. Even Malcolm Sillars, who conceives of movement in very general terms, cautions that critics must put forth some rationale for adopting a particular definition of social movements. It is within the critic’s purview to define or even “create” the movement as a contribution to scholarly knowledge from his or her perspective (Sillars 30). Yet, we must take seriously McGee’s caution against “imputing motives to human actors by fiat of definition only” (McGee 236).

Arturo Escobar has developed an approach to the study of social movements that might resolve this dilemma. Rather than relying upon the perceptions of the critic as McGee and Sillars suggest, Escobar advocates that the study of the social movement be examined as an instrument for the construction of meaning and social identity as perceived by the participants themselves.

Theory thus must start with the people’s self-understanding, with giving an account of people as agents whose practices are shaped by their self-understanding. It is only by getting as clear a picture as possible of this self-understanding that we can hope to identify what should be relevant for theory in the first place. (Escobar “Culture” 63)

Placing the emphasis of ethnographic reportage upon the self-perception of the social actor eludes the problem of unempirical, interpreted data. McGee’s

concern for confusing intended meaning for unintentional phenomena is directly addressed by surrendering the study of social movements as phenomena.

Ethnographers have addressed this same problem for some time now and have developed various methods for trading the role of objective observer of phenomenon for the role of participatory meaning-maker (See Rabinow; Behar; and Geertz).

In the area of social movement studies, Escobar is not alone in placing an emphasis upon the self-awareness of the social actor. Alberto Melucci argues that the critical method for understanding social movements lies in understanding the conflict between the “networks” of everyday life experienced by the social actor and the “dominant codes” that the social actor seeks to challenge by participating in social struggles.

Within these networks there is an experimentation with and direct practice of alternative frameworks of meaning, as a result of a personal commitment which is submerged and almost invisible.... What nourishes [collective action] is the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning, on which the networks themselves are founded and live from day to day... This is because conflict take place principally on symbolic grounds, by challenging and upsetting the dominant codes upon which social relationships are founded in high density informational systems. The mere existence of a symbolic challenge is in itself a method of unmasking the dominant codes, a different way of perceiving and naming the world. (Melucci, “Social Movements” 248)

The epistemological question the scholar of social movements must ask is thus not, “how can I know whether this is a movement or not?” Rather, the scholar ought to ask, “What does this social struggle mean to the social actor involved, what are the dominant and marginalized social codes of the society and are there different kinds of social struggles based upon the nature of the relation

between the social actor and the social struggle?” With this line of inquiry, social movements can be understood as eruptions of the “submerged” social and cultural background of the society from which these struggles emerge (Escobar, “Culture” 73).

This trajectory of analysis feeds back into McGee’s original question about whether social movements are phenomena or meanings. My theoretical reflections point to the answer that movements function to produce meanings. The remaining questions ought to be, “How do they create meanings?” and “What defines a social phenomenon as opposed to a true social movement capable of changing social meaning?”

Alain Touraine’s argument that mere “conflict” can be distinguished from a true social movement by the character of the social actor’s awareness of historicity is useful here. The critical distinction between a mere social conflict or struggle and a true social movement lies within the consciousness of the social actors. Whereas Sillars, Cathcart, and other rhetorical social movement theorists are concerned with the nature of movements as phenomena of social organization, Escobar, Melucci and Touraine have located the defining features of the social movement in protestors’ perceptions of their roles as social actors in the contest to define prevailing cultural models.

When social actors become aware of the “stakes” of a social struggle as “historicity itself,” a social movement becomes a mechanism for participating in the discussions that define society’s “cultural models” and “societal type” (Touraine, *Return* 66-70). The foundation of Touraine’s theory is that human



society has developed to the point that material factors are far outweighed by the social and cultural factors that define postindustrial societies. Given that few or no material constraints exist to define the “societal type,” political organizations, social movements and individuals are at liberty to challenge and even change the very underlying cultural models that reproduce social norms. The fact that social and cultural factors constitute the “engine” for cultural production is important, since the character of social and individual identities are always, potentially “in play.”

For Touraine a true social movement and the social actors that comprise it recognize this fact and direct their efforts to the “highest level of meaning” that the struggle can attain. Social struggles, on the other hand, tend to focus upon “defensive,” short term, or local goals without developing a sense of the higher level of struggle that might be achieved by means of collective protest.

Yet, true social movements, returning for a moment to Cathcart, do “not appear on the scene fully developed” (Cathcart 269). Touraine’s analysis of the French anti-nuclear movement demonstrates that social movements evolve over time. This is an evolution that can potentially move from a social struggle to a fully developed social movement. However, it is not guaranteed that full-blown social movements will evolve out of mere social struggles. Touraine himself argues that most social conflicts in Latin America are merely struggles that seek to increase political participation rather than control of historicity, or the processes of cultural production.

At present, there is no doubt that the Paraguayan land reform struggle is no more than that, a struggle and not a full-blown movement. Touraine's designation has explanatory power in this case and usefully connects the concepts of ideology, representation, protest strategy and success in analysis of the Paraguayan land reform struggle. Peasant protest demands for land, credit, free cotton seed and even for the rejection of international market agreements such as MERCOSUR demonstrate that 1) peasant demands don't address the "highest level of the meaning" of the struggle (which would be full, participatory citizenship and respect for peasants and their culture); and 2) that protest demands are shared largely by ideologies alien to the peasant experience. Most peasants do not fully understand what MERCOSUR is let alone understand how a national economy might or ought to function. The Paraguayan land reform struggle fails to fulfill the first criterion of the new social movement, to create a self-awareness in the peasantry of their own condition as social actors. *Individual peasant protestors continue to displace themselves as actors in the struggle by selecting a language of representation as well as actual representatives who speak in place of the peasants, thereby removing the actual peasant protestor as an actor from the actual sites of the struggle.*

In addition, the Paraguayan land reform struggle fails the second criterion for qualifying as a new social movement as well. Protest organizations have failed to either 1) represent the peasants as participants in the national dialogue about the future of the nation or; 2) to posit social demands that redress the actual social inequities experienced by the peasantry. These failures demonstrate the

Paraguayan land reform struggle's inability to intercede at the level of historicity. *Peasant demands have always been addressed to politicians and oligarchs who are inscribed within the structures of historicity as requests for cooperation rather than as demands for participation.*

Given the failure of the Paraguayan land reform struggle to transform itself from pockets of localized resistance into an organization that cultivates its members' self-awareness as social actors, two questions remain: "What are the chances that the Paraguayan land reform struggle can become an effective social movement?"; and "What constrains the Paraguayan land reform struggle from becoming an effective social movement?"

## **5.5 The Peasant as Social Actor**

It has long been accepted that the economic relationship of Latin American and other developing nation to the industrialized world has been characterized by *dependencia*.<sup>175</sup> However, the internalization of this neo-colonialist practice to the function of the Latin American state has yet to be fully explored. Just as relations of exploitation and domination have defined a hierarchical relationship between developed and developing economies so too is the relationship of the peasant producer and the state as regulator of the agro-industrial market hierarchically and exploitatively structured.

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<sup>175</sup> Prebisch, Raul. *Change and Development: Latin America's Great Task*. Washington, DC: The Inter American Development Bank, 1970.

The dependent, obedient peasant who works the land without political representation and without complaint is a product of a specific socio-economic system promoted and founded by the state. The breakdown of the economic component of this system, predicated as it was on the availability of “free” or surplus land, has led to the breakdown of the entire socio-economic system, including the individual peasant subjects interpellated within it.<sup>176</sup> Defining the individual peasant as subject of the state is not to import a simplistic and reductive concept of false consciousness or ideology, to define the individual subject of the state as a mere “dupe.” In fact, the complexity of the interpellated subject is essential to the means by which the interpellation takes place. Anthony Giddens points out that identity is based on complex personal narratives.

A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing “story” about the self. (Giddens 54)

The peasant is a subject who is called into being with a system of social and economic production. Indebted to his or her *patrón*, indebted to his or her state for land, credit, protection, and the freedoms the peasantry do enjoy, the Paraguayan peasant works with a blind, dependent faith in the state to protect and support him or her. The identity of the peasant is succinctly expressed in a rural aphorism, “*Hay que trabajar para vivir!*” [One has to work in order to live!]

The socially interpellated peasant subject is a *Guaraní* speaking man or woman who is dependent upon his or her *patrón* and his or her state to create

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<sup>176</sup> See footnote 37 for a discussion of Louis Althusser's use of the term “interpellation.”

markets, buy and ship the agricultural products produced by the peasant. The *patrón*, a member of the socio-political elite and usually the local representative for the dominant Colorado party, mediates between the *Guaraní* speaking rural subject and the Spanish (and more commonly English) speaking purchasers, manufacturers and commodities brokers. The peasant must ask which crops to grow, must ask for seed, and must ask for information about planting, harvesting and processing the crop. The peasant must also ask the favor of the *patrón*, who mediates between the peasantry and the politicians, carrying their requests to the state for the construction of roads, schools, the provision of electricity, and other public services.

In short, the peasant does little for him or herself. Despite living far from the physical presence of the state, at the end of unpaved byways that are impassible for portions of the year, the peasant's experience of his or her life is mediated by the state. Even the work ethic by which the peasant lives, "*Hay que trabajar para vivir*" is in a foreign language. The best evidence of this mediation lies in the alienation of the peasant from his or her material, economic condition.

The work the peasant performs is rarely for him or herself. Rather, work is performed to pay off a debt owed either to a local *patrón* (who collects 5% interest per month on store accounts and loans) or to the state which provides agricultural loans to cotton farmers who are locked into a system of low prices and high risk of crop failure. In many cases, peasants work to pay portions of loans that they can never hope to pay off in full. The peasant depends upon state forecasts of commodity prices and the availability of state seed and state credit are

the determining factors in crop selection. Every aspect of the peasant's economic life interpellates him or her into the local or national state apparatus. Even more important to the peasant alienation from his or her own material conditions is the fact that no other system has *ever* existed in Paraguay.

This system has been functioning, more or less, in its present form since the native population was deprived of its property and livestock and was forcibly integrated into the Paraguayan economic system as labor on the large *encomiendas* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mechanized production and a scarcity of cheap, arable land has created a labor glut and pressure on the peasant population to support itself in the pursuit of small-scale agriculture. For the first time in the history of the nation, peasants are not locked into an economic contract that trades their cheap labor for guarantees of employment and protection from harm.

One would think that such freedom from direct exploitation would be viewed as an accomplishment. To the peasant who has suddenly been denied the security of a system that, although exploitative, does provide a place and a means of subsistence, the transition out of this exploitative but relatively secure relationship has been alarming. Recent peasant protest activity can almost completely be characterized by its insistence on the re-institution of the economic apparatus that has virtually enslaved the Paraguayan population for the last forty years: the supply of free land in exchange for supporting the cotton monopoly run by the socio-political elite of the country.

The means by which the peasantry has found itself demanding its own exploitation are actually quite sensible. Since the end of the era of the

employment of peasants in massive resource extraction and agricultural projects on the *encomiendas* and later *estancias*, peasant labor was concentrated on small private farms that peasants owned, squatted or were given by the state. The IBR was founded in 1963 to supply peasant farmers with unexploited state land. This program functioned very well bringing unequalled economic prosperity to the nation until the late 1980s. Excess peasant labor was displaced to the forested frontier of the nation, occupying the labor of a growing population and contributing to the economy of the state as a whole.

This strategy preserved the social contract by preventing large numbers of peasants displaced by the increasing mechanization employed on large farms and ranches, from becoming idle. But eventually, the closing of the forested frontier as state land reserves were exhausted, the sudden scarcity of land for farming and the high level of unemployment in the rural countryside produced a rupture in the social contract and problematized the subject position of the Paraguayan peasant.

A peasant who does not work, simply put, is not a peasant or any sort of social person within the Paraguayan socio-economic system. A peasant who does not work obviously lives outside of the economic social network, but more importantly such a peasant also lives outside of the complex social network of loyalty obligation and therefore, is not only not a peasant (defined as a rural worker) but also is no longer a subject of the state (defined as a link in the system of loyalty obligation).

As a consequence, the scarcity of land and the sub-employment of the peasantry have resulted in crises of identity for individual peasants. The state

discourse that has reinforced the subject position of the loyal, dependent, and hardworking peasant fails to interpellate the unemployed peasant as a subject of the state. The ability of the state to interpellate the peasant subject is first dependent upon a material and economic regime that reinforces the peasant's subject position. Without the material effects of labor with its concomitant inscription of the peasant into social and linguistic hierarchies, the linguistic apparatus defining the peasant as a subordinate subject of the state becomes unstable. Thus, politicians and state bureaucrats invoking time honored tropes such as "*Hay que ser responsable!*" and "*Vamos a trabajar*" which hail the peasant as a subordinate subject by re-inscribing the clientelist relations between the working peasant and the politician who benefits from and protects the individual laborer collapses. As a result of the failure, a new subject position has emerged outside of the hegemonic domination of the clientelist system. This new discourse employs tropes of resistance and represents a potentially new peasant identity, a new kind of peasant, a resistant peasant.

## **5.6 The Interpellated Subject**

The origins of today's peasant protest activity lie in the breakdown of the traditional peasant identity. The fairly rigid clientelist system is an ideological, economic and political system. Not only does it promise occupation of a peasant and protection from the local party boss or a *patrón* if the peasant works hard, but the local party boss incurs a debt or obligation of loyalty to the peasant also. The *patrón* incurs the responsibility of passing peasant needs to politicians up the



chain of political authority. This chain of obligation ascends, theoretically, to the highest levels of government connecting the most remote of peasants to the highest realms of political power in the nation.

The system is predicated upon peasants trading their labor for economic support and political favors. When a peasant suddenly finds him or herself without land and without the means to labor in support of his or her family, the system suddenly breaks down. There is nothing to tie the peasant to the state when the peasant is not engaged in the system of labor bondage. This is far more important to the function of the state than the mere unemployment of a tax-generating laborer; the unemployment of a peasant is a rupture in the economic as well as the political and ideological ties of the peasant to the state. To the peasant, there no longer exists a social contract; without land, the peasant is no longer a citizen of the state!

The unoccupied peasant has no social, economic or political identity and is forced to find an alternative means of describing his or her life and relationship to the society. Ordinarily, the peasant's daily response to his or her life-conditions is mediated by the state ideology as a system of socially legitimated language and ideas transmitted over time in the form of arguments and key terms that the peasant has at his or her disposal for interpreting his or her experience. Ordinarily, a peasant faced with a material hardship describes that need in terms provided by the state hegemonic system and addresses the need by actions legitimated by that same system. Describing or addressing material concerns outside of legitimate vocabularies or normative actions will be defined *by the*

*peasants themselves* as deviant behavior, and individuals engaging in such behavior will be socially and/or ideologically constrained by “legitimate” social authorities empowered in the name of social norms.

There are many constraints militating against the construction of a subject position outside of the clientelist system and its product, the dependent peasant, with a substantial portion of such constraints operating on a linguistic level. Much of the peasant’s ability to articulate his or her own subjectivity is defined by a finite number of cultural tropes that re-inscribe the peasant’s dependence. Terms such as *aca hata* [stupid], *opa rei* [It’s over. There is nothing to be done about it], *xe ñembotavy* [I’m stupid. I screwed it up], and *ate’y* [lazy] are by far the most common terms of self-description employed by peasants. Each of these terms is invoked as a method of self-description for chastising a peasant who transgresses the identity of the hard working but simple peasant who follows the state. A peasant who cannot provide for his or her family no matter whether they work hard or not will be seen and will describe themselves as *aca hata* [stupid] or *ate’y* [lazy]. The identity of the dependent peasant is completely inscribed within the state established clientelist system. It is difficult for the peasant to imagine any failure on the part of the state when seeking to cast blame. The blame always falls squarely on the peasant who is too lazy, too ignorant, and too powerless to be an agent in the economic process. Ironically, it is the peasant who invokes the incompetent, illiterate peasant as a self-description, “*xe ñembotavy*,” [I’m stupid. I screwed it up].

Each of these terms re-inscribes the clientelist system with a reasoning predicated on the lack of agency of the peasant and the capability and leadership of the state. As opposed to “*Hay que trabajar para vivir*,” [One has to work in order to live] many of these tropes have penetrated so deeply into the peasant consciousness that they are articulated in *Guaraní* rather than Spanish. Their articulation in *Guaraní* reveals and reserves the special significance of these terms within the self-constructed identity of the *Guaraní* speaking peasant. These are not merely terms translated from another culture or another language but these are terms generated and sustained from within the peasant’s own language, own culture and own self-conception

These dynamics become clearer when considering Rigoberta Menchu’s famous description of how Native Americans have been forced to hide their identities in order to resist colonial regimes:

*Así es como se considera que los indígenas son tontos. No saben pensar, no saben andar, dicen. Pero, sin embargo, nosotros hemos ocultado nuestra (sic) identidad porque hemos sabido resistir, hemos sabido ocultar lo que el régimen ha querido quitarnos.* (Burgos 196)

[This is why Natives are considered stupid. They don’t know how to think, they don’t know how to walk, they say. Nevertheless, we have hidden our identities because we have resisted, we know how to hide what authority has wanted to take from us].

According to Menchu, the Native American maintains his or her own identity by means of preserving an indigenous space, defined by language and culture. She goes on to say that she resists the efforts of the authorities to colonize indigenous culture:

*Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tenga muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos.* (Burgos 271)

[I continue to hide what I think nobody else should know, not even an anthropologist, nor an intellectual, no matter how many books (he) has, they don't know how to find our secrets].

There exists, for Menchu, an ontological distinction between the sphere of indigenous cultural formation and the sphere of colonial domination. However, in the Paraguayan case, the *Guaraní* speaking, *mestizo* peasant has no alterity, no native culture in which refuge can be sought from the dominant culture of the state. Arturo Escobar has argued that marginal social groups in Latin America have never had the ability to define themselves. Noting that post-colonial Latin American culture has functioned as “the Hegemonic discourse [that has] transformed the system thorough which identities were defined” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). What we now have is a vast landscape of identities—“the ‘illiterate,’ the ‘landless peasants,’ ‘women bypassed by development,’ the ‘hungry and malnourished,’ ‘those belonging to the informal sector,’ ‘urban marginals,’ and so forth” out of which the category of landless peasant is only one of a host of “identity groups” (Escobar, “Culture” 65). The peasant, his or her culture and the very language with which he or she describes him or herself has been interpolated into the clientelist system, through which the power of the state manifests itself to even the remotest parts of the country.

Thus, the very *Guaraní* language with which the peasant constructs his or her identity becomes a constraint upon challenging the notion that the peasant is little more than an ignorant laborer who must accept his or her lot in life. The

*Guarani* term *ate'y* is only one of many such terms. *Ate'y* translates into the English as “lazy.” However, its cultural significance in the process of identity formation of the peasant suggests that much of the meaning of the term is lost in translation. *Ate'y* describes any peasant who fails to marshal a sufficient amount of energy to successfully carve his or her living out of the Paraguayan soil. Most peasants work with only hoes and machetes to cultivate 2-5 hectares of land throughout the year. Working in conditions that would be inhumane in the United States, peasants work fifteen-hour days cutting sugar cane, harvesting cotton or plowing the soil with oxen and a wooden plow. In a very literal sense, the 500-year-long economic history of Paraguay has been predicated upon the ability to the peasantry to carve a living out of a hostile tropical environment without the benefit of roads, transportation, sanitation or any national resources. Each peasant family is economically independent. The work ethic of the Paraguayan peasant has been so outrageously exaggerated by the expectations placed upon him or her that anything less than a superhuman effort is considered “laziness.” The term *ate'y* reinforces the image of a hardworking, independent peasant who does not depend upon the state to supply the least amount of aid in the form of infrastructure (electricity, water, transportation), economic or technical assistance.

## **5.7 A New Subject Position**

The leading edge of the Paraguayan peasant struggle lies in the disruption of the traditional system of peasant identity construction. It would be naive to assume that, at any historical point, the Paraguayan peasant had access to an

original, pre-conquest, anti-colonialist culture (what would have been termed the *tekoha* by the *Guaraní* Indians).<sup>177</sup> However, a fundamental shift in the constitution of the peasant identity does not necessarily involve an oversimplified conflict between “native” and “modern” cultures. A more sensible approach can be taken by asking the question, “What happens when the peasant realizes that his or her failure to successfully farm is not his or her own fault?” What happens when a trope like *ate’y* is applied to the peasant, and rather than satisfying the peasant’s need for an explanation, it demystifies the peasant’s use of the term, encouraging the peasant to find another explanation for the phenomenon, an explanation that questions the social contract and the role of the peasant in the society?

One must recognize that state control of society is not a given fact but a constant process. Peasant identity does not exist a priori to lived experience; rather, identity is a mechanism for mediating between lived, material existence and the state. Material challenges fail to reveal contradictions in the social system because they are mediated by language and culture before the subject can reflect upon them. Minor disruptions have and always will exist in every category of social description that a state imposes upon a society. The clientelist system and its concomitant disempowering language (in both Spanish and *Guaraní*) not only re-inscribe the peasant identity within a hegemonic system, but they divert, re-describe and normalize challenges that erupt within the system of signification that represent peasant identity.

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<sup>177</sup> Escobar discusses the concept of cultural hybridity in Latin American societies (*Encountering Development*).

Social struggles such as that of the Paraguayan land reform struggle may originate in the failure of hegemonic systems to fully interpellate individuals through their normalizing apparatuses. Such failures lead to the constitution of social struggles as crises of individual identity played out upon a larger stage. Originating as ruptures in the integrity of a social contract violated by extreme exploitation or rampant state corruption these social struggles become not necessarily attempts to constitute a new identity but attempts to re-constitute an old one. In this case, the peasant rebellion is an attempt to compel the controllers of the mechanisms of social formation in the Paraguayan society to re-construct the clientelist system and reconstitute the peasant as an obedient worker with a guaranteed place within that society.

The peasant farmers protesting for land in Paraguay are not seeking to change the society in some progressive manner in order to create a society that recognizes a broader conception of rights or privileges in order to include more and different interest groups in the society. Quite the opposite is actually the case. These protestors want to return to a previous condition, far from ideal or revolutionary, a status quo that satisfied them. The mechanisms for constituting the clientelist system with its “set of cultural, cognitive, economic and ethical models” is constantly invoked by peasants who yearn for a return to, as Touraine identifies it, “a ‘state of nature’” (Touraine, *Return* 42).

While usefully describing the circumstances of the struggle, Touraine’s notion of historicity offers too broad a category to be useful. I would like to sharpen the term “historicity” to demonstrate the specifics of cultural formation

and its contestation in this case. “*Hay que trabajar*,” “*ate’y*” and a host of other linguistic artifacts offer some concrete examples of the “cultural, cognitive, economic and ethical models” that Touraine suggests exist for the formation of culture in this specific case. Exploring the specific means by which the clientelist culture is constituted and how it addresses the challenge offered by the peasantry will be illustrative of an area not examined by Touraine: how the social system called “historicity” is used by the state to resist usurpation by protestors.

Here it is important to note that counter-hegemonic identities are not merely permitted to erupt out of normal, shall we call them “historical” social relations in which historicity is firmly in the control of the state. It should be obvious that revolutions of thought and action have taken place across the world and that, even in the Paraguayan case, physical force has been a recourse used as recently as 1975 to destroy the *Ligas Agrarias*, a group of agricultural colonies established and supported by the Catholic Church outside of and in conflict with the state ideology under the Stroessner regime. Yet, most revolutions are prevented not after they have broken out but before they are permitted to develop and mature. The state’s resources for addressing challenges to its ideological hegemony can also be investigated as a technique for diverting and destroying challenges to its control of historicity. Any social movement must address not only the need to control the historicity of a society but also to counter the natural, reflexive tendency of a society to reject usurpation of historicity. Thus, an essential component of any social struggle is to be found in an understanding of the strategy employed by the society to dominate and thwart social protest. This



project explores that state strategy in the case of Paraguayan peasant protest in order to elucidate characteristics of the peasant struggle itself.

### **5.8 Hegemonic Pressure and the Rhetoripolitical Strategy**

Rather than merely crushing the peasantry with overwhelming force, the Paraguayan state has resorted to other, less coercive means of addressing the threat to the social order posed by peasant protest. In fact, the response of the state shows an intuitive sensitivity to Touraine's notion that historicity is at stake and is what ultimately determines the success or failure of social struggles. If a protest challenges the state rather than the "cultural, cognitive, economic and ethical models" that make the state possible, then a protest will fail. If, however, a social protest does not directly challenge the state but, rather, challenges the conditions that make the state possible, then a protest has an opportunity to call the legitimacy of the state and its very existence into question. Only the latter movement actually threatens the state and requires a response.

The state's primary concern is with the models that make the state possible and not with protests and protestors themselves. Nevertheless, the state's control of these models is not a *fait accompli* but a process. The state maintains control of these cultural models through a process of "offensive" attacks upon protest activity that challenge the protestor's legitimacy, language and identity. All of this is done by re-invoking or re-establishing accepted social tropes as a method for interpreting the meaning of the protest activity.

The Paraguayan state has utilized a two-pronged approach to de-legitimize peasant protest in this way. First, the legitimacy of the protestors is attacked by re-asserting the fact that peasants are, by nature, a backward people. They are illiterate, lazy, and unable to organize themselves to offer a serious challenge to the state. The “meaning” of any protest activity is simply that these are unruly people who are resisting the natural authority of the state to direct them, a task they cannot possibly complete themselves. The ineptitude of the protestors is established using long accepted social tropes that invoke a particular cultural logic of identity. Terms such as *vuro*, *sinvergüenza*, *ate’y* are used to re-inscribe and reconfirm the peasant identity as the lazy, incompetent, and sheltered by the tolerant state within the Paraguayan society. Secondly, the state has always insisted that “some other group” has organized and motivated the peasants to protest. These “other groups,” those truly responsible for the protest, have included NGOs, an exiled general, and the opposition party just to name a few.

In one instance, a group of approximately twenty peasant women protested outside of *Mburivicha Roga* for three days until the president agreed to meet with them. This small group of women traveled to the capital in order to explain to the president that they needed land for their husbands and families to farm. A recent *amandau guazú* or hailstorm had destroyed the tiny crops they could manage on the little land they did own. The president responded, “*Que sinvergüenza! Pende pe ambiapo pe mena, pe chacra pe! E-ho pe cocue pe! Pende pete’y aite!*” [You are so shameless! You should be working with your husbands in the fields! Get back to the farm! How lazy all of you are!] (María

Martínez, Personal Interview). After being so scolded by then president Luís González-Macchi, the women returned home to work with their husbands (María Martínez, Personal Interview). The women's attempt to present themselves as *sintierras* failed singularly as a result of González-Macchi's ability to invoke tropes that re-inscribed them as powerless subjects who were violating their social roles. González-Macchi's language cast them as little more than ignorant, lazy housewives whose primary business is to work hard in the fields beside their men. What business did they have addressing the President of the republic?

In fact, time after time, in the Paraguayan peasant's struggle for land, equality, and governmental assistance, the state has employed rhetorical techniques that have stalled the impetus for protest and permitted a return to the rural countryside and the quotidian poverty that is the life of the Paraguayan peasant. The results of peasant protest activity have amounted to little as a result of scale, technique, method or spectacle; in the end, nearly every peasant protest has failed.

A typical example of such protest activity occurred on February 14, 2001, when approximately 80,000 peasants protested in the capital. Senate leaders met with the leaders of the protest and the state agreed with each demand presented to the congressional delegation: funding land purchases for peasants, providing state subsidies for cotton seed and other promises that never have and never will be fulfilled. This was the seventh large, organized peasant protest in the capital city since 1994. The government decried the protests as the work of the exiled Armed Forces Chief General Lino Oviedo. Furthermore, the peasants were accused of

damaging the national economy by not working. Common phrases describing the peasant motivation for protest included the terms *ate'y* and *sinvergüenza*. None of these protests succeeded in anything more than soliciting empty promises from the government (members of Congress agreed to work on the problems in future legislation) and a return of the peasantry to the drudgery of the labor.

The function of these promises as well as the belittlement of the peasants before the meetings (remember, the congressional delegation met with peasant leaders who were accused of not being competent enough to organize their own protests) was to gain control of historicity or the models of cultural production. Why would the state agree to every demand made by peasants they accuse of incompetence, laziness, and stupidity? Wouldn't it appear a humiliating act to cave in to the demands to such people?

Rather than producing a loss of face, this tactic has proven a successful rhetorical approach on the part of the state. Re-invoking cultural tropes that re-inscribe the peasant as lazy, stupid, and ignorant while promising that the benign state will fulfill the social contract (as it is understood under terms of the clientelist relationship between the peasant and the state) have, in almost every case, proven successful.

The strategy of pressuring protestors and protest groups to abandon counter-hegemonic self-descriptions and to accept the terms and language offered by the "greater society" is what I call "rhetoripolitics." Rhetoripolitics permits societies to respond to social challenges in such a way as to re-inscribe the protesting social actors into a dominant and pervasive economic system by means

of defining the terms of the argument in terms that *pre-exist* and *co-opt* resistance. This can be done either by describing and defining protest activity in prejudicial language or by co-opting a group or individuals by granting economic or financial concessions that appear as short term gains but which function in the long-term to further integrate a social protest group within an economic regime with the effect of conflating that group's apparent material interests with that of the larger society, without actually resolving the initial social complaint.

Rhetoripolitics is a useful concept for addressing the often-invisible process of "agenda setting" or "terminological representation" stages of argument formation. In his examination of the tendency of institutions to prevent public deliberation, Erik Doxtader notes that, "The demise of public deliberation through colonization may be a function of institutional tendencies to short circuit learning processes necessary for collective will formation. This is evidenced by the way in which institution define and enact the terms of representation" (Doxtader 201). This study points out the fact that institutions intervene in the process of public deliberation by substituting institutional codes of communication for alternative and collective methods of public deliberation.

While Doxtader's study is one of many that have demonstrated the social constraints upon a truly democratic process of public deliberation of the public good, he gestures beyond a mere critique by suggesting a future area of study. He says, "By studying how institutions use definitional arguments in order to group justificatory norms of action, it may be possible to render colonization processes transparent in a manner that recreates time and space for learning oriented toward

the creation and expression of public opinion” (Doxater 201). In other words, accepting the fact that public argumentation has been co-opted, practical and academic efforts to reverse this state of affairs should rely upon an examination of “definitional arguments” and “justificatory norms.” Furthermore, an understanding of the colonization tools, frees individuals for the possibility of a genuine “expression of public opinion.”

Public opinion, public expression and public action are predicated upon understanding rhetoripolitics as the rhetorical technique for utilizing “definitional arguments” and “justificatory norms” to constrain public opinion, public expression and public action. In the case of the Paraguayan peasantry, there is an important connection between protest activity and self-representation. Protest arguments are essentially arguments exploiting ruptures in the hegemony of the Paraguayan state. While still nascent, the protest strategies employed in the Paraguayan land reform struggle have the potential to call for the recognition of a new kind of peasant, a peasant who demands rights and a peasant who is not content to adhere to a clientelistic chain of command. Government counter-arguments in response to peasant protests, rallies, land occupations, and marches have successfully addressed this demand for recognition by systematically rearticulating it and re-interpreting it in terms of legitimate, authorized discourse, as well as and perhaps most importantly, non-discursive expression.

When the Paraguayan government has argued that peasants are lazy, incompetent, stupid and organized by others, this is rhetoripolitics at work. The net result of a rhetoripolitical strategy is the following: 1) a shift of the burden of

proof to the abnormal arguments/descriptions offered by individuals and groups who challenge social and linguistic norms; 2) the privileging of normalizing accounts that either marginalize the resistant individuals and/or groups or redescribes the issue in familiar terms that either 3) rob the issue of its exigence and/or 4) displace the burden of critical engagement to a less visible and/or less contested domain of the socio-political system.

The key feature of rhetoripolitical practice is that it invokes pre-extant language/argument to 1) define protest activity as deviant, uncivilized or inappropriate and 2) to circumscribe the meaning of protest activity and the protester's arguments within the dominant cultural model in order to craft a "solution" that resolves the protester's sense of exigence while reinforcing the dictates of the economic and social system. Thus, defining protestors, as *sintierra* or landless peasants rather than as social actors of equal worth and distinction within a social system smuggles in and re-inscribes the historical hierarchies of value that constrain the peasantry's social agency to fully participate in the equitable distribution of resources in the Paraguayan society. The very term *sintierra* signals that individuals and groups in questions who are stupid, lazy, and manipulated by outside agitators.

## **5.8 Rhetoripolitics and Identity**

The concept of rhetoripolitical practices can be used to sharpen Touraine's broad notion of historicity as the primary means of cultural production.

Rhetoripolitics identifies this means of cultural production as a specific system of

symbolic management that re-describes potentially counter-hegemonic representations of identity within a “normalizing” discourse. It is important to note the distinction between normal and normalizing here. The reproduction of “normal” discourse would simply be restricted to the re-presentation of identity to an individual or a group of individuals with little persuasive force. However, a “normalizing” discourse recasts an individual or a group identity within a whole complex of meaning that evokes a sense within the individual or group of individuals of a return to a safer, known, compelling status quo. This “normalizing” function is akin to Louis Althusser’s interpellative “hail” (Althusser 127-48; 177-86). Makela Finn offers a concrete example of the “hail”:

A mundane, but pertinent, example of the Althusserian mechanism can be found in the relation between name and identity. A newborn is no more 'naturally' a John than a François or an Ishmael. Later in life, however, when called the child will recognize himself as John and this is not just an illusion; he really is John. Shifting to a political context, we are not citizens in virtue of any 'real' state of affairs that predates the State's interpellative hail. Yet when we vote, participate in debate and so forth, we are not delusional; we really are citizens. In each case the authority bearing institution (Family, State, etc...) 'calls out' to the individual who (mis)recognizes that the hail is directed to her. In answering, she reveals that she really is that which she was called to be. (Finn 1)

In the case of the peasant who has worked so hard to redefine him or herself, rhetoripolitical discourses offer an enticing return to an originary and primary subject position for the peasant. Thus, as Finn puts it, the “call” of the state is (mis)recognized by the radical peasant as a solution to the problems of the interpellated peasant. The radical identity of the peasant can be quickly subverted by invoking linguistic and social practices to which the radical peasant responds



without even knowing that he has ceded control of him or herself. The mesmerizing influence of the return to a pre-radical identity in the state and the status quo is a metaphysical constant whose function is not mitigated by the development of another subject position. Rhetoripolitics is an argumentative strategy utilized by the state to invoke a specifically dis-empowering subjectivity within the protesting, rebellious subject.

Revealing rhetoripolitics in this way leads us to conclude two things: 1) identity politics are at the heart of any organized resistance to status quo politics (as they are the primary means by which radicalism is co-opted); and 2) the success of social struggles might just depend to a far greater degree upon the process of subject formation of the individual protestor than on the “quality” of the argument or the issue at hand.

### **5.9.2 Non-verbal responses to rhetoripolitical pressures**

Touraine argues that effective social protest struggles for control of historicity; however, a refined notion of historicity in the form of rhetoripolitics necessitates that effective social protest identify and address rhetoripolitical pressures. While most struggles are presumed to involve protestors pitching arguments to a public, the peasant struggle in Paraguay demonstrates the important role rhetoripolitics plays in the sustenance of the critical consciousness or self-expressed identity of the individual protestor to him or herself.

Here it is important to note that social protest is not merely an ideological conflict between state hegemonic regimes and individuals who reject a statist

narrative, but effective social protest must address the need to construct and reaffirm a counter-hegemonic self-description and identity for individuals whose life experience contrasts with the state's accounts of their lives. Social protest, while challenging the need to change a protestor's lived experience, must also perform the work of representing the protestor's life conditions and identity to the protestor him or herself as well. Protestors, as social actors, must construct and re-construct that new identity by means that lie *outside of the limits of expression defined within the ideological norms of the society*.

Sit-ins, marches, rallies and many other forms of protest activity have proven almost wholly ineffective in the process of constructing and maintaining a new peasant identity in the Paraguayan peasant struggle. These practices do offer concrete, physical disruptions of the flow of social, economic, and informational commerce but, en toto, fail to challenge the state and its right to define the social stakes of the struggle in any serious way. To the contrary, by presenting a symbolic threat to the status quo and allowing the state to resolve the tensions generated by such protest, peasant protest activity has enabled the state to dictate the means by which these standoffs end: physical threat, violence, murder, negotiations, or concessions. The sum of peasant protest activity has only *reaffirmed the state's primary role in social production and its control of historicity*. It can be argued that such protest activity only empowers the state *by calling the state into being*, allowing the state to assert itself as the principle actor in the social struggle while protestors and protest organizations are relegated to the role of recipient and observer.

The state is empowered through the principle of action: the discourse of protestors and protest organizations does not call the state into being as a subject, but the discourse of the state calls into being those normalizing subject positions, those obedient subjects. However, failed attempts by the state to quell peasant protests have always occurred when the opposite conditions have obtained: the actions of the peasants called the state into being as a dominating subject. As Saul Alinsky has suggested, reaction by the opposition may be more important than action taken by protestors (Alinsky 150).

Resistant peasants who have forced the state to use dogs, soldiers, bullets and batons have actually won the identity conflict by managing to occupy the position of the subject of discourse, successfully hailing the state and setting the terms for identity construction. Three notable occasions include the *Día de Perros* in Asunción on June 23, 1989, the repeated *desalojos* at *Capi'ibary*, in 1992 and, more recently, the death of Calixto Cabral outside of *Colonel Oviedo* in June 4, 2002.

These three cases of successful peasant protest reveal something important about the function of rhetoripolitics in public argument. It is not the whim of a disenfranchised and fickle public, nor is it the careful deliberation of a well-formed public sphere that determines the fate of peasant protestors in Paraguay; rather, it is an implicit understanding on the part of all parties, the public, the protestors and the state, that control of the rhetoripolitical ground has shifted. In every case in which the Paraguayan state has lost control of the site of struggle by reacting to squelch peasant protest rather than acting to resolve the conflict, a

fundamental sense of discomfort on the part of all parties compels the state to immediately reassert itself as the primary social actor by quickly conceding to the demands of the protestors. This quick, *kairotic* response enables the state to reassert its subjecthood, relegating the protestors once again to the position of a subject-acted-upon rather than an active subject.

Physical protest is not, in itself, superior to discursive forms of protest. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the success of the cases of the *Día de Perros*, the *desalojos* of *Capi'ibary* and the case of Calixto Cabral is that rhetoripolitical strategies are primarily discursive in nature. The rhetoripolitical interpellation of the peasant subject functions primarily as a result of language and verbal argumentation. When peasants offer verbal arguments in support of their cause, they are easily countered by the state with verbal tropes that reinscribe the peasant as too stupid, lazy and dependent to protest. This defuses the protest and returns the society to its status quo. On the other hand, physical protest does not evoke a response that features these tropes. Physical protest requires the state to act outside of the rhetoripolitical system of representation with physical force of its own.

### **5.10 Consequences**

The Paraguayan peasant struggles over the past fourteen years have amounted to few material gains and little sustained protest activity. The protest cycle that has emerged belies the few successes of the overall struggle for equal representation of peasants in the society. Rhetoripolitical definitions of peasant

identity and peasant protest activity have successfully defused the impetus of peasant protests. Perhaps the only real result of this protest activity has been to sharpen and improve the rhetoripolitical strategies of the Paraguayan government. Government authorities have developed an armamentarium of tropes for defusing and diverting protest pressure in public contexts.

While the identification of rhetoripolitics as a counter-protest strategy is useful for developing an understanding of the failure of the Paraguayan peasant struggles, it also raises some important questions about the evolution of new social movements as well as strategies for collective protest in the developing world. If rhetoripolitics is a dominant strategy in the state response to peasant struggles in Paraguay, can this practice be generalized to other developing nations? Can it be generalized to industrialized nations such as the U.S. as well? While physical methods of protest seem, in the Paraguayan case, to successfully thwart rhetoripolitical response in this case, is that true in all such cases? Is there a physical component to rhetoripolitics that addresses physical methods of protest? Furthermore, what strategies exist within the category of discursive protest methods that might successfully thwart rhetoripolitical responses by the state?

Rhetoripolitics as a statist strategy for interpellating the protesting subject makes the case for re-examining the specific means by which the state constrains protestors and protest activity. A further examination of this concept might explore the questions above as well as the function of protest rhetoric in the process of constructing a “protesting subject.” Protest rhetorics must implicitly or

explicitly create, reference or contest the arguments that pre-date the protesting subject. In this vein, more work could be done to seek out sources for the generation and preservation of extra-hegemonic forms of expression.

Furthermore, given the historical contexts of developing nations like Paraguay, an important question arises about the power of historically embedded argument themes stemming from colonialism, neo-colonialism and powerful economic influences such as globalism and internal national development and industrialization strategies. The very existence of rhetoripolitical strategies as mechanisms for constraining collective protest calls into question the idea of a universal method of protest as well as universal rhetorical protest strategies. The state's capacity for mobilizing historically embedded argument themes in order to co-opt social struggles may require culture specific analyses of argument strategies to be developed with great sensitivity to the power of developing states to deprive potential social actors of models for self-representation.

Touraine's observation that society is not a "dominant ideology" is important here because I am not saying that rhetoripolitics is a mere linguistic and ideological hegemony (Touraine, *Return* 8). Touraine's argument that what we often view society as a dominant ideology when the social interactions of human beings at this point in history would be better described as a "stake, a set of resources and models that social actors seek to manage, to control, and which they appropriate or whose transformation into social organization they negotiate among themselves" (Touraine, *Return* 8). Arguments, too, are resources and collective protest is an attempt to mobilize arguments while rhetoripolitics is a

hegemonic strategy for preventing the successful development of new arguments and of occupying old ones.

In this sense, systems of domination, colonization, exploitation and conquest, long viewed solely in terms of their ability to mobilize physical and economic resources, might, today, be viewed as systems for the mobilization and occupation of argument strategies. Social systems promoting colonialism, globalism and racism cannot be productively resisted by collective protest of the poor and disenfranchised by mobilizing material and economic resources; they have no such resources to mobilize. However, contesting such systems with an awareness of rhetoripolitical strategies might offer a new resource to those members of society who are economically poor but idea rich.

This study has demonstrated that a deeper exploration of the employment of non-discursive means of argumentation and its particular practice in the developing world ought to be pursued. One possible extension of this notion is that concrete but often overlooked protest strategies such as graffiti and political humor could constitute important sources of contestation that lie outside of legitimate political discourse. In addition, a number of important questions can be identified in the future study of social movements in the developing world. Do developing nations provide a sufficiently distinct context for the manifestation of unique social movement structures? Does a theory of post-colonial public argument need to be constructed to account for the differences between industrialized and non-industrialized societies? Would the study of collective protest in such different contexts continue to challenge definitions of collective

protest and the category of the new social movement? Factors such as high levels of illiteracy and weak public spheres in the developing world obviously present real obstacles to transposing models of collective protest from the developed world to the developing world. Yet, the question remains: could rhetoripolitical practices function as a universal means for co-opting social movements in the developing world as well as industrialized world?

Regardless of the answers to these questions, there must be a benefit to re-conceiving social struggles as ideological and historical struggles (in Alain Touraine's sense of the term) and examining collective protest strategies in a different light. Analysis of this sort could be put into practice in the development of protest movements that displace the site of struggle from the arenas of economic wealth and political influence to the common "will to affirm and to choose oneself as well as to recognize others as persons, in their differences and their own will to be" available to all men and women (Touraine, *Return* 8).

### **5.11 The Future of the Paraguayan Land Reform Struggle**

The Paraguayan land reform struggle is an example of a complex, polyvocal protest struggle in the developing world. Study of the struggle has been complicated by Paraguay's unique historical, linguistic and cultural circumstances, requiring a profound level of analysis. As a result of analyzing the many factors influencing the struggle and its outcomes, it has become apparent that the deep co-option of the national peasant organizations and the collectivist tendencies of individual peasants severely impair the prospects for either



movement success or movement transformation. Given the Paraguayan government's capacity to subvert linguistic attempts to express the real, lived conditions of peasant farmers, there appears to be no alternative but to continue to utilize non-discursive means of expression in order to structure anticipated responses from the state including brutal repression and peasant deaths.

The success of individual non-verbal strategies is limited by the inability of the national peasant organizations to represent their membership. The demands that have been met by the Paraguayan government have been small in scope and irrelevant to resolving the economic and social crises motivating peasants to organize in the first place. However, there is hope that local peasant organizations can “spin off” from the national organizations in order to bring the level of protest activity closer to the physical and ideological proximity of the peasant while preserving a sense of historicity from the training of local activists within the national organizations and the NGOs that offer their services through those organizations.

A recent and surprising example of the reversal of the flow of talent and information that usually channels resources into the national peasant organizations, was revealed in the land struggle in *Yvyturuzu*. In several of the communities involved in that conflict, peasants have adopted nuanced non-verbal protest rhetorics that originate at the local level and arise directly from the consciousness of the peasant farmers themselves. Farmers of the *comités de agricultures* in the communities of *Nino Ykua*, *Maria Auxilladora*, and several others have constructed *viveros*, or plant nurseries, and have begun to plant native

species of trees throughout their communities. The presence of thousands of trees lining the roads, surrounding farms and fields and beautifying the communities functions as a powerful non-verbal argument for peasant resource management. In several cases, the peasants have planted more trees in their communities than national and international reforestation projects in the region. In fact, some peasants have supplied state and international agencies with seedlings for their own reforestation projects. Such strategies seriously damage the state's ability to cast the peasants as deforesters and squanderers of natural resources within the boundaries of a national park.

I hope that future studies of social movements find opportunities to respond to emerging struggles and nuanced socio-economic and political contexts such as globalism that may present challenges to our suppositions about the nature of collective protest. I have had the opportunity to develop a sensitivity for and a desire to examine the possibility of a different model for public deliberation as represented by social movements and the different contexts they offer for re-examining social possibilities. Finally, I hope that the readers and scholars of social movement theory do not lose sight of the human element of social movements. In the case of the Paraguayan land reform struggle, more than 300,000 families constituting some 2.5 million people live each day precariously. It is essential that we do not objectify the subject of our study, such as the Paraguayan land reform struggle, by overlooking the basic fact that social movements grow from the anguish of real people who are struggling to survive and to ensure a better future for their children. My heart goes out to the thousands

of Paraguayan families who are harvesting cotton in the hopes that this year the price will be high enough that they can improve their lives and escape grinding poverty by finding a way to more fully participate in their own societies.

In dedication to all of those kind proud Paraguayans who taught me their languages and their ways: *E-ko porã xe ra'a kuera! Ja ha, ja u la terrere enterove!*

## APPENDIX A

### Index of Abbreviations

- (ACADEI) *La Asociación Campesina de Desarrollo Integrado* or the Association of Peasants for Integrated Development.
- (ACAP) *La Asociación Campesina de La Colonia Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* or the Association of Peasants of the Agroforestry Settlement of Capi'ibary.
- (ALALC) *La Asociación Latinoamericana de Libre Comercio* of 1961.
- (ANR) *La Asociación Nacional Republicana* or the National Association of Republicans.
- (ANTELCO) *Administración Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* or the National Telecommunication Administration.
- (APRO) *La Asociación de Productores Orgánicos* .
- (ASAGRAPA) *La Asociación de Agricultores de Alto Paraná*.
- (BCP) *Banco Central del Paraguay* or the Central Bank of Paraguay.
- (BDR) *Banco de Desarrollo Rural*.
- (CADELPA) *la Camera Algodonera del Paraguay*.
- (CAH) *Crédito Agrícola de Habitación* or Agricultural Credit for Habilitation.
- (CEB) *Las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* or Foundational Ecclesiastical Communities.
- (CCH) *La Comisión Central de Horticultores*.
- (CIDSEP) *El Centro Interdisciplinario de Derecho Social y Economía Política*.
- (CIPAE) *El Comité de Iglesias para Ayudas de Emergencias* or the Committee of Churches for Emergency Assistance.
- (CNT) *Coordinación Nacional de Trabajadores* or the National Workers' Coordinating Committee.
- (CONAPA) *La Coordinación Nacional de Productores Agrícolas*.

(CPA-SPN) *Coordinadora de Productores Agrícolas de San Pedro Norte* or the Coordinating Committee of the Farm Producers of Northern San Pedro.

(CPCC) *El Centro Paraguayo de Coopertivistas de Cordillera* or the Paraguayan Center for Cooperatives of the Department of Cordillera.

(CPKP) *El Comité de Productores Kokue Poty* or The Farmers' Committee of the Flowered Farm.

(CORPOSANA) Paraguay's state waterworks company now known as la Empresa de Servicios Sanitarios del Paraguay (ESSAP).

(CST) *Campesao Sem Terra* or the Peasants Without Land.

(CUT) *Central Union de Trabajadores*.

(FNC) *Federación Nacional Campesina* or the National Peasant Federation.

(IBR) *Instituto del Bienestar Rural* or the Institute for Social Welfare.

(JAC) *Las Juventudes Agrarias Cristianas* or Christian Agrarian Youth.

(JICA) Japan International Cooperation Agency.

(LAC) *Ligas Agrarias Cristianas* or the Christian Agrarian Leagues.

(MAG) *El Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería* or the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

(MCAAC) *la Mesa Coordinadora del Asentamiento Agroforestal de Capi'ibary* or the Coordinating Committee of the Agroforestry Settlement of Capi'ibary.

(MCNOC) *La Mesa Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas* or the National Coordinating Committee of Peasant Organizations.

(MCP) *El Movimiento Campesino Paraguayo*.

(MERCOSUR) is an acronym for *Mercado Común de Sur* or Southern Common Market. MERCOSUR is a free trade pact amongst Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay with limited tariff agreements.

(OLT) *La Organización de Lucha por la Tierra* or the Organization for the Fight for Land.

(ONAC) *La Organización Nacional Campesina*.

(ONC) *Organización Campesina del Norte*.

(PLRA) *El Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico*.

(PEN) *El Partido Encuentro Nacional*.

(PRF) *Partido Revolucionario Febrerista* or the Febrerista Revolutionary Party

(PSC) El Pastoral Social Cordillera or the Social Pastoral of the Department of Cordillera.

(SEAG) *Servicio de Extension de Agricultura y Ganadería*.

(SEARCO) *Servicio Arquidiocesano de Comercialización*.

(SNC) *El Servicio Nacional Forestal* or the National Forestry Service.

(STICA) *El Servicio Técnico Interamericano de Cooperación Agrícola* or the Inter-American Technical Service for Agricultural Cooperation.

UNA-BID Universidad Nacional de Asunción y el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo.

(UNC-ONONDIVEPA) Union Nacional Campesina.

(UTEP) *La Unidad Técnica de Ejecución de Proyectos* or Technical Entity for the Execution of Social Projects.

## APPENDIX B

### Index of Spanish and Guaraní Terminology

*Abono*—money that is contributed by members of a group to defer the costs of travel by members of a peasant organization or community.

*Aca hata*—*Guaraní* word meaning “stupid” or “slow witted.” Literally translated, it means hard headed.

*Acopiadores*—generally refers to anyone who buys cotton, more specifically, it refers to the oligopoly of cotton cooperatives known as CADELPA, *la Camera Algodonera del Paraguay*.

*Almacén de consumo*—small in-home store where retail goods are sold within the community.

*Anarcosindicalistas*—Paraguayan anarchist labor and trade unions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Ane’embegue de lo mburuvicha kuera*—learned discussion among leaders.

*Aplicación de venenos*—pesticide application.

*El Aporque*—the necessary practice of manually hilling earth up around the base of cultivated plants like cotton or corn in order to create better support to resist wind damage to the crop as well as to encourage rooting.

*El Arado*—plowing or soil preparation.

*El Arranque y Quema*—the agricultural practice of manual removal of the last year’s crop, which is burned in order to destroy the eggs and larvae of parasitic insects that over-winter in the husks of last year’s crop to plague the next year’s crop.

*Asentamiento*—an agricultural colony usually located in a remote area of the country.

*Asunceños*—also known in *Guaraní* as *la mitã paragua’y pe*, is a rural term for city dwellers.

*Ate’y*—translates from the *Guaraní* as laziness.

*Avati*—*Guaraní* word for maize or corn.

*Barrio*—a district within a town.



*Los blancos*—a term referring to light skinned foreigners or *Asunceños*, both of whom are viewed as different from the *campesinos* by race or culture.

*Bloqueo de la ruta*—roadblock.

*Bracero*—peasant laborer on an *encomienda* or *hacienda*.

*Brasiguayos*—neologistic reference to illegal Brazilian immigrants living along the Paraguay-Brazil border.

*Cámara de Diputados*— The lower house of the Paraguayan parliament.

*Cámara de Senadores*— The upper house of the Paraguayan parliament.

*Campesino*—*Guarani*-speaking rural peasant of *mestizo* racial heritage.

*Campesinos sin tierra*—a term sometimes applied to protesting peasants by members of the press who compare the Paraguayan land reform movement to the Brazilian *Campesao Sem Terra* movement of the 1980s.

*Campo*—term referring to the rural countryside.

*Capi'ibary*—translates from the *Guarani* as capybara, but refers to the site of a land struggle delimited on one side by a river of the same name.

*Capullo*—the husk or boll protecting the fiber and seeds of the cotton plant.

*Cara dura*—literally translates as the “hard face” but describes the act of committing a social crime and presenting a face with an unchanging expression to those wronged. The *cara dura* is a strategy employed by the socio-political elite to evade peasant challenges to their political, economic and social crimes. Given the *cara dura*, the peasant realizes that there is nothing to be done, *opa rei el asunto*, and walks away.

*Carbon*—charcoal made by felling trees and incinerating in anaerobic environments. Peasants use an *horno* or a *tatakua* or sometimes bury the lumber in the soil in order to impede full combustion. The production of *carbon* is an essential source of income to peasants in *asentamientos*.

*La Carpida*—hoeing.

*Carretas*—oxcart.

*Carretera*—rough path made through the countryside by the passage of oxcarts.

*Catequistas*—lay clergy, peasants trained by the Catholic Church to teach church doctrine in their own communities.

*Catequización*—the training received in order to become a *catequista*.

*Caudillo*—a Latin American dictator who rules repression and a cult of personality.

*Caudillismo*—a political ideology and system of rule defined by the cult of personality and dictatorial rule common throughout all of Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but persisting in Paraguay until 1989.

*La Chacarita*—the famous urban slum of Asunción, a shantytown directly behind and surrounding the congressional building.

*Chagas*— a fatal virus transmitted by the *vinchuza*, a variety of the assassin bug that prefers to live in the wattle and daub walls of the peasants' shacks. 50% of all peasants are suspected of being infected with the virus.

*Changa*—day labor or work in exchange for money. Peasant farmers supplement their income by working on the farms of *terratenientes* at rates of about two dollars a day.

*Clientelismo*—a system of reciprocal exchange of goods and services between individuals of unequal status and structured by dependence and obligation.

*Club de amas de casa*—mothers club.

*Club de jóvenes*—youth group.

*Cocue cue*—literally translates from the Guaraní as “old farm” and usually refers to land that has been overexploited agriculturally and is no longer fit for crops.

*Coima*—a bribe.

*Colono* system—a system in which peasants are given heavily forested land to farm for three to five years and then evicted in order to use the land for ranching. This system exploits peasant labor.

*Colono*—another name for an agricultural colony but usually reserved for an older, established colony.

*Colorado*—refers to the party in power since 1936, the (ANR) *La Asociación Nacional Republicana*.

*Comité de agricultores*—local farmers' committee.

*Comisiones vecinales*—neighborhood association.

*Compañía*—small agricultural district associated with a *pueblo*.

*Concientización del campesino*—phrase meaning “raising the socio-political consciousness of the peasantry.”

*Conquistador*—Spanish term denoting the original Hispanic conquerors of Paraguay.

*Creole*—term describing the urban Paraguayan’s descended from a foreign (non-indian) heritage. Culturally, the term “*criollo*” or “*creole*” connotes a preference for Europeanized practices such as drinking soda as opposed to drinking *tereré*.

*Croqueta*—a bribe offered a public servant in order to perform a public service that such a public servant is already obligated to perform.

*Dependencia*—a theory that the developing world is structurally dependent upon the economies of developed nations and, therefore, cannot become developed nations in their own right.

*Desalojo*—the term used to indicate the forcible removal of peasants from a property they are squatting upon.

*Desde arriba*—“from above,” referring to orders from leadership.

*Día de Perros*—“day of the dogs,” referring to the attack of the peasants of Cleto Romero and Juan de Mena by Paraguayan police with dogs on June 23, 1989.

*Diario ABC Color*—the most widely circulated newspaper in Paraguay, once known as the official opposition newspaper.

*Encomienda*—large land grants offered to Spanish nobles by the King of Spain during the period of colonization.

*Esclavitud blanca*—a system of virtual slavery in which peasants who are encouraged or compelled to plant cotton accumulate more debt each year losing money as a result of exploitation, a cotton monopoly and ignorance.

*Granizo*—a hailstorm, a serious threat that often destroys crops.

*Gremiales*—labor unions.

*Hacienda*—term denoting an extensive ranch in imitation of the *hacendados* of the past.

*Hacendado*— an extensive cattle ranch during the early colonial period of Paraguay.

*Indio*—literally, the term means Native American but it is popularly used as a derogatory term to denote a lazy, uncivilized, or untrustworthy person.

*Informalidad*—the practice of effecting land ownership and transactions under circumstances not specifically addressed by law.

*Invasion*—the act of trespassing and occupying or squatting private or state lands by a group of peasants.

*Ipohyite*—Guaraní translating as “very heavy” but often means “extremely hard work!”

*Irresponsible*—is a term denoting that one has failed to hold up one’s end of the social contract: either a peasant’s failure to work hard or a administrator’s failure to reward and support peasant who work hard.

*Ka’aguygua*—Guaraní term for pueblos of the forest, established by Native Americans in an attempt to construct communities beyond the reach of the colonial powers.

*Ka’a he’ẽ*—sugarcane. Translated from the *Guaraní*, it means “good tasting plant.”

*Kumanda*—beans.

*Latifundia*— a vast tract of land 1,000+ hectares with the implication that the owner is an absentee landlord.

*Latifundias improductivas*—large, unproductive land holdings of 1,000+ hectares

*Latifundista*— the owner of a vast tract of land 1,000+ hectares.

*La ley de lo mbarete*—the law of the jungle, meaning that the rich and powerful are above the law.

*Liberales*—the opposition political party, (PLRA) *El Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico*.

*Ligas Agrarias*—Short for *Ligas Agrarias Christianas*, which was an association of rural church dioceses for the purpose of rural and agricultural development. The *Ligas* encouraged and sponsored development workshops, experimental agricultural and cooperative living in rural Paraguay from the late 1960’s to the *Pascua Dolorosa* of 1976 when Stroessner crushed the movement with military force.

*Lo mbarete*—Guaraní for the social elite who economically and politically dominate the country.

*Lo ate’y*—Guaraní for the “lazy ones.”

*Lo jataivy guasu*—Guaraní that translates as “the big ticks,” is a term of description for Spanish speaking Paraguayans who exploit the peasant’s cheap labor and grow wealthy without doing any physical labor of their own.

*Loteamiento*—the legal titling of land that was occupied by peasants but owned by another

*Maestro*—teacher.

*Mandi'o*—the yucca root that serves as a major sustenance crop for the peasantry.

*Marzo Paraguayo*—popular name for the *coup d'état* of 1999 that removed president Cubas Grau from office.

*Mbarete*—translates from the *Guaraní* as “strength” or “power.”

*Mburuvicha roga*—*Guaraní* name for the presidential mansion. It translates as Home of the Tribal Chief.

*Medida de fuerza*—this is a protest tactic employing sheer numbers and a show of strength running the risk of a physical confrontation with the police or armed forces. An example of a *medida de fuerza* would be a roadblock employing several hundred peasants who refuse to permit traffic to pass.

*Mestizo*—a person of mixed Native American and Hispanic ancestry.

*Mestizaje*—the process by which race and/or culture is mixed.

*Minga*—cooperative work performed in a community free of charge. *Minga* usually involves the whole community donating labor to a different member every other week in rotation. Probably a pre-colonial practice contrasted with *changa*, work in exchange for money.

*Minifundia*—the subdivision of land through the passage of land from one generation to the next that results in plots that are too small to for sustainable agriculture. This is a serious, endemic problem in Paraguay.

*Minifundista*—a peasant who owns less than the minimum of five hectares of land.

*Minifundización*—the process of subdivision of peasant land holdings.

*La mitã o-ke se hape ari*—this translates from the *Guaraní* as “the people want to sleep in the road,” meaning that the peasants are too uncivilized and lazy to do anything for themselves.

*La mitã paragua'y pe*—also called *Asunceño* in Spanish, *La mitã paragua'y pe* is a *Guaraní* expression referring to a city dweller, also connotes that such a person is not racially a peasant (*mestizo*) but is *blanco* or white.

*Mondacráticos*—a reference to the time honored practice of political regimes sacking the state coffers. The term is derived from the combination of the words “*democrático*” and “*mondaha*,” to mean “rule by those who steal.

*Mondaha*—*Guaraní* for “thief.”

*Movimiento de los Campesinos Sin Tierra*— a term sometimes applied to protesting peasants by members of the press who compare the Paraguayan land reform movement to the Brazilian *Campesao Sem Terra* movement of the 1980s.

*Nembotavy*— “stupidity” in *Guaraní*.

*Noticias*—*Diario Noticias* is the second most popular newspaper in Paraguay.

*Nuestra Señora de la Asunción* —full name of the capital city.

*Occupaciones*—temporary invasions of private or state property in which peasants build ranchos and plant some crops, usually in full expectation of being evicted.

*Opa rei*—*Guaraní* expression meaning, “It’s over. There is nothing to be done about it.” It is commonly used to indicate that politics, greed or stupidity has ended the possibility of something.

*Parapiti*—sugarcane liquor.

*Pasaje*—the cost of travel by bus from a rural area to a town or to the capital.

*Pascua Dolorosa*— literally translates as the Sad Easter, in reference to the forceful dissolution of the Ligas Agrarias between April and May of 1976 when hundreds of peasants were injured and dozens murdered.

*Patrimonio*—national heritage.

*Patrón*—a local person of wealth and influence who loans money to peasants at exorbitant rates. The peasant is indebted to a *patrón* who exploits the peasant by overcharging for services and undervaluing the peasant’s labor.

*Picudo*—the cotton boll weevil.

*Pobreza*—poverty.

*Poroto*—the Spanish term for *kumanda* or beans.

*Pueblo*—a small town.

*Py nandi*—literally means barefoot in *Guaraní* but refers either to the traditional irregular peasant troops known for their ruthlessness or to the fact of a peasant’s poverty.

*Py rague*—*Guaraní* term meaning peasant spy planted by the Stroessner government to monitor peasant organization activity, including communism.

*Que Paraguayo!*—Expression meaning “stupid” or “inept.”

*Raices*—Spanish term for “roots,” as in “the roots of the plant.”

*El Raleo*—the practice of thinning seedlings after they have emerged from the soil.

Choosing to allow only the healthiest plants to remain and grow after a few weeks increases crop yields and diminishes the potential for disease to infect weakened plants.

*Rancho*—a temporary housing structure constructed by farmers in their fields as a place to rest and to take a meal since a farmer's land can be miles from the farmer's home. Ranchos also refer to the shacks constructed by peasants as their homes in new settlements, either legal or illegal.

*Rollotrafico*— is the practice of illegally harvesting, processing and transporting valuable lumber from state or private land in violation of private property or conservation efforts.

*Rosado*—virgin land that has a dark, red color and is highly productive for agriculture.

*Rubros*—a compensation paid to teachers for room and board. It is common for rural teachers to accept compensation for *rubros* in order to obtain a teaching position in the rural countryside, after which the community takes responsibility for petitioning the government to supply the teacher with a salary.

*Seccionalero*—the local party boss in charge of a *seccional*. Often the *seccionalero* also served as the local mayor as well as *patrón* of peasants in the area.

*Seccional*—the local and smallest component in the chain of command within the Colorado party's political structure.

*Semilla*—seed for planting.

*Ser responsable*—translates literally as, "Be responsible!" It is a phrase defining the implicit social contract in Paraguay and prescribing the rule of behavior for the peasant: be responsible and the society will provide for you.

*Sexto curso*—sixth grade, equivalent to the fifth grade of an American primary school.

*La siembra*—planting.

*Sintierra*—a peasant without his or her own land.

*Sinvergüenza* —one who is without dignity and possesses no shame.

*Sombrero piri*—*jópara* meaning "straw hat." The *sombrero piri* is a symbol that represents pure rural peasant culture. Traditional peasants wear straw hats, indicating their adherence to traditional rural and peasant values.

*Stroneato*—term for the 35 year long rule of the dictator Alfredo Stroessner de Matiauda, which ran from 1954 to 1989.

*Stronismo*—dictatorial political tactics and thinking in the mold of the *Stroneato*.

*Tallo*—stem, particularly in reference to the hard woody stem of the cotton plant.

*Terrateniente*—the owner of a vast tract of land 1,000+ hectares.

*Terrere*—*yerba mate* drunk cold, often with ice. This practice is unique to Paraguay and a particular addition of the peasantry.

*Tierra*—land.

*Tractorazo*—protest or roadblock by farmers with tractors.

*El Trueque*—bartering and or the extension of informal lines of credit.

*Ultima Hora*—Paraguayan newspaper.

*Venenos*—pesticides.

*Viveros*—plant nurseries.

*Vuro*—*Guaraní* for “stupid.” Derived from the Spanish word “burro.”

*Yerba mate*—a tree cultivated to produce leaves that are consumed in the national drinks of Paraguay, *terrere* and *mate*. It is a valuable source of income for peasants.

*Xe ñembotavy*—translates from the *Guaraní* as “my mistake,” but, by implication, refers to a supposed profound inability of the Paraguayan peasant to do anything right.

*Yvy*—*Guaraní* term for “land.”

*Yvy-i*—*Guaraní* term for “*minifundia*,” the subdivision of land through the passage of land from one generation to the next that results in plots that are too small to for sustainable agriculture.

*Yvy porã*—*Guaraní* for “good land,” meaning arable or agriculturally fertile land.

*Yvytyruzu*—name of the *Parque Nacional Yvytyruzu*, a 24,000-hectare tract of land named for the small mountain range that divides the property. The *Parque Nacional* was established in 1995, as a result of management and tenure disagreements land struggles have erupted in the region since 2002.

*Zafra Algodonera*—cotton harvest as opposed the *la zafra*, which refers to the sugarcane harvest.

*Zapatu*—*Guaraní* word for “sandals” or “shoes.”



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