IN PRAISE OF AMBIGUITY

Big Water focuses on the multiple actors that for four centuries have constructed an imprecise zone known today as the “Triple Frontier.” The first issue presented is the difficulty in determining its exact size, its outer edges, its centers, all of which vary according to the research approaches, time frames, and methodologies of the academic disciplines found herein.

To understand this region we must undoubtedly overcome national divisions, a complicated task given that the area itself is crossed by dividing legal boundaries. It can be seen as a key environmental and historical landscape marked by the presence of dense fluvial networks, namely the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers, and their tributaries. These grand waters flow to the south and to the Atlantic coast and also northward, connecting with Amazonian towns—the original paths of penetration used by conquistadors who lacked overland routes. These same waters were considered by republican creoles as the gateway to free trade. Today, they provide the backbone of Mercosur and power the production of massive amounts of hydroelectric energy. But these paths and routes of penetration also highlight the region’s sociospatial mobility, accentuating the imprecision and ambiguity of the area. The water system is seamlessly connected with neighboring landscapes of swamps, lagoons, low farmlands, and distant horizons of ports.
and seas. Some authors, inspired by recent studies on the Guarani aquifer—one of the largest freshwater deposits on Earth—have taken it as a unifying theme, discussing the transnational nature and interests of regional and extraregional actors. And others have poetically linked the uncontaminated aquifer with ancient Native traditions, like the Land without Evil of the Tupi-Guarani people. Even then the liquid character of the region appears almost beyond reach, as if the very waters that define this landscape are themselves ungraspable.

So when the editors of this volume posit why this area is a blind spot that only recently has begun to merit adequate historical attention, we cannot hesitate to say that the ambiguity of the region itself is one of the main causes: we, as scholars, have become accustomed to imagining human spaces as precise, with clear edges that go beyond geometric concepts. As indicated by Tim Ingold, our ways of organizing space through lines and surfaces reveal characteristics of ways of living and understanding the world that are not necessarily shared by non-Western cultures. In fact, the ways of living of Native peoples in these lowlands, themselves perpetual travelers, contrast with the fixed spatial patterns and limited schema that receive such extraordinary weight in modern culture and in concepts such as “homeland” or, more precisely, “nation.”

That is why in the introduction to Big Water, the editors highlight the ways in which South American national historiographies have avoided more comprehensive approaches to border areas that challenge the territorial assumptions of each nation. The force with which the historical discipline has firmed its grasp over the space of each country results, to a certain degree, from many of the obstacles that the constructed nations themselves had to overcome in South America. The discipline of history was called on in this process to act as an educational arm of the newly formed nation-states in the last two centuries. With this form of “assistance,” the political geographies were constructed through catechism-like narratives to complete the mystique of “national unity.”

These stories drew inspiration from the idea of a modern trinity: the state, providing order; fatherland, a common history; and territory, an earthly domain. But the very construction of the South American republics places in doubt—even more harshly than in Europe—the credibility of the narrative that sustains them. Order is always a promise of the future; origin does not refer to the Native but rather to the conqueror; and territory is disputed, expanded, or, in the case of Hispanic nations, dismembered. That is why the reflection on ambiguous and jumbled borders like the Triple Frontier takes on a particular value that exceeds a purely documentary interest in South America.
The “nation”—or more precisely, the criticism of it—justifies in part the greater attention given in this book to the last century and a half. This scope highlights a series of issues that although rooted in earlier historical moments still feel strongly contemporary. More than just a presentist history, the chapters in this book present a purposefully self-aware history that embodies the living, the open, and the unfinished, mirroring the difficulties in giving precision to the ambiguous spaces of the Triple Frontier.

But it was precisely this tension toward the present day that leads me to reflect on the importance of the ideas and the problems defined in this volume. Above all, the reinterpretation of the concept of “frontier” as a key step in reading landscapes that are unbound by “form” in the classic sense. But we must also note the extension of space as an active catalyst in the evolution of human society: the strong relationship between stories and the environmental sciences, the new contributions of ethnography, and even the political commitment of NGOs with “indigenous peoples.” What role do these new representations play today in our ability to see, to plan, to ponder, and to act?

This is not a generic question. If national histories have acquired this functional dimension, it is because the written word has come to possess a central and ultimately constructive place in the South American world—the Uruguayan Ángel Rama and the Argentine José Luis Romero have worked on this topic from different angles. It is therefore necessary to supplement the historical and geopolitical events, the infrastructural achievements, the abrupt social changes, the concrete forms of Native life, all with the important South American tradition of literary criticism that beyond didactic stories about the “nation” has invoked original configurations of territory and place to focus—at times obsessively—on the national “identity.”

This approach deals with issues that are fundamentally literary in their broader meanings: historiographical, essayistic, and fictional. And although often used with eclectic European and later American sensibilities, this created a process of creolization that many authors have called “Latin American thought.” The contrasts and differences within this literature are relevant (especially among the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking worlds) but coalesce around a common focus on the importance of “space”: topics such as the effect of vast spatial dimensions on particular forms of government, the wealth or cruelty of climates that define human behavior, or the possibilities and limits of the technical restructuring of territory that existed even before colonial independence. Such reflections cannot be cast to the margins in our current
interpretations because they offer paths as strong if not stronger than the powerful interwoven narratives of the nation.

The same theme of borders discussed by the various authors of this volume also has a foundational role in the literature of the three countries in question. In Argentina, a country abandoned as a peripheral nation in the mid-nineteenth century, texts by writers such as Sarmiento and Echeverria presented the borders as key to national identity. Paraguay, dismembered by successive wars, proudly chose to display its idiosyncratic and mixed “Guarani” identity. In Brazil, “the border” was a key theme of national writings. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda stated that all of Brazil could be regarded as “an uncertain border area . . . between Europe and Africa,” an astute comment that allows us to think that the Triple Frontier can in many ways be seen as a border between borders. I will use this conclusion to briefly review the topic of spatial imagination in South American literature as a means to complement the rigorous work presented throughout Big Water. I will focus on the literary traditions of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina, discussing themes whose influence help guide us to problems of the present day.

CONTROLLING THE VOID

INFLATED SPACE

In 1920, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, a frequent visitor to Argentina, explained in the preface to the first Spanish translation of The Philosophy of History that Hegel and his followers eliminated American history because of the problems inherent to vast, open landscapes: “When space remains, men seize control of nature.”

Such an idea—without its metaphysical precision—precedes the reflections of Hegel. Even those who, like Alexander Von Humboldt, discussed the arrogant philosophical generalizations about America did not fail to promote the construction of canals and roads to reduce the region’s ungovernable territorial dimensions. The republican creoles were also obsessed with the grand issue of size. Without having read Hegel, Domingo F. Sarmiento wrote in the beginning of his famous Facundo that “The curse of Argentina is its void.” The contraction of these bloated spaces did not necessarily mean losing land. Rather, it implied naming, delineating, categorizing, and exploring a basis for the development of infrastructure that would define the territories of the future nation-states. No
wonder, then, that a reflection on the character of the people is marked by an obsession over space that deploys a far-reaching sociogeographic narrative.

But the spaces in the heart of South America were almost unknown. The Spanish and Portuguese crowns, which recognized the concept of the Tordesillas line, appointed a joint committee of experts to redefine their domains according to the Treaty of Madrid. Even though the results of the comisionados made notable inroads in charting knowledge of the area, protagonists of the time such as the Peruvian Miguel Lastarria highlight the persistent unknowableness of these “vast, empty regions cut by rivers, lakes and forests, inhabited almost exclusively by wild and ferocious people.”

Through the end of the nineteenth century, revolution and war precluded a more thorough accumulation of scientific knowledge. No wonder Humboldt became such an assiduous reference for South American patriots like Sarmiento. Despite only touring the northern reaches of South America, Humboldt offered a narrative model of the subcontinent that gave it a distinctive form seemingly independent from political judgment or ancestral prejudices and fixed instead by the laws of nature. This was the beacon for South American patriots.

Humboldt introduces a “cultural geography” to be tested throughout South America. A key issue is the Andean superiority over the “lowlands,” a view shared by many of the New Granada’s educated class at the time. This opinion was based on an argument that seemed irrefutable: the wealth of the “Inca” civilization, which was described as a world of high population density, fluid communication networks, taxation systems, agricultural and productive capacities, advanced engineering and agronomic techniques, and stone cities in addition to an extensive iconography that could bear witness to its own past.

The cultural landscapes of the Andes differ sharply from the Caribbean islands, the vast continental plains, and the impenetrable rain forests. How many centuries will it take, writes Humboldt, for civilizational changes to take root in the lowlands of Venezuela, of the Meta and Caquetá, of Buenos Aires? How long until the scorched lands and forests are transformed to allow a “sensible improvement of the moral state of the people?” Humboldt also wields scientific knowledge to guide restless travelers to this region, describing the vertical cliffs of the Andean foothills, the tremendous biodiversity, the intensity and variety of geological phenomena. He also emphasizes the aesthetic, writing that no horizontal landscape rivaled the sublime scenes of the Andes. Although the soul, he says, exalts in the boundless solitude, a sadness can devastate travelers in the dreary plains, a horror that penetrates the labyrinthine forest. In short,
since the early nineteenth century, an image has formed of South America that divides the “civilized” Andean world and the wild lowlands whose only redeeming qualities are its natural resources to be exploited and ultimately extinguished. Those who inhabit the lowlands—people of murky worldviews—do not belong to history. Rather, they are immersed and defined by nature itself.

Another dichotomy advanced by Humboldt weighed heavily in South American thought: that between coast and inland. Known early to foreign explorers, the coasts were well charted. But Humboldt noted that the inlands rarely could be seen from maritime journeys, writing that “beyond a barren coast [one] perceives a hill covered by mountain greenery, but whose remoteness precludes their study.” This separation justified the innovative purpose of his trip: the penetration of the inland, an area of yet unknown but certain grandeur. The contrast between coast and inland fluctuated over the next two centuries, from chronicles of glorious coastal cities open to the world to accounts of the lack of authenticity of Westernized seaboards vis-à-vis the ancient values of the hinterland.

These cultural geographies that link environmental landscapes with human values played a central role in the construction of the nations found today in the Triple Frontier. Well into the twentieth century, this Andean-centric discourse helped funnel much of the historical, archaeological, and scientific research into the area of the northern and central Andes. Colonial history also emphasizes the international interest in the highlands, often to the detriment of areas such as the River Plate basin that served as the outer markers of wealthy viceroyalties or even to the vast central areas that the Spaniards had not yet dominated. For more nuanced reasons, the Luso-American area was situated in the shadow of the regions seen as far more culturally rich. Especially in the last century, nations occupying the “lowlands” had to imagine stories that inverted the Andean seduction to focus instead on their arid backlands, their solitary plains, their lush jungles, their spurned people. They conceived of these spaces as borders on which nations could advance and as a spatial shrine to be respected.

PARADISE AND EARTH

This disjointed portrayal of South America acquires another quality defined by the Edenic echoes that were already present in the diaries of Christopher Columbus—the illustrious Andean precedence would draw from this early idea of a “virgin” landscape inhabited by noble savages. Recall that the admiral thought he had found evidence of the existence of the Garden of Eden in the
strange animals and beautiful naked Natives that reminded him of Adam and Eve. The extreme heat of the tropics, it was thought, suggested the proximity of the flaming swords of angels guarding the holy doors. On his third voyage, Columbus imagined the vast Orinoco as one of the four rivers flowing down from the mountain of paradise. The Edenic echoes of America can be found in the actions of early settlers who created paradises in the wilderness by pushing a radical renovation of old European culture and also in the descriptions of naturalists who tried to identify the primordial history of mankind in isolated tribes during their millenarian preaching. The people of the lowlands conformed to this image, and the seduction has not relented since: simply look at the photographs published by Lévi-Strauss about the Nambikwara. What could be more attractive to those coming from complex societies, highly hierarchical and bureaucratized, than these people with no interest in the accumulation of surpluses, without metal instruments, without social structures resembling hierarchies of power?

Paradises are always accompanied by their infernal counterpart. The publishing house De Bry opened its second American series with a cover decorated by an Indian devouring human body parts. Hell could be found in both the Andean and the Mesoamerican—the “cruelty” of human sacrifice continues to fuel novels and adventure films today. But hell was most feared in the lowlands, stretching ominously from the Caribbean to the River Plate basin. The terrors of a prodigious nature mixed with reports of cannibalism, reverberating in the writings of everyone from Montaigne to Shakespeare. Are we surprised that the Caliban of The Tempest—an anagram for cannibal—represents an assiduous reference in South American literature mirrored by the good spirit of Ariel and the magic of Prospero, the builder of utopias? Few issues better express how the “nature/culture” duality in the South American lowlands was implemented: the cannibal was directly associated, despite the warnings of Montaigne, with the natural chaos to which men had been thrown after the fall from Eden, plunging mankind into a bestial existence. As we shall see, this becomes even more noticeable in how the figure of the feared cannibal would serve in the twentieth century to establish the characteristics of a new culture.

NATURE, LANDSCAPES, AND CLIMATE

During the formative years of the new South American nations, “nature” constituted more than a form of chaos to be overcome or an arena to be dominated.
Rather, it served as a conception of the world intimately related to a broader vision of “progress.” The freethinkers in the River Plate basin, eager to clear the bureaucratic and clerical cobwebs of colonialism, adhered to a “positivist” thinking—secular, scientific, and radically naturalist both in earth sciences and in matters of the spirit. No wonder, then, that the culture of the time was oriented toward explanations of the environment, climate, evolution, and race. So, too, did it seek to define the human condition and the spirit or genius of mankind. In this context, geography—in its cosmic Humboldtian version—began to play an important role in the joining of history and civic consciousness. As historical narratives continued to tell stories of events, battles, and national heroes, geography provided an eyewitness account of the rich natural world with enough eloquence to enchant young minds. To achieve this goal, geography presented “nature” as a function of the landscape.

This ambiguous notion related fragments of terrestrial morphology with aesthetic representations that offered more conventional meanings. Thus, “landscape” was more successful in compelling a wider audience than scientific descriptions, news of technical achievements, or even dates of battles. Landscape, after all, alluded to a nature in which the fate of the nation would be encrypted. So the naturalistic passions of young creoles, who like their idols went “outdoors” to learn the world, did not focus only on scientific or practical purposes. They instead sought to describe and adequately represent the “parts” of nature that bore witness to the great futures of every nation.

This vast canvassing of the natural world condensed in the twentieth century as a new legal concept: the national park. In Argentina, the National Parks Act of 1907 focused on two border areas: the Parque del Sur (later Nahuel Huapi) and the Iguazú National Park, which Frederico Freitas studies in chapter 4. In both cases, the protection of nature and its scenic beauty was explicitly merged with a selective policy of colonization supported through the 1930s with the Rooseveltian premise of “soft handling” and the need to stop the “advances” of neighboring countries.

But the area of Iguazú presented problems that exceeded those of a natural park, namely, what to do with the Jesuit missions? The theme of the missions defined the historical character of the area in the Triple Frontier; three chapters in Big Water are devoted to the subject, and one of them (chap. 6, by Daryle Williams) deals with the history of how the Jesuit ruins became a World Heritage site in the late twentieth century. The question then becomes how to balance and depict the work of men with the continuity of the “natural” world.
An early debate formed over a remarkable parallel between nature conservation and heritage conservation. The Iguazú Falls were considered a natural monument. Interest in the location focused mainly on preserving the majestic waters themselves and not the surrounding jungles. As for the Jesuit ruins, which some wanted to rebuild to their original spirit, people like Paul Groussac, an aristocratic mind, warned of the danger in restoring the sites and opening them to a budding and ignorant influx of tourism. According to Groussac, the ruins should look natural, with minimal outward signs of intervention. Other topics that loomed large in debates during the early twentieth century have already been forgotten. For example, how can the actions of the Jesuit order—which had always been seen as antithetical to a linear vision of “progress”—be incorporated into national histories? But the main points of that debate still persist as they put in check an older set of values, the historical and the aesthetic values that Riegl posed as premises for conservation. The idea of heritage concentrated anew in art and architecture, and only recently has progress been made in the recovery of the territorial footprints that give magnitude to the historical actions of Jesuits.

Despite changes in sensibility, the seductive motif of landscapes remains in the encounter between the ruins of the Jesuit empire and the mighty jungle surrounding it. Creole naturalists did not stop imagining organic relationships between the consummate baroque style, with its serpentine lines found in Jesuit-Guarani art, and the call of the wild. This was not only morphological mimicry. A key word used to explain the relationship between areas and voices offered a twist on pure visuality of the notion of landscape. Here, climate became central in various arguments over representations of the nation in the early twentieth century.

Take, for example, the texts of Argentine Estanislao Zeballos, a traveler, naturalist, archaeologist, lawyer, and diplomat who was active in negotiations with Brazil for the missionary frontier. Zeballos made it clear that he was not from the northeast of Argentina but rather from the center-south region, where a healthy and virile race could be developed. In Zeballos’s view, the center-south had the moral advantages of a climate “that cultivates a triumphant nature . . . whose splendid forms are the shrouds that keep at bay the soft effeminacy and decrepitude of the races.” Zeballos compared Argentina to its great rival, Brazil, by distinguishing the latter for its “tropical climate.” Argentina, which had already incorporated the Patagonian Andes, chose to define itself through its temperate and cold climates. The Iguazú National Park, where the inhabitants
Climate and race lead us to one of the most obsessive questions in South American literature: identity. Compared to the Mesoamerican and Andean nations that could refer back to an ancient “solar” race, the Plate region was inhabited by noncomplex groups, indigenous “nomads” who fought against creoles as recently as the second decade of the twentieth century, Indians who had mixed with Europeans since the beginning of the conquest, in contrast to what authors believed had happened in North America. To further complicate the matter, at the same time that nation-states began to form, new migratory flows consistently altered the demographics in the River Plate basin, resulting in the number of foreigners far exceeding the local population.

This demographic effect further intensified questions regarding identity. It was one thing to promote, through immigration, the “whitening” of Native races; it was another still to receive poor European peasants, mostly from Europe’s hardscrabble southern regions, who dreamed only of returning to their home country after “making it” in America (hacer la América). The mixing of races worked in unpredictable ways, radically accentuating the American melting pot. It blurred and mixed traditions and origins, and in countries such as Argentina, it led to the establishment of free public education as a tool for homogenization.

How can we even think of a nation in which one of the basic mythic elements, autochthony, is nonexistent? How can we understand these formless clusters that “grew with the rapidity of a fungus” in desert climates, only to be “flooded” by human beings that drowned hierarchies and histories alike? It will fall to the next generations to provide frameworks for linking social types with categories of landscape and nation, using extensive historical and geographical scenarios that both explain the present and gesture to the future. And in its various forms, the idea of borders plays a central role, with its limitless character—at once fixed and permanent—that forever appears in equal contrast to the grand coastal cities.

In the nineteenth-century world of the River Plate basin, Argentina’s emerging literature focused largely on the frontier. According to Sarlo and Altamirano, “nature and border tended to align in a continuum through which they
move from a social and economic notion to an imposed dimension: the definition of the plains,” which is to say, the inland pampas, the “desert, domain of the Indian and the ‘barbarian.’” The pampa also penetrated the cities, as seen in the famous tale of Echeverría, “El Matadero”: “one edge (as Borges would later say) that, instead of separating, connects the city with the plains: as such, a space of urban sanctuary exposed to rural invasion.” Echeverría rejects these socioenvironmental mixtures of frontiers, perceiving in the peripheries a lack of physical order that reproduces the absence of a social order and can, in turn, infect as miasma the very heart of the city.

Only once the Indians were defeated and the border was “pacified” could the pampas become central to the construction of the nation. No Turnerian epic of frontiers accompanied the conquest of western Argentina: the borders were opened and settled by the national army, and the land was quickly spread among those who had financially supported the Campaña del Desierto. And so it was after 1880 that the idea of border emerged as a rigid territorial limit determined either by internecine wars or agreements between governments. The space of the fatherland seemed to have already closed.

Argentina grew dramatically in the first decades of the twentieth century, and these transformations triggered new questions about its elusive national identity. One no longer spoke in terms of ominous borders but rather of the “interior.” It was now in the journeys to this “interior” that Argentines went to find traditional values, guarded by children of the earth itself who lived a simple and authentic life away from urban alienation. The prototypical figure is the pampa gaucho (cowboy of the plains), a character whose Indian blood and bandit origins are minimized, originating from the borders of Rio Grande do Sul, Uruguay, and the Argentine coast. Other local landscapes accompanied the national cause, demonstrating the eternally rich “nature” even while its significance remained eminently local.

The division between the interior and the *rioplatense* coast is starkly evident in the classical texts by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, whose essay “Radiografía de la Pampa” helped give structure to an emerging national ideology. His views owe much to Oswald Spengler’s, *The Decline of the West*, translated early into Spanish. In this way one can understand the geological obsession with the “land,” as Spengler insists that although ideas can migrate, races cannot. From this approach Martínez Estrada calls attention to the consequences that have repeated in the Argentine national psyche: the so-called European culture of the *porteños* (inhabitants of the port city of Buenos Aires) is just a mask that
barely hides a deeper barbarism—“the gaucho peeks under his pressed shirt.”

In these immense solitudes that had turned conquerors into lords of nowhere, any attempt to impose civilization ended in fragile, inorganic superstructures.

What place do these national platitudes confer to Argentina’s tropical borders, in particular the areas that form the Triple Frontier? Literature has not completely dismissed these seductive landscapes, the school canon includes Cuentos de la Selva from the renowned Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga. But certainly the violence and cruelty of a world that refused to be dominated has not yet been appropriately intertwined in Argentine life. And indeed, it is in the experience of these boundaries (in the Chaco and Misiones regions) where texts emerged to criticize national sensibilities and denounce the atrocities that governments chose to ignore. Such is the case of the early articles of Spanish journalist Rafael Barret, published in Argentine, Uruguayan, and Paraguayan newspapers. Barret’s works took place precisely in the frontier zone at stake in Big Water. In El dolor paraguayo and Lo que son los yerbales, Barrett chronicles the brutal working conditions of the mensú—laborers for the large yerba mate companies—highlighting the absence of the type of civilization promised by republican states. Far from idealizing the wretched of the earth, Barret outlines two types of humans in this cruel landscape “of extreme degeneration”: the slave, a poor frightened beast, and the fierce habilitado (enabler), the procurer of urban greed. The universe of Barret’s ideas, in short, is not unlike that of the progressive creoles: the jungle is not an Eden but a prison.

Rather than a national perspective, Barret employs a regional approach to introduce the complex problems of the Paraguayan identity. The country that he visited was just barely beginning to recover from the destructive Paraguayan War, which reduced it to a landlocked ward dependent on its powerful neighbors. According to Ana Couchonnal, the end of the war enabled the institution of a modernity that articulated the promises of liberal capitalism with an ideology of a dehistoricized national identity. This narrative extended into the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (1954–1989) and further invokes memories of the guerra Guazú and the condition of Guarani Indians.

Language was a key element in the definition of the Paraguayan national identity. The relationship between language and territory in Paraguay is rather surprising: the Guarani language in various inflections is spoken by 87 percent of the population, both inside and outside of national borders. Unlike other indigenous languages, Guarani crosses diverse ethnic and social boundaries. Rather than an inherently indigenous trait, the language was recognized in Paraguay
“not as a sign of Indianness, but as an obstacle to an early miscegenation . . . a distinctive sign of the national [character].”

The stories about Paraguay’s bloody Chaco War with Bolivia (1932–1935) reinforce the idea that because of the language spoken by indigenous and peasant communities in the region, these territories belonged to Paraguay.

Brazil’s path developed very differently. Since the late 1930s, the bandeirante trope constituted grounds for nationalistic pride, growing from a purely regional reference (São Paulo) to a key referent in the expansion of the country’s borders. Shawn Michael Austin’s chapter in *Big Water* (chap. 1) chronicles the bandeirantes in the Triple Frontier during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unlike Argentina, Brazil was perceived as a territorially “incomplete” nation with vast unknown areas simply waiting to be dominated and civilized. For this reason borders acquired an explanatory value in the definition of the Brazilian identity. Borders in Brazil, unlike the version told by Turner, held the promise of a bright future. It is generally acknowledged that the conception of a Brazilian national idea first emerged from the texts of the engineer and journalist Euclides da Cunha. In a surprising manner given its time period, Cunha’s canonical work, *Os Sertões*, places in question not only the unity of a Brazilian society in crisis but the very purpose of the republican project.

The notion of sertão (great desert) is important to understand in the inland border areas. As Florencia Garramuño notes, the word is not tied to a particular landscape or morphology: Cunha’s great innovation is the presentation of varied backlands landscapes built in a dialectic between tropicalism and aridity and arguing against the uniqueness of the “tropical lushness” that otherwise served as Brazil’s identity. On the other hand, Cunha’s overt criticisms of state violence are silhouetted against the resistance of the Canudos community, a microsociety in retreat. With no territory and no nation, Canudos forms a powerful image that even today evokes both the figure of isolated groups in the heart of the Amazon and of indigenous communities displaced by large engineering projects.

We will focus now on two other names that will loom large in the conception of borders within Brazilian literature: Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. The importance of Freyre’s landmark text, *Casa-grande e senzala*, extended beyond the local or national level. Those who visited Brazil in the 1930s—including Roger Bastide, Blaise Cendrars, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Fernand Braudel— appreciated his extensive territorial descriptions treated with an almost Proustian sensitivity. Braudel, in particular, was influenced by Freyre,
as seen in his conceptions of the longue durée. In effect, Freyre radically reinterpreted history as a notion of time closely linked to space—a nonabstract space, nor one contained by the “natural” but rather a material space attentive to the particularities of the roads, the cuisines, the houses, the ways of living. As stated by Ricardo Benzaquen, Brazilian culture is presented as “a syncretic symbiosis of Brazilian specificity with a heritage and creativity common throughout humanity,” admitting, moreover, the influence of “all traditions, Muslim, black, Jewish, or French, simultaneously extending and altering its own notion of culture.”

Freyre proposed a general picture of the tropical world previously discussed, emphasizing the difference between the Portuguese and Spanish conquistador. Beyond the diverging styles of conquest, we are shown unique forms of spatial articulation. Through literal geometric metaphors, Freyre presents a Weberian type of hybrid species deriving from the already mixed spaces between Europe and Africa. Describing the Portuguese Man, Freyre used the features of a horizontal figure, flattened, elusive, resting with effeminacy in his hammock in the vicinity of the calm waterways that served as his trade routes. The Spanish, however, are pictured as Gothic and quixotic warriors standing vertical and venturing into territory dotted with rivers and rugged mountainous terrain. Hence, concludes Freyre, in Brazil, “we expand ourselves superficially before we develop ourselves internally.”

This was an impressive picture: horizontal versus vertical, surface over depth, softness over rigidity. We can think that the famous opposition coined by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda comes from this inspiration: the Portuguese “planted” cities and lived in rural territories; the Spaniards were ladrilhadores (builders), their cities constructed as places of order triumphing over chaos and fear.

Whereas Freyre worked in the Brazilian northeast; Buarque de Holanda’s Caminhos e fronteiras (1957) centers on the Triple Frontier at question in this volume—even though it is expanded. And there is another key difference: both in the study of the bandeirante expeditions and in the earlier Monções (1945) detailing river journeys from São Paulo to central Brazil, border areas are interpreted not only as dialectical areas of edges and defined centers but as twists, roads, and riverways, increasing a sense of mobility that is likewise anchored in territorial interpretations. These Brazilians don’t rest in hammocks: they travel. The themes of these early works would resurface in his posthumously published O extremo oeste (1986), where bandeirantes, travelers, explorers, and muleteers are the protagonists of a varied and changing landscape, resistant at its core to spatial or temporal boundaries.
In the notes to the first edition of *Monções*, Holanda describes the work as part of a future study about the expansion of Brazilian territory and the creation of an almost accidental civilization. In this space, society could accept, assimilate, and produce new forms of life.\(^{36}\) This is a transparent allusion to Turner and Bolton, although the Brazilian version of the creative impulse focuses on more than simply the “adapted” conqueror or the *mameluco* (mestizo) as a mere mediator. Instead, the “alluvial” societies had stood for centuries in an “unstable and undeveloped” situation. Society, he writes against Freyre, emerged from the creation of paths and movement, “not in agriculture, which creates only sedentary people.”\(^ {37}\)

In short, by emphasizing mobility, mixture, instability, and creativity outside of clear or precise frameworks, Holanda offers an original answer to the questions posed by European ideas of nation—and many other authors had emphasized the same topic. In this approach, Brazilians discarded ideas of autochthony, purity of blood, or even being rooted in one place. It is interesting to note the time period in which Holanda did research for *O extremo oeste*: the post–World War II years when the United States became the new referent not only for Brazil’s economy and geopolitics but also in its cultural landscape. This cultivated a new type of pan-Americanism that included an American academic interest in Hispanic and Lusophone histories and also inspired Brazilian writers to question issues of identity, political democracy, and modernization.

**THE TRAUMA OF DEVELOPMENT**

South American developmentalism anchors many of the features of nineteenth-century progressive ideals. As they did then, the great projects of the postwar period remain key to solving the contrast between the vast and lonely “interior” and the urban coast. A telling example is the iconic construction of Brasília in the late 1950s. But it is not only plans of urbanization, peasant attachments to land, or even the construction of roads and infrastructure. The very idea of territory is transformed by placing it at the center of national concerns over the production of energy and industry.

Although energy projects already existed, the negotiations and conflicts over harnessing the massive hydroelectric power in the upper Paraná borderlands proved to be a defining feature in the region’s history throughout the second half of the twentieth century. As Jacob Blanc shows in chapter 8, projects like
the Itaipu Dam require one to rethink the meanings of borders and the degree of autonomy they confer on nations. An emblematic example—equally for its veneer of regional unity as for the problems lingering below—was the 1969 Treaty of the River Plate basin that sought to regulate the use and control of the region’s waterways and tributaries. These early hydroelectric and geopolitical roots soon expanded farther still, and as Christine Folch details in chapter 10, the economic common market Mercosur codified a new regionalist approach that also brought in other linked countries such as Bolivia and Uruguay.

The literature that addressed these processes also changed its tone, separating itself from the idiosyncratic accents of essayistic prose to instead reinforce a gloss of scientific and technical impartiality. Under this objective appearance, a new wave of literary works put forth a common analysis shared by both the national left and the right: put simply, the abstract benefits of modernization.38

Modernization, as a term, had already lost its historical dimension that originally posited its universality, becoming a word with strong economic undertones. The closely related idea of social development soon emerged. In Argentina, sociologists such as Gino Germani located the key to the country’s hardships in the imbalance between modernization and development.39 Such “solutions” also permeated literature that denounced the world empire, the United States. In these productivist schemes, a vision of the “other side” of the wall was adopted and aligned with the Soviet Union, including Cuba—the bright star of the revolutionary Third Worldism in Latin America.

An overview from the 1950s to the 1980s in South America cannot help but marvel at the scale and magnitude of industrial development projects. Striking, too, is the world of art and architecture, with innovations ranging from powerful forms of Brazilian modernism to the architectural appearance of interstellar devices from Cuzco to La Plata.40 These developments took place in vastly different political situations, although most emerged in the context of the technocratic desires of military dictatorships that governed Paraguay, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. The extent and intensity of these dictatorships united the destinies of the Southern Cone between 1964 and 1989, though the dates are not the same for the whole. Although the unbridled nationalism of military governments made multinational cooperation difficult in the realm of large infrastructure plans, agreements proved far easier in the development of “counterinsurgency” against revolutionary undercurrents. The famous example is Operation Condor, a cross-continental approach planned since the late 1960s and institutionalized in 1975.41

This joint endeavor of South American
security services enabled the practices of kidnapping and killing beyond borders and regardless of nationalities. This sinister form of “South American brotherhood” developed with the support of the U.S. government, which, a decade later, in contrast, played a decisive role in the fall of dictatorships.42

We see then how South American dictatorships kept alive the technocratic and modernizing impulse. In the aftermath of the repression unleashed, this impulse could no longer be interpreted as progress but rather as a form of exclusion. The propensity toward thinking about the future—so dominant in the postwar decades—was now replaced by the obsession of memory, the manner of collectively dealing with a rejected past. To remember and to preserve involves more than just words; they extend into the physical realm. These dictatorships had not only done away with individuals (the figure of the disappeared is different from the executed; it never leaves a trace) but also entire neighborhoods, whether by means of the construction of new highways or agricultural projects and dams that wiped out indigenous communities and landscapes. Nonetheless, these new perspectives focused not on borders but on cities, places formalized by history, strongly articulating both an aesthetic and a political representation. The Habermasian idea of public sphere acted as a safeguard of Nunca más (never again).

Along with the recovery of constructed memory, the postdictatorship period witnessed the growth of a “green sensibility” that until a short time ago was unconnected to progressive political action. This idea paradoxically corresponded to the rise of the public sphere despite the opposing logics wherein environmentalism is linked with “the natural” and political representation emphasizes the preeminence of the city. But even within this debate, their differences soften against a common enemy: the technocratic modernization that aimed to destroy both “nature” and “memory.”

It was at this point that the constellation of ideas led by radical groups in the United States became important even in countries such as Argentina that had previously resisted its influence. While American culture had imbued nature with a powerful ideology of transcendent meanings, in South America nature was seen more as an obstacle to either be dominated, studied scientifically, or exploited for its resources. The winds of revolution, as they say, had not changed these beliefs. By the 1990s, however, an ecological sensibility grew in tandem with the extension of a public sphere, which included numerous institutional structures and global frameworks. Since the Brundtland report, the articulation of environmental, economic, and social concerns has constituted a radical ideological shift. This change also responded to the end of continental Europe as the
unquestioned mecca of both South American intellectuals and the continent’s educated public in general.

For some time now the American naturalist passion has concentrated on those areas that still remained “virgin,” especially in the Amazon, emphasizing the harmonious relations of Native groups with “nature.” But the new conceptual approaches to landscapes that would redefine the question of borders also emerged from other American perspectives, or more precisely, American interpretations of European notions. The “spatial turn,” whose initial impulses borrowed from French poststructuralism, arrived in South America in the 1990s via American debates, similar to what happened with radical relativism and cultural and postcolonial studies. As such, the turn-of-the-century recovery of the Turnerian vision of society advancing toward frontiers—which, as we have seen, inspired many South Americans—was now repositioned as a fundamental issue.

The tangible effects of these ideological changes were felt in different ways in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. In Brazil—perhaps due to the tradition of anthropologists drawing eclectically from disciples of Boas and Lévi-Strauss or the early exposure to American culture—there were early and radical efforts to craft legislation to protect the rights of Native peoples. A stark example is the case of the Xingu Indigenous Park in the Amazon, certified as such by the federal government in 1961. From its inception, the park exhibited a philosophy that stood in contrast to the militaristic and strategist character of the long-standing ideology of Brazil’s March to the West; rather than progressing toward new and increasingly modern frontiers, the park focused on the area’s biodiversity and indigenous ways of life. However, the general situation of indigenous groups remained dire, as demonstrated by the Figueiredo Report in 1967 that brought sweeping international repercussions. Given the problems posed by federal policies of indigenous integration, it was later decided to create reserves “in absentia,” avoiding all contact with isolated groups by altering the very notion of “national territory” and placing strict limits on expansion. The preservation of the last earthly “paradise” has been far from successful; the absence of the state in the vast protected areas did not stop the raids of private exploiters of both resources and people.

The Amazon serves as an inevitable reference when discussing the internal borders of the South American lowlands, an area also inhabited by indigenous communities, some of whom were also only recently contacted. By invoking the Amazon in this conclusion I seek to elucidate its seductive allure and global
prestige while at the same time exposing the limits of the Amazon example through the particular dynamics and history of the Triple Frontier, an area distinguished by its fast-paced transformations, the early mixture of its inhabitants, and the ambiguity of its borders. As shown implicitly in Guillermo Wilde’s description of territorial reconfiguration, ethnogenesis, and population mobility during the Jesuit period, the reduction of complex processes into singular categories results in a dehistoricized understanding of local communities, reproducing the old European image of noble savages in paradise.

This basic duplicity also accompanies current debates about forms of territorial occupation. In Brazil, although social and environmental protection policies continued to develop, so too did the government’s impulse toward modernization. As seen in the case of the Itaipu hydroelectric dam, this developmentalist approach was intimately linked to the context and ideologies of military rule, yet it continues today even under democratic society. The Belo Monte Dam on the Xingu River in the Amazonian state of Pará, for example, reaffirms Brazil’s enduring technocratic drive even in the face of widespread international criticism.

The Argentine case presents different angles: the homogenizing concept of territory and population render invisible, even today, claims of indigenous communities. In Argentina, the country’s technical-productive capacity is minimal compared to Brazil’s, its neighbor to the northeast. Nonetheless, growing conflicts in recent years have pitted large mining and energy projects against popular movements seeking to protect the nation’s social and environmental heritage. In the Triple Frontier, when the government prepared to inaugurate the Yacyretá Dam, the province of Misiones voted in an open plebiscite against the Corpus facility that would form part of the hydroelectric complex.44

These contradictions have become heightened after the political changes of the past decade, as a strong reaction against the savage neoliberalism of the 1990s led people to revisit the need for autonomous productive development. This approach, it is hoped, might finally produce a new social balance. The emergence of a neodevelopment narrative is especially evident in Argentina, whose national self-image points strongly to moments of inclusion and social ascension in the postwar period. This framework is able to incorporate environmental sensibilities without limiting the end goal. It is fair to wonder whether this duality and the tensions between development and conservation, between modernization and pastoral nostalgia, ultimately forms part of our own South American culture and perhaps also that of the Americas more broadly.45
HYBRID LANDSCAPES

Toward the end of the twentieth century, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, new radical interpretations emerged to criticize universal concepts that affected our spatial imagination. Among other ideas that eclectically flooded the intellectual field of the River Plate countries were issues such as borders as “intermediate areas,” extraterritoriality, the use of forensic evidence in physical sites to expose historical violence, seeing catastrophes as the norm rather than the exception, networks and nodes, and the changes and resilience of topologies.

In Argentina, the 2001 crisis reinforced this trend, driving experimental work that proved particularly powerful in the field of architecture. This led to debates that went beyond theoretical positions to instead discuss concrete territorial issues such as formalizing strategies for public beautification projects, the image of “place” associated with sedentary societies, and the presumption of boundaries between nature and artifice. The “liquid” areas in the River Plate basin proved masterfully conducive to these reflections.⁴⁶

This reflexive tendency was part of a global trend, which in the new millennium took on additional meanings outside of artistic and academic disciplines. A telling example comes from Hollywood, as the 2005 movie *Miami Vice* was filmed in the Triple Frontier and in other locations of the River Plate basin. “What attracted me to Ciudad del Este,” explained the director Michael Mann, “is the energy of [the city’s] trade, but also the multiethnic environment. . . . That to me says what the world is today.”⁴⁷ This city, unknown to most international audiences before the movie, is for Mann the epitome of a fragmented global culture. Along with filming scenes of the majestic Iguazú Falls, the director also used locations in the Uruguayan cities of Montevideo and Atlántida as stand-ins for Havana. In Mann’s eyes, Uruguay could be Cuba, and the teeming markets of Ciudad del Este become interchangeable with the Mexican border cities of Tijuana and Sonora. This pan-Latin Americanism identifies “Latino” with the sumptuously tropical, the mixed and the colorful, the sensual and the backward, the violent and the corrupt—a limitless seduction to draw in a global audience.
Although international perceptions play an indisputable role, South Americans still guard their own particular ways of interpreting the sociospatial hybridity of their borders. Even these more resistant interpretations are inextricably linked to the broader traditions—both global and “local”—discussed throughout this conclusion.

Argentines, for example, are reluctant to be identified or collapsed into the picturesque box of “Latino”—even as their European-tinted capital of Buenos Aires looks increasingly like Paraguay’s Ciudad del Este. These overlapping landscapes are evident in Hernán Vanoli’s novel, *Cataratas*. Situated in the Triple Frontier in an ambiguous but not-too-distant future, Vanoli explores the tension between the city’s aesthetic seduction and its chaotic spaces, at once delocalized and informal, a visceral political rejection of the region’s current conditions. In the border depicted by Vanoli, its inhabitants live in a state of exception, with an ominous presence always looming from a corrupt authoritarian police and international security patrols that offer no guarantee of justice. Some characters, infected with a rare disease, mutate into semiaquatic monsters, as if returning to a prehuman condition. The landscape emerges descriptionless in a pure series of unfolding events, against a backdrop of weapons, radioactive waste, casinos built in dismantled hydroelectric plants, soda cans, and digital devices among the swaying palms, persistent rain, and horizontal rivers—forms of “nature” that no longer are.

In this dystopia, the rupture of the old *nomos* (the triad of territory, order, and birth) produces no new orders, nor does it reanimate any sort of harmonious pre-Columbian landscape. This world dangerously resembles a field like that observed by Arendt and developed by Agamben: with no distinction between exception and rule, without a discernable physical order, humans seem doomed to subsist in their pure biological state, neither human nor animal. Although the author Vanoli was barely a newborn in the years of dictatorship, his work shows how the weight and threat of that authoritarian period still linger in the Argentine imagination. But older roots also predominate: “the jungle” has always imbued Argentina’s literature with ominous accents, hallucinatory and fantastic—the aforementioned Horacio Quiroga mixed an alchemy of science and fiction to portray these borders.

We have already discussed the importance, in Paraguay, of the relationships between identity, space, and the Guarani language, a perspective that demands a revision of the very idea of territory. It is remarkable that while the image of the Guarani existed as a constant undercurrent in nationalist speeches and
even as a source of political resistance, writers and poets of the Paraguayan canon invariably wrote in Spanish. In the few cases when authors did write in the Guarani language, they still employed Western cadences and metrics. This only began to change in the 1980s when poets such as Ramon Silva paid attention to the particular sonority of the Native language, invoking the meanings of oral tradition. The monolingual structure used by Silva is characteristic of Guarani songs, where according to Melià, the property of every word is emphasized as if each one contains an image and a feeling. Silva also uses a rhythmic pattern inspired by the dances of the Mbyá-Guarani (one of the major ethnic groups in the Triple Frontier), acoustically suggesting not only movement but also feet on the ground, a materiality hardly achievable by Western written languages.

Some authors speak of *cinematopeya,* calling attention to how sound has played an increasing role in defining the production of films. The Triple Frontier offers an example through Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schembori’s widely acclaimed 2012 film, *7 Cajas.* Asunción’s enormous Mercado 4 serves as both backdrop and protagonist, with its contrasting accumulation of religious figurines, ñanduty patterns of brightly colored fabrics, flowers and fruits, and endless displays of electronic and digital items, an array of people and goods so dense and vast that even the grand market that is Ciudad del Este cannot spark envy. The language spoken in *7 Cajas* replicates the area’s material reality—characters speak mainly in Jopará and Spanish, punctuated by new words in English. In short, Paraguay’s territory is the territory of language, but this space, the directors tell us, is as fluid and changing as the boundaries studied in this volume. The flowing, unstable, and ambiguous images associated with “the border” now extend inward to the centers once presumed to be consolidated, formalized, fixed.

Brazil offers a different case. Primarily through its economic but also cultural power, it has become in the last few decades a leading reference in Paraguay and to a lesser extent, in Argentina. In many ways, the structures of Mercosur have lubricated these connections between countries. We can analyze, for example, how the recent valorization of the Guarani language has emerged not as an idyllic evocation on its own terms, but rather as the result of the Brazilian ethnographic tradition; many Paraguayan intellectuals fled in exile to Brazil during the Stroessner dictatorship, strengthening ties that, as seen in several chapters of this book, replaced Paraguay’s traditional alliance with Argentina. The convergence of ethnographic, cultural, and postcolonial studies also led to a theoretical
reinterpretation of findings and arguments forged decades earlier. Such is the case with the work of Pierre Clastres, who studied Tupi-Guarani groups in the Triple Frontier region in the late 1960s, providing an early philosophical-political framework of Native ways of living. Emerging from the global spirit of 1968, the indigenous way of life offered a key point of departure for studying “the origins of work as alienated work,” the advent of the state, the cold machine imposed on these forgotten borders, and the imbalance between environment and human settlement. Links between these studies and the well-known hypothesis of Deleuze and Guattari have already been highlighted. Following the path of these thinkers, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro suggests that the current decentered vision of man and the renewed emphasis on the materiality of space owe much to what he calls the “metaphysical Amerindian”: an open willingness, relational, where the exchange with the Other, rather than one’s own identity, is the key determinant. From this theoretical assault, little remains of the trinity between nation, territory, and state.

And yet, national traditions still retain their influence. Viveiros de Castro puts forward, with an eclectic freedom and sensibility for Latin American voices, concepts that continue to mark the Brazilian avant-garde: the positive and enthusiastic assertion of the unprecedented and unplanned mixing between Europe and America. The despised lowlands, which unlike the Andes cannot be equated to the classic ways of “civilization,” simultaneously exist as the extreme west—a final frontier—and as a radical answer to the “universal” ways of life. Even the idea of identity is reimagined in relation to the ancient theme of paradise:

Perhaps it was the Amerindians, not the Europeans, who had the “vision of paradise” in the American encounter. For the former, it was not a question of manically imposing their identity on the other, or even rejecting the other for the sake of their own ethnic excellence, but rather of transforming their own Indian identity through actualizing a relationship with the other (a relationship that had always existed on a virtual level). The inconstancy of the Indian soul, at its moment of opening, is the expression of a way of being where “it is the exchange, not the identity, the crucial value to be affirmed.”

Whether or not we agree with this romantic image, it is clear that Viveiros de Castro works from a framework of elective affinities, freely appropriating the knowledge of our world. While Brazil reaffirms this complicated legacy,
even in times of economic boom Argentina has always nostalgically identified with a lost identity—the gray melancholy of tango serves as enduring proof. And with Paraguay’s dramatic history of destruction and the justified retreat into an idealized Guarani “origin,” only now are its citizens questioning this traditional discourse.

Even with his misgivings, Viveiros de Castro stresses the disruptive contributions of Brazil’s cannibalistic movement (antropofagia) led by the modernists of São Paulo in the 1920s. Here, we return again to persistent South American myths: paradise and hell, Ariel and Caliban, the limits of Prospero’s magic. But the modernists radically inverted these values: hell is much more fun than the paradise.

This perspective was only made possible by a distinctly avant-garde dynamic: to go back, recreating the old world in visions for the future. Paulista intellectuals and artists turned the idea of cannibalism on its head long before writers such as Mikhail Bakhtin formulated theories on the transgressions of Carnival. But unlike Bakhtin’s ideas, the duality between high and low is blurred in the works of the movimento antropofágico in a way that does not simply challenge clearly defined models, it digests them. It is true that the conflict was rooted in an artistic-intellectual debate based in Paris. But these objections do not diminish the revelation of an aesthetic foundation subsequently eroding the essential forms of political-territorial linkages.

To be sure, the Paulista vanguards did not advance beyond the borders of Brazil, reducing antropofagia to a key pillar of Brazilianness, justifying without guilt what other South American authors rejected: their polished “European” or “North American” veneer. We cannot forget how through atypical Shakespearean channels the issue has been addressed in the River Plate region since the early twentieth century, reinforced in a contemporary sense through the famous phrase of Caliban: “you taught me language, and my profit on’t / is, I know how to curse.”

Brazilian vanguards went even further: there exist no traces of bitterness or dispute. On the contrary, as Oswald de Andrade said in his famous manifesto dated 374 years after the Bishop Sardinha was swallowed alive, cannibalism unites us, both among ourselves and with the world. Without distinguishing between bishops, planes, and canned food, Andrade writes, “I am only interested in what’s not mine.” He promises a new paradise vastly different from that of Columbus, where not even Hollywood is excluded: “A idade de ouro anunciada pela América. A idade de ouro. E todas as girls.”

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6. The expression was first used in the 1940s to refer to a complex of ideological phenomena that could not be reduced to philosophy even while participating in the discipline. Ricauter Soler, *El positivismo argentino: Pensamiento filosófico y sociológico* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979). This idea was widely used in the River Plate basin beginning in the 1980s, with more emphasis on cultural, rather than ideological, dimensions.


8. I focus only on some sufficiently representative authors in the canon of literature and “national” prose. However, the reflection on “our identity,” including recent polemics against the essentialism of this idea can be found previously raised by many other authors. In Argentina, a classic critical presentation of this universe is in Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, *Ensayos argentinos: De Sarmiento a la vanguardia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1983), which traced from Echeverría to authors connected to the magazines *Martin Fierro* and *Sur*. It should be remembered, however, that the “Argentine canon” is almost exclusively porteño; recent efforts have broken this hegemony, emphasizing regionalisms and the interior. It would be difficult to summarize in this way the Brazilian canon. Among authors who considered the size, nature, and forms of occupation of space as a key issue to thinking through the “national,” we can further include Alfonso de Taunay, Capistrano de Abreu, Cassiano Ricardo (providing a key account of the bandeirante construction of nationality), Oliveira Vianna, and Nelson Werneck Sodré. These authors focus in different ways on the issue of borders and the March to the West. Paulo Prado merits particular mention for his *Retrato do Brasil: Ensaio sobre a tristezas brasileira* (São Paulo: Duprat-Mayença, 1928), addressing issues such as racial mixing (important to ideas of *antropofagia*, or cultural cannibalism), geographical awareness, and spiritual sensibilities. Among scholars who discuss these issues, an excellent summary comes from Candice Vidal e Souza, *A pátria geográfica: Sertão e litoral no pensamento social brasileiro* (Goiânia: Editora UFG, 1997).


11. The comments of Lastarria introduce the relations of one of the most celebrated Spanish comisionados, Miguel de Lastarria, “Noticia de la vida y escritos de Don Félix de Azara,” in Félix de Azara, *Viajes por la América meridional* (Buenos Aires: El elefante blanco, 1998, 14).


13. Humboldt refers primarily to contemporary travelers. Spain, without a doubt, had already penetrated the interior of the subcontinent, although news of these events remained secret. Humboldt, *Viaje a las regiones equinociales*, introd., p. 6.


15. For more on this theme and its importance in South America—along with its contrasts in Puritan imagery—see Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1969).


20. The term *race* was widely used throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Plate region, linked to ideas of social Darwinism. Nonetheless, in countries like Mexico, the notion was used against presumptions of ethnic superiority by authors such as José Vasconcelos.

21. In quotes, I mention typical figures of speech that are still in common use.


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid.

26. Rafael Barret, *El dolor paraguayo: Lo que son los yerbales* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2010). Barret’s views inspired many authors, including the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos, one of the main writers of the Latin American “boom” and who explicitly cites this influence in *Hijo de hombre* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1960).
27. Ana Couchonnal, “La lengua Guaraní en la configuración política y territorial del Paraguay: espacios, voces oficiales y actores silenciados en la posguerra de la Triple Alianza” (working manuscript, 2015).
29. Souza, A patria geográfica.
34. Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo, Guerra e paz: Casa-Grande e Senzala e a obra de Gilberto Freyre nos anos trinta (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1994), 103.
37. Ibid., 34.
42. Ibid.
43. The first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972 saw the publication of World Ecological Areas Program, focusing on the plight of the Amazon jungle, linking climate risks and the destruction of “the way of life of the indigenous peoples who inhabit these areas.” The journal’s symbol was an Indian with a bow and arrow. http://www.edwardgoldsmith.org/963/world-ecological-areas-programme-a-proposal/, originally published in Ecologist 1, no. 1/2 (January/February 1980).
44. The initial protocol for Yacyretá was outlined in 1925, but an agreement was only officially signed in the 1973 treaty between Paraguay and Argentina. Construction
on the binational dam began in 1983, but the project only reached its maximum capacity in 2011. The agreement for another binational complex, the Corpus Christi Dam, was signed in 1971 and also has a long and complicated history that is still debated today.

45. In the United States, one of the first to discuss this tension between radical naturalism and technological modernization is Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

46. E.g., since the 1990s the São Paulo–based group *Arte-cidade* has worked in the inner city with various artists and architects. Another group is M7red, out of Buenos Aires, an independent platform of activities and research projects on architectonic and art whose first works focused on the “liquid” spaces of the lowlands.


52. For Clastres, Native groups could establish themselves as masters of their domain to the extent that their productive activities were based only on the expenditure of daily energy; the introduction of metal tools, whose efficiency allowed the accumulation of surplus and population growth (this volume, chap. 1), was a dramatic turning point.


55. Ibid., 206.


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