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**The Nation and National Identity  
in Paraguayan School Textbooks**

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# The Nation and National Identity in Paraguayan School Textbooks

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## Introduction

How is 'Paraguay' described to young Paraguayans? How are they taught what it means *to be* a Paraguayan? What are they told about their 'national identity'? School textbooks can help answer these questions: they serve as both repositories and conduits for ideas about the nation. I analyse how description combines with prescription to construct national identity in Paraguayan school textbooks.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Paraguay was governed by one of the longest-lasting authoritarian regimes in Latin American history. General Alfredo Stroessner, in power from 1954 to 1989, constructed a highly centralised public education system and promoted a national doctrine of *unidad granítica*.<sup>1</sup> This official creed was supported with the discourse of ethno-national homogeneity and xenophobic militarism against neighbouring countries.<sup>2</sup> School textbooks of the period were 'moralizante, nacionalista, etnocéntrica'; they focused on 'episodios bélicos' in national history, and emphasised the unity of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

The fall of the Stroessner regime in 1989 was followed by internal democratisation and international *rapprochement*. Paraguay became a founding member of *Mercosur* in 1991, along with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay: this intergovernmental organisation aimed to facilitate economic cooperation and alleviate regional

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<sup>1</sup> P.Lambert, '“¡Muero con mi patria!” Myth, Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Paraguay', in W.Fowler & P.Lambert (eds), *Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Latin America* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.197-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.194-5.

<sup>3</sup> M.Durán Estragó, M.Rivarola & M.Prieto Yegros, 'Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya de la Historia para la reforma de programas y textos escolares de la materia', *Historia Paraguaya*, XXXVI (Asunción, 1996), p.259.

antagonisms.<sup>4</sup> Constitutional change in 1992 abandoned previous emphases upon ethnic and cultural homogeneity, re-defining the country as ‘un país pluricultural y bilingüe’.<sup>5</sup> In order to complement these processes, the new democratic regime launched a comprehensive educational reform in 1994.

An important part of the reform agenda of the *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* (*MEC*) was the publication and free distribution of new school textbooks. In 2007, for the first time, the ministry invested in textbooks for *Educación Media*.<sup>6</sup> In the initial distribution, nearly 550,000 were delivered to 1,625 (mainly state) institutions, reaching over 162,000 students.<sup>7</sup> Although the use of these materials is not obligatory, they have been widely adopted in classrooms: not only do they complement the curriculum prescribed by the *MEC*, but they were presented to schools with often extremely limited resources.<sup>8</sup> The textbooks are not due for revision before 2012; until then it is intended that they will be passed down annually to each new student intake.

I analyse the content of *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías*, one of the seven textbook series distributed in 2007, and compare them with previous textbooks.<sup>9</sup> First,

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<sup>4</sup> A.Malamud, ‘MERCOSUR Turns 15: Between Rising Rhetoric and Declining Achievement’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18, 3 (2005), pp.422-3.

<sup>5</sup> B.Siebzehner, ‘Shaping Collective Identities through Educational Reforms in Paraguay’, in L.Roniger & M.Sznajder (eds), *Constructing Collective Identities and Shaping Public Spheres: Latin American Paths* (Brighton, 1998), p.222.

<sup>6</sup> *Educación Media* consists of three year-groups, officially ages 15-17. It is not compulsory; only 41% of 15-17 year-olds were enrolled in 2007, 76.7% in state schools. *Paraguay: Educación en Cifras 2007* (Dirección General de Información, Monitoreo, Planificación y Calidad Educativa, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura) [www.mec.gov.py](http://www.mec.gov.py) (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>7</sup> The textbooks were also published on the *MEC* website, which was developed to facilitate the reform agenda. *Noticias* (Reforma Joven, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, May 2007) <http://www.reformaeducacionmedia.edu.py/contenido/noticia22.html> (Accessed May 2009); <http://www.arandurape.edu.py/default.aspx> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>8</sup> (Portal Educativo Arandurape, personal communication, 20 April 2009); (P.Petters Minck, Director of Colégio Nacional, Asunción, personal communication, 25 April 2009).

<sup>9</sup> In future, ‘*Ciencias Sociales*’. The other series were *Lengua Castellana y Literatura*, *Guaraní Ñe’ẽ*, *Matemática*, *Educación Física*, *Lengua Extranjera: Inglés*, and *Artes*. A selection of school textbooks

I describe the structure and didactic style of the materials. Second, I investigate the conceptualisation of the nation and national identity they present. Third, I analyse how history is incorporated into these concepts, focusing on accounts of the sixteenth-century conquest, *mestizaje*, and military conflicts. Fourth, I discuss how the nation is placed in a contemporary context, and the implications this has for national identity.

Questions of nationhood in Paraguay are more relevant now than ever. Twenty years after the fall of the dictatorship, critics lament that there has been no thorough re-examination of Paraguayan national identity, despite processes of democratisation and regional integration.<sup>10</sup> The way that the nation and national identity are presented to the likely future leaders and professionals of Paraguayan society may reveal not only how ideas have developed in recent years, but also how they might change in the future.

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from the Stroessner era are held at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany.

<sup>10</sup> The overall success of these processes has also been questioned: Lambert, “¡Muero con mi patria!”, pp.192, 201.

## **School Textbook Research in Latin America: Motives and Methods**

School textbook research in Latin America has focused on the identity-forming potential of didactic materials.<sup>11</sup> Since its foundation in the early 1990s, the *Sector Educativo Mercosur (SEM)* has recommended the elimination of nationalist discourses in the textbooks of member-states. This initiative intends to facilitate the promotion of a ‘conciencia ciudadana favorable al proceso de la integración’, and assumes that certain national loyalties can harm *international* harmony.<sup>12</sup> Similar projects have appeared throughout Latin America: the *Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)*, *Convenio Andrés Bello* and *Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos* all aim to expose nationalism and encourage regional perspectives of history and identity in textbooks.<sup>13</sup> The *OEA* revealed its concerns in 1995: ‘resulta muy preocupante, a pocos años del tercer milenio, la existencia de menciones agresivas a los países vecinos’.<sup>14</sup>

The recent spate of ‘internationalist’ literature in Latin America is in response to the way that school textbooks have traditionally sought to strengthen *national* identities.<sup>15</sup> In 1959, the Mexican state published and distributed compulsory national textbooks, motivated to a large extent ‘por el deseo de fomentar y encauzar la lealtad y la

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<sup>11</sup> G.Ossenbach Sauter, ‘La investigación sobre los manuales escolares en América Latina: la contribución del Proyecto MANES’, *Historia de la Educación: Revista Interuniversitaria*, 19 (Salamanca, 2000), pp.195-203.

<sup>12</sup> L.Brezzo, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina en los textos escolares: una perspectiva bilateral de las representaciones del otro’, *Entrepasados*, 20-21 (Buenos Aires, 2001), p.164.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163; G.Muñoz, *La enseñanza de la historia en el nivel medio: situación, tendencias e innovaciones* (Madrid, 1996), p.309; R.Valls, ‘Introducción’, in R.Valls (ed.), *Los procesos independentistas iberoamericanos en los manuales de Historia, Volumen II: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay* (Madrid, 2005), p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Brezzo, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina’, p.163.

<sup>15</sup> Though as early as the 1920s the League of Nations was emitting similar critiques: J.Zoraida Vázquez, ‘Introducción’, in J.Zoraida Vázquez & P.Gonzalbo Aizpuru (eds), *La enseñanza de la historia* (Washington, 1994), p.4.

conciencia nacional de los ciudadanos adolescentes'.<sup>16</sup> Throughout Latin America, the need to weld together often diverse and unequal societies ensured the prioritisation of nation-building through education in general, and school textbooks in particular.<sup>17</sup>

Studies of Paraguayan textbooks, though rare, have also been motivated by changing political imperatives.<sup>18</sup> Caetano justified his critique by emphasising the need for 'una perspectiva regionalista' in narratives about the wars of independence.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Brezzo investigated the way Argentina and Argentines were depicted in Paraguayan textbooks, lamenting how bellicose interpretations of national history can lead to a 'dejo de confianza' between 'las sociedades de la región'.<sup>20</sup> Proposals for school textbook reform presented by the *Academia Paraguaya de la Historia (APH)* - and accepted by the *MEC* in 1996 - concentrated on similar themes, recommending that accounts of national history be modified to serve and reflect democratisation and regional cooperation.<sup>21</sup> Such internationalist motivations, however, have only recently come to the fore in Paraguay. The very same *APH*, for example, had until the democratic transition been a vociferous proponent of the use of national history to solidify *national* identities.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M.Riekenberg, 'Caudillos y caudillismo: la presentación del tema en los libros escolares de historia latinoamericana', in M.Riekenberg (ed.), *Latinoamérica: enseñanza de la historia, libros de textos y conciencia histórica* (Buenos Aires, 1991), p.173.

<sup>17</sup> G.Ossenbach Sauter & M.Somoza, 'Introducción', in G.Ossenbach Sauter & M.Somoza (eds), *Los manuales escolares como fuente para la historia de la educación en América Latina* (Madrid, 2001), p.23.

<sup>18</sup> The paucity of research on Paraguayan school textbooks is exemplified by the presence of just one work (Caetano, below) in the library of the *Proyecto MANES*, an otherwise extensive collection of school textbook research in Ibero-America: *Proyecto MANES – Centro de Investigación MANES, Manuales Escolares* <http://www.uned.es/manesvirtual/ProyectoManes/index.htm> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>19</sup> G.Caetano, 'Paraguay y Uruguay', in Valls, *Los procesos independentistas iberoamericanos*, p.135.

<sup>20</sup> Brezzo, 'El Paraguay y la Argentina', p.164.

<sup>21</sup> Durán Estragó *et al.*, 'Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya', p.259.

<sup>22</sup> 'Pronunciamento de la Academia Paraguaya de la Historia sobre la Enseñanza de la Materia', *Historia Paraguaya*, XXVI (Asunción, 1989), p.129.

Politicians, social leaders and academics are all concerned with the way that different interpretations of *history* can create, reinforce or change contemporary identities. Urribarri, hoping to cultivate a *mercosureña* identity, encourages interpretations of regional history that emphasise cooperation rather than conflict.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Mexican ‘textbook controversy’ of 1992, during which teachers and schools rejected new government-produced materials, was to some extent provoked by the perception that history had been re-written to serve political ends.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, before we assume that interpretations of history are intended to influence contemporary identities, we should also see, where possible, what textbooks say explicitly about the present.

In recent decades most investigations of school textbooks in Latin America have presented their findings in the style of literary book reviews, using a combination of historiographical and discursive analysis to identify prominent ‘ejes semánticos-ideológicos’.<sup>25</sup> Pratt criticises these methods, demanding quantitative data to facilitate cumulative and comparative research; also, he suggests that this would limit the impact of subjective biases.<sup>26</sup> I agree that the value of textbook analysis is greatest when objective description is clearly separated from prescriptive recommendations. Researchers often criticise the juxtaposition of descriptive and prescriptive discourses

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<sup>23</sup> D.Urribarri, ‘Nosotros y los ‘otros’ en los manuales escolares: identidad nacional y Mercosur’, *Cuadernos para el Debate*, 2 (Buenos Aires, 1999), p.28.

<sup>24</sup> D.Gilbert, ‘Rewriting History: Salinas, Zedillo and the 1992 Textbook Controversy’, *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, 13, 2 (Summer, 1997), p.271.

<sup>25</sup> N.Léon, ‘Introducción’, in G.Bini *et al*, *Los libros de texto en América Latina* (Mexico City, 1977), p.8.

<sup>26</sup> The quantitative measures proposed are not appropriate for the purposes of this paper, but could benefit future research: D.Pratt, ‘Bias in Textbooks: Progress and Problems’, in J.Berry, M.Laferrière & R.Samuda (eds), *Multiculturalism in Canada: Social and Educational Perspectives* (London, 1984), p.156.

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in school textbooks, seemingly unaware that their own work is most hindered by the guiding presence of politics and ideology.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ossenbach Sauter & Somoza, 'Introducción', p.23.

## **Structure: *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías***

Debates about the purpose of teaching history persist everywhere.<sup>28</sup> Should its primary aim be to encourage critical thinking, convey information about the past, or simply contribute to the construction of contemporary identities? Throughout the twentieth century Paraguayan history textbooks revealed their identity-forming motivations: one published in 1959 for *Educación Media* hoped that students ‘a través de este estudio aprenderá a amar mejor a su Patria’.<sup>29</sup> In 1981 the *APH* suggested that an awareness of history had solidified national sentiment and contributed to Paraguayan successes during the Chaco War.<sup>30</sup> References to the patriotic value of history may have been used simply to resonate with the nationalistic military government. Nonetheless, the role of history - and History - in the formation of contemporary national identity continues to be explicitly recognised in the materials commissioned by the *MEC*.<sup>31</sup> The incorporation of History into *Estudios Sociales*, first implemented under the military dictatorship, was vigorously contested by the *APH*, which feared that this would devalue the discipline.<sup>32</sup> Zoraida Vásquez, though, points out that this amalgamation ‘tiene la ventaja de integrar los eventos del pasado con los del presente’.<sup>33</sup> Attempts to influence contemporary identities continue to inform the way that history is taught in Paraguay and elsewhere.

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<sup>28</sup> V.Radkau García, ‘Aprendizaje histórico: consideraciones y propuestas didácticas’, in J.Pérez Siller & V.Radkau García, *Identidad en el imaginario nacional: reescritura y enseñanza de la historia* (Puebla, 1998), pp.282-3.

<sup>29</sup> V.Vasconcelos, *Lecciones de Historia Paraguaya* (Asunción, 1959), p.7.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Pronunciamiento’, p.134.

<sup>31</sup> O.Massare de Kostianovsky, ‘Estrategias de cambios en la enseñanza de la historia’, *Historia Paraguaya*, XXXVIII (Asunción, 1998), pp.27-9; *Guía Didáctica: Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías*, Primer Curso, Volumen 2, Unidad 4 [in future, *Guía Didáctica 1-2-4*] (Asunción, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Pronunciamiento’, p.125.

<sup>33</sup> J.Zoraida Vásquez, ‘Los libros de texto de historia y ciencias sociales en Latinoamérica, España y Portugal’, in Zoraida Vásquez & Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *La enseñanza de la historia*, pp.33-5.

*Ciencias Sociales* is a six-volume multidisciplinary textbook series that introduces students to ‘problemas del entorno social’.<sup>34</sup> The first three volumes of the series are for the *Primer Curso*, two are for the *Segundo Curso*, and one for the *Tercer Curso*. Each volume is divided into seven to ten chapters (*unidades*), each of which broadly represents individual disciplines ranging from History to Health. There is some chronological order to how narratives of history lead to discussions about the present, for example where Paraguayan identity is discussed in three consecutive chapters: ‘Nuestras raíces’, ‘Nuestra identidad’ and ‘Identificándonos con nuestras raíces’. Eclectic combinations of theoretical discussion, historical narrative and connections to the contemporary world frequently appear in the chapters that deal with history and identity. Concepts are usually introduced before they are applied - ‘History’ is discussed before history is taught - which provides an opportunity to compare how the substantive content of the narrative is (or isn’t) informed by these wider theorisations. *Ciencias Sociales* offers a platform for explicit and implicit connections between history, the present, and national identity.

In the *Ciencias Sociales* series, topics are often repeated, and some materials present contradictory information and conclusions. Contrasting depictions of the first contacts between Europeans and Guaraní Amerindians, for example, repeatedly appear in uncoordinated fragments of information.<sup>35</sup> Since 1973 Paraguayan history has been taught using the ‘progresivamente ampliada-reiterativa’ method, whereby the same historical periods are covered in increasing depth each school year.<sup>36</sup> Advocates of reform denounced this technique for encouraging excessively simplistic narratives in

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<sup>34</sup> *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías*, Tercer Curso (3), Unidad 1 (1) [in future, *Ciencias Sociales* 3-1] (Asunción, 2007), p.14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías*, Primer Curso (1), Volumen 2 (2), Unidad 2 (2), [in future, *Ciencias Sociales* 1-2-2] (Asunción, 2007), pp.70, 73, 80, 81, 89, 96; 1-2-4, pp.149-150.

<sup>36</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.257.

early years before nuanced discussions are (too much) later introduced.<sup>37</sup> It is of course unrealistic to expect school textbooks to explain complex concepts and represent multiple perspectives, especially to younger students. Therefore, the messages that *are* presented are all the more worthy of analysis, as they reveal dominant (or perhaps simply established) interpretations of history, events and ideas. In *Ciencias Sociales*, though, there is a tendency to present seemingly contradictory overall narratives based on assortments of stand-alone ‘truths’. School directors have expressed their disappointment: ‘presentan unas misceláneas de contenidos sin secuencias lógicas’.<sup>38</sup> The eclectic structure of these textbooks appears to be due not only to the heterogeneous subject area of *Ciencias Sociales*, but also to a lack of editorial cohesion.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.257-8.

<sup>38</sup> (P.Petters Minck, Director of Colégio Nacional, Asunción, personal communication, 25 April 2009).

## **Didactic Style: ‘Intenta modificar aquellas negativas’**

The *Ciencias Sociales* series attempts to avoid the narrative-heavy didactic style traditionally employed in school textbooks. Critics of these ‘traditional’ methods condemned how information was presented as an unquestionable truth, and how exercises simply demanded the regurgitation of information; this was particularly the case in History textbooks.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, *Ciencias Sociales* provides students with a variety of interactive exercises and activities that often demand a critical engagement with the information provided. This reflects general changes in didactic style (preached, though not always practised) throughout Latin America, which encourage more participatory and interactive techniques rather than learning by rote.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of the tendencies described above, perhaps inevitably *Ciencias Sociales* continues to present ‘ya procesado’ narratives purporting to convey the truth.<sup>41</sup> The section dealing with ‘La historia de un país mediterráneo’, for example, consists of four pages of uninterrupted narrative dictating just one interpretation of the processes and events of Paraguayan history from 1534 to the 1860s.<sup>42</sup> In this account there is no recognition of alternative viewpoints, the source of the information is not cited, and the narrative is not introduced as in any way subjective. Extracts like this are found throughout the series, and serve as a reminder, if it were needed, that textbooks continue to ‘speak the truth’.

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<sup>39</sup> Durán Estragó *et al.*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, pp.256-7.

<sup>40</sup> E.Ossana, ‘Una alternativa en la enseñanza de la historia: el enfoque desde lo local, lo regional’, in Zoraida Vásquez & Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *La enseñanza de la historia*, p.95.

<sup>41</sup> Muñoz, *La enseñanza de la historia*, p.306.

<sup>42</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, pp.62-5.

Certain values about national identity are promoted in *Ciencias Sociales*. This is most obvious in the *Evaluación Socioafectiva* sections, which are ostensibly designed to ensure that students ‘autoevaluar...actitudes sobre la base de los contenidos desarrollados’.<sup>43</sup> In the exercise section of ‘Identificándonos con nuestras raíces’, students are invited to evaluate their ‘nivel de identificación como paraguayo o paraguaya’.<sup>44</sup> They are asked to state how they value certain elements of *paraguaydad*, such as ‘la identidad nacional’, ‘la cultura aborígen’, and ‘el idioma guaraní’. In the final stage of the exercise, though, an active moralising intent is revealed. If they are unfavourably disposed towards any of the listed characteristics of Paraguayan national identity, each student is instructed: ‘busca estrategias para mejorar tus valoraciones negativas’. Similar exercises appear throughout the series, revealing a clear intention not only to define the constituents of Paraguayan nationhood, but to encourage the incorporation of these into a positive valuation of national identity.

The discursive perspective employed throughout *Ciencias Sociales* is predominantly that of ‘nosotros los paraguayos’. It is assumed that all readers are ‘paraguayos’, and that references to ‘nuestra patria’ are concerned with Paraguay. There are occasional exceptions, for example where ‘nuestra identidad ibero-americana’ is expressed, but this is a rare deviation from the explicitly national connection between the text and the reader. There is nothing surprising about this national perspective: textbooks throughout the world are produced and distributed for national audiences.<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note, though, that in addition to ‘extranjeros’, also omitted from this discursive perspective are ‘indígenas’ and ‘nativos’. Readers are asked to empathise

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<sup>43</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, All Volumes, ‘Conociendo el libro’.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-4, p.179.

<sup>45</sup> An interesting exception is the joint Franco-German history textbook first published in 2006. See [www.gei.de](http://www.gei.de) (Accessed May 2009).

with the ‘indígenas de nuestro país, cuyas culturas generalmente no son valoradas’, which assumes that they (the readership) could not possibly be indígena themselves (as they are, instead, ‘paraguayos’).<sup>46</sup> This exclusive and restricted view of ‘nosotros los paraguayos’ is explicitly contradicted elsewhere by rhetoric that values internal diversity as a key constituent *of* the Paraguayan nation.<sup>47</sup> In reality, though, ‘indígenas’ *are* unlikely to attend institutions of *Educación Media*.<sup>48</sup> One of the major quandaries of school textbook production is therefore revealed: how to include social groups within the national narrative (if that is the intention of the pluri-cultural policy) when they are in fact marginalised. The exercises that I have cited ostensibly intend to encourage a greater understanding of these ‘others’, but they also reveal their underlying exclusion from *paraguaydad*.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-3, p.124.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5, p.202.

<sup>48</sup> For discussion of the marginalisation of ‘indígenas’: R.Horst, *The Stroessner Regime and Indigenous Resistance in Paraguay* (Gainesville, 2007).

## **Nationalism and the Nation: ‘Unida por los lazos de sangre y un destino común’**

A simple yet useful distinction between different forms of nationalism contrasts ‘ethno-cultural’ and ‘civic’ doctrines.<sup>49</sup> The former are generally deemed to be ‘exclusivist’, as they invoke primordial bonds to explain nationhood; and the latter are seen as at least potentially ‘inclusive’, universal and ‘voluntaristic’, as they permit more flexible ascriptions of national identity. Arguments about the origins and characteristics of ‘nations’ focus on whether they are essential, perennial, or simply modern constructions.<sup>50</sup> ‘National identity’ is a similarly contested concept, either used as an objective explanatory variable, or simply characterised as a ‘subjective belief or proposition entertained by historical agents’.<sup>51</sup> Miller criticises widespread assumptions that internal diversity and the weakness of nation-states has rendered nationalism and national identities relatively unimportant in Latin American politics and society.<sup>52</sup> I contextualise the messages presented in *Ciencias Sociales* within these wider debates.

According to the criteria of ‘nacionalismo’ described to the *Segundo Curso*, the way the Paraguayan nation is promoted throughout *Ciencias Sociales* is unabashedly ‘nacionalista’. ‘El nacionalismo es una doctrina o corriente politico-social que exalta las características propias de una nación, como el idioma, las costumbres, los

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<sup>49</sup> M.Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural, and Multicultural Politics* (London, 2000), p.50.

<sup>50</sup> See E.Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Oxford, 2006); A.Smith, *National Identity* (London, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> A.Knight, ‘Mexican National Identity’, in S.Deans-Smith & E.Van Young (eds), *Mexican Soundings: Essays in Honour of David A. Brading* (London, 2007), p.193.

<sup>52</sup> N.Miller, ‘The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 12, 2 (2006), pp.201-202.

ideales'.<sup>53</sup> The 'nacionalista' credentials of the textbook series itself are demonstrated by its frequent celebration of the 'características nacionales del Paraguay' and national symbols.<sup>54</sup> Information added to the above definition, however, confuses the way that nationalism is conceptualised: there are warnings that 'algunas características' of nationalism include 'patriotismo...cerrado, excluyente, totalizante', a belief in the 'superioridad de las virtudes nacionales o de la raza', and, amongst other things, 'es antidemocrática'.<sup>55</sup> Given that the textbook series is explicitly designed to foster democratic values, it is fair to infer that a rather negative view of 'nacionalismo' is being portrayed.<sup>56</sup> These competing definitions may be due to unscrupulous editing, or they could be the result of ideological disputes. What is clearly presented, though, is the idea that whilst much of the content referring to Paraguay in the textbooks can and should be described as 'nacionalista', the doctrine of 'nacionalismo' is dangerous in a democratic society. Perhaps this apparent paradox demonstrates how wider concepts are applied in an exceptional manner to specific discussions about Paraguay.

In marked contrast to the generally negative definition of 'nacionalismo' cited above, *Paraguayan* nationalism is presented as a positive force in national history: 'el sentimiento de un profundo nacionalismo hizo que el pueblo se uniera para lograr un único objetivo: la defensa del territorio nacional [in the Chaco War]'.<sup>57</sup> The emergence of nationalism in Paraguay is connected with a wider process of emancipation - from the 'yugo español', for example - which resonates with

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<sup>53</sup> *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías, Segundo Curso (2), Volumen 1 (1), Unidad 5 (5)* [in future, *Ciencias Sociales 2-1-5*], (Asunción, 2007), p.168.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-1-5, p.168.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-1-5, p.169.

<sup>56</sup> *Guía Didáctica*, 1-2-2, p.15.

<sup>57</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-1-5, p.169.

nationalist discourses throughout Latin America.<sup>58</sup> Miller is vindicated with the assertion that the ‘importante arraigo nacionalista’ was crucial for contributing to social cohesion.<sup>59</sup> In the *Tercer Curso*, moreover, the role of the state in nation-building is celebrated, which offers an implicit justification for the nationalist discourse found elsewhere in the textbooks.<sup>60</sup>

In *Ciencias Sociales*, ‘national identity’ is predominantly described as a socially-constructed rather than essential phenomenon, although it is also connected with a pre-modern past. The narrative recognises that early twentieth-century nationalist intellectuals ‘incursionaron en el revisionismo histórico para rescatar la identidad nacional y fortalecer la autoestima del pueblo paraguayo’.<sup>61</sup> This conscious promotion of national identity is cited to explain why ‘se declaró héroe máximo de la nacionalidad paraguaya’ the formerly ostracized president Francisco Solano López.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, textbooks published under the dictatorship would simply refer to this ‘principal héroe’ without worrying about how the tribute came about.<sup>63</sup> The cultivation of national identities is presented as a logical and benign method of maintaining social order, though the narrative also recognises that these national loyalties are threatened by political and economic trends in the early twenty-first century.<sup>64</sup> In general, the strength and presence of ‘national identity’ is conceptualised as a socially contingent rather than essential phenomenon.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-1-5, p.168; Miller, ‘The Historiography of Nationalism’, p.204.

<sup>59</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-1-5, p.169.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5, p.202.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-1-5, p.169.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-1-5, p.169.

<sup>63</sup> Vasconcelos, *Lecciones de Historia Paraguaya*, p.145.

<sup>64</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 3-5, pp.202-3.

An ethnic rather than civic conception of national belonging is in evidence throughout the earlier volumes of *Ciencias Sociales*, most clearly where the nation is described as a community ‘unida por los lazos de sangre y un destino común’.<sup>65</sup> The ‘nación’ is presented as an objective entity, a ‘comunidad de individuos asentada en un territorio determinado, con lengua, etnia, historia y cultura comunes’.<sup>66</sup> A qualification is made to recognise that many nations in history have lacked one or another of these characteristics, though the ethnic element remains integral. Also, the *Primer Curso* is presented with the traditional and rather simplistic depiction of a Paraguayan national homogeneity based on ties of blood and history.<sup>67</sup> In later volumes, however, ‘the nation’ is discussed in more ‘civic’ terms, which recognise the possibility of cultural and ethnic diversity.<sup>68</sup> The diversity of Paraguayan society is emphasized to the *Tercer Curso*, and framed within a context of globalisation, migration, and multiculturalism.<sup>69</sup> There is a clear progression from an ethno-cultural concept of nationhood to a more civic view.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.80.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.81.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.80.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5, pp.202-3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5, p.202.

## **Ethnicity and the Nation: ‘Los descendientes de los españoles y guaraníes’**

Paraguay is often distinguished from the rest of Latin America in ethnic terms. This distinction is based on assumptions that the country possesses a uniquely homogenous ethno-national identity strongly defined by the survival and national strength of a pre-Columbian language and culture, Guaraní.<sup>70</sup> Official doctrine under the Stroessner regime celebrated the virtue and unity of the *raza paraguaya*.<sup>71</sup> Lambert denounces the ‘cult of the nation, the myth of Guaraní descent... the uniqueness of Paraguayans’ as a political construct, although in so doing he recognises its powerful appeal.<sup>72</sup>

Certainly, Guaraní has survived and prospered as a *national* language, an unusual phenomenon for an indigenous tongue in what became Latin America: just 8 per cent of the population claim to be monolingual Spanish speakers.<sup>73</sup> The Guaraní heritage is invoked by Paraguayan nationalists to identify the primordial origins of the nation; nevertheless, *paraguayos* remain clearly distinguished from *indígenas* in nationalist discourse.<sup>74</sup> The dichotomy between the *paraguayo* (or *mestizo*, infused with Guaraní and Spanish blood) and the ‘indígena’ is revealed in a textbook published under the *stronato*: it omits Paraguay from a list of ‘aquellos países’ with predominantly indigenous populations.<sup>75</sup> This results in a puzzle: pretensions to Paraguayan

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<sup>70</sup> Siebzeher, ‘Shaping Collective Identities’, p.222; B.Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Ed. (London, 1991), p.197.

<sup>71</sup> M.Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías y Percepción Colectiva de la Historia en el Paraguay’, *Historia Paraguaya*, XXXVI (Asunción, 1996), pp.61-3; P.Lambert, ‘The Regime of Alfredo Stroessner’, in P.Lambert & A.Nickson (eds), *The Transition to Democracy in Paraguay* (Basingstoke, 1997), p.14.

<sup>72</sup> Lambert, “¡Muero con mi patria!”, p.194.

<sup>73</sup> 60 per cent of the population is bilingual: S.Villagra-Batoux, ‘The Guaraní Language- the Paraguayan Seal of Identity: A Path to Integration and Development’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 60, 3 (September 2008), p.53.

<sup>74</sup> This is also demonstrated by the distinction made between Guaraní and indigenous languages in the 1992 constitution: S.Villagra-Batoux, ‘The Guaraní Language- the Paraguayan Seal of Identity: A Path to Integration and Development’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 60, 3 (September 2008), p.53.

<sup>75</sup> L.Benítez, *Lecciones de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea* (Asunción, pre-1971), p.41.

uniqueness are based upon the incorporation of an indigenous, pre-Columbian culture into the national imagining, yet all things '*indígena*' are separated from notions of *paraguaydad*.

Similar attempts to subsume national identities into ethnic or racial groupings *have* occurred elsewhere in Latin America. In Mexico, *indigenismo* extolled the *mestizo* descent of Mexicans and included Amerindians (previously excluded from *mexicanidad*) into the national revolutionary discourse.<sup>76</sup> Also, the post-1952 revolutionary government in Bolivia sought to defuse ethnic tensions by encouraging class identities and appealing to unity through the homogenising ideal of national *mestizaje*.<sup>77</sup> A transnational ethnic imagining was promoted by concepts of racial fusion in Latin (or Indo-) America, most famously by Vasconcelos' celebration of the *raza cósmica*.<sup>78</sup> Such projects have been reversed in recent decades as a region-wide politicisation of ethnicity has undermined notions of ethnic homogeneity.<sup>79</sup> Miller asserts that 'most Latin Americanists would now emphasise the extent to which ideologies of racial mixing were based on racialised state structures and official national iconographies that excluded black and/or indigenous people'.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the Paraguayan conception of common ethnicity remains not only resilient, but also particularly *national* in character. Paraguay is often ignored in discussions of rising

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<sup>76</sup> A. Dawson, 'From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: *Indigenismo* and the 'Revindication' of the Mexican Indian, 1920-1940', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30 (1998), p.279.

<sup>77</sup> X. Albó, 'The 'Long Memory' of Ethnicity in Bolivia and Some Temporary Oscillations', in J. Crabtree & L. Whitehead (eds), *Bolivia: Unresolved Tensions* (Pittsburgh, 2008), p.21; for a different opinion of ethnicity in Bolivia see J.L. Roca, 'Regionalism Revisited', in Crabtree & Whitehead, *Bolivia*, p.67.

<sup>78</sup> J. Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana; notas de viajes a la América del Sur* (Barcelona, 1926).

<sup>79</sup> D.L. Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.79-83.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, 'The Historiography of Nationalism', p.204.

ethnic antagonisms, and continues to be identified as perhaps the best example of ethno-national homogeneity in Latin America.

Although Guaraní continued to be the most widely spoken language, under Stroessner it was marginalized from official state business, and public education was conducted entirely in Spanish.<sup>81</sup> This official suppression exposed a contradictory feature of the 'ethno-national' concept. Whilst the Guaraní heritage was trumpeted in political rhetoric to illustrate the uniqueness of Paraguayan ethnicity, in practice it was often subordinated in a Paraguayan version of the continent-wide dichotomy and conflict between *hispanismo* and *indigenismo*.<sup>82</sup> According to the proponents of ethno-national homogeneity, such conflict should have been made redundant by the success of *mestizaje*.

The democratic transition facilitated the official re-definition of Paraguay as a bilingual country with bilingual institutions.<sup>83</sup> There has been an unprecedented surge in the provision of bilingual education, although Spanish continues to be the *de facto* language of the state and government.<sup>84</sup> Also, an increased recognition of internal cultural heterogeneity has sparked vigorous debates about the constituents of Paraguayan nationhood, because previously ignored indigenous groups and other minorities are now not so easily obscured by the hegemonic *mestizo* category.<sup>85</sup> It appears that Paraguay *has* been affected by the wider tendency - propelled under the

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<sup>81</sup> Villagra-Batoux, 'The Guaraní Language', p.52; Siebzeiner, 'Shaping Collective Identities', p.222.

<sup>82</sup> See J.Zoraida Vásquez, 'Textos de historia al servicio del nacionalismo', in Riekenberg, *Latinoamérica: enseñanza de la historia*, pp.48-9.

<sup>83</sup> Siebzeiner, 'Shaping Collective Identities', p.222.

<sup>84</sup> Villagra-Batoux, 'The Guaraní Language', pp.53-6.

<sup>85</sup> C.Añazco & R.Dendia, *Identidad Nacional: aportes para una reforma educativa* (Asunción, 1997), p.162.

‘Third Wave’ of democracy in Latin America - to recognise intra-national diversity and increase support for marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

School textbooks published in Paraguay before the educational reforms of the 1990s generally conformed to the official doctrines espoused by the military regime: ‘la nueva raza paraguaya, más hermosa e inteligente que la española’, was presented as a homogenous, unchanging and superior entity that had demonstrated its strength throughout Paraguayan history.<sup>86</sup> There was little room for those outside of this *mestizo* ideal in the national narrative, and non-Guaraní indigenous groups were often only described as relics of a distant past.<sup>87</sup> Critics of these messages asserted that the heterogeneity of Paraguayan society was suppressed by the military regime’s pursuit of national unity.<sup>88</sup>

In school textbooks throughout Latin America, certainly up until the wave of educational reforms in the 1990s, interpretations of the ‘discovery’ and conquest of the Americas tended to assume that European colonisation conferred progress and civilization upon inferior indigenous peoples.<sup>89</sup> Paraguayan textbooks also portrayed indigenous groups as ‘hostiles, salvajes y agresivos’, and ripe for the civilising influence of ‘conquistadores y sacerdotes’.<sup>90</sup> Such depictions demonstrated how, despite the rhetoric of inclusion through *mestizaje*, many elements of Paraguayan national identity were portrayed in similar, Eurocentric (or indeed racist) terms to those of the rest of Latin America.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ciencias Sociales – Primer Curso*, Texto EDISA, Nuevo Currículo, Editorial Don Bosco (Asunción, pre-1989), p.271.

<sup>87</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.261.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.265.

<sup>89</sup> Zoraida Vásquez, ‘Los libros de texto de historia’, pp. 11, 18, 23-4; Benítez, *Lecciones de Historia*, p.43.

<sup>90</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.261.

The conquest of what became Paraguayan territory was depicted in school textbooks as a process of reciprocity and friendship between Europeans and Guaraní Indians: ‘el mito del Harén Americano’ supported ideals about the construction of a unique national unity.<sup>91</sup> ‘En nombre del nacionalismo, la memoria de la resistencia indígena fue olvidada’.<sup>92</sup> In response, the reformers of the mid-1990s, who determined that the Paraguayan conquest had not been quite so harmonious, recommended less ‘romantic’ accounts of the period.<sup>93</sup> Wider theories had been modified to suit the political imperative of presenting Paraguay as a unified and homogenous nation, but this practice came under increasing scrutiny during the democratic transition.

In *Ciencias Sociales* the foundations of ‘la nación paraguaya’ are presented as the ‘lazos de sangre’ forged between ‘padres españoles’ and ‘madres nativas’ in the sixteenth century.<sup>94</sup> It is asserted that the ‘pueblo paraguayo’ appeared as a direct result of the ‘hecho biológico y social’ of *mestizaje*.<sup>95</sup> Non-*mestizo* outsiders are excluded from the historical formation of the Paraguayan nation, and are described as clear ‘others’ against which to relate the unity of the *paraguayos*.<sup>96</sup> The rigidity of a definition of Paraguayan ethnic identity based on the historical moment of *mestizaje* is exemplified by the way that the act of union is always described as one between Spanish men and Guaraní women, rather than as an evolving and complex process.<sup>97</sup>

The past and the present are intimately linked by these accounts of racial fusion, as

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<sup>91</sup> Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías’, p.56. This interpretation remains popular Paraguayan academic discourse: M.Prieto Yegros, ‘La nación paraguaya’, *Historia Paraguaya*, XLIII (Asunción, 2003), p.295.

<sup>92</sup> Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías’, p.69.

<sup>93</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.262.

<sup>94</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.80.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-1-2, p.80. Also see A.Spedding, ‘Mestizaje: ilusiones y realidades’, in H.Ruiz, A.Mansilla & W.Vargas (eds), *Mestizaje: ilusiones y realidades* (La Paz, 1996), p.28.

the original act of *mestizaje* is portrayed as the defining feature of Paraguayan ethnicity.

Depictions of contemporary Paraguayan nationhood consistently refer to biological ties between Spanish and Guaraní as though they were unchanged since the conquest: ‘los descendientes de los españoles y guaraníes, unidos en el mestizaje’, are deemed to have populated the central region of the country ‘durante la mayor parte de nuestra historia’.<sup>98</sup>

Relative geographical and political isolation is considered to have contributed to ‘la homogeneidad de la población paraguaya...esto se debe principalmente a que al Paraguay no arribaron las grandes corrientes migratorias de europeos’.<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to note that a paucity of non-Hispanic European immigration is deemed sufficient to warrant the tag of racial homogeneity, which rather ignores the indigenous peoples inhabiting Paraguayan territory that were not incorporated into the *mestizo* ideal. The reader is left in no doubt that the authentic Paraguayan of today is, or at least should be, a *mestizo*, infused with both Guaraní and Spanish blood. National identity, as portrayed in accounts of history, continues to be defined in the terms of ethno-national homogeneity, as the narrative celebrates a particularly ‘Paraguayan’ breed of *mestizaje*.

In *Ciencias Sociales*, the survival of the Guaraní language is celebrated as a key feature of *paraguaydad*, and is used to differentiate Paraguay from the rest of Latin

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<sup>98</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-1-2, pp.26-7.

America.<sup>100</sup> An active promotion of Guaraní goes beyond the notional commitment to this heritage displayed in textbooks before the educational reform: the narrative asserts that ‘el idioma guaraní se constituye en el nexo más importante con nuestros predecesores’.<sup>101</sup> The unbalanced bilingualism of the textbooks, however, also reveals the extent to which Guaraní had been marginalised under the Stroessner regime. Whilst there is a conscious effort to provide, for example, Guaraní chapter headings, the vast majority of the material is written in Spanish. Thus, Spanish maintains a normative pre-eminence, although Guaraní is being actively encouraged in an attempt to substantiate its role as a defining element of *paraguaydad*.

Guaraní roots are frequently valued *above* Spanish ones in *Ciencias Sociales*, which marks a dramatic reversal of the Eurocentric discourses that characterized pre-reform textbooks. The national narrative adopts the historical perspective of the Guaraní, and depicts the Spanish as outsiders: ‘cuando llegaron los españoles, *nuestros antepasados* [my italics] no poseían grafía, pues ellos se comunicaban en forma oral’.<sup>102</sup> The narrative, still ostensibly speaking from a Paraguayan perspective, clearly takes possession of Guaraní roots and distances itself from Spanish ones: ‘el idioma español lo obtuvimos como herencia de los europeos españoles que conquistaron y colonizaron el territorio paraguayo y el idioma guaraní, como herencia de nuestros autóctonos antepasados’.<sup>103</sup> Also, Guaraní is explicitly lauded as a unifying force for the nation: ‘ha sido reconocido como la fuerza unificadora más importante del

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<sup>100</sup> This reflects a wider thesis: C.Bolke Turner & B.Turner, ‘The Role of Mestizaje of Surnames in Paraguay in the Creation of a Distinct New World Ethnicity’, *Ethnohistory*, 41, 1 (Winter, 1993), p.139.

<sup>101</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-4, p.136.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-4, p.136.

<sup>103</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-1-3, p.166.

país'.<sup>104</sup> The Guaraní heritage of Paraguay is venerated in the text, and adopted by the narrative voice as the authentic expression of *paraguaydad*.

'Romantic' interpretations of the conquest are actively undermined in *Ciencias Sociales*. The decision of some Guaraní to cooperate with the Spanish is described as a political one, nothing to do with innate generosity or pacifism, as had been glibly assumed in previous textbooks.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the 'Guaraní' are not always described as a homogenous people that submitted *en masse* to the process of *mestizaje*: there is a recognition that some Guaraní groups bitterly resisted the Spanish and *mestizos*.<sup>106</sup> It is explicitly recognised that the much-celebrated union between Spanish and Guaraní did not result, immediately, in an egalitarian harmony: ethnic-based inequalities during colonisation are exposed, whilst in past textbooks they had often been ignored under the homogenising banner of *mestizaje*.<sup>107</sup> Instead, it is determined that 'la nueva organización sociocultural provocó en los guaraníes una actitud agresiva, debido a que fueron obligados a intensos trabajos a favor de los españoles'.<sup>108</sup> The less romantic, more nuanced accounts of the conquest and initial relations between the Spanish and Guaraní demonstrate a significant divergence with the narrative trends of textbooks published before the educational reform.

The present-day plight of non-Guaraní indigenous groups is extensively catalogued in *Ciencias Sociales*, whereas previous textbooks had tended to refer to them in a purely historical context.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, students are encouraged to understand and

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-1-2, p.95.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.70.

<sup>109</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, 'Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya', p.261.

sympathise with these often impoverished and marginalized groups; they are instructed to prepare ‘planes de acción para ayudar a los nativos y nativas’.<sup>110</sup> The multicultural nature of Paraguayan society is trumpeted: ‘en Paraguay se tiene la oportunidad de practicar la interculturalidad, especialmente, con los pueblos indígenas que también presentan diversidad étnica y cultural’.<sup>111</sup> It seems that the positive valuation of multicultural identities, a key objective of the educational reform, has affected some *explicit* portrayals of contemporary ethnicity in Paraguay.<sup>112</sup>

The Guaraní heritage of Paraguay is generally incorporated into the national *mestizo* paradigm and distinguished from that of other indigenous groups. Nonetheless, there are exceptions to this rule: one caption describes how ‘la población autóctona del Paraguay, los guaraníes, interactúan con todos y todas en la sociedad, dándoles oportunidad de practicar la interculturalidad’.<sup>113</sup> This caption contradicts many of the dominant notions of Paraguayan ethnic identity presented elsewhere in the textbook series. It is suggested that some Guaraní are still identifiable as autonomous groups, separate from the homogenising reach of *mestizaje*. Elsewhere, the ethnic mixing of the Guaraní with the Spanish is presented as near-universal. This narrative deviation symbolises how simplistic notions of homogenous ethno-nationality and common descent are becoming increasingly untenable in the multicultural, democratic Paraguay that the *MEC* and others are attempting to forge. Also, it suggests an occasional lack of coherence between the ideas expounded in the textbooks, which may be the result of competing ideologies and shifting political imperatives.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-1-6, p.227.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5, p.204.

<sup>112</sup> Massare de Kostianovsky, ‘Estrategias de cambios’, pp.25-6.

<sup>113</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 3-5, p.204.

## War and National Identity: ‘Después de la Guerra’

Paraguay fought in two of the bloodiest international wars in Latin American history; the collective memory and imagining of these conflicts are consistently cited as key constituents of Paraguayan national identity.<sup>114</sup> Centeno identifies the exceptional significance of these *contiendas* for nation-building and national identity in Paraguay, in a region with historically-few international conflicts, adding that ‘much of Paraguayan identity is based on that country’s fate in the two wars’.<sup>115</sup> The War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) pitted Paraguay against its present-day regional partners, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, and resulted in catastrophic territorial loss and the decimation of its population.<sup>116</sup> In the Chaco War with Bolivia (1932-5), Paraguay emerged nominally victorious, though paid a heavy price.<sup>117</sup> I investigate the connections made between these historic events and contemporary national identity in Paraguay.

One of the major debates of Paraguayan history has been concerned with how the nineteenth-century conflict in particular should be remembered.<sup>118</sup> In the inter-war period, it was presented by ‘liberal’ intellectuals as a stain on national history provoked by unnecessarily nationalistic and isolationist policies.<sup>119</sup> After the Chaco War, however, a more bellicose interpretation rose to prominence and extolled the tragic yet heroic sacrifice of the Paraguayan nation in the face of villainous invading

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Pronunciamiento’, pp.128-9; Añazco & Dendia, *Identidad Nacional*, pp.187-9.

<sup>115</sup> M.Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (Penn State, 2002), pp.58-9, 169, 198-9.

<sup>116</sup> T.Whigham, ‘The Paraguayan War: A Catalyst for Nationalism in South America’, in H.Kraay & T.Whigham (eds), *I Die with my Country: Perspectives on the Paraguayan War, 1864-1870* (London, 2005), p.179.

<sup>117</sup> Brezzo, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina’, p.171.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina’, pp.166-8.

<sup>119</sup> L.Brezzo & B.Figallo, *La Argentina y el Paraguay de la guerra a la integración* (Rosario, 1999), pp.464-5.

armies.<sup>120</sup> This militaristic nationalism reached its apex under the Stroessner dictatorship, which sought to increase its hold on national imaginations by encouraging emotive celebrations of these past military adventures.<sup>121</sup> Whigham describes how ‘Paraguayans accepted it as only natural that their identity as a people was defined by their forebears’ actions in the 1864-70 struggle’.<sup>122</sup> The legacy of this nationalist doctrine continues to affect present-day Paraguay: street-names and banknotes are emblazoned with military symbolism, and Francisco Solano López, president and war leader during the 1860s, has since 1936 been officially recognized as the ‘Héroe Máximo de la Patria’.<sup>123</sup>

Narratives of national history in Paraguayan school textbooks have traditionally been dominated by accounts of the causes, consequences and military events of the two wars. These often jingoistic narratives have been widely condemned by organisations that seek to promote regional harmony: the textbooks have been accused of seeking to ‘formar patriotas nacionalistas y buenos soldados’.<sup>124</sup> There was a tendency to attribute the perceived tragedy of Paraguayan history to the machinations of external rivals (usually Brazil, Argentina or Bolivia).<sup>125</sup> Regional powers were portrayed as aggressive neighbours who constantly threatened Paraguayan sovereignty.<sup>126</sup> Students were asked inflammatory questions about the motives driving these apparently hostile forces: ‘¿tenían ofensas del pueblo paraguayo?’<sup>127</sup> Most strikingly, military events

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<sup>120</sup> Brezzo, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina’, p.171.

<sup>121</sup> Lambert, ‘¡Muero con mi patria!’, pp.187, 194-5, 203.

<sup>122</sup> Whigham, ‘The Paraguayan War’, p.198.

<sup>123</sup> Lambert, ‘¡Muero con mi patria!’, pp.201-3.

<sup>124</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, pp.259-264.

<sup>125</sup> Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías’, p.56; J.Chaves, *Compendio de Historia Paraguaya*, Tercera Ed., Editorial Carlos Schauman (Asunción, 1988), p.181.

<sup>126</sup> Benítez, *Lecciones de Historia*, p.145.

<sup>127</sup> Brezzo, ‘El Paraguay y la Argentina’, p.174.

were chronicled in intimate detail, and dominated the overall historical narrative.<sup>128</sup>

Such accounts explicitly equated past demonstrations of national valour with essential qualities of *lo paraguayo*.

Amongst the proposals for textbook reform accepted by the *MEC* in 1996 was the commitment to refocus narratives of national history away from bellicose accounts of the wars.<sup>129</sup> It was hoped that an increased emphasis on previous democratic experiments would foster a commitment to contemporary democracy amongst the citizenry:

en un período de transición democrática e integración como el actual, deben recuperarse para la memoria colectiva los procesos democráticos anteriores, y contextualizar en forma crítica el Paraguay- y sus procesos sociales, económicos, políticos, culturales- en su entorno regional y mundial.<sup>130</sup>

Demonstrating a radical shift with previous trends, the textbooks published in 2007 barely mention the events of the two wars, military or otherwise. The main historical narrative passes smoothly from the accession of Francisco Solano López to the presidency in 1862, to the inauguration of the liberal regime in 1870, only mentioning the war in passing. It is simply described how after López assumed the presidency, ‘estalla la Guerra contra la Triple Alianza (1864-1870) y el Paraguay termina arruinado tras seis años de devastación’.<sup>131</sup> Use of the passive voice to present this brief account of the *Guerra Grande* represents a phenomenal contrast with previous textbooks, which had focused on the wartime period and lambasted external forces. The events of the Chaco War are also ignored, confirming the consciously non-militaristic nature of the textbooks.

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<sup>128</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.264.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.259-60.

<sup>130</sup> Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías’, p.72.

<sup>131</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-1-6, p.247.

In *Ciencias Sociales*, long-term tensions arising from unresolved colonial border disputes are cited to explain the outbreak of War of the Triple Alliance, whilst in previous textbooks this had tended to be explicitly blamed on the machinations of external foes.<sup>132</sup> López is not mentioned in relation to the causes of the war, and there are no explicit value judgments about his conduct.<sup>133</sup> It is surprising that the ‘Héroe Máximo de la Patria’ does not receive any biographical reference, especially as he continues to be revered (or loathed) in public symbolism throughout the region.<sup>134</sup> The Chaco War, meanwhile, is more clearly attributed to Bolivian expansionism: ‘en su búsqueda de una salida hacia el mar, Bolivia desencadería otra Guerra’.<sup>135</sup> This more orthodox account - in that it corresponds with previous textbook materials *and* dominant Paraguayan historiography - serves to highlight the radical change in the way that the causes of the nineteenth-century conflict are discussed.<sup>136</sup>

School textbooks throughout the twentieth century emphasised that the War of the Triple Alliance shattered a nineteenth-century *Edad de Oro* of prosperity, autonomy and economic growth.<sup>137</sup> This ‘revisionist’ interpretation of Paraguayan history had emerged in the 1960s, arguing that the war was caused by an imperialist plot to

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<sup>132</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.64.

<sup>133</sup> This is despite intense historiographical disputes in Paraguay and elsewhere about his agency in the build-up to war. See F.Doratioto, *Maldita Guerra: Nova História da Guerra do Paraguai* (São Paulo, 2002); J.Rubiani, *Verdades y mentiras sobre la Guerra de la Triple Alianza* (Asunción, 2008).

<sup>134</sup> López is depicted on current Paraguayan banknotes, whilst a recent controversy followed the decision of Cristina Kirchner, Argentine president, to name a military unit in his honour.

<sup>135</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-2-3, p.109.

<sup>136</sup> Popular and academic literature in Paraguay continues to portray the causes of the war in ‘revisionist’ terms’ (see below): Rubiani, *Verdades y mentiras*; *ABC Color* (Asunción, 6 March 2008) <http://www.abc.com.py/2008-03-06/articulos/396512/lopez-en-la-optica-del-senador-jaeggli> (Accessed May 2009).

<sup>137</sup> Rivarola, ‘Filosofías, Pedagogías’, p.54.

scupper the economic nationalism of independent Paraguay.<sup>138</sup> In 1996, the committee proposing educational reforms criticised this interpretation for encouraging isolationist tendencies amongst the citizenry, which it deemed a threat to the project of regional integration.<sup>139</sup> Public opinion polls were invoked to suggest that perceptions of a ‘destino trágico’ led to a widespread suspicion of *lo extranjero* amongst Paraguayans.<sup>140</sup> The reform proposals in 1996 demanded that more attention be devoted to the post-war liberal regime, rather than the pre-war ‘nationalist’ government.

*Ciencias Sociales* continues to promote the *Edad de Oro* thesis, and although more attention is paid to the post-war period - in comparison with most previous textbooks - the ‘nationalist’ era continues to be presented in a far more favourable light than the ‘liberal’ one, which rather undermines the intention to encourage democratic and regional perspectives. The ‘retraso económico’ that followed the conflict is connected more to the imposition of liberalism than the war itself.<sup>141</sup> Although explicit portrayals of the wars have been omitted, there has been no thorough revision of the underlying themes in the national historical narrative.

Paraguay’s modern-day regional partners are spoken of in less antagonistic terms, but themes of territorial loss and the need for resolute national defence continue to be described as key elements of the Paraguayan historical process. This presents the Paraguayan nation and, by association, national identity, in rather defensive and

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<sup>138</sup> This thesis was linked to allegations of United States imperialism before the Chaco War, and intervention in Cuba after 1959: M.Almada, *Paraguay: Educación y dependencia* (Asunción, 1989), pp.35, 39, 50, 72.

<sup>139</sup> Durán Estragó *et al*, ‘Propuestas de la Academia Paraguaya’, p.260.

<sup>140</sup> Añazco & Dendia, *Identidad Nacional*, p.126.

<sup>141</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-1-6, p.247.

isolationist terms. The two wars are incorporated into a narrative of national survival which laments the succession of ‘desmembraciones territoriales’ from the colonial period to the twentieth century.<sup>142</sup> Distinct historical periods, pre- and post-independence, are combined into a continuous national narrative charting various ‘pérdidas territoriales’: a map denotes the ‘territorios perdidos por el Paraguay al término de las guerras’, demonstrating how the two wars are conceived to be part of the same historical process.<sup>143</sup> Even where the wars are not explicitly mentioned in the text, the exercises that follow require their discussion as an integral part of this process of territorial loss.<sup>144</sup> *Mediterraneidad*, a predicament attributed to cumulative territorial losses rather than any natural geographic circumstance, is defined as the most important feature of the Paraguayan geopolitical reality.<sup>145</sup> Students are asked to evaluate its contemporary significance, and assert whether Paraguay has ‘superado’ the misfortune.<sup>146</sup> Although explicit references to the events of the two great wars in Paraguayan history have been omitted from the national narrative, these conflicts continue to loom large in constructions of national identity.

Explicit connections between the collective experience (or imagining) of the wars and features of contemporary national identity continue to be made. Amongst the professed ‘características del pueblo paraguayo’ is the ‘gran capacidad de resistencia frente a los ataques foráneos’, determined to be both an historical fact and innate quality.<sup>147</sup> The wide sweep of Paraguayan history is invoked to exclaim that ‘el

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<sup>142</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.64.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, pp.60-1.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.66.

<sup>145</sup> The genealogy of the Paraguayan nation is framed to extend beyond independence; territorial ‘losses’ during the colonial period are incorporated into the *national* story; hence, Paraguay’s *mediterraneidad* is presented as an enforced and unnatural phenomenon, part of the historical process that saw repeated incursions on Paraguayan sovereignty.

<sup>146</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.67; 1-3-8, p.282.

<sup>147</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.82.

pueblo paraguayo sabe ser sufrido’, and is stronger for it.<sup>148</sup> Many of the national symbols presented in the textbooks reflect the continuing presence of the wars in collective, national imaginings: a stirring patriotic poem referring to the battle of Curupayty is a perfect example.<sup>149</sup> It is followed by leading questions about the patriotic sentiments of students and how they relate historical events to their sense of national identity. The inclusion of such symbols in the textbooks may simply reveal a conformity with wider social norms (the national symbolism of Paraguayan society is infused with references to the wars), though it is true that an active moralising element is again revealed in the accompanying exercises. Whilst political imperatives can shift with a change of government, ingrained symbolism and imaginings can be more enduring. Therefore, we should hesitate before attributing all ‘bellicose’ inclusions to political or ideological machination. Nevertheless, it is clear that whilst the events of the wars have been omitted from accounts of Paraguayan history, they continue to influence promotions of Paraguayan national identity.

Modern school textbooks, even those commissioned to spearhead an educational reform, are not fashioned out of thin air: editorial control, the availability of resources and established norms and conventions all contributed to the production of *Ciencias Sociales*. An image of Francisco Solano López - ‘condujo nuestro ejército durante la Guerra de la Triple Alianza’ - appears rather anomalously in a section which mentions neither the military events of the conflict nor López himself.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, an annotated map of the ‘principales batallas de la Guerra del Chaco’ is presented, even though these events are not mentioned anywhere in the entire series; nor does this

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.93.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.79.

<sup>150</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-2-2, p.63.

map complement any later activities.<sup>151</sup> Many of the images presented in *Ciencias Sociales* are clearly (and explicitly) extracted from old textbooks and amalgamated with new narratives.<sup>152</sup> The inclusion of images that bear no correspondence with the surrounding narrative reveals a certain degree of editorial disorganisation. Furthermore, it demonstrates how militaristic accounts of the wars have been omitted in a rather superficial, haphazard and incomplete manner. On the other hand, the sudden incongruence of militaristic images – a traditional staple of school history textbooks – does indicate just how radical even this partial reform has been.

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.65.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.63.

## **The Nation Meets the Region: ‘Ya no permiten hablar de aislamiento’**

Contemporary trends of regional integration, hemispheric cooperation, and globalisation are described in great detail in *Ciencias Sociales*, and the title of the final chapter of the series, ‘Un mundo organizado en solidaridad’, reveals a broadly internationalist stance. Students are asked to reflect on (and if necessary improve) their awareness of current world affairs, the role of international organisations, and interactions between supranational bodies and nation-states.<sup>153</sup> The discussion of national history and politics is contextualised within a wider continental and global terrain.

Certainly, national sovereignty remains an expressed priority: ‘es importante el fortalecimiento de nuestra frontera como medio para salvaguardar la soberanía nacional’.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, the textbooks reconcile the cultivation of strong national *identities* with support for regional integration:

rechazando toda forma de etnocentrismo...desde una perspectiva que pretenda rescatar y mantener los valores propios que nos identifican como paraguayos y paraguayas, para enriquecer, a la vez, la rica gama cultural de la region del Mercosur.<sup>155</sup>

Whigham asserts that the nation- and state-building effects of the War of the Triple Alliance ensured that its protagonists ‘emerged better positioned to face the challenges of the modern age and ultimately better able to deal with each other in terms more amicable than violent’.<sup>156</sup> These perspectives reinforce the notion that

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<sup>153</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 2-2-6, p.230.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3-8, p.287.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.110.

<sup>156</sup> Whigham, ‘The Paraguayan War’, p.198.

strong national identities can coexist with and even strengthen other loyalties and associations.

An entire chapter is devoted to ‘Identificándonos como iberoamericanos’, which complements rather than competes with chapters that elsewhere encourage national identities. This combination of parochial and supranational loyalties is a perceived characteristic of Latin American nationalism in general, emanating from the linguistic and cultural synergies of the region.<sup>157</sup> It seems that the *Reforma Educativa* in Paraguay has shifted the explicit presentation of contemporary national identity away from notions of uniqueness, and towards the recognition of commonalities with other nations.

*Ciencias Sociales* provides a forum for debate about the advantages and disadvantages of Paraguayan accession to *Mercosur*, and encourages critical thinking.<sup>158</sup> In addition to these open discussions about regional integration, though, history is clearly invoked to *support* Paraguay’s engagement with the process:

La decisión del Paraguay de integrarse al Mercosur se fundamentó en aspectos estratégicos, económicos y socioculturales que quedaban perfectamente enlazados a los factores históricos y de la posición geográfica del Paraguay.<sup>159</sup>

The *historic* impediment to national development, *mediterraneidad*, is re-interpreted as a locus of opportunity within the present context of regional integration: ‘el Paraguay se podría convertir en el eje y centro de todo emprendimiento de integración.

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<sup>157</sup> Miller, ‘The Historiography of Nationalism’, p.216.

<sup>158</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-3-8, pp.281, 284.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3-8, p.282.

Su inserción en el Mercosur potenciaría grandemente esta situación'.<sup>160</sup> Also, the favourable impression of economic nationalism, geopolitical isolation and *autonomía* propounded in discussions of Paraguayan history and the *Edad de Oro* is, in references to the present, completely overturned with positive valuations of commercial and diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries.<sup>161</sup> The divergence between interpretations of the past and prescriptions for the present is best demonstrated in the concluding sentence of an account describing the homogeneity and historic isolation of Paraguay, in which it is recognised that the demands of the contemporary world 'ya no permiten hablar del aislamiento'.<sup>162</sup> The multidisciplinary nature of *Ciencias Sociales* facilitates (and requires) investigation of how interpretations of history are not necessarily applied to prescriptions for the present and the future, contrary to the assumptions of school textbook researchers, politicians and educationalists.

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<sup>160</sup> *Ciencias Sociales*, 1-3-8, p.282.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3-8, p.282.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2-2, p.65.

## Conclusion

A multitude of unresolved tensions confront educationalists and policy-makers in Paraguay; these have prompted seemingly contradictory presentations of the nation and national identity in school textbooks. Whilst the materials published by the *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* in 2007 differ in various ways from those used during the Stroessner era, significant continuities are also evident.

Despite the modification of didactic styles to facilitate participation and contestation, the *Ciencias Sociales y sus Tecnologías* textbook series pursues a clear moralising agenda. Descriptions of the Paraguayan nation are combined with the positive valuation and promotion of national identities. Wider concepts are modified when applied to Paraguay to facilitate this nation-building prerogative. An enduring commitment to (national) identity-formation underlies the professed aims of Paraguayan education.

It is difficult enough to satisfy the requirement for accurate, concise *and* comprehensible information in school textbooks, without the presence of competing definitions and values. Ethno-cultural perceptions of homogenous national identity dominate the early part of *Ciencias Sociales*, but are replaced with more civic notions in later volumes. This conceptual shift is explained either by a didactic concern for what younger students are able to comprehend, or by a lack of ideological consensus. The rhetoric of the *MEC* promotes multiculturalism and inclusiveness, but these values are yet to unambiguously take hold in school textbooks. Perhaps this is also a reflection of the ambiguities inherent in the ‘pluri-cultural’ and ‘national’ policies themselves.

Tensions about notions of inclusion and exclusion continue to haunt depictions of Paraguay and Paraguayan identity. The resurgence of active support for the Guaraní heritage, a clear manifestation of greater inclusiveness, is seemingly dependent upon the exclusion of non-Guaraní groups from the pantheon of national belonging. An inclusive element of the *mestizaje* ideal continues to ignore a persistent reality of exclusion. Perhaps a less simplistic and dichotomous treatment of such issues would obviate the need for this exclusivity.

Paraguayans continue to be taught that their national identity is defined by a history of unity and struggle in the face of external aggression. Also, though, they are told that the nation can only achieve prosperity in the present day through regional integration, and by abandoning ideas of isolation. These contradictory messages demonstrate the evident tensions between interpretations of history and prescriptions for the present, which have not been reconciled in *Ciencias Sociales* (and possibly do not need to be). Perhaps they reveal that abstract notions of ‘national identity’ can differ but coexist with more concrete ideas about national development.

Many of the same dilemmas facing Paraguay appear elsewhere, as societies grapple with the question of what to teach future generations about identity and belonging. Contradictory messages about the essential or constructed, inclusive or exclusive, heterogeneous or homogenous, separate or engaged essence of nations and national identities coexist in often confused and fragmented narratives, and not only in didactic materials. Discursive shifts provoked by political change and ideological re-alignment grate against underlying assumptions and norms. This fundamental tension in identity-construction is manifested in limited and uneven reforms to the narratives of school

textbooks; these can undermine the ambitions of the reformers and confuse the wider picture.

School textbooks do not only reflect social change. Sometimes they can go beyond it, as is demonstrated by the radical removal of militaristic accounts of war in *Ciencias Sociales*, which counteracts accepted national symbolism in Paraguay. It is likely that a triumvirate of forces will continue to influence the messages presented in school textbooks: legacies of the past, the imperatives of the present, and aspirations for the future. In order to see whether the intense debates that surround these materials are justified, more research is required into not only the processes which create them, and their content, but also their effect upon popular ideas. Does the content of school textbooks bring about broad ideological change? Such research may elucidate still further the apparent tensions that afflict constructions of the nation and national identity in a changing world.

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