IN 1969, four years after the opening of the Puente de la Amistad (Friendship Bridge in English or Ponte da Amizade in Portuguese) that connects Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, to Puerto Stroessner (now Ciudad del Este), Paraguay, the New York Times travel reporter Joyce Hill narrated her three-day drive from São Paulo, Brazil, to Asunción, Paraguay. In her words, her trip was from “South America’s fastest-growing city [São Paulo]” to “Asunción, Paraguay, its slowest-paced capital.” The article documents her experience, as she called it, of traveling “backward though time.” Starting in Brazil’s largest, most important, and most modern city, meandering through the countryside of the Brazilian state of Paraná, crossing the Puente de la Amistad, and slowly making her way on Paraguay’s new highway, the sojourner highlighted South America’s many appealing features. But her description of Asunción as “full of innocence, charm[,] and unreality” was certainly a portrayal Paraguayan president Alfredo Stroessner (1954–1989) was determined to end. More to his liking would have been a request for directions to the airport—both to show her how modern transportation had arrived in the middle of the twentieth century in the form of the modernized Aeropuerto Alfredo Stroessner and to demonstrate that Paraguayan-owned jets both arrived and, more importantly in this case, departed daily to rid the country of such a condescending reporter.²

For the Stroessner regime the opening of the new bridge, the modernized airport along with jet travel, and Hill’s seamless travel across a South American
border represented not a trip into the past but a leap into a bright future. No longer tied to Argentina by boat via the Paraguay River or by train on the slow-moving, antiquated rail line, the new bridge and the new airport would help bring the nation into the modern world. In the minds of those in power in Paraguay, connecting with the dynamic economy and culture of neighboring Brazil by means of automobiles and air travel represented the hope of a better tomorrow. By this time Argentina’s economic, cultural, and political dominance of South America had waned significantly. The days of vast Spanish and Italian immigration, Argentine tango singers filling music halls in Europe and the United States, and “vacas gordas” (fat cows) of economic glory days had passed in Argentina.3 The declining fate of Argentina stood in stark comparison to the perceived rise of Brazil. This trend in local geopolitics and culture was most visible in the periphery, and particularly Paraguay. The bridge signified a new era in Paraguayan history; Paraguay was no longer dependent on the Paraguay River, Argentina, and its major city, Buenos Aires. In a play on words, asuncenos (as residents of Asunción are known) had moved away from their river port, and porteños (as residents of Buenos Aires are known) had moved toward a Brazilian ponte and in the process were becoming ponteros. As a result, the middle decades of the twentieth century brought hope for novel Brazilian Paraguayan trade and cultural and social interconnectedness.

Historical studies of Asunción are limited. The few studies of the city tend to focus on the early years of conquest or the time lines of the city’s most important landmarks. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debates about how the city was founded and by whom sparked an initial interest from historians—many of whom were attempting to tie their own family histories to the early conquerors.4 In the latter part of the twentieth century, historians reexamining the period began questioning the myth of peaceful conquest often retold in earlier works.5 The anthropologist Branislava Susnik narrates a more complicated and tenuous early relationship between the indigenous Cario-Guarani and the Spanish conquistadors.6 Her work has gained increasing attention from historians. In recent years, historians have begun to tackle the question about the city’s infrastructure development and cultural institutions. More recent work, including that of José Carlos Rodríguez, has noted that urbanization in Asunción in the middle decades of the twentieth century occurred in the direction of metropolitan growth toward Ciudad del Este instead of along the river, as had previously been the case.7 In this chapter I add to the discussion about urbanization in Paraguay by postulating that this
Asunción–Puerto Stroessner connection radically changed the geopolitical, cultural, and social orientation of the city. No longer limited to the Lower Río de la Plata via river or train but rather extending toward the Triple Frontier by bus and automobile, Asunción became more Brazilian and less Argentine. Paraguayans in the middle of the twentieth century began favoring political alliances with Brazil, copying Brazilian cultural norms, and vacationing in Brazil’s larger cities and beautiful beaches. Many elite Paraguayans and government officials hoped—and imagined—that these dramatic changes would lift Paraguay out of an extensive colonial and early national isolation into a new tropical urban modernity. Asunción would not be isolated, sleepy, or backward. It would be connected, active, and even innovative.

RIVER, RAILROAD, AND HIGHWAY

According to Paraguayan legend, the first European to arrive in the area that is today Asunción was Aleixo Garcia, a Portuguese conquistador working for the Spanish crown in the early sixteenth century. Garcia succeeded in reaching the remote area after making an arduous trip from Santa Catarina, in present-day Brazil, overland to the banks of the Paraguay River. The hardy traveler then continued west to seek out the vast cities of silver that were rumored to exist beyond the river. Garcia never returned from his travels to recount his exploits to other Europeans. His demise remains a mystery. Garcia was one of the few travelers to attempt the overland route to reach the banks of the Paraguay River. The conquistadors who followed, including Juan de Ayolas, Juan de Salazar, and Domingo Martínez de Irala, all traveled up the Paraguay River from the Lower Plata. This method of travel to Paraguay and its capital, Asunción, remained the only safe and viable way for travelers, immigrants, and invading armies to penetrate the region throughout the colonial and early national periods in Paraguay.

As a result of the Spanish conquistadors’ achievement in founding the city of Asunción—the first successful Spanish city in the Río de la Plata—conquistadors headed out from Asunción to found other cities, including Corrientes, Buenos Aires, and Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Consequently, Paraguayan historians and nationalists refer to the city as the “mother of cities.” The nickname confers to Asunción and, by extension, to Paraguay as a whole, a greater level of importance in the early colonial era. Nonetheless, after this brief period, Asunción and Paraguay fell into relative obscurity because of their geographic
isolation and lack of easily exportable commodities (with the exception of yerba mate—Paraguayan green tea) in a growing Atlantic and global market. While not entirely cut off from wide regional and global trends in the late-colonial and early national periods, Asunción’s limited interaction with the Atlantic basin can be traced to its dependence on the Paraguay River as an outlet to the Atlantic. Repeated interference by Buenos Aires in both the colonial and national periods strained relations between asuncenos and porteños. As noted by Thomas Whigham, in the period between the Bourbon reforms and the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870), the region had “real potential, intermittently realized, for a thriving export economy. This potential, however, was powerfully and repeatedly disrupted by politics.”

While outside the scope of this chapter, it is sufficient to write that the river trade on the Paraguay River was dominated not by Asunción river’s headwaters but by Buenos Aires and somewhat less so by Montevideo, both at the estuary of the Paraguay River.

During the War of the Triple Alliance, Argentine, Brazilian, and Uruguayan troops who penetrated the region via the same river that had brought the Spanish conquistadors Ayolas, Salazar, and Irala were successful in invading the Upper Plata, and the Allied troops who fought their way to Paraguay via the river occupied the city from 1869 to 1876. The same cannot be said for the troops who traveled from São Paulo to Campinas and Uberaba in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the hopes of reaching the Paraguay River. Attempting to slash their way through the dense forest, they never arrived. According to Whigham, 568 doomed men headed out of Campinas in April 1865. Another 1,212 men in Uberaba joined them in July with the intention of attacking the Paraguayans from the rear. The plan, however, was foiled by the harsh conditions of travel in the South American forest. Death from disease, starvation, and Paraguayan bullets ensured that this group of Brazilians never reached Asunción or the Paraguay River. They learned the hard way that travel overland from Brazil to the Upper Plata was nearly impossible.

This reality remained even after the end of hostilities. In the late nineteenth century the American travel reporter Theodore Child wrote in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine that Paraguay, “situated in the heart of the [South American] continent, and communicating with the sea only by the intermediary of the Paraná River . . . has remained a far-away country.” Significantly, forty years later another American, William Reid, also traveled to Asunción. He arrived via the Paraguay River, although he wrote that it was possible to travel from Montevideo or Buenos Aires to Asunción via train “in about 48 or 50 hours”; it
would be faster than traveling upriver, a journey that would require five or six days. He suggested, however, that if a traveler arrived in Asunción by train, it was best to return by river (only three days to return to Buenos Aires or Montevideo) and enjoy magnificent views on the Paraguay River. It is clear from these early travelers that Paraguay, and specifically for our purposes the city of Asunción, was a port city from its founding in the early sixteenth until the middle of the twentieth century. In 1895, travel writer and geographer Élisée Reclus documented this trade when noting that earthenware, lace, and the “extract . . . of orange flowers” were “forwarded to Buenos Ayres.”

Earlier, though, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Paraguayan president Carlos Antonio López (1841–1862) built the first railroad in Paraguay with the dream of improving transportation. Under López, the first 6.4 miles of railroad connected Asunción to its suburbs in 1861. Under the early presidency of his son Francisco Solano López (1862–1870) the railroad was extended “almost to Paraguai, some 72 kilometers” to the east of Asunción. The War of the Triple Alliance halted the construction of the railroad, but after the conflagration, in 1870 various British investors hoped to earn a profit building a railroad in Paraguay. However, according to the historian Harris Gaylord Warren, “The Paraguay Railway was a lure and a dream rather than a means of transportation” in the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, in September of 1913, the railroad was finally extended from Villarrica to Encarnación on the Paraná River. From there it was possible to take a ferry to Argentina. By extending eastward from Asunción rather than to the south, the railroad connected Paraguay only to Argentina; Brazil was still out of reach via railroad.

The first highway that headed east from Asunción was begun in 1939 when Marshal José Felix Estigarribia, hero of the Chaco War (1932–1935), in his role as minister to the United States secured a three million dollar loan for road construction. The road reached the town of Coronel Oviedo when completed, about 140 kilometers to the east of Asunción. As a result of his efforts in both the Chaco War and his efforts in securing the funding for the highway, it is commonly known as ruta Mariscal José Felix Estigarribia (fig. 9.1).

The second extension toward the east is ruta VII (José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia), which connects Coronel Oviedo with what was then known as the city of Puerto Stroessner (today known as Ciudad del Este), located on the Paraná River that forms the border with Brazil. Begun in 1955 with Brazilian financing, the road was completed in January 1959 with a ceremonial opening in June of the same year. With the road completed, asuncenos had the first direct
overland route to the Brazilian border. Paraguay and its capital city would be forever changed by a new geographic orientation.

**PARAGUAY’S TENSE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL**

Up until the construction of the road and bridge connecting Asunción to the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu, Brazilians watched begrudgingly as Argentina dominated both the political and cultural landscape of Asunción. Early in the nineteenth century, this Argentine domination was a source of major concern because, as noted by the historian Francisco Doratioto, “the Brazilian Empire [believed] that Buenos Aires had as one of its ambitions becoming that center of a [nation] state that included all of the jurisdiction of the old Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, of which Paraguay had been a part.” After the Allied victory in 1870 in the War of the Triple Alliance, the Brazilians forcefully occupied the city; nonetheless, a hasty end to occupation meant that Brazilian influence was relatively short lived. Even so, in the early years after the war, political forces in Paraguay appeared to favor Brazil. The first political party in Paraguay, the
Asociación Nacional Republicana, commonly known as the Colorados, was led by the pro-Brazilian general Bernardo Caballero, who when elected to the presidency maintained relatively close political relations with Brazil. The opposition party, the Centro Democrático, commonly known as the Liberal Party, favored closer relations with Argentina. Although the Colorados were in control of politics for most of the period before 1904, in the decades following the war, Argentina continued as the most important power in the Upper Plata. After the fall of the Empire of Brazil in 1889, two events, the 1894 Cavalcanti Coup and the Chaco War (1932–1935), highlight the political and economic strength of Argentine influence. During the 1894 Cavalcanti Coup, Brazil, fearing the installation of an anti-Brazilian president, helped to support the election of Juan Bautista Egusquiza. In the end, however, Brazilians were unable to secure his position as the primer mandatario (the head of government and state), and Argentine influence in politics dominated throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the 1904 Liberal Party coup, Argentine political influence and its economic and cultural hegemony were secured until the middle of the twentieth century. For example, during the Chaco War, the Argentines sold supplies and military matériel to the Paraguayans, a clear demonstration of support for the Paraguayan cause over their Bolivian adversary in the Chaco region of South America. Moreover, the largest investor in the region was Carlos Casado, an Argentine from Rosario who built the only railroad in the vast Chaco region in order to grow his quebracho (literally ax-breaking tree) extraction business.

This fact was not lost on Paraguayans of the middle twentieth century, including Coronel Ramón César Bejarano, who noted with hostility that “it is well known that the porteño [Buenos Aires] capital, before and after American Independence, attempted to exercise political and economic hegemony over the cities in the interior [of South America]. As a result, there was anarchy in the Río de la Plata [after independence].” Culturally and linguistically, Paraguay had traditionally shared more with Argentina than its larger eastern neighbor. Spanish, the language of the Lower Plata, was and is the language of government, science, business, and religion in Paraguay. Commerce, a shared colonial past, and language connected the Upper Plata to the Lower Plata via the Paraguay River until the middle of the twentieth century. It was precisely for those reasons that Bejarano noted with obvious hostility toward Buenos Aires that “for such reasons, the idea of a search for another outlet to the Atlantic ocean . . . developed into a true obsession of all patriotic governments including
those of [D]on Carlos [Antonio López] and General Stroessner.”

Even if López, as hinted by Bejarano, had wanted to extend a road toward Brazil, the reality was that a dense forest prevented such a highway.

With the rise of Alfredo Stroessner in 1954, development toward the east became possible. Paraguayan dependence on and preference for all things Argentine shifted dramatically. Through the early 1950s the Paraguayan military and its leadership had shown strong predilections for Brazil over Argentina. This can be traced to the perceived notion that Brazil had a strong military that the Paraguayan army desired to emulate. Stroessner shared these views. Although he did not share Juan Perón’s political visions, when Perón was exiled by the military in a coup, Stroessner gave him a safe haven. According to Francisco Doratioto this had more to do with the long tradition in Latin America of welcoming exiled political leaders and less with Stroessner’s “fondness” of Perón. Nonetheless, the Argentine military interpreted the event as support for Perón, further pushing Stroessner and Paraguay into Brazil’s growing sphere of influence in the Southern Cone.

Stroessner was undoubtedly a Brazilophile, and his desire to strengthen Paraguayan’s political ties to Brazil helped to ensure that a road connecting the Paraguayan capital to the border, a longtime dream of Colorado Party leaders, was brought to fruition under his watch. Significantly, his presidency oversaw the construction of a bridge over the Paraná River that connected Puerto Stroessner, Paraguay, with Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. The treaty between Brazil and Paraguay to build the bridge was signed on May 29, 1956, only a few short months after Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek was sworn into office in January and two years after Stroessner had assumed the presidency of Paraguay in a coup d’état on May 4, 1954. These two men also celebrated the inauguration of the bridge a few years later, in 1961, with speeches that celebrated a new era in Brazil-Paraguay relations. While in this chapter I stress the importance of the bridge for Paraguayan hopes, dreams, and ambitions, the construction of the bridge was also significant for the new Kubitschek government, which was embarking on a series of new building projects that historian Joel Wolfe has described as “developmentalist,” including but not limited to the construction of Brasília. These policies started “on his [Kubitschek’s] first day in office . . . [when he] laid out plans for expanding basic industries and transportation networks.” These Brazilian building and infrastructure projects clearly appealed to a new Paraguayan leadership looking to expand toward a modern Brazil. The thought of a Paraguay connected to a modern, progressive state was not lost
on Alfredo Stroessner: at the bridge inauguration ceremony in 1961, he stated, “it is with great pride that I declare that we have arrived from Asunción to this historic event. . . . On the highway that my government has constructed, in service to the great interest of the nation, opening though the dense jungle, a new path for progress and civilization.” When finally opened to the public in 1965, the Puente de la Amistad brought a dramatic geopolitical and economic shift to the region. No longer was Paraguay’s only access to the Atlantic restricted downriver on the Paraguay River; instead, roads (even if only partially paved!) connected Asunción directly to Brazil’s large markets and the nation’s growing cultural hegemony in the Southern Cone (fig. 9.2).  

THE PHYSICAL CITY

Founded as a port city, Asunción long hugged the Paraguay River, with its low-lying areas frequently flooding. Residents and leaders of Asunción, even with the threat of repeated flooding, chose to build homes, businesses, and
government offices along the river. It was the lifeline of the city, bringing in needed goods and services to *asuncenos* and creating a conceptual and logistical attachment to the river that resulted in Asunción’s status as a port city. Maps of the city clearly record this trend. Roberto Chodasiewicz and Enrique Mangel’s 1870 work shows the city in an interlocking colonial grid expanding outward from the river’s edge. The city’s most important buildings—and the only ones marked on the map—closely hug the coast. The port is clearly marked, and a road leading from the port to the street is drawn on the map (fig. 9.3).

Significantly, the railroad that was constructed before the War of the Triple Alliance is identified and shown hugging the river. Some fifty years later, a 1920 map by Federico E. Degasperi shows the city expanding both to the north and east. Although the city had grown since the earlier map, it was still small enough that many residents still lived only blocks away from the river. In yet another fifty years, though, a detailed map of the city created by the United States government in 1978 clearly demonstrates how the city was growing toward the east along the newly constructed highway toward Brazil, from the ruta II—that connected with ruta VII—that connected with Puerto Stroessner and the bridge to Brazil (fig. 9.4).

Asunción’s outer suburbs grew along the highway stretching east, appearing almost like an arm reaching out toward Brazil. This was not coincidental; it was driven by Brazil’s growing cultural, social, and economic influence in the Southern Hemisphere. An emerging regional and global powerhouse, the promise of Brazil left the Paraguayan government with the hope that it, too, could partake in Brazil’s expanding sphere. Asunción was no longer the river city that it once was. Government officials aspired to much more.

### A MORE BRAZILIAN PARAGUAY

On March 27, 1965, the day that the Puente de la Amistad opened to the public (as opposed to its earlier limited use opening in 1961), both Brazilians and Paraguayans celebrated by walking across the bridge. The bridge appeared crowded with people walking across in celebration of the opening in the Paraguayan newspaper *El País*. The throngs of civilians crossing the bridge was proceeded by presidents Stroessner and Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco (1964–1967) arriving at precisely 7:45 a.m. on their nation’s respective sides of the bridge and walking toward each other for a ribbon cutting in the middle. Both
men were dressed and photographed in “civilian attire,” not the military dress each was accustomed to for such inaugural events. (Stroessner was a general and Castelo Branco was a marshal.) This sartorial choice, as noted in the Paraguayan press, was specifically to highlight the peaceful nature of the twentieth-century bridge that connected the nineteenth-century enemies. Although the bridge connected Paraguay and Brazil, the Paraguayan press gave full credit for its engineering to Brazilians and noted that it was a “historic offering from the Brazilian people to the Paraguayan people.” The bridge was much more than a simple path across a raging river; it was seen by Paraguayans as a gift of friendship that would bring Brazil, and its sleek, urban modernity, that much closer to Paraguay.

In the middle of the twentieth century, a new social magazine (“with the largest circulation in the country” as was often repeated on its cover) appeared in Asunción: Ñandé (meaning “ourselves” in Guarani). The magazine, aimed at elite white Paraguayans, contained articles ranging from women’s fashion to recipes to new business endeavors in Paraguay. But, most importantly, it was both a visual and rhetorical propaganda machine for the Stroessner regime as it highlighted and glorified the many positive changes in Asunción. A close inspection of the magazine emphasizes the hopes and desires of the Stroessner regime to increase both social and cultural ties to Brazil and its efforts to convince the educated and moneyed classes in Paraguay that their best hope for the future was a closer and more intimate relationship with Brazil.

A year before the 1965 public inaugural of the bridge, a new experimental Paraguay-Brazil school opened in Asunción (fig. 9.5). This ultramodern building reflected larger trends of architecture popular in Brazil at the time (in particular the recently constructed capital city Brasília). The Brazilian architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, most famous for his work on the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, replicated many features of the building in Rio into his work in Asunción. Specifically, modernist V-shaped façades are predominant features on both buildings.

Although in the end many of the school’s design features were never finished, the building certainly highlighted the growing Brazilian influence in Asunción. In a glowing article written in Ñandé, the stated purpose of the school was to help promote Brazilian-Paraguayan friendship and “primarily to train teachers in general psychology, . . . educational theory, Portuguese language, [and] Portuguese and Brazilian literature.” Moreover, the magazine reported that the space was to serve as location for “artistic, cultural, and scientific conferences,
expositions, concerts, and courses. The hope that Brazilian Paraguayan amity
would overcome the past hostility between the two nations was symbolized
in the choice of the new director of the school, Dra. Gladys Solano López,
great-granddaughter of Francisco Solano López, the marshal-president who
had fought the Brazilians for six years in the nineteenth century. This point was
not missed when it was noted that “the new generations have totally surpassed
the divergences of the past. The reality is that Brazilians and Paraguayans work
toward a fertile peace.” The propaganda directed at the magazine’s readers
credited this change of course to Alfredo Stroessner. As clearly highlighted in

FIGURE 9.5 Experimental Paraguay-Brazil School, Asunción, Paraguay, ca. 1964. Photo
the article, the planning and construction of the project began in 1954 with the rise of his presidency. According to this logic, Stroessner was the true peacemaker between Brazil and Paraguay.

Only a month after the inauguration of the experimental school, Ñandé reported that the Bank of Brazil was planning to construct in March of 1965 a new building to house the bank’s Asunción branch. The edifice, to be built with “Paraguayan material and labor,” was to be more than just the location of a new bank, it was also to contain “an exposition hall for Brazilian products [and] a conference room.” With these ideas in mind the building was to serve as “vigorous transcendence in the cultural aspect of Paraguayan-Brazilian relations.”

Moreover, the building of the large and imposing Bank of Brazil in downtown Asunción symbolized the growing economic importance of Brazil in Paraguay in the middle of the twentieth century. Clearly demonstrating the economic power of South America’s largest country in one of South America’s smaller nations, the loyal Paraguayan press gave Brazilians an outlet for their growing economic and cultural imperialism. As noted in Ñandé, Brazilian businesses from São Leopoldo, a suburb of Porto Alegre, were going to hold an exposition in Asunción from May 18 to 30, 1965, with the hope of showing many Brazilian products. In exchange, in October of the same year, Paraguayan products were to be shown in Porto Alegre, led by Juan Carlos Martinez, the Brazilian owner and operator of the company Importadora del Paraguay Ltda. Although the article does not mention the list of Brazilian products to be exhibited, the Paraguayan products that were to be highlighted and promoted in Brazil were traditional crafts including “aho-poí [fine Paraguayan embroidery], ñanduti [Paraguayan lace], wood working, musical instruments, etc.” The hope was that these crafts would be exported on a “large scale” because the show was to be highly promoted in Brazil through “television, radio, newspapers, and even in pamphlets.” The exchange seems a bit uneven as the products that Paraguay was expected to export to Brazil could be viewed as “handicrafts” and not sophisticated manufactured products as surely the Brazilians were showing off in Paraguay. However uneven this exchange might have been, it was still likely seen by Paraguayans as a positive step forward, a way to help end their country’s perceived isolation. Ñandé promised to support the effort “through our pages, [and] our friend, Juan Carlos Martinez, can have the assurances” of continued encouragement.

While Paraguayan goods were clearly relegated to handicrafts, Brazilian technology and industrialization were slowly penetrating the Paraguayan mar-
ket via the Puente de la Amistad. The day after the opening of the bridge, El País ran a small article inviting asuncenos to come see an exposition of Brazilian autos in Caballero Park. The cars had come to Paraguay via the newly opened bridge in the early hours of March 27, 1964. These Brazilian-made vehicles, Mercedes-Benz autos in particular, were on display to show how accessible Brazilian-made products were to become. It is not insignificant that the cars, out of all Brazilian imports, were highlighted in the paper. Autos, highways, and bridges were the path to modernity according to the Stroessner government, and Brazilian autos arriving via the new bridge and highway symbolized a new Paraguayan hope.45 While autos were clearly the most important of Brazilian commodities to reach Paraguay via the new bridge, other Brazilian goods were also put on display in Asunción. A late 1960s issue of Ñandé announced that the Brazilian industrialist Don José Carlos Pereira Lópes was visiting Asunción with the purpose of giving one of his Climax refrigerators to Stroessner as a sign of friendship and trade.46 The hope of on demand cold in the tropics brought new hope for a country where unbearable heat made life complicated. Hope ran true that, at least for Paraguay’s small moneyed class, the comforts and ease of modernity were within reach.

Beyond economic hope and Brazilian investment in the landlocked country, the new Paraguayan gaze toward the east, at least in the minds of hopeful Paraguayan authorities and journalists, indicated that Brazilians could “see” Paraguayans for the first time. In 1979, an Asunción-based dance troupe traveled to Brazil to perform. According to its leader and teacher Inocencio Báez Villalba, it was the first time that “a Paraguayan folk ballet performed [at the] Palacio [dos Bandeirantes] in honor of Brazilian Independence.” According to Ñandé, over “7 million Brazilians, including the president Joao [sic] Figueiredo” witnessed the event.47 This larger number was attributed to the fact that the show was televised in color throughout Brazil. That seven million Brazilians could view the performers in vibrant Paraguayan color spoke to the power of the Brazilian media and quite possibly showed the readership of Ñandé that Paraguayan folk culture was recognized internationally. Oddly enough, the images of the group were not in color in the magazine (although the magazine did regularly offer color images, and covers were always in color), leaving the reader to wonder about the color of the costumes worn and what exactly their Brazilian neighbors viewed. The fact that Paraguay was technologically behind the more advanced Brazil is not lost in this article. Even so, with stronger connections and economic and cultural exchange, Paraguay could hope to “catch up” to the more
advanced Brazilians. Tying a future to Brazil as opposed to Argentina, far from its glory days at the beginning of the twentieth century, although not directly mentioned was and remained a new hope for the landlocked nation.

The Paraguayan press and the government of Stroessner encouraged Paraguayans to get to know Brazil better. In May 1968, Nandé published a full-page encyclopedia-like article that offered a brief overview of Paraguay’s largest neighbor. Encouraging its readers to learn more about the nation, the final paragraph of the article noted that “here, there are only a few ideas about Brazil, its physical realities, its culture, institutions, and economics.” The hope was that Paraguayans would be encouraged to find out more about Brazil and its people because “the Brazilian man is exuberant, cordial[,] and happy.” To demonstrate this, an image of two Brazilian children, one of African descent and the other European, are shown in a happy embrace. If Brazilians could accept and continue to accept outsiders (according to the article, six million European immigrants had arrived in Brazil since 1863), then it was possible for Brazilians to also accept Paraguayans, a former nineteenth-century enemy, in an equally warm embrace.48

But the question remained, how were Paraguayans and Brazilians going to get to know each other better? The imagined possibilities that Paraguayan journalists and government officials concocted about modern transport connecting the two nations can be gleaned from the pages of Nandé. The Paraguayan bus company Rapido Yguazu offered the “most economical and direct route to São Paulo, Brazil.” The image of a modern bus highlighted the comfort in which a tourist, businessperson, or cultural ambassador could travel to Brazil. A liner map of the trip highlighted the ease of the trip: Asunción, Puerto Stroessner, Cataratas [Foz do Iguaçu], Curitiba, São Paulo. The ease of a modern highway and newly constructed bridge offered the possibility for both Paraguayans and Brazilians to connect to each other’s most important cities in luxury and simplicity.49 Highlighting this comfort, Nandé noted that they had transported four thousand passengers to Brazil on 120 buses in 1963. The prediction was that more travelers could be expected in the next few years. The article, which reads more like an advertisement for Rapido Yguazu than a magazine story, opined that the “inside of the buses are well decorated, and the seats are fluffy and comfortable with anatomical designs that recline and adapt to the body.” These traveling South American La-Z-Boys guaranteed that the traveler would not experience discomfort and would relieve the “bodily stress” as promised in the caption of a photo included with the article.50
More exciting, however, was that elite Paraguayans and Brazilians in the middle of the twentieth century could and did occasionally travel to and from each other’s countries on jet planes that were owned and operated by Paraguayans. In 1957 César Rego Monteiro Porto, a Brazilian businessman, founded the Servicios Aéreos del Paraguay S.A. with 52 percent Brazilian and 48 percent Paraguayan capital. Although the airline failed to make a profit, in 1960 another airline, Lloyd Aéreo Paraguayo, was founded with 88 percent Paraguayan and 12 percent foreign capital; the airline’s first route in 1961 was Asunción-Curitiba-São Paulo. In 1963 the two companies merged, and more Brazilian capital was acquired to keep the company flying. However, in the same year, the Paraguayan military started its own national airline Líneas Aéreas Paraguayas (LAP), which became Paraguay’s flag carrier and connected the Paraguayan capital to Curitiba, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.51 Inaugurating a new era, Ñandé announced “new hope for . . . our mediterranean [landlocked] [nation].”52 The new airplanes, like the new buses, were to bring tourists to and from Paraguay. Cities such as São Paulo and Rio were now within reach. Quick and easy travel and “the best service in the air” were what LAP promised to travelers to Brazil on their three weekly trips to those metropolises.53 In the mind of Paraguayans, modernity now connected Asunción to the world.

By the middle of the twentieth century, it was finally possible to travel overland to Brazil—and by extension to the Atlantic—because of the new bridge connecting Puerto Stroessner to Foz do Iguaçu. As a result, a new era in Paraguayan history began, one where Brazil was to play an increasingly important economic, political, and cultural role. The Stroessner regime hoped that the pain of the War of the Triple Alliance would fade away and be replaced by a new hope for prosperity through modernity. A modern highway and jet airplanes were quickly replacing the old fluvial link to the Atlantic via the Paraguay River. Asuncenos had left the porteños behind and had become “ponteros.” Argentina was left in the rearview mirror of busses and cars racing toward the Puente de la Amistad and in the exhaust of jet planes; ahead lay Brazil—and all its tropical modernity—in the windshields.

NOTES

2. According to a USAID report from 1983, the runway was extended in 1958 “to accommodate jet passenger planes” with a load from the Export-Import Bank.
of the United States. The report adds, though, that the runway had “soft-spots” and that it was in serious need of repair in the 1980s. Paul Fritz, *A.I.D. History in Paraguay: Report on the Development Assistance Program to Paraguay by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Its Predecessor Agencies, 1942–1988* (Asunción: USAID, 1988), 97–98. While Stroessner and his government officials loved to take credit for the airport, it is quite clear that its construction was much more complicated than simple Paraguayan ingenuity. Clearly the airport in Asunción was part of a larger Cold War initiative of the U.S. government. While clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, I hope to further investigate this.

3. The declining fate of Argentina is difficult to track because authors rarely write about the decline of Argentina in direct relation to the rise of Brazil. However, there is strong evidence of Argentina’s weakening. Matthew B. Karush writes, “For most of the twentieth century, Argentina suffered from severe political instability”; *Workers or Citizens: Democracy and Identity in Rosario, Argentina, 1912–1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002). As a result, it became increasingly difficult for Argentina to exert political influence in the Southern Cone. This political instability stemmed from real economic crises; the commodities that had led to turn-of-the-century riches and that had attracted European immigration were subject to the ups and downs of the global market. A new and growing literature about consumption—both in cultural and physical commodities—tracks these challenges for the poorer and emerging middle classes in Argentina. See, e.g., Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Natalia Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Rebekah E. Pite, *Creating a Common Table in Twentieth-Century Argentina: Doña Petrona, Women, and Food* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

4. Efraín Cardozo, one of Paraguay’s most erudite historians, argues in his work *La fundación de la ciudad de Asunción en 1541* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad de Historia Argentina, 1941), that it was Juan de Salazar who founded the city of Asunción. Arguing against this narrative is Vicente Pistilli in *La primera fundación de Asunción: La gesta de Don Juan de Ayolas* (Asunción: El Foro, 1987), who argues that it was Juan de Ayolas who should be credited with European foundation of the city.


6. Branislava Susnik’s work *El rol de los indígenas en la formación y en la vivencia del Paraguay* (Asunción: Instituto Paraguayo de Estudios Nacionales, 1982) was the first to place the indigenous population of the region into the history of the city and its foundation. Later ethnohistorians—including Florencia Roulet, *La resistencia de los Guaraní del Paraguay a la conquista española, 1537–1556* (Posadas, Argentina: Editorial Universitaria, 1993), and Dorothy Tuer “Tigers and Crosses:
The Transcultural Dynamics of Spanish–Guaraní Relations in the Río de la Plata 1516–1580” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2011)—expand on Susnick’s work and highlight some of the major abuses of the conquistadores.


14. Ibid., 11.


17. When President Higinio Morínigo visited the United States in 1943, he met with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In a memorandum prepared by Secretary of State Sumner Wells in advance of Morínigo’s visit, Wells notes that the Paraguayan government considered the extension of the highway “from Villa Rica [sic] to the Brazilian frontier near the Iguazú Falls . . . [to] be a very important contribution to the industrial development of Paraguay.” However because the first part of the highway from Asunción to Villarrica had yet to be completed, the memorandum suggests that “the proposed highway should be deferred until the termination of the present work [from Asunción to Villarrica].” President’s Secretary’s Files, December 1, 1941–June 30, 1943, Presidential Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

18. A 1970s study of the possibility of tourism in Paraguay noted the poor state of rutas II and VII. Specifically, the report highlighted that the highways were “too narrow,” failed to have clear signage, and had a “lack of effective and permanent maintenance.” Latinoconsult Paraguay, Desarrollo del turismo en el Paraguay (Buenos Aires: Latinoconsult Argentina, 1970), 64.


26. Ibid., 150.


de Sá, and José Luiz de Andrade Franco, “A construção simbólica do Oeste brasileiro (1930–1940),” 63–89. In an e-mail conversation with Professor Wolfe he wrote “Vargas made a series of pronouncements [the March to the West] and put minimal resources into the project. There was some colonization, but things took off with Kubitschek’s road building and then with the military dictatorship’s resettlement programs [starting 1964].” Joel Wolfe, e-mail correspondence with author, January 12, 2016. At this point I can speculate that the March to the West may have contributed to Brazil’s interest in Paraguayan roads and bridges, but it is impossible to say for sure what the direct effect of the internal Brazilian program was on Paraguayan infrastructure or development.

32. The Brazilian fondness for auto travel and road construction is explored in great detail in Wolfe, Autos and Progress.
34. It is rather unclear to what extent the bridge was being used before March 1965, if at all. What is clear is that before this date, civilians crossed, and most if not all trade was conducted via ferry between Brazil and Paraguay.
41. “¡Asi, se hace panamericanismo practico!” Ñandé 6, no. 128 (September 1964): 8.
42. Ibid.
49. Advertisement, Ñandé 6, no. 122 (1964), no page number.
53. Advertisement, Ñandé 10, no. 293 (1968), no page number.

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