

State devices, illegalisms, and social practices in the Brazil-Paraguay border (1890-2015)

Dispositivos estatales, ilegalismos y prácticas sociales en la frontera Brasil-Paraguay (1890-2015)

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Abstract

The objective of the investigation is to analyze the development of illegal practices and their relations with the control and repression devices in the Brazil/Paraguay border, specifically in the boundaries between Foz de Iguazú-Ciudad del Este and Guaíra-Salta del Guairá. Methodologically, we use interviews, bibliographic sources and criminal processes. Through the sociological historical approach, we problematize the relations between illegal practices and state apparatus in three specific moments, which represent periods where the Brazilian government and the inhabitants of the zones referred to presented different positions in relation to the borders. The investigation allowed to conclude that the organization of the labor market and the experiences of the residents of the border are related to the intensity of the presence of the State in the region studied.

Keywords: borders, State, society, illegal practices.

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación es analizar el desarrollo de las prácticas ilegales y sus relaciones con los aparatos de fiscalización y represión en la frontera Brasil-Paraguay, específicamente en los límites entre Foz de Iguazú-Ciudad del Este y Guaíra-Salto del Guairá. Metodológicamente, utilizamos entrevistas, fuentes bibliográficas y procesos criminales. A través del abordaje histórico sociológico, problematizamos las relaciones entre las prácticas ilegales y los aparatos estatales en tres momentos específicos, que representan periodos en los cuales el gobierno brasileño y los habitantes de las zonas referidas presentaron posiciones diferenciadas en relación con las fronteras. La investigación permitió concluir que la organización del mercado de trabajo y las vivencias de los habitantes de la frontera están relacionadas con la intensidad de la presencia del Estado en la región estudiada.

Palabras clave: frontera, Estado, sociedad, prácticas ilegales.

Received on June 13, 2017.

Accepted on May 24, 2018.

Published on June 21, 2018.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE LANGUAGE:
SPANISH.

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CITATION: Cardin, E. & Fiorotti, C. (2018). Dispositivos estatales, ilegalismos y prácticas sociales en la frontera Brasil-Paraguay (1890-2015) [State devices, illegalisms, and social practices in the Brazil-Paraguay border (1890-2015)]. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 19, e012. doi:<https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.1812012>

Introduction

The border between Brazil and Paraguay is presented as one of the most dynamic border regions in South America, which arouses media and academic interest. In the last two decades, many researchers have studied the region and promoted dialogue with scholars from other localities, highlighting the relations established in the research produced in Argentina (Giménez & Montenegro, 2006; Montenegro & Giménez, 2010; Renoldi, 2014) and Mexico (Camal-Chelujá, Arriaga-Rodríguez & Cardin, 2015). In between approaching and distancing, it is worth noting the attentive look given to the complex relationship between nation states and the daily life of workers who live on the international borders every day.

Any less attentive or careless observation of the Latin American borders immediately leads us to the creation of prejudices that may indicate the excess of state presence, visualized in the militarization of borders or, on the contrary, its absence, which generates the myth of a lawless border. However, the different researches carried out in regions with international borders have shown that the social reality existing in these localities is partly derived from the relations between the political actions promoted by state devices which, to a large extent, aim to regulate the behavior and social practices developed by the local populations.

In this context, the aim of the text is to reflect on the cross-border flow in the region where the borders of Brazil and Paraguay meet, observing the relationship between these flows and the changes in the way the Brazilian State acts on the border. We try to learn about these relationships through bibliographic studies and also by using some information obtained in oral interviews and in records of criminal proceedings.

Historically, the movement of workers and goods between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina has been common since the 19th century (De Souza, 2009). In the past, although there may have been a recognition of territorial boundaries, there was no repression regarding such practices, a fundamental aspect when thinking about how trade and transit at the border were not viewed solely on the basis of legal provisions. Restrictions on the movement of people and goods on the triple border began during the first government of Getulio Vargas and consolidated during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. Throughout this period, two fundamental phenomena have been observed for the understanding of the role that the border began to play for the State: the need to spread awareness of the Brazilian identity and the understanding that borders are areas of national security and, therefore, places that require more attention, with the consolidation of population and urban structure.

Finally, with the process of democratization and reorganization of the world economy—expansion of the neoliberal model, strengthening of the economic blocs, and bilateral agreements—customs control within Brazil-Paraguay borders is beginning to suffer oscillations related to the importance that the movement of workers and goods acquires in maintaining the balance of the Brazilian domestic market. Within the different situations that mark the relationship between States and their territorial limits, there are changes in the practices of control and repression devices, which are reflected in the existence of different levels of control and tolerance in relation to the movement of persons and goods.

Invisible Boundaries and Circularity at the Border

There is a popular fictitious story regarding the inhabitants of the region where the Brazil-Paraguay border meets that says that there was no clear recognition of international boundaries among them until the beginning of the 20th century. Legal frameworks, although they may have already existed, played only a figurative role in those inns (Colodel, 1988; Lima, 2001; Sperança, 1992; Wachowicz, 1982). The inhabitants supposedly came and went as if the border municipalities had the same structure and had been thought to guarantee the coexistence of the different nationalities in the same space, sharing a logistics that would guarantee the commercial and cultural flow between the different nations. While that may be an exaggeration, said perception is not entirely wrong.

As Adriana Dorfman (2009, p. 2) reminds us, a “good international border must materialize into a cultural discontinuity”, given that national construction supposedly involves the recognition of the elements that would be specific to each nation. Language and its local idiosyncrasies, folklore, traditions, and founding myths would distinguish the peoples and justify the demarcations. In this context, if these demarcations were successful, we would find “an abrupt change from one people to another, from one language to another, from one culture to another, accompanying the limits of state sovereignty” in the margins of the national territories (Dorfman, 2009, p. 2).

However, the “good frontier”, which would be the result of a combination of political, natural, and cultural breakthroughs is not easily found, as there is rarely a coincidence in the level of contact with such dimensions. Generally speaking, the border is characterized by contrasts at different scales, and there is no universal rule that makes it possible to generalize such differences. Although, regardless of the existing approaching and distancing, the border “attracts people who wish to benefit from the advantages that are present in the area, in the form of a lower cost of living, greater job opportunities, and access to services such as health, energy, and telephone services” (Dorfman, 2009, p. 3).

The experience of life at the border gives its frequent visitors the necessary tools to articulate the identifying differences, making it possible for people to become bearers/passers of the symbolic or material goods that express such contradictions and differences as a *savoir passer* acquired by the inhabitants of the border, who are accustomed to acting on national, linguistic, legal, ethnic, economic, and religious differences and similarities that either represent advantages or a reduction in transit or rights. The border is the place where differences come together (Dorfman, 2009, p. 3).

In the region under investigation, *savoir passer* and the feeling of living on a free border are derived from a historical context that precedes the effective presence of the State on the border between Brazil and Paraguay. Such a situation may promote the misunderstanding of only indicating smuggling practices and the experiences of living on the border together as one (Dorfman, 2009; Godinho, 2009). In short, the concept of smuggling culture attempts to capture, in a single term, the naturalization

process of smuggling in a situation of explicit acceptance by the local inhabitants, which guarantees its legitimacy, and of state tolerance, due to its complacency with the situation and its objective difficulty in controlling it. This does not mean that the local population is responsible for monitoring movement at the border, rather quite the contrary. The centuries-old experience of movement means that local inhabitants do not recognize the need for supervision, as cross-border mobility is a practice that has historically been part of the daily life of the inhabitants.

The effort of trying to capture a reality in order to insert it into an analytical model allows subtleties to escape. Knowing how to “get through” does not allow us to label all those who are skilled as smugglers, nor does it allow us to generalize the practice to all those living in border regions. Like other men and women, the social subjects inserted in the research context work, produce, and inhabit the place where they live in a broad sense. However, the intervention and use of space on the border, even if intentional, is not calculated or thought of in a strategic way, it is lived and modified as people there relate to the available materials. In intervening, we are shaped not by the end-goal we long for but by the means we develop.

The production and occupation of space, and of life itself, constantly modifies the beam of lines drawn by the subjects, weaving the historical dimension, and “as they move together through time and meet each other, these paths intertwine to form an immense and continuous evolving spinning mill” (Ingold, 2015, p. 34). To think that beings inhabit and not simply construct or produce the place where they are has analytical implications, given that the absence of separation between the subject and the environment stands out. When we build or produce the place in which we live, we simply occupy a structure that can be altered in an instrumental way, a fact that allows us to observe the action of an active subject in a passive environment.

The bundle of lines, composed of threads woven by the different dwellers, is tied together in a great plot, which transforms throughout history as experiences, intentions, and the environment relate to one another. To think of a culture of smuggling is to think of the end-point, that is, of “smuggling” itself. This is a situation that becomes more complicated when we acknowledge that “knowing how to get through” came before the actual presence of the nation state. Thus, with the aim of problematizing the relationship between “knowing how to get through” and “smuggling”, we explore different situations where the “naturalization” of border traffic and attempts to discipline and control it at different times can be seen.

Up until the first two decades of the 20th century, the presence of the Brazilian and Paraguayan governments in the border region between the two countries was derisory, despite the existence of international treaties after the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) that established the international limits and landmarks of these borders. Although recognizing the Brazilian empire in the figure of Don Pedro II and the geopolitical importance of the locality, the most ostentatious presence of the Brazilian state devices was not realized until after 1930 through national population policies (Freitag, 2001). The consequence of this absence is visualized in the uncontrolled exploitation of the territory and by the large presence of foreigners living in the area (Brito, 2005).

Publications written and organized by memorialists (Lima, 2001; Sperança, 1992) and by some historians of the 1980s (Colodel, 1988; Wachowicz, 1982) describe this border in a very particular way. In those records it is commonly acknowledged that part of the eastern Paraguayan and western Brazilian regions were exploited by foreign companies, known as *obrajes*. The vast majority of them were involved in the extraction of natural resources, wood, and *yerba mate*, using, to a large extent, the Paraguayan labor force (*mensu*). The organization of these companies was completely beyond Paraguayan and Brazilian control. There was no payment of taxes and no labor protection, resulting in a situation of abusive exploitation of the environment and workers.

Therefore, it is possible to state that the circulation of Brazilians, Paraguayans, and Argentines throughout the border region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had the primary objective of economic exploitation. The extraction of natural resources from one country to be sold in another, the supplementation of income by means of the resale of products available on the other side of the border, or the simple supplementation of goods needed in households and businesses generated flows and interdependence (Lima, 2001). Such practices can be seen as criminality given that since the foundation of the Military Colony of Foz do Iguaçu at the mouth of the Iguaçu River in 1888, they were already known and tolerated by the devices that should control or inhibit them.

This kind of primitive accumulation of capital, where the absence of the State and any regulatory landmark concerning the economic exploitation of the region are harnessed, appropriates the knowledge and the local inhabitants. The knowledge of the territory and its potential, the capacity to move, and the adaptation to an environment—which for many could be hostile—are important elements for the maintenance of the extraction practices carried out until the beginning of the 20th century. Finally, the exploitation denounced by these stories points to the existence of different ways of living at the border, where the first attempts to “capture” the way of life of the native population are highlighted.

The coexistence of a large cross-border movement of workers and goods and of permissive control by the devices of the Brazilian State can also be observed in the 1950s and 1960s. In the research that we carried out in the collection of criminal cases available in the *Núcleo de Documentação Pesquisa* (NDP/Unioeste), we found the existence of inquisitions of alleged smuggling crimes that ended with the acquittal of all the accused and the respective filing of the case, demonstrating once again the presence of “knowing how to get through” and criminality, confirming that these “are neither dysfunctions of political technologies nor exceptions to their legal practices, but constitutive parts of the exercise of government” (Hirata, 2014, p. 98).

The criminal proceeding 164/15 of 1961, for example, corresponds to an order referring to an arrest made by the Paraná Military Police. The document portrays the situation of a Paraguayan worker named Rafael Barrios, who was transporting rice, sugar, oil, and fuel purchased in the municipality of Toledo, Paraná, to be delivered to the company where he worked in Puerto Marangatú, Paraguay. During the tour, he was intercepted and accused of smuggling by local police but was then acquitted by the Brazilian Public Prosecutor’s Office. According to the ruling of the judge responsible for the case:

Such crime has not been committed, since it has been well established that the accused did not act as smugglers, they acted in good faith, without fraud, which is the main element for the characterization of the crime of smuggling. Smuggling is generally carried out for a large quantity of goods and more importantly—and what characterizes a crime—is carried out in secret, and its agents seek in every way to evade fiscal and police surveillance. In this case, the volume of goods does not classify it as smuggling, as this was not destined for any other purpose but the consumption of the Paraguayan buyer company, which naturally supplied itself with what it could in Brazil, in Toledo, as it was a closer place of supply (Auto criminal, 1961).

The case described becomes more relevant because Barrios had a letter from his “boss” with the list of products to be acquired in Brazil, and also because he had informed the Brazilian customs prosecutor that he would make such purchases and obtained from him an “informal authorization” to do business. The worker, his “employer”, and the prosecutor were accused of involvement in the smuggling “scheme”, but all were acquitted. On that occasion, the judge admitted that such a practice was necessary and common in the daily life of the region. Did they intercept the worker for not being part of the so-called “scheme” or did they intercept him to exercise authority?

According to Cintia Fiorotti (2015), an apprehension of this type of merchandise transported in an unregulated manner between Brazil-Paraguay and vice versa was not common. However, that does not mean it was not happening. The case presented indicates that the transportation of food and fuel at the border existed and was tolerated by some State agents (Fiorotti, 2015). During the assessment we did not find any criminal prison sentences for workers transporting industrialized goods for their own consumption. This observation is reinforced when we observe that such practices are still carried out, however, the direction of the flow of goods and their specificities vary according to seasonality and changes.

This context, which would denounce a lack of precision in the definition and regulation of customs and practices in the border region, can also be seen in other sources and in more recent historical periods. Interviews conducted during the investigation express situations that might be considered curious. At the beginning of 2015, looking for Paraguayan interlocutors who lived in Guaíra, Paraná, Brazil, to form a network of contacts for future research, we talked to many people and they told us about others, supposedly Paraguayan, who lived in the city for a long time. Among these interlocutors, the conversations that were established pointed to the existence of experiences of living on the border made up of countless threads woven into a set of journeys made along different paths. There is knowledge in the narratives acquired during the movements carried out, knowledge that is not precise or founded, but that originate from their own life and that is exposed in the speeches, in the gestures, and in the descriptions made of the different paths traveled. As Ingold (2015) points out, living, moving, knowing, and describing are part of the same movement, which is synthesized in living.

In this sense, Cartesian thought does not comprehend or explain the lives of these workers and is not part of the mechanisms used by them to direct their practices, to mediate their relations with the environment and, much less, to construct their own narratives about their own lives. In the comments of the interviewees, the notions

of space-time and their own identities are part of the same act, any attempt at linear organization of the trajectories is part of the effort to conduct the interview and not of the perception of life existing between the different interlocutors.

The stories of Domingas Candi Lopes, Maria Tereza Cabrera, and the Blas family, for example, point to a shift between physical and legal identity and the supposed symbolic identity. The first speaker, who was 95 years old at the time, was identified as Paraguayan by all members of the migrant community in the municipality of Guaíra, Brazil, but not by herself. In “*portuñol*”, she spoke of her Paraguayan origin and that of her family, about the wood and *yerba mate* extraction work carried out by her parents in the middle of the 20th century, and claimed to have been born in Mato Grosso, Brazil.

The second speaker, Maria Tereza Cabrera, who was 54 at the time of the interview, also conveys the same shift between identities. The interview was conducted while she was making *chipa*, a small salad of manioc starch typical of Paraguay, in the kitchen of one of the traditional meeting points of migrants in Guaíra, where there is a chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Initially, speaking in Portuguese, the speaker said she was Paraguayan and told us about her life story. However, when she explained her current occupation at the Brazilian Consulate in Paraguay, she began to speak Spanish and recognize her Brazilian nationality.

In the third case, the mobility of the Blas family is visualized, accompanying the migratory movement of Brazilians to Paraguay, stimulated by Paraguayan government policies during the 1970s (Albuquerque, 2010). Ana Maria moved to the neighboring country and there she formed the family; she had three children, who were raised with Paraguayan families and were literate in Spanish and Guaraní. Less than two years ago, they decided to move to Brazil and insert themselves into the labor market of the country, working in logging companies and in the cassava harvest, activities associated with Paraguayans in the region. However, even with this profile, the family explicitly defends a supposed Brazilian identity.

At this time, it is not our aim to discuss the content of the interviews and to present the narratives in detail, but to highlight only two aspects that strengthen the idea of the disagreement of the natural, economic, political, and cultural fractures that supposedly define the process of demarcation of what could be considered a “good frontier”. The cases presented show the existence of a kind of circular migration, in which the inhabitants move through the countries bending their own identities and, consequently, developing transnational networks that guarantee the permanence of certain connections and networks.

The purpose of presenting such cases is to demonstrate that, although the border is explicit and there are legal boundaries between the nations and between these subjects, the movement and belonging do not observe such elements, being Paraguayan or Brazilian is circumstantial, and the way other people identify them does not necessarily correspond to self-identification. For these people, greater customs control is an obstacle to the daily construction of a hybrid identity (García, 1990), since, as Grimson (2005) notes, state policies for borders do not reflect the experiences of border subjects, rather only of those who have a privileged position in the market.

The interlocutors point out that for the practice of displacements where the border is not presented as an impediment, the relationship they establish with the limits and with their own identities are constructed during living. Taking this into consideration, the decisions of the Brazilian Public Prosecutor’s Office to absolve the inhabitants

of the region when they were accused of smuggling in the 1950s and 1970s, and also the understanding of the difficulty of building awareness of the Brazilian identity or imposing it on the region in a period when state devices were still in their infancy, become more understandable.

The situation of living *the* and living *in the* border is not comprised of a linear or homogeneous history. The Triple Alliance War established by Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay drew the attention of governments to local geopolitics, but this does not entail substantial changes in the existing border flows in the area. Until the 1930s, the region under investigation suffered from an intense process of expropriation of the productive forces, constituting a moment of primitive accumulation of families that were gradually linked to the tourist and hotel sector and sought to move away from the local inhabitants who had their ways of living directly from the possibilities arising from the border.

However, the coexistence of different uses of the border, marked by the presence of natural resource extraction companies that exploited local labor, of workers who made their living from subsistence agriculture and, at the same time, of “knowing how to get through”, which served as an income supplement, does not represent a moment or a past situation. Although the production processes may have changed, the presence of the different uses of the border and the efforts to regulate the existing uses and customs are still visible today. The difference lies in the diversification of the forms of capital accumulation and the sophistication of the forms of disciplining.

The Border and National Boundaries

The intangible legal boundaries and the circularity of the inhabitants of the region, marked by Brazil-Paraguay border, are gradually being altered and disciplined by means of two politically more systematized movements aimed at guaranteeing national sovereignty and control of the area. The first of these occurred during the Getúlio Vargas dictatorship when new states-territories were created in the country; one of them was named the Iguaçu Territory, which reached part of the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina. The main justifications for the undertaking were the need to centralize a core state administration in the region to facilitate political relations with the federal government and also to ensure the strengthening of a national identity.

Two elements that are directly correlated are displayed at this historical moment. The concern of the Brazilian government for the border was not directly linked to the leakage of foreign exchange or the entry of illegal goods into Brazil, but rather to the need to ensure the strengthening of an ethnic border in relation to the other Latin American countries. Observing the body of criminal proceedings under investigation, it should be noted that the control of the movement of goods, mainly of trucks transporting coffee, began most effectively during the 1950s, that is, during the period when the northern region of the state of Paraná presented itself as a major producer.

Initially, the objective of the Brazilian government was to ensure that the territory along Brazil-Paraguay border was exploited by Brazilians and to develop a sense of

belonging to the nation. As was said before, until the first decades of the 20th century, the mobility of the border population was high, making it difficult to establish “national identities” and concealing the existence of international boundaries. Since the beginning of the Vargas government it was sought to reverse these relations by making explicit the existence of the border in order to make the cultural continuity existing among the border population unworkable. If in the first moment the borders were hidden, in the second, the invisibility of the transnational social networks that guarantee the circularity of the local inhabitants is desired.

This situation brings us closer to one of the existing misunderstandings about border regions. The establishment of the “good frontier” is effective when the boundary indicated separates groups that would theoretically be different in their formation and cultural practices. However, such a “fracture” is non-existent in the localities that suffered and still suffer a continuous colonization (Dorfman, 2009). The existence of a “good frontier” would make it possible to identify the ways of life and the economic and political practices that would characterize each nation. However, in a region of intense flow and interdependence, the effort to define a “national identity” is ignominious and requires systematic disciplining policies.

The constitution of a nation state requires the formation of a “national identity”, that is, the homogenization of certain cultural characteristics that are supposed to guarantee social cohesion throughout the national territory. In this manner, the “civilization policy” that seeks to guarantee a Brazilian (Garcia, 1999), Chilean (Valdebenito & Lube, 2014), or Argentinian (Zaidenweg, 2013) identity becomes commonplace in relatively new states. The attempt to establish the Iguazu Territory during the first term of Brazilian President Getulio Vargas had the aim to bring closer together a population isolated from the political center of the country, guaranteeing its recognition and the development of a sense of belonging to the nation, but this objective was not fully achieved. Between 1943 and 1946, six different national territories were created and dissolved with the aim of protecting national borders during World War II. In the case of the Iguazu Territory, the effort to strengthen national identity had more to do with the nationalization of the workforce in the 1930s through the replacement of Paraguayans and Argentines by Brazilians.

In all cases, the question of national identity in the region where the border of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay meets is not a simple one. Marked by intense transnational flows throughout history, the presence of a “pure identity”, supposedly representing national stereotypes, is almost non-existent. The border is imposed as an element that makes strategies and identities more flexible. As Néstor García Canclini (2000) points out, what characterizes the border city is not the immediate constant and deep-rooted presence of a national identity, but the possibility of the border to be configured either as a place of connection or separation. George Simmel (1996) affirms that “at every moment it is us who separate what is connected or reconnect what is separated” (Simmel, 1996, p. 10). It is not enough for people to fix the path between two places, we emphasize the need to visibly indicate “the path on land so that these places can be connected again” (Simmel, 1996, p. 10). In this sense, bridge building would be an example.

To build a bridge is to materialize something that exists in our needs. We do not unite something if we do not recognize the existence of a separation, whether imposed by geography or by human history. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that

we do not connect something if we do not want it. Thinking of a bridge as a metaphor for the border means recognizing its potential to guarantee or make possible the connection or meeting of places that, for men and women, are separated. In this way, the bridge “overcomes the distance of its extremities while making it perceptible and measurable” (Simmel, 1996, p. 12). However, the bridge, which can be visualized and thought of as an analogy of the border, is often insufficient to represent the border.

The strengthening of state devices on the Brazil-Paraguay border reinforces another feature of the border, marked by the control of flows. Thus, if the border can be seen as a bridge, it also needs to be thought of as a gateway administered by the respective nation states. While the bridge is set up as a connection and passage corridor between two points, passing a supposed security regarding traffic, the door is constituted as a possibility of transit. The bridge mixes with nature and is naturalized with it, becoming part of the landscape.

If at the beginning the efforts of the inhabitants of the Brazil-Paraguay border to build bridges can be seen in terms of not admitting the geographical and political separation, of seeking to strengthen their transnational social networks, or of demonstrating the importance of the free movement of workers and goods, from a certain point in time, with the most effective presence of the State, the concern is directed towards the construction of doors. In other words, the policies developed during the Vargas government sought to strengthen the flow control mechanisms, establishing “doors” to regulate transit along the Brazil-Paraguay border.

The expansion process of the agricultural border promoted by the Brazilian and Paraguayan governments, which in a way has been facilitated by the construction of the crossing infrastructure, makes explicit at the same time a kind of control. The Friendship Bridge and the customs posts, structures that seem to link the two countries, actually serve to restrict the passage and facilitate the control of people who may pass through. The agricultural occupation policy, which allowed thousands of Brazilians to migrate to Paraguay, was not universal to all parties, and was instead limited to a profile of workers that was in the interest of the Brazilian and Paraguayan governments. In other words, the bridge is both an approximation and a control structure.

The second movement to strengthen state devices was promoted during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). During this period, important changes in the border policy of the country were observed. First of all, we can see that the attempt to occupy and control the bordering regions of the country ceases to be an attempt to build a supposedly Brazilian identity and becomes, in a more effective way, military. While the efforts to establish a military colony at the mouth of the Iguazú River at the end of the 19th century were unsuccessful due to the approach of the military to the daily practices of the first inhabitants of the region (Lima, 2001); the second attempt at military occupation was more hierarchical, taxing, and influential in the relations between Brazil and Paraguay.¹

The constitution granted in 1967 gave the National Security Council responsibility for issues related to development and security within the limits of Brazilian territory, a position that was reinforced by Law No. 6634/1979. At the time, it was determined

¹ We cannot fail to point out that in the same period the Paraguayan dictatorship of General Stroessner (1954-1989) was also of fundamental importance in the reorganization of the border, either because it had allowed the entry of more than 500 000 Brazilians east of Paraguay or for the foundation of Ciudad del Este and the creation of the differentiated taxation area.

that the limit of public lands for alienation or concession in the border strip was from 2 000 to 3 000 hectares; that the Federation would cease to compete with 50% of the cost of municipal public works in the strip, but would reserve the right to compete with the total or partial cost in accordance with the interest of the area for national security; and, finally, that the National Security Council would assume responsibility for the allocation of resources for projects in the border strip (Cardin, 2012).

The strengthening of an ideology that mixed security and development is confirmed in the construction of the Itaipu Binational Hydroelectric Power Plant, located on the Brazil-Paraguay border. An infrastructure project that managed to solve four problems faced by the military government: 1) the “Sete Quedas” dispute over the territorial demarcation of the Brazil-Paraguay border; 2) it led Paraguay to Brazilian influence and practically put it in a “buffer state” situation (Arriaga-Rodríguez & Visintin, 2012); 3) it would guarantee sufficient energy supply capacity to meet the needs of the multinationals interested in operating in the country; and, 4) it defined the strategic control of the region marked by the confluence of the borders of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina (De Souza, 2011; Espósito, 2013).

Within a general context, the binational agreement that has made possible the construction of the hydroelectric dam on the Paraná River has modified the geopolitics of the Conesur River and, in a local perspective, completely transformed the border between the two countries. Since the mid-1970s, the cities of Foz do Iguaçu-Brazil and Ciudad del Este-Paraguay have invested in the urban structure to serve the thousands of workers who arrived to work on the construction sites of the plant. Housing, markets, schools, clubs, streets, and avenues were quickly built to specifically serve the workers set by Itaipu, redesigning the urban geography and promoting a demographic explosion that has compromised the attention of other residents of the region.

Immediately, the intense migratory flow that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s reinforced existing problems related to the lack of housing and jobs, difficulties in supply and in violence rates, problems that fostered artificial inflation in the region derived from the association of the great search for innumerable types of merchandise and the scarcity of the same. The construction of the power plant promoted a clash between ways of living, and between temporal and spatial rhythms that were judged differently by the local population (Catta, 2002). It also altered the history of the border municipalities of Guaíra and Salto de Guairá by submerging the “Sete Quedas” during the formation of Lake Itaipu, thus extinguishing the main tourist attraction in the area (Fiorotti, 2009).

The great migratory flow attracted by the construction of the hydroelectric plant enabled the municipality of Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil to obtain an increase of more than 400% of the population in just ten years, which radicalized the existing problems. The lack of housing and employment, aggravated by the problems of the existing structure for health and education care, required changes in the social practices of the local population, which became more dependent on the economies of neighboring countries (Cardin, 2015; Catta, 2002). As this was not enough, it also changed the power relations that existed until that moment (Ribeiro, 2015).

During the first decades of the 20th century, economic and political power gradually concentrated in the groups that controlled extractive activities first, and then in the tourism sector. However, with the beginning of the civilian military dictatorship in 1964, the municipal mayors began to be appointed by the regime, without them

having any links with the local inhabitants. This situation promoted the importance of the Itaipu Power Plant in the city, which, in addition to it being the main generator of employment and income in the municipality, also became an important political agent, directly influencing the measures developed in the 1970s (Ribeiro, 2015).

Not coincidentally, it is during this same period that the market of President Stroessner (currently Ciudad del Este) began to gain expression and to occupy a prominent place in the sale of North American and Asian products. Created in the 1960s, the Paraguayan free trade zone effectively began to influence the economy of the region in the following decade, at a time of high unemployment, mainly due to the changes brought about by the hydroelectric power plant (Cardin, 2011). In this context, the border is beginning to be occupied and used in a different way from what had been happening up to that moment, since the environment constituted by the military regime encouraged an increase in the number of workers economically dependent on the border, workers who were not always native to the region and who had no knowledge on “how to get through”. The acquittal of Rafael Barrios and the opinion of the Public Prosecutor’s Office on the issue contained in the criminal trial discussed above demonstrate this. The practice developed by the worker was considered culturally accepted in a situation of shortage of goods, which would make it impossible to convict the accused of the alleged crime of smuggling. The strengthening of the nation state throughout the 20th century directly interferes with this. It is not possible to affirm that the “knowing how to get through” present in practice and in Barrios was extinguished or that it ceased to exist in the lives of the inhabitants of the Brazil-Paraguay border, but it is certainly possible to think that it has lost its state of innocence.

The mechanism used by the Brazilian State to guarantee its sovereignty in the region was to encourage population growth, economic development, and to control the movement of people who were against the civil-military regime. To a large extent, these aspects were achieved with the construction of the hydroelectric plant and the concentration of political power in agents linked to the dictatorship. Thus, during this period, there was no strengthening of state devices that aimed to control and prevent smuggling and misappropriation.

The impact of not “knowing how to get through” is not the result of persecution or repression by the State, but of the increase in the number of people dependent on the Paraguayan market and the alteration of the goods available in Ciudad del Este. This fostered a situation in which the “bridge” of the Brazil-Paraguay border was used by the local population in the exercise of their traditional practices and in the maintenance of their transnational networks, but also by buyers interested in purchasing imported products at attractive prices and by the first *sacoleiros*, who at the time were responsible for the purchase, distribution, and resale of mainly counterfeit clothing, drinks, and cigarettes.

The fictitious story that links Paraguay to piracy was born, as well as a context where traditional practices were losing importance and visibility. The Paraguayan market began to become attractive and to receive more visitors, becoming famous for its commerce and covering up old ways of life. Many of the traditional inhabitants of the border region would adopt the commercial logic imposed by the adherence between the existing unemployment and the possibilities that arose with the strengthening of the Paraguayan free trade zone (Catta, 2002), causing a homogenization of the social practices carried out.

The traditional transnational movement on the border between Brazil and Paraguay has not ceased to exist. The presence of transnational social networks is still common, as is the transit between the borders with the aim of complementing food supplies and using existing services in one or another border municipality, as well as making the self-identification of many inhabitants more flexible. However, the rapid growth obtained with the opening of the International Highway from the Port of Paranaguá, Brazil, to Asunción, Paraguay, and the construction of the Itaipu hydroelectric dam have contributed to a change in the way the border is used by inserting it more directly into the movement of goods, taking advantage of the surplus labor force and Paraguayan tax policies.

The Border and Neoliberal Advances

The Brazilian military dictatorship, associated with the construction of the hydroelectric dam, has inserted external political control in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, restricting the space previously occupied by the local ruling classes. Such a situation began to change during the democratization process in Brazil, when the aim was to join together the different political and economic interests of the city through a revaluation of the tourist sector (Ribeiro, 2015). However, this historic moment occurred simultaneously with the economic liberalization process of the country, which directly and indirectly interfered with trade flows along the Brazilian border with Paraguay during the 1990s.

Initially, there was a change of perspective on security strategies in border regions. In order to break with the militarization of previous decades, post-democratization policies were based on the assumption that border security should be associated with human development. Thus, instead of investing in the presence of a larger military contingent at the borders, efforts were directed towards the empowerment of civil society groups, outsourcing responsibility for regional development. Thus, customs control became even more fragile, making it easier for illegal goods to be bought and sold and for tax evasion to take place (Cardin, 2012).

The greater porosity of the territorial boundaries was accompanied by different economic changes that contributed to the strengthening of the “*sacoleiro* circuit” such as, for example, changes in the processes of export and import, trade agreements between nations, productive restructuring, and the long period of economic recession experienced by the country. Such factors, associated with local elements such as the end of the construction of the Itaipu Plant, promoted the emergence of an immense mass of unemployed people and an attractive tax configuration for the practice of smuggling and misappropriation. In this context, it is concluded that the “*sacoleiro* circuit” is mainly derived from the coexistence of three elements: surplus labor force in the Brazilian labor market, fragility in customs control, and tax disparities among neighboring countries (Cardin, 2011).

As we have seen, the circulation of goods between Brazil and Paraguay is an ancient practice that precedes the effective presence of state devices in this region of border confluence. However, the change in the profile of traded goods and also in the intensity of the state presence has altered the flow of this circulation throughout the 20th century. Until the 1960s, flows were concentrated in natural resources, mainly wood

and *yerba mate*. Subsequently, we have the transit of agricultural products such as coffee and soybeans. The movement of manufactured and industrialized goods occurred in smaller numbers and for local supply purposes. Since the 1960s, agricultural products have continued to be visualized, but with the presence of whisky smuggling, as well as hygiene and food products. With the strengthening of the free trade zone in Paraguay in the 1970s, there was a greater diversity of products and an increase in the flow of buyers (Fiorotti, 2015).

However, it is during the 1990s that the apex of this market is visualized. Electronic products of Asian origin, with low cost production, began to be sold by foreign workers who did not have any job security in the stores and tents of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. These were products that were bought and made available by thousands of Brazilian workers who were excluded from the national labor market, but who saw in the oil industry a shorter way to obtain a minimum income or even to obtain resources much higher than those available in formal jobs.

In this period, categories such as passer-by, mules, waiters, quota, tree, or ant work began to become common in the region. At one point, about 60% of economically active workers in Foz do Iguaçu were directly and indirectly dependent on trade with Paraguay (Cardin, 2011). This situation caused the Friendship Bridge to acquire the characteristics of an urban bridge, due to the growing number of cars and people that passed over it on a daily basis. In the midst of this, few arrests were made due to the lack of customs agents and to the difficulty in calculating the relationship between the legality and legitimacy of such practices. It was also believed that the entry of imported goods would help in the equilibrium of prices in the Brazilian market and in the expansion of consumption.

Amidst the approaching and distancing in the management model adopted by the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) and the Partido do Trabalhadores (PT) in the federal government, the first mandate of the PT presented significant differences in terms of the presence of the State on the Brazilian borders, allowing greater control of tax evasion and a break with the drug and arms trafficking circuits that supply the large Brazilian centers. Many customs offices were rebuilt and the contingent of federal prosecutors and police officers expanded. This situation has provoked immediate reactions in the configuration of the *sacoleiro* circuit and in the social relations it involved, causing Foz do Iguaçu to have a period of crisis and economic and social reorganization in the first decade of the 21st century (Cardin, 2015).

The success of the Peacekeeper Police Units in Rio de Janeiro, a security program aimed at the occupation of the conflict zones by the State on an even wider scale, the reduction of crime in the cities that would host the Confederations Cup, the Football World Cup, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, required strict control of the access “gates” to Brazil. In this context, countless special security operations were carried out along the entire border of the country with the intention of limiting the entry of arms and drugs and of weakening criminal groups. Foz do Iguaçu has directly felt the impact of such policies. The economic recession, the decrease in the circulation of buyers, and the increase in violence in the municipality during the first decade of the 21st century are elements that, in some ways, were influenced by flow control policies (Cardin, 2015).

The inauguration of the new customs office on the border of Foz do Iguaçu-Brazil and Ciudad del Este-Paraguay made it difficult to use the Friendship Bridge as a way

out for goods purchased in the Paraguayan micro-center. The immediate response of the *sacoleiro* circuit was the use of ports, which were not official or regulated, to carry out the crossing of the goods. Some of these ports already existed and were used by drug and arms traffickers, but many others emerged. The difference between passing the goods through a public road (Friendship Bridge) and passing the goods through an often “private” space (the ports) has encouraged disputes between different groups, putting the municipality among the ten most violent cities in Brazil in 2006 and 2007 (Cardin, 2013).

While trade relations between Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este began to be more controlled, the movement of workers and goods on the border of Guairá and Salto do Guairá was strengthened, since there the control was still not so rigorous compared to Foz do Iguaçu (Fiorotti, 2015). However, it is not easy to affirm that there was an immediate migration on the part of the *sacoleiro* circuit; the understanding of this involves the observation of other movements. Supposedly, with the expansion of the use of ports in the region of Foz do Iguaçu, the Treasury and the Federal Police invested in technology (unmanned aircraft and ships) to monitor Lake Itaipu, making clandestine ports migrate to other points of the river border, bringing with them part of the violence that exists in Foz do Iguaçu (Cardin, 2015).

Thus, the number of homicides in Foz do Iguaçu has been decreasing successively after 2008, while the indicators for other municipalities bordering Paraguay are rising. Finally, the modification in the inspection imposed by the Brazilian government has demanded a reorganization of the *sacoleiro* circuit, visualized in: 1) the decrease of the groups operating in Foz do Iguaçu and, consequently, in a decrease of violence in the municipality; 2) the pulverization of the ports throughout the Itaipu Lake region; and in 3) the strengthening of commercial relations between Guairá, Brazil, and Salto del Guairá, Paraguay, to attend buyers and groups of *sacoleiro* mules that lost space in the use of the previously existing places of passage.

Final Thoughts

Within the historical cutback analyzed, it is observed that the uses of the border by the inhabitants of the region are related to the strengthening of the state presence and to the capitalist expansion towards the interior of Brazil. While the state devices did not strictly exercise their functions and capitalism lived through a phase of primitive accumulation, with direct expropriation of natural resources and workers without legal mediation, the local inhabitants occupied and lived in the region without considering the legal boundaries. Free movement and transnational networks were part of everyday life and guaranteed the existence of ways of living linked to their own territoriality.

During the 20th century, the attempt of the nation state to occupy and nationalize the region is visualized, first by administrative and population measures and, later, by the military presence. The purpose of such policies was to seek the realization of the “good frontier”, that is, the geographical, political, and cultural break that would mark the territorial boundary between two nations. To this end, the aim was to strengthen the national identity, disregarding the colonial continuity and the existing transnational

networks, as well as the insertion of the region in the political and administrative logic exercised by the federal government.

Finally, with the process of democratization and economic opening of the country in the late 1980s, there was a rapid growth of trade in the region and the proliferation of occupations that, in different ways, sought to take advantage of the existing economic and tax asymmetry between Brazil and Paraguay. In this context, other social phenomena gained visibility, covering up and modifying the traditional social practices of living on the border. If in the past the territory could be thought of through its use value, with the strengthening of the State and the expansion of capital in the region, its exchange value is increasingly highlighted.

Nowadays, the *sacoleiro* circuit is presenting different facets. If during the 1990s it was explicit, expressed by convoys that were able to unite more than a hundred rented buses to transport goods from Paraguay, today it is less visible. The main merchandise traded on the border between Brazil and Paraguay is cigarettes, which enter Brazilian territory via unofficial ports, but mainly along the dry border between Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraguay.

If Paraguay had at one point been important based on the sale and distribution of electro/electronics, that importance has dropped a lot in recent years due to the ease of credit in Brazil, the shopping circuit Brazil-Miami, USA, as well as by the emergence of other forms of distribution of goods. Although further investigations are necessary, the observations made point to a change in trade relations established at the border. At present, the insertion of the *sacoleiro* circuit into the “virtual world”, with the use of the Internet for shopping and banking transactions, is being visualized; while on the other hand there is the return of a typical buyer profile from the 1980s, with the presence of workers responsible for directly mediating Paraguayan stores and the immediate consumer.

Today the frontier has many facets, which are defined by the place of origin of the observer and also by the form of use attributed to it. While the different workers in the *sacoleiro* circuit see in it the potential for profit or a minimum income, other people see it as a mechanism that helps reduce the house costs by expanding the competition for the sale of essential products, others, as an extension of the possibilities of entertainment and, finally, some others who are indifferent to all this, remain so, as they do not consider the border as a limit.

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