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**Liberal Youth, Modern Exuberance, and Calamity:  
Aspirations for Modern Nationhood in Paraguay,  
1858-1870**

**Michael Kenneth Huner**

Grand Valley State University

Paraguay in the mid-nineteenth century produced its healthy share of ironic moments. Many of these moments came in a calamitous war that devastated the country during the late 1860s. For example, we find intriguing developments from the war when an autocratic Paraguayan state was broadcasting print propaganda written in the indigenous vernacular Guaraní that alternately cajoled the populace to defend their “liberty” and the fate of American republicanism in general, while exhorting their ceaseless loyalty to a supposed messiah-like, divinely-anointed president.<sup>1</sup> But even before the conflict—when some members of the lettered Paraguayan elite at least had their reasons for optimism about the fate of

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<sup>1</sup> “*Toikove Ñane Retã!*: Republican Nationalism at the Battlefield Crossings of Print and Speech in Wartime Paraguay, 1867-1868,” *Building Nineteenth-Century Latin America: Re-rooted Cultures, Identities, and Nations*, ed. William G. Acree Jr. and Juan Carlos González Espitia (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 79-97. Another insightful analysis of Paraguay’s curious wartime press includes Thomas Whigham, “Building the Nation while Destroying the Land: Paraguayan Journalism during the Triple Alliance War,” *Jarbuch Fur Geschichte Lateinamerikas: Anuario de História de América Latina* (2012): 157-80.

their country in a New World of troubled republics—we find some more curious and telling affairs. Consider the celebration thrown by the government in April 1864 for a new printing press machine. It seemed to capture an awkward liberal motif now cloaking this autocratic state.

Few things could excite the liberal passions of the age like the printing press.<sup>2</sup> The event marked the technology's twenty-year anniversary in the country, whose production nonetheless had always been assiduously controlled by the state, while inaugurating new facilities and machinery. The opening night witnessed a ball for the elite of the capital, Asunción, held in the printing press' newly constructed location. Floating balloons bobbed, rockets darted, and fireworks exploded in the air outside the building. Inside, music filled the hall to accompany waltzing couples gliding past each other on a makeshift dance floor. They danced within sight of the government's "retired" printing press machine, which sat between portraits of the late president, Carlos Antonio López, and his son, the current president, Francisco Solano López. The machine itself was decked out like an altar with national flags, garlands of leaves, and a tricolor rose. Earlier, the leading Paraguayan Bishop Manuel Palacios gave mass to bless the activities of the state press. Soon the music and dancing rested momentarily for a string of toasts and speeches by the gathered elite to further honor its labor. These included some brief words from the president himself as well as toasts from a team of young men who were responsible for publishing the state newspaper and who, like the president, had been to Europe and knew and shared its cultural prejudices.<sup>3</sup>

Tension seemed to hang in an air already made heavy with smoke, solemn words and prayers, and the sounds of merrymaking. The article in the state newspaper reporting the event boasted that the party demonstrated the favor that president "confers to the propagation of

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<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating study of popular print culture in nineteenth-century Argentina and Uruguay and its relation to liberal-republican nation-building projects, see William Garrett Acree Jr., *Everyday Reading: Print Culture and Collective Identity in the Río de la Plata, 1780-1910* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> "La imprenta en la noche del 19," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 April 1864, no. 522, 1-3. The article provides a full description of the fiesta.

enlightenment, of which the press is the most powerful means.”<sup>4</sup> Most Paraguayans though could not speak the printed Spanish coming off the press, let alone read it. The festivities, in turn, followed a traditional pattern of colonial-style “rituals of rule” still common throughout the Paraguayan countryside.<sup>5</sup> The portraits of the presidents adorning the altar-like decoration of the old printing press machine provided a strong air of royal-like patronage. The mass celebrated by the Bishop signaled the press as part of customary religious practice tied to the legitimization of state authority. Was this indeed a night of modern exuberance looking forward to the achievements of civilization, progress, and enlightenment heralded by the century that even Paraguay might enjoy? Or was this mostly an autocratic exercise consistent with a backward-looking, conservative autarky long assumed of the country by its contemporary detractors and later by historians as well?<sup>6</sup>

The results and interpretations of the subsequent war that devastated the country make this a pressing riddle. The War of the Triple Alliance (1864-70) was the largest international conflict in the history of South America. It featured Paraguay fighting alone for over five years against the combined forces of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. In the end, Paraguay suffered defeat, foreign occupation, and the loss of over half its population. The allies, in turn, enjoyed the fruits of territorial expansion and the writing of history from their perspective. A powerful historical vision that helped to justify war imagined allied armies as the vanguard of liberal progress and civilization sent to liberate Paraguay from its own

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For the importance of such celebrations in colonial Mexico, see the edited collection *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, eds. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, William E. French (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Whigham highlights a similar tension in the development of the wartime press—between the allegedly cerebral pretensions to European-inspired modernity and the visceral appeals to Guaraní-speaking masses where notions of nationhood became largely about ties to the soil and despise of racialized foreigners. See “Building the Nation While Destroying the Land.” As the present article begins to ponder, however: what if, before the war, these two types of appeals (cerebral aspirations and visceral loyalties), and the tensions between them, had already become hopelessly intertwined?

backwardness, tyranny, and barbarism.<sup>7</sup> With the allied victory, such claims passed into common historical wisdom. Immediately after the war and into the early twentieth century, historical accounts continued to reproduce the perspective of a backward, conservative Paraguay confronting the forces of liberalism and modernity in the war.<sup>8</sup> Later revisionist accounts of Nationalist persuasions nonetheless found heroic value in this presumption of a Paraguay opposed to the march of liberal modernity. It served as an inspiring example of nationalist autonomy in the face of a nineteenth-century liberalism dominated by the imperial interests of British capitalism.<sup>9</sup> More recent histories of Latin America, especially those gleaned from general works and essays, persist in portraying prewar Paraguay as the epitome of an embattled conservative, isolationist state.<sup>10</sup> Specialized studies also complicate this depiction significantly, recognizing strains of liberal thought and practice in post-colonial Paraguayan state

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<sup>7</sup> Paraguayan enemies of the López regime in Buenos Aires had begun crafting this view well before the conflict, although it still remained to be seen whether other governments of the region would adopt it as their own. See here Juan B. Gill Aguinaga, *La Asociación Paraguaya en la Guerra de la Triple Alianza* (Buenos Aires: Edición del Autor, 1959), 23-26. For the most comprehensive study of the early development of the war, see Whigham, *The Paraguayan War: Causes and Early Conduct* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). Other recent studies of the war include: Chris Leuchars, *To the Bitter End: Paraguay and the War of the Triple Alliance* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002) and Francisco Doratioto, *Maldita guerra: Nova história da Guerra do Paraguai* (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Héctor Francisco Decoud, *Los emigrados paraguayos en la guerra de la Triple Alianza* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Graficos Argentinos, 1930); Cecilio Báez, *La tiranía en el Paraguay* (Asunción: Intercontinental Editora).

<sup>9</sup> On this historiographical point see the essay by Leslie Bethell, *The Paraguayan War, 1864-1870* (London: British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1996); Hendrik Kraay and Thomas Whigham, "Introduction," *I Die with My Country: Perspectives on the Paraguayan War*, ed. Hendrik Kraay and Thomas Whigham (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 15-19. For specific examples see, León Pomer, *Guerra del Paraguay, Gran negocio!* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Caldén, 1968); Julio José Chiavenato *Genocidio americano: La guerra del Paraguay*, trans. Justo Pastor Benítez (Asunción: Editora Litocolor, 1984); E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 128-31; and Eduardo Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos S.R.L., 1971), 244-55.

<sup>10</sup> John Lynch, "The River Plate Republics," *Spanish America After Independence, c. 1820-c. 1870*, ed. Leslie Bethell (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 371-75; Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith *Modern Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 141-42; David Bushnell, "Assessing the Legacy of Liberalism," *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-century Latin America*, eds. Vincent Peloso and Barbara A. Tenebaum (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 278-300.

formation.<sup>11</sup> Even so, leading scholars of the subject continue to agree that the allied victory in the war moved the region toward an age of more modern liberal nationhood, with prewar Paraguay standing on the wrong side of history.<sup>12</sup>

What precisely was the relationship of the prewar Paraguayan state and its collaborators with the ideas and exuberance of modern nationhood and liberalism? Again, as previous scholarship has begun to establish, the regime of Francisco Solano López, and that of his predecessor and father, Carlos Antonio López, did in fact sustain a careful engagement with ideas of liberalism, political modernity, and even capitalist-oriented expansion.<sup>13</sup> The relationship was necessarily fraught with tension, as both leaders jealously guarded autocratic power and maintained state monopolies over principal exports, like *yerba mate* and timber. What remains little understood is how, if at all, the regime and its collaborators navigated such tension and fashioned their own peculiar visions of liberal modernity for their country and even the region at large.

The intellectual and cultural sojourns of five young Paraguayan men sent to Europe to be trained and educated as lettered agents of the state provide some essential clues to the puzzle. Their names are largely unknown outside of students of Paraguayan history—Geronimo Pérez, Juan Crisóstomo Centurión, Cándido Bareiro, Andrés Maciel, and Gaspar López. But, as we will find, the Paraguayan state was more than just an extension of the personalities of autocratic leaders, and exploring the experiences of underlings and collaborators draws attention to how this state could even inspire the dreams of those filled with the prevailing liberal ideals of the

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<sup>11</sup> Whigham, *The Politics of the River Trade: Tradition and Development in the Upper Plata, 1780-1870* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); Heinz Peters, *El sistema educativo paraguayo desde 1811 hasta 1865* (Asunción: Instituto Cultural Paraguayo-Aleman, 1996); Juan Carlos Herken Kraur y María Isabel Giménez de Herken, *La Gran-Bretaña y la Guerra de la Triple Alianza* (Asunción: Editorial Arte Nuevo, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Whigham, "The Paraguayan War: A Catalyst for Nationalism in South America," *I Die with My Country, 179-98* and *The Paraguayan War: Causes and Early Conduct*. Also see, James Saeger, *Francisco Solano López and the Ruination of Paraguay: Honor and Egocentrism* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007) and Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira, *A expansão do Brasil e a formação dos estados na Bacia de Prata: Argentina, Uruguai e Paraguai* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilizãõ Brasileira, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Whigham, "Paraguay and the World Cotton Market: The "Crisis" of the 1860s," *Agricultural History*, vol. 68, n. 3 (Summer 1994): 1-15.

age, largely captured in the slogan of “progress and civilization.” These young men indeed absorbed first-hand the high tides of nineteenth-century liberalism in London and Paris, where wearing frock coats and delighting over railroads mixed with enthusiasm for parliaments and constitutions. They returned to Paraguay as culturally liberal themselves charged with applying their lessons in faithful service to the government. In particular, during subsequent foreign missions and, most prominently, in the pages of the state newspaper, *El Semanario*, they had the task of promoting Paraguay in terms tasteful to a liberal-oriented world. That is, the five young men went about defining the image of a high modern, liberal Paraguayan nation.<sup>14</sup>

Their words and experiences were reflective of many lettered elites throughout Latin America at the time. They had to paste liberal sentiments over the contradictory traits and practices of their own societies, and their own personal lives, rationalizing the contradictions within a flexible cultural-ideological framework. The product was a variant of liberalism with a decidedly local flavor.<sup>15</sup> This article contends that in the Paraguayan

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<sup>14</sup> For an anthropological review of high modernism and its origins in nineteenth-century material advancements and liberal-progressive thought, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially ch. 3.

<sup>15</sup> The Brazilian case is most instructive here in terms of articulations of liberal ideals and practices, as espoused by both elite statesmen and students, largely conforming to, rather than upsetting, local structures of power, see Emilia Viotta da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 53-76, and Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Class Mates: Male Student Culture and the Making of a Political Class in Nineteenth-century Brazil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 119-45. In this context, the edited volume of Peloso and Tenebaum *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-century Latin America* also provides an instructive overview of Atlantic-born liberal ideals playing out differently in different Latin American contexts. The now classic study of nineteenth-century liberalism among Argentine intellectuals remains Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The now rich literature on nineteenth-century popular liberalisms in Latin America provides ample additional evidence of variant liberalisms gaining currency and rendered new (perhaps more democratic) meanings among peasants and other subalterns, see, for example: Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Sarah C. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru 1780-1854* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Foundation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) and *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press,

case, the regime of Francisco Solano López in particular largely embraced the language of ascendant liberalism to promote its image abroad, define the nation, and even justify its move toward war. Moreover, the words and experiences of the five young men capture how, crucially, certain prevailing tensions were never fully resolved within a regime still clinging to autocratic practices and combating accusations of barbarism and tyranny with its own, often tortured, vision of liberal exuberance and modern nationhood. And, as a result, although the storm that was the War of the Triple Alliance ultimately defeated their efforts, for a brief optimistic moment the five young men did find ways to navigate this tension to help imagine Paraguay as a model of progress and civilization in the Americas.<sup>16</sup> Upon considering this argument, then, we must reconsider how we typically depict and understand the conflict that destroyed their dreams.

### *Liberal Youth*

The lives of the five young men and their experiences abroad were fundamentally tied to the country's curious engagement with liberal-oriented modernity, and the contradictions found therein. Born between 1834 and 1840, Gerónimo Pérez, Juan Crisóstomo Centurión, Cándido Bareiro, Andrés Maciel, and Gaspar López came from a range of influential and middling families from the capital and the surrounding countryside. Whatever their complexions, they likely identified with a white religious-racial caste as a most common claim of stature and dignity in Paraguayan society.<sup>17</sup> Of course, they also spent their childhoods mostly speaking the provincial indigenous-origin vernacular Guaraní and absorbing views of

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2005), James E. Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and Michael T. Ducey, *A Nation of Villages; Riot and Rebellion in the Mexican Huasteca, 1750-1850* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson has highlighted the role of political imagination in the discursive construction of nationhood, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991). For the interpretive value of propaganda-style sources of nineteenth-century Latin America, see John Charles Chasteen, "Fighting Words: The Discourse of Insurgency in Latin American History," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 3 (1993): 83-111.

<sup>17</sup> On Paraguayan constructions of whiteness as tied to Spanish colonial caste system, see Ignacio Telesca, *Tras los expulsos: Cambios demográficos y territoriales en el Paraguay después de la expulsión de los jesuitas* (Asunción: CEADUC, 2009), 197-206. Also see Huner, *Sacred Cause, Divine Republic*, ch. 2.

splendid forests surrounding abode, thatch-roof houses. Here, praying the rosary, walking red-dirt paths behind horses and cattle, and chasing birds with slingshots were as familiar as the ponchos and *chiripá* loin cloths that clad farmhands, peasant servants, and relatives alike.<sup>18</sup> Theirs was still largely an agrarian life and perspective before political changes and fortune ushered them out and into a whole new reality.

The five young men came of age following the end of the twenty-six year regime of Paraguay's first ruler, Doctor José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia in 1840. Francia took power shortly after Paraguay's independence in 1811 and imposed a strict rule over the country. He justified its virtual diplomatic and commercial isolation as necessary for the defense of national independence. As export trade collapsed and foreign presence dwindled, Paraguay indeed consolidated its political existence, though in the eyes of much of the world it slipped behind a veil of mystery that continued to haunt the country's image for decades on end.<sup>19</sup> For many outside observers it became the curious and exotic inland "China" of South America.<sup>20</sup> The five men grew up with a new regime anxious to escape this reputation while still conserving autocratic rule and patriarchal order in the countryside.

Francia's eventual successor, Carlos Antonio López, perceived wisdom in gradually departing from such policies. Significant wealth for the state and his family were not to be gained hiding behind the shroud of despotic isolation. He took on the constitutional formalities of a republican presidency, though continued autocratic rule, and actively sought formal foreign recognition of Paraguayan independence, which neighbors like Argentina were reluctant to grant. López eventually established diplomatic relations with the country's South American neighbors as well as with

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<sup>18</sup> See here Juan Crisóstomo Centurión's post-war literary reflections, *Viaje nocturno de Gualberto o recuerdos y reflexiones de un ausente* (New York, 1877), as reprinted in *Apuntes biográficos de un coronel* (Asunción: Fundación Cultural Republicana, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Whigham, *The Politics of the River Trade*, 30-37, 199-200. Whigham emphasizes the primacy Francia placed on Paraguay's political independence as well as the social and economic dormancy that were the results of his regime's policies. See also Williams, *The Rise and Fall of the Paraguayan Republic* (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas, 1979), 30-110, for a discussion of Francia's isolating rule.

<sup>20</sup> Héctor Varela, *Elisa Lynch* (Buenos Aires: El Elefante Blanco, 1997).



North Atlantic powers. He then advanced the growth of Paraguay's commercial relations with the outside world, re-initiating a regular trade with Buenos Aires (principally in yerba mate, tobacco, and forest products) and attempting to attract a European commercial interest in the country's exports. Such new flirtation with the world was an important part of a modernization effort that soon witnessed the introduction of the printing press, the expansion of public education, and the eventual construction of an arsenal, an iron foundry, naval yards, and a railroad.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the state's monopoly control of the export yerba trade financed these ventures.

In this climate of modernization, the five young men emerged as favored students of the regime. Familial connections and their own talents got them access to advanced instruction from foreign educators contracted by the government, and they were later considered top students of the *Aula de Filosofía*, the upstart academic institute under the direction of the Spaniard, Ildefonso Bermejo. From the ranks of the Aula, the president and his powerful son, Francisco Solano López, would soon pick a set of favorites for the opportunity to study in Europe. Solano López had not long ago returned from a formative trip to Europe himself during the mid-1850s as a special diplomatic envoy of Paraguayan government, seeking those letters of official recognition among the acclaimed powers of the North Atlantic, forging ties with industrial and commercial houses, and even contracting technicians and machinists for the ambitious plans of iron yards and railroad-building back home. Following Solano López's lead, the regime was interested in only expanding such cultural and economic ties across the

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<sup>21</sup> Whigham highlights López's eagerness for extensive relations with the outside world in order to advance his "modernization" effort, which, Whigham adds, had a decided emphasis on improving the country's military readiness. He also notes López's wide use of nepotism, *The Politics of the River Trade*, 52, 69-72, 201. Williams indicates that López's state monopoly of the country's main exports (yerba and timber) was done in order to reinforce the state's power—a point Whigham does not ignore and characterizes as the government's tradition of mercantilist-like policies. Williams also narrates Paraguay's struggle for international recognition, *The Rise and Fall*, 129-177. For López's efforts to develop diplomatic relations with European nations, see Peter A. Schmitt, *Paraguay y Europa, 1811-1870* (Asunción: El Gráfico S.R.L., 1990), 33-77. For details on the industrial side of the modernization effort, see Juan Pérez Acosta, *Carlos Antonio López: Obrero Maximo* (Asunción: Editorial Guaranía, 1948). For reference on the printing press and the expansion of public education, see Efraím Cardozo, *Apuntes de Historia Cultural del Paraguay* (Asunción: Editorial Litocolor, 1985), 237-39, 252-53.

ocean. They were already contemplating the establishment of a permanent diplomatic legation in Paris as well as sponsoring the envoy of a contingent of students to absorb the intellectual and technical lessons the schools of Europe may provide. Two of the young men, Gerónimo and Juan Crisóstomo, found the president's favor for this latter opportunity. Solano López chose the other three—Gaspar, Andrés, and Cándido.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, ties of kinship and patronage would remain a defining marker of their experience and, as Juan Crisóstomo remembered years later, the subtle and explicit expectations to follow one's duty that came along with them. Days before their life-changing journey was to begin, the president called Centurión and Pérez to his office, stood them in front of his desk like two "army recruits," and lectured them that as representatives of Paraguay in the "civilized world," they must behave.<sup>23</sup>

The modernization effort of the Paraguayan state thus also featured sending these five young men to Europe in 1858. In fact, their vessel was to make just the second direct voyage between Asunción and Europe. It was to carry not just students but typical products and rare extractions from the country for possible sale and display on the continent: yerba mate, tobacco, and even an embalmed *jakaré*, or crocodile.<sup>24</sup> Along with further developing commercial ties, the López regime sought to create skilled lettered servants to man the posts of an expanding bureaucracy. The five young men were to be the trusted sons of the patria destined to absorb the advanced knowledge of a European education and apply it in dedicated service to the state.<sup>25</sup> They did not travel alone in this regard. London was

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<sup>22</sup> Acosta, *Obrero Maximo* 402-403, 527; Cardozo, *Apuntes*, 249-51; Juan Crisóstomo Centurión, *Memorias o reminiscencias históricas sobre la Guerra del Paraguay*, vol. 1 (Asunción: El Lector, 1987), 108, 110-19; and "Algo sobre los estudiantes de los López," *La Democracia* 14 February 1882, 1. Cardozo asserts that the government decided to give the opportunity to study in Europe only to poor students of the countryside, the reason an accomplished student from a prominent family, Natalicio Talavera, was not chosen. However, Centurión suggests the favoritism involved.

<sup>23</sup> Centurión, *Memorias*, vol.1, 116-17.

<sup>24</sup> Centurión, *Memorias*, vol. 1, 119, 126.

<sup>25</sup> Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 116-17. For references to the government's plan for the five, see also George F. Morice to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 October 1858; Archivo Nacional de Asunción-Colección Río Branco (hereafter, ANA-CRB) I-29, 35, 26 n. 32. Morice to Solano López, Buenos Aires, 14 December 1859; ANA-CRB I-29, 34, 30. Alfred Blyth to Francisco Solano López, London, 23 December 1862; ANA- Sección Historia vol. 331 n. 25. (hereafter, ANA-SH).

their destination, and eleven other young Paraguayans accompanied them for training of a more technical nature. Accordingly, the British industrial-financial firm of John and Alfred Blyth now served as the primary commercial agent of the López government in Europe. Their iron-works factory in Liverpool suggested a valuable training ground for Paraguayans needed to learn engineering skills. Anxious to lessen its dependence on foreign technicians for its own industrial projects, the regime took advantage of the contractors' offer to accommodate and train a group of young Paraguayans in the firm's facilities. Accommodation for the five students of letters was included in the Blyth's arrangement. The Englishmen offered to front the capital for their expenses and secure quality instructors for their education.<sup>26</sup>

These were impressionable young men who boarded the *Río Blanco* for London in June 1858—ages between 19 and 24—with Cándido the trusted elder and Juan Crisóstomo the bright-eyed greenest of the bunch.<sup>27</sup> They left for the “civilized world” with new wool suits tailored in the latest European fashion.<sup>28</sup> Yet Centurión also remembered their forlorn looks as the *Río Blanco* embarked and turned the first curve in the Paraguay River toward Buenos Aires, leaving their relatives, bidding them goodbye on the docks of Asunción, out of sight. Then on the open sea came various occasions to contemplate death, as the small Paraguayan steamship almost succumbed to a number of storms during the protracted, three-month journey. Finally, exhausted from the trip, the five students took in the marvel of industrializing England upon arriving in London in early September.<sup>29</sup> The English Captain of their ship, George F. Morice, an employee of the Blyth firm, had to select from a range of boarding-school

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<sup>26</sup> Paraguayan government account, 8 December 1859- 8 January 1860; ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 39 n. 6. Paraguayan government account, 8 May- 8 June 1862; ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n. 15. Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 October 1862; ANA-CRB I-29, 34, 25 n. 15.

<sup>27</sup> See Ildefonso Bermejo, “El Vapor Río Blanco,” cited above. The article listed the students' names and ages. As the elder of the group and one with close familial ties to the López, Bareiro was the officer of the cohort. He distributed monthly allowances, communicated the government's desires to their professors and the Blyths, and informed Solano López of the students' concerns.

<sup>28</sup> Receipt of suits made for the *becarios*, ANA- Sección Nueva Encuadernación, vol. 2760, n. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 119-30.

establishments fitted for receiving foreign students to place the young men. He settled on St. Mary's School in Richmond, which lay along the Thames. Already by November, the Paraguayan students began their instruction under the director, Dr. William Kenney, learning English.<sup>30</sup>

St Mary's School advertised that it received students from "every port of the world." Accordingly, these Paraguayans were not the first and only young sojourners from South America, supported by either their families or their governments, to attend the schools of London and Paris. Young Brazilians, in particular, were an increasingly common sight in the medical and technical schools of France since the 1820s.<sup>31</sup> Upon arriving in Europe, these Brazilians expressed the pangs of separation from families, longed for the plates of *guava* jelly of home, and commiserated about the misery of endless cloudy days and cold winters. But they often later parlayed their education and "cultural capital" gained in Europe into powerful positions once back in Brazil, as prominent statesmen and publicists, and, according to Roderick Barman, the crucial "interpreters to Brazilians of civilized world that flourished on the other side of the Atlantic." Their own writings boasted about bringing their lessons of enlightenment home.<sup>32</sup> Members of the famous Argentine Generation of 1837 had their own formative experiences in Europe and elsewhere that likewise had them pledging to bring Western European-style liberal modernity to their country. These experiences, however, could just as well be the result of painful exiles as difficult educational journeys abroad.<sup>33</sup>

The pangs of acculturation for the five young Paraguayans paralleled those of their South American counterparts. Learning English frustrated minds and bled their tongues, and ear infections could keep them in bed for weeks before any learning was done.<sup>34</sup> The cold, damp

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<sup>30</sup> George F. Morice to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 November 1858, ANA-CRB I-29, 35, 26 n. 37. Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 130-31.

<sup>31</sup> Roderick Barman, "Brazilians in France, 1822-1872: Doubly Outsiders," *Strange Pilgrimages: Exile, Travel, and National Identity in Latin America, 1800-1990s*, eds. Ingrid E. Fey and Karen Racine (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 23-36.

<sup>32</sup> Barman, "Brazilians in France," 34-6.

<sup>33</sup> Shumway, *Invention of Argentina*, ch. 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> There were numerous comments concerning the student's difficulties with English. Morice to Solano López, Buenos Aires, 14 December 1859. Morice to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 February 1860, ANA-CRB I-30, 23, 29. Leone

winters of England would bear heavily upon all the Paraguayan students' health until their ultimate departure.<sup>35</sup> But the Paraguayan government instructed the Blyth firm not to spare any expense to solve the health problems, funding doctor fees, medicines, and even trips to the seacoast to alleviate their ailments. <sup>36</sup> In fact, the government guaranteed that the young men were to have a comfortable material life to complement their lettered education. In addition to the regular expenses of their schooling, the young men received a monthly allowance (at first ten shillings per student, later a whole pound), extra books and education materials, new tailored suits, funds for small excursions, extra language instruction, holiday amusement money, and the occasional bonus of between eight and twelve pounds distributed to each of the five.<sup>37</sup> And like their Brazilian and

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Levi to John and Alfred Blyth, London, 6 March 1862, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n. 9. The latter document, written by one of the students' professors, noted that Centurión was the exception, his spoken English being rather good. Centurión claimed he gained this mastery through his tongue twisting practice sessions after class, *Memorias* vol.1, 133. Centurión blamed the students' use of Guaraní, which gave them an improper knowledge of Spanish, as the major obstacle to their acquiring of English, "Algo sobre los estudiantes de los López," *La Democracia*. On early problems with sickness, see Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 November 1858, ANA-CRB I-29, 32, 8 n.43. Paraguayan government account, 20 January-6 February 1859, ANA-CRB I-29, 32, 8 n. 10. Morice to Solano López, London, 8 January 1859 and Morice to Solano López, Falmouth Harbor, 7 February 1859, ANA-CRB I-29, 34, 30 n. 1-2. Paraguayan government account, 9 March- 8 April 1859 and Paraguayan government account, 9 April- 8 May 1859, ANA-CRB I-29, 32, 6 n. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Reports of ill students were frequent. See, for example, Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 July 1861 and Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 7 September 1861 and Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 October 1861, ANA-CRB I-29, 34, 25 n. 8, 13, 15. Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 23 October 1862, ANA-CRB I-30, 24, 33 n. 17. Blyth report to Venancio López, London, 23 February 1863, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 7 n. 3. Bareiro was fighting a stiff illness upon his departure from Europe, see Blyth report to Venancio López, London, 8 February 1864, ANA-CRB I-30, 5, 72 n. 11.

<sup>36</sup>Bill from W. Lambert Kiddle pharmaceutical chemist for Gaspar López, 14 January 1863 and Bill from Dr. Barrett, 1861-1862, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 2 n. 2, 8-9; Expenses of Centurión in Brighton, 17 July 1862 and Receipt of medical attendance for Centurión and G. López, 21 August 1862 and Paraguayan government account, 8 November-8 December 1862, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n.30, 36-37, 88; Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 September 1862, ANA-CRB I-30, 1, 8 n. 7.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Paraguayan government account, 8 January-8 February 1860, ANA-CRB, 8 March- 8 April 1860, ANA-CRB, 8 August-8 September 1860, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 39 n. 7, 9, 21; Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, 8 November 1860, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 38 n. 35. Bill from James Cocks-tailor, November 1862; ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n. 75; and Account of Bareiro's expenses, 27 December 1862, ANA-CRB I-30, 7, 55 n. 12.

Argentine counterparts could do, the young Paraguayans began to settle into the livelihood of affluent Europeans and consequently partook in the amenities of their social and cultural life.

Consider the details of attending to their attire while in England. Hats were all the rage, and Centurión, Bareiro, and López made occasional payments for the purchase and maintenance of fashionable headwear. There were other coveted items they bought such as gloves, boots, scarves, and walking sticks. Repairing and cleaning of clothes was a regular necessity and, as indicated, so was buying new vests, coats, and pants. They saw the English tailor James Cocks, “inventor and pantee of trousers without side seams,” and Maciel, Bareiro, Centurión, and López all had to have a pair of the patent checked onyole trousers. In donning such items, self-presentation followed cultural aspiration. That is, despite their initial difficulties adjusting, the five eventually and eagerly took to the social conventions of European life. They met companions for tea in the afternoons and partook of ale, wine, and cigars during discussions in the evenings. Each morning an issue of the *London Times* lay at their door.<sup>38</sup>

Cultural horizons broadened, but the eyes and ears of an autocratic state remained in the background, if muted, even from across an ocean. Greater proficiency in English allowed the young men to expand their studies to literature, French, and history, and the Blyth firm sent regular reports on their progress back to Francisco Solano López in Asunción.<sup>39</sup> They moved to a new school, intensified their language training, and by 1860 were writing monthly essays in French and English that were also sent home for the review of Solano López.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Gerónimo Pérez impressed the most. By the end of the 1860, he received orders from the government to move to Paris, to serve as a clerk for the newly-installed Paraguayan legation there.<sup>41</sup> He would assist the legation’s chief, the

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the various bills and receipts from May-December 1862, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n. 15-36, 41, 55, 57-61, 66-88.

<sup>39</sup>Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 132. Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 May 1860, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 38 n. 9, 11.

<sup>40</sup>Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 June 1860, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 38 n. 15; Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 23 November 1861, ANA-CRB I-29, 34, 25 n. 19; Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 137.

<sup>41</sup>Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 8 December 1860, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 38 n. 37.

Argentine Carlos Calvo, and its Paraguayan secretary, Gregorio Benítez, in the tasks of letter transcribing, copying documents, and errand running. He and Benítez took occasional lessons in their free time, but Pérez's training was now of a decidedly practical nature.<sup>42</sup> The rest of the group remained in London to continue its studies, reminded that the young men remained bound to the whims and wishes of their political patron.

Even so, the young men in London also continued to flourish on the wings of a decidedly liberal education. The Blyths soon contracted Dr. Leone Levi, professor at King's College of the University of London, to take the other four Paraguayans under his mentorship. Here, the industrialists' connections proved valuable. Levi claimed some renown as an expert on international relations and later wrote influential works in the field.<sup>43</sup> He provided his Paraguayan pupils with expertise in the study of international law and political economy. By early 1861, the four began their studies under Levi, traveling each day by train to take lessons in the professor's personal study at Lincoln's Inn in Temple, and later enrolled in his classes at King's College. Centurión remembered that this was a time of real intellectual expansion for the Paraguayan youths. Levi introduced them to London's academic community, as they frequented scientific and literary societies. They attended sessions of Parliament and enthusiastically followed the procedures and debates of the legislative body. The five also joined the gatherings of international congresses and exhibitions and basked in their optimism for liberal progress.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Levi delighted over the intellectual growth of his young students. He recognized Cándido Bareiro as the assumed leader of the group and noted his "considerable judgment and experience." Writing the Paraguayan government in March 1862, Levi reported that Bareiro had a

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<sup>42</sup> Gregorio Benítez, in his diary, described the daily activities of the Legation, the duties of the *ayudante* (first Pérez, later Maciel), and mentioned they took classes. *Diario de Gregorio Benítez*; Biblioteca Nacional de Asunción-Colección Juan E. O'Leary, *Papeles de Gregorio Benítez*, 3, 25. The Argentine Carlos Calvo later complained to Solano López that Pérez frequently gave deference to Benítez in the affairs of the Legation, undermining his authority. Carlos Calvo a Francisco Solano López, Paris, 7 October 1861, ANA-CRB I-29, 32, 20 n. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Leone Levi, *International Law: With Materials for a Code on International Law* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1888).

<sup>44</sup> Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 137, 141, 145-48.

“character firm and obliging,” exactly what it took for a “successful career in public life.” Maciel struck Levi of equal ability but of different character. “Naturally more delicate than Mr. Bareiro, Mr. Maciel has a kind and pleasing address.” Levi also believed him a “careful observer” with “much solid knowledge.” The English professor found Gaspar López “most ingenious and loveable” and acclaimed his “great desire to acquire a thorough knowledge of whatever he takes on hand.” Since Centurión had the most proficient English, Levi thought his youngest student was “the most promising.” Despite the good progress in their studies, however, Levi judged that his Paraguayan students still required at least two more years of training before taking on the responsibilities of “public life” and recommended “that they should ripen themselves before they leave.”<sup>45</sup> Yet they soon would be returning home.

The comportment and perspectives of the men now reflected the glossed-eye awe of other elite South American sojourners who traveled to London and Paris. The young Paraguayans beheld the host countries as their own, as the pinnacles of civilization, prepared to weep when it was time to leave.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, they continued to debate the international political issues of the day, the Polish insurrection of 1863 and the U.S. Civil War, and discussed the finer points of Byron and Shakespeare. They eagerly purchased books, especially dictionaries and works on grammar. They even pursued French and English women with relative success, some

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<sup>45</sup>Leone Levi to John and Alfred Blyth, London, 6 March 1862, ANA-CRB. He expanded: “As far as I am able to form an opinion, each of them has much to learn, and they require yet much more patient study to be able to assume the responsibility of the direction of any public office. It has been my desire to make them conversant with many subjects absolutely necessary to a public office. But they have as yet done little more than a drilling on the surface of the various questions. They want maturing in all branches. They require more experience, more reading, more general and thorough knowledge in all.”

<sup>46</sup>Centurión *Memorias*, vol. 1, 149-50. References to Paris as the “center of civilization” between Paraguayans with experience in Europe were common. Carlos Saguier a Gregorio Benítez, Buenos Aires, 12 December 1865, BNA- Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez. Gregorio Benítez’s attachment to France grew so firm that while in Paris during the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War, he considered taking up arms for the country, Gregorio Benítez a Juan Bautista Alberdi, Paris, 29 August 1870, BNA-Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez.



finding love and even marriage, others only rebuffs at Parisian balls.<sup>47</sup> The Paraguayan government began calling them back home in December 1862. Pérez was the first to leave, as the others received the opportunity to at least spend a few weeks in Paris to see the daily workings of the Paraguayan legation and take tours of the city. Gaspar López and Juan Crisóstomo departed for Paraguay from France during the early months of 1863, with tears in eyes.<sup>48</sup> Upon still carrying out duties for the government in London, Bareiro left for Paraguay in November. Maciel had replaced Pérez as clerk of the Paraguayan legation in Paris and served there until June 1864—the last of the five to return to Asunción.<sup>49</sup>

Theirs was a patchwork education of practical training, carrying out actual services for the government in Europe, and academic study. Accordingly, the Paraguayan state wanted capable lettered servants not towering intellectuals. But the state did solicit for them a lettered and cultural education in the centers of nineteenth-century North Atlantic liberalism, and the young men eagerly imbibed. The secretary of the Paraguayan legation in Paris, Gregorio Benítez, for example, remained impressed and amused with some of his younger compatriots. After a late night conversation with Centurión, just before his departure, over the “rights of nations” and the North American Civil War, the Paraguayan diplomat marveled in his diary at the young man’s theoretical knowledge of international law.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, months later, upon the departure of Bareiro for Paraguay, Benítez mused that his good friend was filled with English ideas, desiring “to establish as base of a constitution,” in Paraguay, “the

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<sup>47</sup>Diario de Gregorio Benítez; BNA-Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez, 12-13. Of the eleven technical students, one fathered a child and three married English women. After the students’ departure from England, the government offered to pay the women’s passages to join their husbands in Asunción. Two accepted. Paraguayan government account, 8 October-8 November 1862, ANA-CRB I-29, 36, 1 n. 71; Blyth report to Venancio López, London, 8 April 1864 and Paraguayan government account, 8 February-8 March and Blyth report to Venancio López, London, 8 March 1864, ANA-CRB I-30, 4, 69 n. 1, 14, 15.

<sup>48</sup>Gaspar López left Europe in January, Centurión in March. Diario de Gregorio Benítez, BNA- Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez, 2-19, 43-56.

<sup>49</sup> Blyth report to Francisco Solano López, London, 22 November 1862, 8 December 1862, ANA-CRB I-30, 23, 29 n. 72, 87; Paraguayan government account, 8 May- 8 June 1864, ANA-CRB I-30, 2, 63 n. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Diario de Gregorio Benítez, BNA- Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez, 50-51, 55-56.

institutions of England.”<sup>51</sup> Again, such aspirations and learning only reflected the sort of cultural affiliation with Western Europe as the model of civilization that other South American liberal elites were voicing at the time.<sup>52</sup> Still, as Benítez himself alluded, the tensions created by the application of such aspirations and learning to the social and political realities of South American homelands were also evident. And already, while still in Europe, circumstances had forced the five young Paraguayans to navigate the contradictions of serving as liberal agents of an autocratic regime.

In September 1862 Carlos Antonio López died. It took two months for the news to reach the Paraguayans in Europe. In late November, they received word of the passing along with news of a hastily formed congress electing Francisco Solano López to the presidency. That following month, Benítez passed around a document to the five young men asking for their signatures as joint authors of a letter, to be published in the Paraguayan state newspaper, mourning the loss of the late president and affirming loyalty to the new government. Actions spoke just as loud as words in these circumstances, and all five realized their duty and put their names to the document.<sup>53</sup>

Tellingly, the letter pursued a rhetoric with which the five could now closely identify. It addressed not the new president but the congress that elected him, calling its members the “Honorable Representatives of the Nation” and praising them for their political judgment. This congress largely just followed the wishes of Solano López, as past congresses had done for his father; yet the letter preferred to address it as an autonomous legislative body. There was more. Calling themselves “citizens,” the cohort praised the late Carlos Antonio López as the “first and most useful citizen of a free people.” The letter then listed the country’s progressive accomplishments during the former president’s administration. It highlighted the growth of commerce and industry, the country’s stable finances, the construction of a railroad, and the establishment of schools.

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<sup>51</sup> Diario de Gregorio Benítez, BNA-Colección Juan E. O’Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez, 203-6.

<sup>52</sup> Again, see here Shumway, *Invention of Argentina*, 154-64.

<sup>53</sup> “Remitido,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 31 January 1863, 2.

Finally, the authors boasted that thanks to the elder López, Paraguay “is today considered part of the great family of civilized nations.”<sup>54</sup> Their letter finessed the language of liberalism to praise their society and revere their political leaders, advancing daring, if not outright hyperbolic, claims that in Paraguay a free people elected their new president while enjoying the fruits of modern nationhood.

The letter established a keen precedent for the five young men as they prepared to return to Paraguay. It gave them a clear indication how to exercise liberal sentiments while not betraying their patron, the López-dominated, Paraguayan state. In turn, the López regime offered plenty of room to finesse and maneuver in this regard. Indeed, Francisco Solano López pursued the consolidation and tightening of autocratic rule. There was no democratic opening with the new president, and internal dissent met repression. Yet the regime clearly had an eye for the economic and military benefits of liberal-style progress. And, equally important, it had an image to promote. The old veil of Dr. Francia yet haunted the Atlantic-wide reputation of Paraguay, allowing political enemies and detractors abroad to still dismiss the country as tyrannical and barbaric. With liberal rearing in Europe and eloquent boasts of Paraguayan membership in the “great family of civilized nations,” the five were in position to offer invaluable service to an autocratic regime seeking the political and commercial endorsement of the world.

Quiet doubts remained however, and the internal contradictions of serving an autocratic regime did not fade away. In fact, while still in Europe, some perhaps began to chafe under the shadow of autocracy and control, persistent in the background. Centurión recalled the growing resentment against Cándido Bareiro, who while serving as the cohort’s informal leader also kept a close watch on the students’ sentiments toward the regime for his cousin, Francisco Solano López. The vigilance soon began to strike some of the cohort as an incoherent extension of Paraguayan despotism in the “free world” of Western Europe. Later, during their return trips to Paraguay, widespread rumors in the Plata of the new president’s tightening grip on power were also a source of silent concern.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Yet, again, actions spoke over thoughts and just as loud as words, with consolation sought in the very ideological currents that they now so fully embraced. When considering the situation in Paraguay, the old lesson of English liberals advocating the gradual reform of society, rather than radical political and social revolution, seemed quite palatable to them upon reflection.<sup>55</sup> And they all dutifully returned to Paraguay to serve the state.

Upon doing so, the young Paraguayans found the state-run press as the primary outlet for the exercise of liberal sentiments and aspirations for reform. For it represented, in their eyes, both a medium and expression of the liberal modernizing trends that they hoped to accelerate in their country. Gerónimo Pérez, the first to return, arrived in Asunción in January 1863, the height of the Paraguayan summer, and was barely settled a week in the sweaty capital before he went to work, writing an essay for publication in the state newspaper, *El Semanario*. The article was titled “A Pleasant Surprise” and heralded the progressive achievements in the country during his near five-year absence. Pérez humbly acknowledged the piece as his “first contribution to the arena of letters.” Pérez soon made plenty of others. The topics of his articles varied: one, a description of an excursion through the Paraguayan countryside near Lake Ypacaraí, another, a philosophical discussion of the nature of politics. In May, he even issued a proposal to the government to publish a new periodical named *El Amigo del Progreso* (The Friend of Progress). It promised to discuss literature, art, science, agriculture, industry, and local events as well as to have regular correspondents in all parts of the country.<sup>56</sup> The proposal evidenced Pérez’s enthusiasm to promote and expand the state press, if with a more progressive emphasis. The project never came to fruition. One month later, Pérez traveled back to England under orders to serve as supervisor of a new cohort of technical students sent to London.

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<sup>55</sup> Centurión accused Bareiro of having served as Francisco Solano López’s spy in order to keep a close watch over the students in the “free world.” See Centurión, *Memorias* vol. 1, 135-36, 161-65, and “Algo sobre los estudiantes de los López”, *La Democracia*.

<sup>56</sup> See Gerónimo Pérez, “Una sorpresa agradable,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 7 February 1863, no. 459, 3; “La campaña, mis impresiones de viaje,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 25 April 1863, no. 470, 3; “La política,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 28 February 1863, no. 463, p. 3. For the “Friend of Progress” proposal, see Gerónimo Pérez, *Proyecto sobre la creación de un órgano de publicidad con el nombre ‘El Amigo del Progreso,’* Asunción, 15 May 1863, ANA-SH vol. 334, n. 21.

Yet, he still contributed to the Paraguayan press, as London correspondent for *El Semanario*, sending back regular reports of European and North American news events.<sup>57</sup>

The others followed his lead. Upon arriving in mid-1863, Gaspar López received appointment to work in the Ministry of Foreign Relations under José Berges. Yet he also assumed responsibilities editing *El Semanario*, a task he later took to boasting about. Centurión upon his return helped with the editing of the newspaper as well as serving as the president's personal secretary. Back in Paraguay by late 1864, Andrés Maciel too contributed to the Paraguayan "arena of letters" by writing for the state press amid his other bureaucratic obligations in the Ministry of War. By late 1863, the young men were rejoining their friend and colleague Natalicio Talavera and wielding significant influence over the production of the state-newspaper weekly, *El Semanario*.<sup>58</sup> Only Cándido Barreiro concentrated his publicist efforts elsewhere. Shortly after Barreiro's arrival in Paraguay in December 1863, Solano López designated him as the new chief of the Paraguayan Legation in Paris, where he returned in May 1864. In this new charge, it fell to him to promote Paraguay in the newspapers and pamphlets of Europe.<sup>59</sup>

The work seemed to call for enthusiasm and exuberance despite undercurrents of tension that ran apace. It was during this time that the state festivities celebrating the printing press in April 1864, discussed above, were held and the president publically praised the work of the young Paraguayans overseeing its publications. And it was in this moment that Gaspar López took opportunity to also raise his wine glass and laud that the "national press...fulfills its sacred mission to enlighten the people, distinguishing between false dogmas and the maxims of truth, and to instill in the hearts of Paraguayans the love of country, order, and labor."

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, "Londres, Octubre 25 de 1863," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 19 December 1863, no. 504, 2; "Londres, Febrero 23 de 1864," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 16 April 1864, no. 521, 1. The reports offer accounts of events such as the Prussian-Denmark conflict, the Polish republican movement, and the US Civil War.

<sup>58</sup> Gaspar López a José Berges, Asunción, 28 September 1865, ANA-CRB I-30, 9, 106 n. 4. Centurión *Memorias*, vol. 1, pp. 165-66. Acosta *Obrero Máximo*, 531-40.

<sup>59</sup> Cándido Barreiro a José Berges, London, 7 May 1864, ANA-CRB I-30, 4, 20 n. 1.

Festivities like this could go on for days with their masses and religious processions along with spells of popular dances, music, and games to boot.<sup>60</sup> Celebrating the national press was for the young men indeed a reason to drink, dance, and exercise liberal sentiments. It was also a sincere demonstration of state-patronage over the printed word. The young Paraguayans could, and did, delight in the modernizing potential of their work and chosen medium. They also had to broadcast that progress and civilization in Paraguay had just one possible patron: Francisco Solano López.

The young men went about propagating this message to fellow Paraguayans and, in so doing, also continued to weigh the concerns of a foreign gaze. Twice a month the Ministry of Foreign Relations mailed numerous copies of each issue of *El Semanario* to agents in cities all over the Atlantic world. The newspaper reached consulates in New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Montevideo as well as the foreign offices of the fellow Latin American republics Bolivia, Chile, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Uruguay.<sup>61</sup> Abroad the five young men had grown familiar with the skeptical eyes that still saw Paraguay covered in a shroud of barbaric despotism.<sup>62</sup> They never forgot those looks. Such skepticism reflected in many ways their own quiet doubts and internal contradictions. With their education and cultural training in Europe, the task at hand was to fully convince the rest of the world, as well as themselves, that the López regime was indeed a benevolent patron of liberal modernity.

### *Modern Exuberance*

Exorcizing doubts and skepticism about Paraguay's place in the "civilized world" soon yielded ironic presumptions of superiority. That is, still haunted by depictions of Paraguay living behind a shroud of

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<sup>60</sup> "La imprenta en la noche del 19," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 April 1864, no. 522, 1-3. The article provides a full description of the fiesta as well as an excerpt of Gaspar López's speech.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, *Diario de Ministerio de Estado de Departamento de Relaciones Exteriores*, 20 February 1863, ANA-CRB I-22, 12, 3 n. 46; 6 July 1864, ANA-CRB I-22, 12, 3 n. 164; 6 August 1864, ANA-CRB I-22, 12, 3 n. 170.

<sup>62</sup> *Diario de Gregorio Benítez*, BNA- Colección Juan E. O'Leary, Papeles de Gregorio Benítez, 41-42.

barbarism, the published writings of the young men went to task labeling other distant peoples barbaric. In an 1863 article, Gerónimo Pérez described the technological marvels of the railroad and the steamboat in the world and wrote of the supposed dumbstruck wonder that overtook the “Japanese and the inhabitants of the extreme Orient” at the sight of the use of steam-powered automation. He argued that the Asians’ “poor intelligence still sleeps in the sad shadow of barbarism” and that only with time will they “decipher” the mystery of steam technology. For now, the technological acumen of the “inhabitants of the Western world” made them “semi-gods” in the eyes of the ‘barbarous’ Asians. Paraguay, on the other hand, occupied the civilized side of this liberal high modernist civilization-barbarism divide. The construction of a railroad and steamboat vessels by the Paraguayan state backed such claims<sup>63</sup>

It is noteworthy that such boasts of modernity reigning in Paraguay turned on a contra-distinction with the caricature of a barbaric “other.” Mindful that Paraguay served as such a caricature for its detractors, the young men had perhaps implicitly learned that creating their own sense of modern nationhood depended on this same rhetorical maneuver. They too required a positive image against people and epochs barbaric. That is, a specifically high modernist perspective of history was necessary for such claims, one that included Paraguay as among the places making the transition to modern civilized life. This latter proposition remained a boastful, bold, and risky assertion. The haunting legacy of times past and the dour reencounters with impassable roads bleeding red mud in summer rains, the haphazard adobe huts and wandering livestock still dotting the outskirts streets of the capital, and the insular realities and relaxed customs of the Guaraní-speaking peasants who populated the landscape all could perhaps contribute to only deepening conceptual-historical gulfs separating them from the civilizational splendor of wide avenues, bustling railways, and rising smoke stacks recalled from their time in Great Britain and France.<sup>64</sup> The young men had to recognize that there was still plenty of

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<sup>63</sup> Gerónimo Pérez, “El ferro-carril,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 21 February 1863, no. 461, 2.

<sup>64</sup> *El Semanario* (Asunción) 5 September 1863, no. 489, 1.

civilizational ground to make up while nonetheless, crafting a liberal historical vision for their own country to begin to bridge those gaps.

The disturbing question of how to remember the time of Dr. Francia loomed in this regard. The young men were well acquainted with the haunting historical legacy of Francia for their country's reputation as a backward isolationist state, comparable to the Chinas and Japans of the world, among detractors abroad. And with respect to this legacy, the young men's published writings were inclined to agree. In his first contribution to the "arena of letters," Pérez was frank in despairing that during the Francia years Paraguay "presented a sad portrait of decadence."<sup>65</sup> Other disparagements of this period soon followed. One article complained that the "advantages of civilization and international relations" did not penetrate Francia's Paraguay, leaving its inhabitants "under the cold shadow of indolence and lethargy." Another piece referred to the Francia regime as a time of "profound lethargy" that rendered the country in a "state of prostration." The young men added to the voices within the López regime expressing the horror that under Francia "our commerce was entirely extinguished. Horrible misfortunes! Oh that it never return!"<sup>66</sup>

The young men made the laments precisely while constructing a historical vision vital to reinforcing a sense of modern liberal nationhood for Paraguay. This vision had to mark a heroic transition toward progress and civilization in the country, churning out a narrative that mimicked the heralded rise of Western Europe from its own dark ages while telescoping the passage of centuries into just a few years' time. In this regard, the Francia period served as the Paraguayan dark ages giving way to the enlightened renaissance of Carlos Antonio López. Several written pieces by the young men proclaimed such a vision of their national past. One article declared that in Paraguay the "period of decadence, despair, and isolation" was tied to the "name of Francia," while the "epoch of rebirth and

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<sup>65</sup> Pérez, "Una sorpresa agradable," *El Semanario*.

<sup>66</sup> "El Progreso," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 5 December 1863, no. 502, 3; "Una ojeada sobre la situación," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 25 July 1863, no. 483, 2-3; "El Comercio," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 5 January 1863, no. 454, 1. During the 1850s, the Paraguayan diplomat, Juan Andrés Gelly, also heavily criticized the Francia regime in his book *El Paraguay: lo que fue, lo que es, lo que será* (Asunción: El Lector, 1996), 35-45.



regeneration, full independence with the first real caretaker of Paraguayan society” was remembered with the “glorious name of Carlos Antonio López.”<sup>67</sup> The joint letter from Paris had asserted that Paraguay lacked “what constituted the life and vigor of a Nation, properly speaking,” until the “vigorous jolt” given to the nation by the late president. Meanwhile Gerónimo Pérez offered the historical metaphor in which the elder López encountered a “decaying edifice” upon his arrival to power, rebuilt it by hand, and bequeathed a “structure made of marble” to his fellow citizens upon his death.<sup>68</sup> The young men were announcing to the world that modern history had begun in Paraguay under Carlos Antonio López leaving behind the dark past of Dr. Francia.

The concrete advancements they encountered with their own eyes upon returning from Europe substantiated this historical vision. As mentioned, the state construction of a railroad and river steamboats seemed the most profound demonstration that Paraguay now “marched in step with civilization” and even rivaled the level of progress of the “civilized nations” of Europe.<sup>69</sup> They listed others: the growing bustle of river commerce, a modern naval yard, vast stretches of cultivated fields for agricultural production, a new arsenal and iron foundries, the expansion of elementary schools, modern construction in the capital and the surrounding villages, and, as noted above, the festive promotion of the printing press.<sup>70</sup> Was it appropriate then to compare favorably the agrarian laborers of the Paraguayan countryside to the plights of industrial workers in Great Britain and Holland, as one piece in the state newspaper began to do? The author dismissed the emergent “proletarian” philosophies in Europe that called for equalizing wealth and social classes to cure the scourges of poverty and want among industrial workers and, in increasingly

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<sup>67</sup> *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 July 1864, no. 533, 2.

<sup>68</sup> “Remitido.” *El Semanario* (Asunción). Pérez, “Una sorpresa agradable,” *El Semanario* (Asunción).

<sup>69</sup> Gerónimo Pérez, “El ferro-carril,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 21 February 1863, no. 461, 2.

<sup>70</sup> See Pérez “El ferro-carril,” “La campaña, mis impresiones de viaje,” and “Una sorpresa agradable” *El Semanario* (Asunción); “Remitido” *El Semanario* (Asunción); “Aniversario” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 16 May 1863, no. 473, 3; “Mas hechos que palabras,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 May 1863, no. 474, 3; “Función en Areguá,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 8 August 1863, no. 485, 2-3; *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 April 1864, no. 522, 1.

typical liberal fashion, saw the barons of capital and industry as the fountain of productivity and the general salvation of societies from slavery and barbarism. Fortunately in Paraguay, the author implied, few laborers would question the “natural” inequalities of society, and the fertility of the land allegedly kept even the poor working classes well fed. What remained was for the Paraguayan “proletariat” to shed their slothful proclivities and for their patrons to pay them better in wages and credit, more for the worth of their work.<sup>71</sup> But all might come in good time within a historical vision now entertaining the possibilities of widespread free-wage labor and hard-working proletarians in the Paraguayan countryside and also holding the high hopes of a boundless future.

Accordingly, an essential part of this modernist historical vision was that Paraguay was a “young republic” and “nascent nationality” still on the climb and far from reaching its apex. Resort to the metaphor of a child reaching maturity proved almost standard in this regard. One passage read that Paraguay “has recently woken from its infancy, begun to walk under its own power, and learned to speak...in order to communicate with the political world in the language of the republic and the pure accent of nationality.”<sup>72</sup> The apparent weakness of the country’s lagging backwardness had turned into the asset of untapped, youthful potential. The published words of the young men reminded doubters that even those nations “that today carry the title of civilized and have arrived at the pinnacle of their greatness started out much like us.”<sup>73</sup> These declarations further cemented a common generational identity with the nation, as the men had been likely aligning their own youth with its promise of modernity. Already in May 1861, while writing from London, Andrés Maciel had authored an essay dedicated to the educated youth of Paraguay.

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<sup>71</sup> The intriguing article makes references to emergent labor syndicalism and the circulation of Marxist ideas in Europe while, in its approach to Paraguay, seems to anticipate the optimistic liberal-elite views of the brutal (if orderly, in elite eyes) labor regimes of agrarian export capitalist economies that predominated throughout Latin America a generation later. “La clase proletaria,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 January 1864, no. 509, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “Nuestra nacionalidad,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 9 May 1863, no. 472, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*; Centurión *Memorias*, vol. 1, p. 164. For another articulation of this theme in Paraguayan propaganda, see Natalicio Talavera, “Progreso é importancia de la civilización,” *La Aurora* (Asunción), 18.

Published in the short-lived literary periodical, *La Aurora*, Maciel had charged his young compatriots with leading a progressive vanguard in the country to study the “letters, the arts, and the sciences” and thereby suppress Paraguay’s most dangerous enemy from within: uncivilized vices.<sup>74</sup> And, as noted, these hopes of youth and progress continued unabated upon the men’s return to Paraguay, first consoling liberal sentiments, then gaining force with the inclusion of the new president Francisco Solano López in their young vanguard of civilization.

The idea of youth thus eased their identification with the new regime itself. For as the “young president of the Republic” Francisco Solano López seemed to them to embody the modernizing potential of Paraguay, despite his autocratic rule. He too had traveled to Europe on a path breaking diplomatic trip in the 1850s, was instrumental there in hiring English technicians and machinery for the state’s celebrated industrial projects, and now as president cultivated at least the material symbols of modernity, from dress to wine to architecture, even as such things also contributed to his theater of power. In this regard, he also threw lively parties for the printing press, as described above. The young men complimented these alleged displays of modernity with optimistic praise capturing the sense of youthful promise. In his writings, Pérez urged his fellow citizens to unite “under the standard of prosperity and progress that today our young President hoists for us.”<sup>75</sup> Upon giving a toast and speech at a banquet celebrating the president’s birthday in 1864, Centurión exulted that the regime was “adorning itself with the golden embroidery of progress and civilization.” Another article in the state newspaper added that López-led Paraguay belonged “to the societies submitted to a gradual march from which they cannot back away.”<sup>76</sup>

The notion of a youthful nation contained the promise of on-going modern material advance under the charge of a progressive president. It could also assuage unresolved tensions between autocracy and liberty

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<sup>74</sup> Andrés Maciel, “El servicio de la patria consiste en hacerlo posible para serle útil,” *La Aurora* (Asunción), 466.

<sup>75</sup> “Funciones populares,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 30 July 1864, no. 536, 1; Pérez “El ferro-carril,” *El Semanario* (Asunción).

<sup>76</sup> “Deberes para con la patria,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 30 April 1864, no. 523, 3; *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 April 1864, no. 522, 1.

under the same regime. Here the young men were granted the conceptual room to reconcile boasts of their country enjoying the fruits of republican liberty with the evident autocratic rule of their promising president. Gradual liberal reform of political systems following the British model, again, was likely recalled. And the same claims that emphasized the youthful potential of the nation also cited the lack of full political maturity among the Paraguayan populace to responsibly exercise democratic rights. Did not esteemed European political theorists hesitate themselves at the prospect of widespread suffrage and open political systems in their countries? Could not others see the potential ravages that unbridled liberal practices brought to Spanish American states?<sup>77</sup> In this official view then, the full republican maturation of the Paraguayan people was best entrusted to the enlightened, if autocratic vanguard of the López state. Given such a premise, the young men could articulate the voice of the regime that embraced the identity of a constitutional republic and proclaimed a liberty appropriate to Paraguayan youth and maturity reigned throughout the territory.<sup>78</sup> They thus ventured declarations, however problematic, that indeed “liberty is understood and practiced” in the country and that Francisco Solano López won power through the “free and spontaneous election of the people.” They also pretended that freedom of the press was a cherished value in Paraguay and employed within reasonable limits determined by state control.<sup>79</sup>

Latent tensions consistent with the application of liberal ideas to Paraguayan society had even filtered into their very understanding of modern nationhood. Gerónimo Pérez had supplied a definition of the modern nation-state in an article written shortly after his return to Paraguay in February 1863. He proposed that a nation was the “union of a great family,” which “submits itself to a person elected by the society and to the laws that the leader and society have dictated” in order to defend

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<sup>77</sup> Members of the Generation of 1837 asked themselves these same questions. See Shumway, *Invention of Argentina*, 150-54.

<sup>78</sup> “Nuestra nacionalidad” *El Semanario* (Asunción); Also see Natalicio Talavera, “En que consiste la libertad,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 28 February 1863, no. 462, 3-4.

<sup>79</sup> “Remitido,” *El Semanario* (Asunción); “La imprenta en la noche del 19,” *El Semanario* (Asunción).

against potential enemies and watch over its “common interest.” He elaborated that this “united family” had an “established government,” a “fixed territory,” and “laws that guaranteed the common good and tranquility of society.”<sup>80</sup> Pérez had relied on both the traditional language of colonial patriarchy and Enlightenment ideals to describe the conceptual character of the modern nation. On the one hand, he cited the general will of the people, the “society” that elected its leaders and determined its law, alluding to the most basic liberal notion of popular sovereignty. Meanwhile, he also called the nation a “great family,” tying it to older understandings of patriarchal submission to established authority.

The men left such tension unresolved while nonetheless diffusing its incoherence with a barrage of liberal hyperbole. For if liberty was indeed practiced in their country and the people had freely elected the government of Francisco Solano López, they rationalized that the defining trait of the modern Paraguayan nation was political unity, “the mark that distinguishes us.”<sup>81</sup> This assertion spoke to an older Spanish political tradition that cherished expressions of unity rather than dissent and contention as the most profound virtue of a political community.<sup>82</sup> Yet the claim also had an undeniable modern resonance, suggesting that Paraguayan political unity under the regime of Francisco Solano López was the product of democratic consensus. In this regard, they repeatedly defined their republic as the “Paraguayan Association,” as if it constituted a freely formed union where the popular will naturally gelled together without dissent and division. Such rhetorical maneuvers managed to simultaneously consent to autocratic rule while celebrating its alleged democratic foundation. And in the end, the young men were prepared to concede that autocratic rule, and its corresponding “political unity,” was a principal source of the country’s acclaimed progress and civilization.

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<sup>80</sup> Pérez, “La política,” *El Semanario* (Asunción).

<sup>81</sup> “Nuestra nacionalidad,” *El Semanario* (Asunción); *El Semanario* (Asunción) 23 May 1863, no. 474, 2; “Los deseos y los hechos,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 18 July 1863, no. 482, 2; “Producción de la riqueza,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 29 August 1863, no. 488, 3.

<sup>82</sup>On this same account, see the analysis of republican discourse in Rosas-dominated Argentina, Jorge Myers, *Orden y virtud: El discurso republicano en el regimen rosista* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1995), 73-110.

The explicit context for such concessions was the notorious political instability and civil war that plagued much of Spanish America since independence. Paraguay had avoided this fate. And the young men soon clung to this recognition as another prominent contrast with things barbaric to confirm the idea of Paraguay's exemplary cultivation of progress and civilization. Peace and political unity became the source of Paraguayan modernity and prosperity. Writing the essay to his "young Paraguayan compatriots" in 1861, Andrés Maciel encouraged them to "enjoy with pride the sweet fruits of peace while the neighboring populations continuously devour themselves in fratricidal wars" and at the same time to "contemplate with admiration the great progress" in the "country of your birth." In a September 1863 letter from London to Venancio López, Pérez lamented a new outbreak of insurgency in the Plata republics and suggested that instability impeded their rivaling the "greatness and prosperity of the first nations of the civilized world." Paraguay, on the other hand, proceeded along "its road of prosperity with accelerated steps." Pérez further emphasized this theme in his first dispatch to *El Semanario* from London: "Review South America from the Gulf of Mexico to Cape Horn," he urged his readers, "strewn with countless republics torn apart by fratricidal acts, ruined with civil war, and sown with a thousand miseries." The "nascent Republic" of Paraguay in turn was the exception, driving towards progress in peace and political unity.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, beyond cementing the young men's own conformity with autocratic rule, these assertions surged as the point of modern liberal exuberant boasting to the world. The men could claim that the López regime was indeed a benevolent patron of progress and civilization. They might even declare outright that Paraguay was the model of modern nationhood in republican America. One 1864 text proclaimed triumphantly:

When a war of titans desolates the fertile and rich land of the United States, when poor Mexico in punishment for its abuses of liberty bears the weight of a crown over its traditional republican garb,

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<sup>83</sup> Maciel, "El servicio de la patria consiste en hacerlo posible para serle útil" *La Aurora*, (Asunción); Gerónimo Pérez a Venancio López, London, 6 September 1863, ANA-SH vol. 307, no. 242; "Londres, Agosto 6 1863," *El Semanario* (Asunción) 10 October 1863, no. 494, 1.

when the tumultuous Republic of the River Plate [Argentina] speaks of nothing but commotions, upheavals, and massacres, when, finally, Uruguay witnesses in its territory a devastating invasion; peaceful Paraguay celebrates the source of its blessings and privileges.<sup>84</sup>

The piece alludes to the French invasion of Mexico, which had installed a monarchy there amidst prolonged civil war, as well as the machinations of the Brazilian Empire in Uruguay and on-going civil strife in Argentina—all important backdrop to the development of a war that would soon envelop Paraguay. But in this moment of patriotic audacity and peace, the young men could applaud that perhaps even the much-lauded United States, also in the grips of civil war, fell behind the march of Paraguayan modernity. They thus had inverted the charges of tyranny and barbarism made against their country by countless detractors in the Río de la Plata alone. Engaging critics on their own discursive terrain, the five declared Paraguay under the López regime as the exemplary champion of liberal civilization and republican government in all of America. Conversely, its “sister republics” were those who drowned in the barbarism of civil war. The young men basked in such modern exuberance. It allowed them to brush aside the doubts of serving an autocratic state and presume the reality of modern nationhood in Paraguay. For they, like their president, had the confidence of youth, pounding their chests, toasting their wine glasses, and believing the best was yet to come.

*Conclusion: Calamity*

The calamity of war soon followed, in fact, scarring the lives of every one of the five young men. Two of them, Gaspar López and Andrés Maciel, never survived the turmoil. Centurión barely did, escaping the war’s last battle after a bullet tore through his jaw. He had spent the conflict as a chief propagandist of the regime and later served as a lettered magistrate condemning old companions and compatriots to torture and death as alleged traitors to the country. Scenes of “mutilated bodies piled in mountains,” the “moaning and cries of wounded and dying” who were churning in “blood, water, and mud” or crying out from bushes and spines,

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<sup>84</sup> “El pueblo,” *El Semanario* (Asunción) 31 October 1863, no. 497, 2.

and sights of “battalions and regiments, carts, wagons and artillery passing over them hurriedly, as if riding over gravel,” now haunted his dreams.<sup>85</sup> Pérez and Bareiro were lucky to survive most of the war in Europe. They nonetheless returned to a broken country afterward, hoping that unlike the old bonds of friendship among the young men, it was not destroyed beyond repair.

In light of such impending disaster, the previous dreams of modern nationhood that the five young men had brought into the conflict alter our historical understanding of the Paraguayan state and the war itself. Rather than maintaining a hermit state steeling itself against the onslaught of liberal modernity, the López regime embraced the language of ascendant liberalism to justify its actions and even define its nation. Quite simply, further integration into the mainstream of international commerce and diplomacy required pandering to the ideological prejudices of the North Atlantic world. Anxious for such integration, the Paraguayan government in the early 1860s sought to depict itself leading a modern nation, fully in-step with the march of liberal civilization. Trained and educated in Europe, the five were just the men to craft the depiction. Again, their predicament was similar to that of liberal lettered elites throughout the region. In Brazil, high statesmen, firebrand students of law, and even a savant monarch himself wrestled with expressions of liberalism that could be reconciled with institutions of slavery, oligarchic parliamentary structures, and a state that still defined itself as an empire.<sup>86</sup> In Argentina, intellectual architects of a new liberal order imagined modern nationhood in a way that excluded the bulk of their country’s current population.<sup>87</sup> In the Paraguayan case, enthusiasts of the railroad, printing press, and popular sovereignty remained comfortable with the personalist, autocratic rule of a family that enriched itself on colonial-like state monopolies held over principal exports.

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<sup>85</sup> Centurión, *Viaje nocturno de Gualberto o recuerdos y reflexiones de un ausente*, 60-61.

<sup>86</sup>Barman, *Citizen Emperor: Pedro II and the Making of Brazil, 1825-1891* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire*, 53-76; Kirkendall, *Class Mates*, 119-45.

<sup>87</sup>Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (Bogota: Editorial Oveja Negra, 1986). Also see Shumway, *Invention of Argentina*, 133-45.



Modernity remains a tricky, if still useful, historical concept.<sup>88</sup> Far beyond identifying empirical standards marking Paraguay's transition to modern, liberal nationhood, we nonetheless have encountered the riddle of what to make of those states and political classes encompassed within assumptions of backwardness by self-proclaimed champions of liberal modernity who were also self-proclaimed champions of liberal modernity.<sup>89</sup> And rather than the exception to the rule of nineteenth-century Latin American liberalism then, we find that the Paraguayan state and lettered collaborators were its very reflection. The creative acts of rationalization described by the five lettered officials were but typical expressions of aspirations for modern nationhood. That is, liberalism, as practiced by Latin American governing elites, involved the necessary performance of rhetorical gymnastics, which in negotiating the pregnant tensions between principles and practice usually led to perpetual frustration rather than fulfillment of many of its ideals. Hardly detached from political motives and actions, such discursive acrobatics sought to define their very meanings. In this regard, the López regime, amidst accusations of barbarism and tyranny, still professed to be the champion of liberal civilization and even claimed to take up its cause upon inciting the war that brought disaster to the country.

The López regime made war first on Brazil, and later Argentina, in 1864-65 under the pretext of defending American republicanism against the aggression of Old World-style monarchy. The Brazilian empire had emerged as the principal ideological enemy of the Paraguayan republic upon invading Uruguay and allegedly seducing "treasonous" leaders in

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<sup>88</sup> See the AHR roundtable "Historians and the Question of Modernity," especially selections by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "Modernity: The Sphinx and the Historian," Gurinder K. Bhambra, "Historical Sociology, Modernity, and Postcolonial Critique," Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," and Richard Wolin, "'Modernity': The Peregrinations of a Contested Historiographical Concept," in *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 631-37, 638-52, 653-62, 663-75, 741-51.

<sup>89</sup> To what extent does this remain the central predicament of the so-called "new democrats" in Paraguay after the fall of the Alfredo Stroessner regime in 1989, in their attempt to forge a political system and property regime that satisfies the demands for "transparency" of North Atlantic powers and international organizations? See here the fantastic study by Gregg Hetherington, *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

Buenos Aires and Montevideo for its expansionist designs. The widespread practice of slavery, a massive black population, and monarchic rule in Brazil combined to form a striking, if racist, symbol of barbarism and threat as the López regime mobilized support to pursue its own ambitions to become the broker of power and modern nationhood in the Río de la Plata region. Later, as the regime's situation grew more desperate, this same vision of defiant liberal republicanism served as a powerful rallying cry of national survival that state propaganda even articulated with profound resonance in the creole vernacular Guaraní.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile statesmen in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires continued to cite the tyrannical government and Guaraní-speaking peasants of Paraguay as evidence of its backwardness, justifying their belligerence to impose civilization on the region.<sup>91</sup> Here then we finally arrive at an altered understanding of the conflict: the war, in fact, proved not a showdown between forces of liberalism and bulwarks of tradition, as typically depicted, rather it was a confrontation among states with competing claims on liberal progress, civilization, and modern nationhood. And it was a war to resolve, among many other things, which states, indeed, would be the brokers and emblems of this modernity in the region. The steam rolling torment of warfare that consumed so many Paraguayan lives thus billowed forth just as much from liberal ideological pressures within Paraguay as those from without.

The five young men demonstrated enthusiasm for the coming hostilities despite the unforeseen calamity for their country and their own personal lives. They affirmed the geopolitical vision of the state that a defense of American republicanism was necessary and just. Doing so joined their impulse to muffle the still nagging voices of their country's detractors. For the young men believed that a victorious war against Paraguay's neighbors could, like the railroad or the printing press, prove the mettle of its civilization to doubters around the world. Cándido Bareiro voiced this claim in a November 1864 letter to Jose Berges, the Paraguayan Foreign

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<sup>90</sup> See, again, "Toikove Ñane Retã!," 79-97.

<sup>91</sup> See here, for example, the perspective of the Brazilian officer Benjamin Constant as explored by Renato Lemos, "Benjamin Constant: The 'Truth' Behind the Paraguayan War," *I Die with My Country*, ch. 5.

Minister, just before the start of the conflict. He wrote: “Do me the favor of not believing my views exaggerated...I see things very coldly, and I have the intimate conviction that the occasion has arrived for us to draw the sword.” Bareiro’s opinion was typical of the five young men.<sup>92</sup> With dark clouds in view on the horizon, they embraced the storm.

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<sup>92</sup>Cándido Bareiro a José Berges, Paris, 24 November 1864; ANA-CRB I-30, 4, 28 n. 2. Centurión describes his enthusiasm and support of the war, *Memorias*, vol. 1, 208-13.

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