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Guaranía as a strategy of decolonial rebellion and social revolution

La guaranía como estrategia de rebelión decolonial y revolución social

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Abstract

The objective of this exploratory research is to shed light on the transformative socio-cultural mission of the *guaranía*, a product of resilience. The methodology employed relies primarily on participant observation as its central technique. The findings indicate that: 1) the primordial *guaranía* dates back to the era of Paraguay's Independence (1811-1815); 2) its core development took place in Buenos Aires, although its roots are deeply embedded in the territory of the *Interior Paraguay*; and its most influential works belong to the *porteño* exile of the *Exterior Paraguay*, which, through a synergistic exchange with the Interior Paraguay, became a key factor in social mobilization and political change, such as the overthrow of the *Stronist* dictatorship (1954–1989). The study concludes that the *guaranía* is imbued with dialectical tensions between opposing poles, such as the following: 1) it rescues the identity-bearing song of the forest, while employing the European phrasing of *bel canto*; 2) the exile of intellectuals and artists becomes a reward that grants creative freedom, although persecution also operates beyond borders, further enhancing creativity; and 3) the main figures of *Stronist* song ultimately become the principal interpreters of the proscribed songs, following the political shift of 1989.

Keywords: Cultural decoloniality, STAS approach (Science, Technology, Art, and Society), dialectical tensions, *Paraguay Abroad*.

Resumen

El objetivo de la presente investigación exploratoria es arrojar luz sobre la misión sociocultural transformadora de la guaranía, producto de la resiliencia. La metodología empleada tiene como técnica predominante la observación participante. Los hallazgos señalan que: 1) la guaranía primigenia data de los tiempos de la Independencia del Paraguay (1811-1815); 2) su desarrollo troncal tiene lugar en Buenos Aires, si bien sus raíces están profundamente arraigadas en territorio del *Paraguay Interior*; y 3) sus obras más influyentes pertenecen al exilio porteño del *Paraguay Exterior* que, en intercambio sinérgico con el *Paraguay Interior*, se constituyen en factor clave de la movilización social y los cambios políticos como el derrocamiento de la dictadura estronista (1954-1989). Con este estudio se concluye en que la guaranía está impregnada de *tensiones dialécticas* entre polos opuestos, como las siguientes: 1) rescata el canto identitario de la selva, pero valiéndose del fraseo europeo del *bel canto*; 2) el destierro de intelectuales y artistas, constituye un premio que concede libertad creativa, aunque la persecución también opera extrafronteras, lo cual potencia aún más la creatividad; y 3) los principales referentes de la canción estronista, terminan siendo también los principales intérpretes de las canciones proscritas, a partir del cambio de 1989.

Palabras clave: Decolonialidad cultural, enfoque CTAS (Ciencia, Tecnología, Arte y Sociedad), tensiones dialécticas, Paraguay exterior.

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Introduction

On December 9, 2024, UNESCO recognized guarania, whose principal promoter was José Asunción Flores (1904–1972), as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In the wake of that event, amid enthusiastic applause for Flores, those who had cruelly opposed him were photographed prominently. They had opposed him for being a communist, an atheist, and an opponent of the *peace and progress* of Alfredo Stroessner's prolonged autocratic regime (1954–1989): "the peace of the graveyards and the progress of those subservient to the system," as Flores and other persecuted individuals described it.

The *reasons* for conducting this research are:

1. Guaranía plays a central role in Paraguay's sociopolitical development, particularly from its exile in Buenos Aires, where it underwent its greatest development as a musical genre.
2. Nevertheless, its influence remains largely unrecognized, both in academia and by the general public.
3. This is because the phenomenon has never been studied with the necessary depth and scientific rigor.

Indeed, the research is conducted from a STAS (Science, Technology, Art, and Society) perspective, which focuses on the social impacts of science, technology, and art.

The *author's intention* is to shed light on the mission that guarania has fulfilled as a strategy of *decolonial rebellion* and *social revolution* since its standardized formulation in 1925. The standardized formulation of guarania establishes the rhythmic and expressive pattern of the musical genre. It was systematized by José Asunción Flores, thereby facilitating its transmission.

In this regard, its connection with sociopolitical events such as those of 1989 will become apparent. These events brought Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorial regime to an end, ushered in a process of democratization, and paved the way for more empathetic coexistence within Paraguayan society.

The *background* to the present study can be summarized in the following provisional truths:

Beginning in 1940 and continuing in subsequent years, Paraguay experienced a massive migration of artists and intellectuals who, persecuted by dictatorial regimes, generally lived and worked in neighboring countries. A parallel history of Paraguayan culture thus developed outside Paraguay. The most important symphonic composers settled in Buenos Aires, including José Asunción Flores (1904–1972) [...] Herminio Giménez (1905–1991) [...] and Carlos Lara Bareiro (1914–1988). (Szarán, 1997, p. 32)

For its part, UNESCO (2024) states that "guaranía is perceived as a symbol of Paraguayan resilience and values, promoting a sense of shared identity and belonging among Paraguayans and the diaspora" (para. 1).

As will be seen below, a careful examination of these provisional truths will enable us to understand the call to insubordination embodied by guarania in exile and the motivation of its creators, which goes beyond merely maintaining a connection with *identity* and *belonging*.

Our *decolonial* theoretical framework encompasses the following:

From the perspective of the abyssal epistemologies of the Global North [...] a massive epistemicide has occurred over the past five centuries, through which an immense wealth of cognitive experiences has been lost. To recover some of these experiences, the ecology of knowledges resorts to intercultural translation... Embedded in different Western and non-Western cultures, these experiences use not only different languages but also different

categories, symbolic universes, and aspirations for a better life [...] Between [...] two positions (the Eurocentric and the local) are those that maintain that there is not one but many philosophies and believe that mutual dialogue and enrichment are possible. These positions [...] nevertheless consider that incommensurability does not necessarily prevent communication and may even allow for unexpected forms of complementarity [...] through intercultural translation. (Santos, 2010, p. 57)

This proposition provides a highly relevant theoretical basis for understanding guarania as a sociocultural phenomenon. The notion of an *ecology of knowledges* sheds light on the way in which this musical genre articulates dialectical tensions between local traditions and global frameworks, demonstrating that incommensurability can indeed open the door to complementarity.

We will see that guarania emerges as a space of resilience and creation in which the identity-affirming song of the forest contends with the European phrasing of *bel canto*. This and other tensions that characterize the sociocultural phenomenon do not cancel each other out; rather, they generate new forms of artistic expression in synergy with processes of social mobilization and political transformation, such as those that brought about the end of the dictatorship in Paraguay.

Thus, guarania occupies a horizon of intercultural and decolonial dialogue in which marginalized forms of knowledge regain relevance and become a driving force for change. The contemporary relevance of this perspective is reflected in guarania's capacity to embody a cultural practice that simultaneously preserves memory and projects new forms of identity and resistance.

The specific objectives of the research are:

1. To investigate the *big bang* of guarania: its invention, its context of decoloniality and

resilience, the problem it posed to Italian masters and their inability to solve it, José Asunción Flores's scientific solution, and its formalization.

2. To map the *boom* of guarania: its three foundational movements in *External Paraguay*, its Buenos Aires experience, its conditional freedom, its flourishing, and its technologies for social cohesion.
3. To unravel the *boomerang* of guarania: its stages of transfer and its *de-exile*.

In this study, resilience is understood as the capacity of society and its members to overcome the trauma caused by repression, persecution, and especially exile through the creation, performance, and consumption of guaranías (and Paraguayan music in general) as a means of sociocultural struggle.

The concept of the formalization of guarania refers to the adoption, by the academic music community, of the standardized formulation of the genre developed by José Asunción Flores.

The expression *de-exile of guarania* refers to the return to the geographical territory of Paraguay (*Internal Paraguay*) of the musical genre that had been expelled along with its practitioners and subsequently enriched in exile (*External Paraguay*).

Methodology

In terms of its level of depth, the study is *exploratory*. It follows a *qualitative approach*. It is *non-experimental* and *longitudinal*, as it analyzes different stages in the evolution of guarania.

The *desk research* involved *bibliographic analysis*. The authors selected adopt decolonial perspectives. Material produced during the period examined in greater detail (1954–1989, coinciding with the Stroessner dictatorship) was analyzed, including *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, which provides a comprehensive account of the social phenomena of that period (Galeano, 1971). Artificial Intelligence was used as an auxiliary tool to facilitate the location of quotations recalled by the author.

Documentary analysis was also conducted, encompassing graphic and audio materials, musical scores, letters, and recordings on vinyl and open-reel

tape. This made it possible to carry out a *poetic-musical analysis* and characterize the sociocultural impact of the artistic production of the genre under study, taking into account the contributions of qualified informants.

These informants participated in individual *in-depth interviews*. Through these interviews, fundamental contributions—generally in the form of personal testimony—were provided by prominent figures such as Eva de Abente (1935), wife of Carlos Federico Abente (1914–2018), lyricist of the emblematic guarania *Ñemity* (*Sowing*); pianist and music teacher Ariel Romero, son of poet Elvio Romero (1926–2004), who wrote the lyrics to *María de la Paz*, Flores's symphonic poem and a powerful plea for world peace; researcher Armando Almada, biographer of José Asunción Flores; the daughter of one of Flores's partners; poet Gilberto Ramírez Santacruz, former cultural attaché at the Paraguayan Embassy in Argentina; Romualdo Aldana, president of the GuaraniA Cultural Association; Arturo Gómez Zayas, former president of Guarani'A; folklore graduate Sindy Molina, former secretary of Guarani'A; cultural promoter Dionisio Rodríguez; social and cultural activist Juan Carlos Enciso; Gustavo Miranda, former minister at the Paraguayan Embassy in Argentina; and Noemí Zamora and Alfredo Tabacman, presenters of *La voz del Deportivo Paraguayo* (*The Voice of Deportivo Paraguayo*), a renowned radio program from the 1980s broadcast by Radio *Buenos Aires*, with an audience of approximately 3 million listeners.

Their voices essentially made it possible to construct the core of the study's theoretical framework, in keeping with its decolonial perspective. Indeed, their statements and ideas encapsulate the philosophy of guarania. In this regard, particular attention should be drawn to primary sources such as ethnomusicologist Guillermo Sequera and aesthetician Manuel Martínez Domínguez, whose central contribution was to explain that aesthetics and musicology, as we know them, are European disciplines that are ill-suited to the study of Latin American music, art, and culture (Martínez-Domínguez, 2025).

The predominant technique employed repeatedly during the *fieldwork*, however, was *participant observation*, given that several of the researcher's music teachers included him as a singer in their concerts and performances of Paraguayan zarzuela, opera, and other forms of musical theater, as well as in festivals and conferences.

These teachers are practitioners and/or researchers of the genre who played leading roles in the development and consolidation of guarania. They include musicians José Asunción Flores, Herminio Giménez, Epifanio Méndez Fleitas (1917–1985), Luis Szaran (1953), Diego Sánchez Haase (1970), and Bernardino Méndez Vall (1947); as well as songwriters Elvio Romero, Augusto Roa Bastos (1917–2005), and Carlos Agustín Bedoya (Tumbita) (1936–2021).

The researcher also had opportunities to observe the sociocultural phenomenon through the radio and television programs he hosted on stations in Buenos Aires (Radio *Buenos Aires*, *Excelsior*, and *Belgrano*) and Asunción (Radio *Paraguay* and *Nacional del Paraguay*), as well as on television channels such as the Ministry of Education's *Educational Channel* in Asunción.

The *fieldwork* additionally included visits to research institutions and museums, such as the Guarani'A Cultural Association (Buenos Aires Province, Argentina); the private museum owned and directed by cultural promoter Arcadio Pérez (Buenos Aires Province, Argentina); and the Juan Max Boettner Institute of Musicology at the Agustín Barrios Mangoré Bicentennial House of Music (Asunción, Paraguay).

Our aim has been to produce findings through *intersubjectivity*. Having characterized the sources, we collected and cross-referenced the data and drew the *inductive inferences* that will be presented in the Results and Discussion sections of this study.

Results

1. The *Big Bang* of Guarania

a. Its invention

The origins of guarania can be traced back to the period of Paraguay's Independence (1811):

[...] the *purahéi asy* (plaintive song) is the mother of guarania. Let us not forget that this form [...] is so old that it was documented by the Robertson brothers [...] in their book *Letters on Paraguay*, as far back as 1811–1815 [...] they wrote: *I greatly enjoyed the plaintive airs sung by the Paraguayans*. (Cardozo Ocampo, 1965, p. 49)

b. Its context of decoloniality and resilience

“The Paraguayan home is a bleeding ruin: it is a fatherless home” (Barrett, 2007, p. 13). This celebrated statement characterizes the bleak situation at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the aftermath of the *War of the Triple Alliance* (1864–1870), fought by Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay against Paraguay.

Also known as the *War of the Triple Infamy*, it was orchestrated by the British Empire. Its purpose was to put an end to the dangerous example of decolonial rebellion that had begun with Paraguay’s Independence and had been led by José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1766–1840), Carlos Antonio López (1792–1862), and Francisco Solano López (1842–1870). This consisted of the nation’s independent industrial development, which at the time positioned it as *the giant of the Americas*.

In this regard, Galeano (1971, p. 110) states:

The invasion was financed, from beginning to end, by the Bank of London, Baring Brothers, and the Rothschild banking house, through loans at usurious rates that mortgaged the fortunes of the victorious countries. Until its destruction, Paraguay stood as an exception in Latin America: the only nation that foreign capital had not deformed.

In view of the devastation summarized in Barrett’s quotation above (2007), the following occurred in Paraguay:

[...] around 1900, a number of highly influential intellectual figures began to emerge [...] in what is now known as the Generation of 1900 [...] whose [...] principal undertaking, as Rubén Bareiro Saguier aptly puts it, consisted of affirming the spiritual values of a nation rising again from catastrophe. (Méndez-Faith, 2009, p. 44)

This explains why José Asunción Flores (1904–1974), imbued with a patriotic spirit and the urgent need for resilience, like many young people of the time, became committed to rebuilding his homeland through the recovery of its cultural and identity-based heritage.

Thus, he enthusiastically supported the efforts of the Italian masters of the Police Band to keep traditional Paraguayan music alive as part of the ensemble’s official repertoire. This continued the tradition initiated by the López administrations of securing the services of Italian musicians with distinguished careers in the world of music.

c. The problem the Italian masters were unable to solve

Until then, polka scores were written either in three-beat measures¹ (melody and accompaniment) or in two-beat measures with triplets², and without syncopation³.

Strictly speaking, this way of writing the polka did not represent the musicians’ actual performance practice. They played their instruments according to a tradition handed down from generation to generation, by word of mouth... and from ear to ear.

Nicolino Pellegrini (1873–1933), director of the Asunción Police Band, and the other Italian masters in the ensemble read these scores and reproduced the music exactly as written. As might be expected, it sounded different from the way Paraguayans performed it.

d. José Asunción Flores’s scientific solution

Flores’s contribution to guarania was highly significant and of great practical value to the development of

Paraguayan music. Contrary to widespread belief, however, Flores never proclaimed himself the *creator* of guarania, although he did not object to being regarded as the *discoverer* of the musical genre.

Flores studied the acoustic phenomenon underlying the music of his homeland in order to: 1) help the Italian masters understand Paraguayan music and thus 2) revitalize national identity following the inhumane dispossession his country had suffered, with Great Britain providing a solid foundation for Paraguay's destruction as a regional power by financing the *Triple Alliance*.

In 1925, at the age of 20, Flores succeeded in deciphering the algorithm underlying its rhythmic pattern, discovering that the melody a) unfolds over six beats per measure and b) is superimposed on an accompaniment of three beats per measure⁴, entrusted to the *basso ostinato*⁵.

According to physics, low-pitched sounds such as those of the aforementioned accompaniment are produced by low-frequency vibrations of the waves that generate them (Gaona, 2010). The lower the frequency of the sound wave, the greater the number of harmonics audible to the human ear that are generated through *sympathetic resonance* (Méndez-Mazó, 2025a).

Flores also identified and incorporated into the score the syncopation characteristic of Paraguayan music, as defined above. It derives from the prosody of the Guaraní language, with hiatuses and vowel lengthening in certain syllables that create a sense of anticipation and invite reflection before the expression continues. It is commonly known as *Paraguayan syncopation*, an "expression used by musicologist Juan Max Boettner to define the specific quality of Paraguayan music, [which] constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of Paraguay's popular music" (Szaran, 1997, p. 440).

Flores's research involved experimentation, slowing down (reducing the performance speed of) the polka in order to gain a better understanding of this polyrhythmic phenomenon.

e. Its formalization

In this way, the appeal generated by what music theory defines as polyrhythm—a particularly distinctive feature of this musical genre—became more apparent. A *new* form of music for Paraguay, guarania, was thus formalized; it is essentially a slowed-down polka.

It should be noted, for example, that the guarania *Che pycasumi* (*My Little Dove*), immortalized in an accomplished recording by Joan Manuel Serrat (1943), has the same melody as the polka *María Escobar*, but not the same *tempo*⁶. Guarania is slow, whereas the polka is fast.

José Asunción Flores can therefore be credited specifically with the following intellectual contributions to the evolution of Paraguayan music: 1) the systematization of polka notation and 2) the formalization of its slower variant, guarania.

The phrasing of formalized guarania was drawn from *bel canto*, Italian opera, and the Neapolitan *canzonetta*, which the young José Asunción learned from his Italian teachers (Sequera, 2023).

2. The Guarania Boom

a. Its Three Foundational Movements of *Paraguay Exterior*

First movement: The refounding of Buenos Aires. This dates back to Juan de Garay's (1528–1583) expedition of 1580. *****The relationship between Buenos Aires and Paraguay, and with the Guaraní people, began [...] when Garay (re)founded the city of Buenos Aires" (Gutiérrez-Miño, 2007, p. 17).

Garay left Asunción with a contingent of Guaraní people and mestizos who would become the first inhabitants of the new city. Through this foundational act, Asunción became the mother of Buenos Aires, and Guaraní the mother tongue of those who would be born there.

This movement was political, linguistic, and cultural. Paraguay's deep-rooted connection to the land took root in the Río de la Plata. This movement sowed the conditions that, three and a half centuries later, would allow guarania to find fertile ground for its development in Buenos Aires.

Second movement: The expulsions following the War of the Triple Alliance. At the dawn of the twentieth century, while the wounds of the *Great War* were still bleeding, significant waves of migration took place, with political factors constituting the main cause of Paraguay's social transformation (Ayala, 1989, p. 129).

Prominent representatives of this exodus include the poet Marcelino Pérez Martínez (1881–1912), exiled in 1908, and the classical guitarist Agustín Pío Barrios Mangoré (1885–1944), exiled in 1925. Together, they created emblematic works such as the polka *La kyguavera*, which preceded the standardized guarania developed by Flores.

Kyguavera literally translates from Guaraní as *The Large Comb*. In its lyrical context, however, its connotation may be interpreted as *The Woman with the Shining Comb*.

Boettner (n.d.) emphasizes that “without a doubt, Marcelino Pérez Martínez was one of the most cultured men of his time.” Pérez Martínez was a pioneer of poetry combining Spanish and Guaraní and the Paraguay correspondent for the Buenos Aires magazine *Caras y Caretas*. From his exile in Corrientes, Argentina, he wrote his celebrated and powerful denunciations, compiled in *Cartas del destierro* [*Letters from Exile*] (Pérez-Martínez & López-Decoud, 1984).

Mangoré, for his part, introduced technical innovations in guitar composition and performance, such as assigning the melody to the lower notes (the sixth, fifth, and fourth strings, or bass strings) and the accompaniment to the higher notes (the first, second, and third strings) in the form of a trill (the very rapid alternating execution of two notes) or tremolo (the very rapid repetition of the same note).

The expulsion of intellectuals and artists thus became a recurring phenomenon that would continue almost until the end of the twentieth century. Flores migrated to Buenos Aires in 1928. He returned to Paraguay to fight in the *Chaco War* (1932–1935) and to serve during the short-lived revolutionary government led by Rafael Franco, who was in power from February 17, 1936, to August 13, 1937. He served as director of the

Guaraní Folk Orchestra and the *Asunción School of Primary Music Education*, thereby inaugurating the development of official academic music in Paraguay.

Following Franco's overthrow, Flores was once again forced into exile in Buenos Aires. He took with him the poem *Buenos Aires, salud* [*Greetings, Buenos Aires*], which the poet Manuel Ortiz Guerrero (1894–1933) had given him shortly before his death, so that Flores could set it to music and use it as a calling card.

Third movement: The exile caused by the overthrow of the government of the 1936 *Febrerista Revolution*, the Civil War of 1947, and the Stroessner dictatorship from 1954 to 1989. Skilled migrants sought refuge in Buenos Aires, where *Paraguay Exterior* became firmly established as an epicenter of cultural resistance. Leading figures of Paraguayan identity, such as Flores, Abente, Roa Bastos, and many others, found inspiration in the Argentine capital.

With lyrics commissioned by the composer from Carlos Federico Abente, José Asunción Flores composed *Ñemity* (*Sowing*). At the time, Eva de Abente was living with her aunt in Vicente López, Buenos Aires Province, where she met the physician and poet who would become her husband. In an in-depth interview conducted by the researcher at the key informant's residence in Vicente López (Buenos Aires Province, Argentina) on July 19, 2025, Eva de Abente explained:

The idea was Flores's. It was in 1944. That was when Carlos came to treat my aunt, who was Mrs. Riera's widow, and she became seriously ill [...] So I always said that I am the mother of *Ñemity*, because I watched it grow, you see, watched it take shape in our home.

“Paint your village and you will paint the world” (a phrase attributed to Russian writer Leo Tolstoy). With *Ñemity* was born an anthem to Paraguayan and universal farmworkers, which may be heard through the link provided in this source (Abente & Flores, 2025).

b. Its Buenos Aires

Like other prominent artists, Flores developed most of his work in Buenos Aires. He exchanged aesthetic ideas with Argentine musicians Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983) and Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) and formulated his symphonic poems. *Guaranía* thus attained the status of symphonic, *universal*, or *art music*, although José Asunción made no distinction between *art* and *popular* music.

In 1958, he learned that Chagas disease could end his life at any moment. Flores therefore hastened to record his most elaborate works. By then, *guaranía* had already attracted the attention of major centers of musicology and conductors of the stature of Yuri Aranovich (1932–2002). Primarily during the 1960s, Aranovich conducted recordings of Flores's symphonic poems performed by the *Moscow Radio and Television Orchestra and Double Choir*. His work *Gallito cantor* became the theme music of *Radio Moscow*.

By then, *guaranía* had become an aesthetic praxis of exile. Music was active melancholy, while *Guaraní* had reaffirmed itself as a voice of resistance. The lyrics became more explicit in their call for justice.

Buenos Aires thus became the most prolific source of Paraguayan music and culture and the city with the largest Paraguayan population in the world, with approximately one million Paraguayans living there by the 1980s, toward the end of the Stroessner dictatorship. From that cosmopolitan capital, the leading intellectuals, creators, and artists of their time constructed twentieth-century Paraguayan culture and projected it to the world.

Perhaps nothing represents Paraguay better than works such as the novels *I, the Supreme* (Augusto Roa Bastos, 1917–2005) and *The Exiles* (Gabriel Casaccia, 1907–1980); the poems *A Handful of Earth* (Herib Campos Cervera, 1905–1953) and *De caminante [The Wanderer]* (Elvio Romero, 1926–2004); and musical works and songs such as *Galopera* (Mauricio Cardozo Ocampo, 1907–1982), *Mis noches sin ti [My Nights Without You]*, *Recuerdo de Ypacaraí [Memories of Ypacaraí]* (Demetrio Ortiz, 1916–1975), *El canto de mi selva [The Song of My*

Forest] (Herminio Giménez, 1905–1991), and *Ñemity (Sowing)* (Carlos Federico Abente, 1914–2018 – José Asunción Flores, 1904–1972).

On July 3, 2025, *guaranía* was declared to be of cultural interest by the Legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. This was not motivated by any desire to appropriate the heritage of the Paraguayan people. Rather, “*guaranía* was born in Paraguay, but developed in Buenos Aires,” cultural promoter Dionisio Rodríguez stated in an individual in-depth interview with the researcher. Indeed, the *territorialized history of the sonic resignification of guaranía* must be understood through the three migratory events discussed above.

c. Its Conditional Freedom

It is well known that expatriation was the severest punishment in Ancient Greece. Exiled creators endured the pain of estrangement. Yet in addition to this emotional constraint, skilled migrants suffered ruthless persecution that kept them constantly on edge, even beyond Paraguay's geographical borders.

As in *Paraguay Interior*, *Paraguay Exterior* had the social institution of *pyragüeató*, that is, surveillance by the *pyragüé* (spy or informer, in *Guaraní*), which was even more dangerous in *Paraguay Exterior*.

Indeed, unlike *Paraguay Interior*, where *we all know one another*, in *Paraguay Exterior* the *pyragüé* was an invisible, unidentifiable phantom, disappearing into the vast human tide of an enormous metropolis such as Buenos Aires, which at the time had twelve million inhabitants.

This factor multiplied its effectiveness and resulted in the abduction and enforced disappearance of major sociocultural figures of *Paraguay Exterior* in Argentina. Precisely because their movements cannot be traced, it is impossible to confirm whether the claim that singer Samuel Aguayo (1909–1993), for example, was a *pyragüé* is fact or myth. Yet his name invariably appears on the list of figures socially condemned by the exiles.

The coup d'état known as the *Argentine Revolution* (1966–1973), whose principal figure was General Juan Carlos Onganía, marked the beginning of a disastrous Argentine dictatorship. In 1970, following

widespread popular discontent and the *Cordobazo*, Onganía was removed and Alejandro Agustín Lanusse assumed power. A liberal-leaning military officer, Lanusse sought a political solution through the *Great National Agreement* (GAN), aimed at achieving a transition to democracy.

During this period, maestro José Asunción Flores recounted helplessly that, upon returning to his apartment, he frequently found everything in disarray, with musical scores destroyed or missing. The visits of the *pyragüé* and their illegal activities on foreign soil (Argentina) enjoyed the protection of the de facto government. Meanwhile, the Paraguayan (mis)government mocked the very suffering it had caused by describing the tragic experience of the persecuted as a *golden exile*.

In South America [...] since the early 1970s, the political repression taking place within each country acquired an additional and sinister regional dimension through the so-called Operation Condor [...] This can be observed in three aspects: 1) the exchange of information [...] 2) the conduct of joint operations by international working groups [...] 3) the clandestine transfer of persons detained in one country to their country of origin. (ESRC, Impact Acceleration Account, 2025)

Thus, the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983 implemented the *National Reorganization Process*, with the firm backing of *Operation Condor*. The persecution of intellectuals and artists exiled in Argentina consequently intensified, including figures such as Epifanio Méndez Fleitas and Agustín Goiburú (1930–abducted in 1977), both dissident activists of Paraguay's ruling *Colorado Party*, itself *hijacked* by Stroessner. The former, a musician and politician, was abducted on three occasions and came close to being handed over to Stroessner. In 1978, he was rescued through the intervention of UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*) and U.S. President Jimmy Carter (1924–2024), a humanist politician and

member of the *Democratic Party* (Méndez-Vall, 2004, p. 34).

Physician and activist Goiburú was a thinker who inspired other intellectuals and artists of the Paraguayan diaspora, with whom he maintained strong bonds of mutual affection and admiration. He did not share Méndez Fleitas's good fortune. He was abducted on February 2, 1977, and his remains have yet to be found (Boccia-Paz, 2014).

Following the democratic opening of 1989, Rogelio Goiburú, one of his sons and himself a physician and philanthropist, served as Director of *Human Rights* at Paraguay's Ministry of Justice and searched for the remains of those who died as victims of the *Stroessner dictatorship*.

d. Its Flourishing

Paraguay Exterior engaged in exchanges of solidarity, principally with the peoples of Latin America, who were similarly oppressed by civil-military dictatorships and the sinister *Operation Condor*. Among the personalities who befriended Flores and other Paraguayan cultural leaders were the poets Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) of Chile, Rafael Alberti (1902–1999) of Spain, and Nicolás Guillén (1902–1989) of Cuba.

From this form of intercultural exchange emerged works combining poetry and music that enjoyed widespread acclaim among Paraguayans and non-Paraguayans alike.

e. Its Technologies for Social Cohesion

Radio was the predominant means of communication at the time. Paraguayan music recordings were broadcast over the airwaves. At construction sites, Paraguayan workers enjoyed the music of their homeland through radio programs such as *La voz del Deportivo Paraguay* [*The Voice of Deportivo Paraguay*] (*Radio Buenos Aires*, 1980s).

"Well, for those who were here, many of them in exile, this music transported them back to their country, their hometown, their people, their customs," said Alfredo Tabacman, announcer for *La voz del Deportivo Paraguay*, in an individual in-depth interview

conducted by the researcher in Buenos Aires in July 2025.

Noemí Zamora, also an announcer for *La voz del Deportivo Paraguayo*, interviewed by the researcher in Buenos Aires in July 2025, recalled:

I had to learn Guaraní phonetics so that I could announce them [the musical pieces]. And I remembered [...] those films [...] in which guarania is present [...] films by Armando Bo, [...] Isabel Sarli with Guillermo Murray, for example, and the music was by José Asunción Flores.

Programs such as *La voz del Deportivo Paraguayo* conveyed to their *Paraguay Exterior* listeners messages in their mother tongue and native song—Guaraní and guarania—with which they identified: “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1996).

3. The Guaranía Boomerang

a. Its Transfer Stations

Dictator Stroessner referred to the excesses fostered by his administration in Paraguay as *the price of peace*:

In Asunción, the small middle class drinks Ballantine’s whisky instead of Paraguayan cane liquor. One comes across the latest models of the most luxurious automobiles manufactured in the United States or Europe, brought into the country through smuggling or upon payment of minimal import duties, while at the same time ox-drawn carts can be seen in the streets, slowly carrying produce to market: the land is worked with wooden plows, while the taxis are Impalas. (Galeano, 1971, p. 114)

Meanwhile, Lila Mazó (1917–1998), a singer from *Paraguay Exterior*, hosted *peñas*—informal gatherings centered on music and culture—at her home in San Telmo, Buenos Aires. There, Flores met Eladio Martínez (1912–1990), who, while residing in *Paraguay Interior*, regularly traveled to Buenos Aires to record his albums. They took advantage of these occasions to exchange aesthetic ideas and approaches to musical creation and to sing duets. This constituted one of the *channels for guarania’s return from exile*, which the *New Paraguayan Song Movement* embraced as a banner of sociocultural

vindication in *Paraguay Interior* during the 1970s and 1980s (Bogado-Rolón, 2018, p. 27).

b. Its Return from Exile

“Exiles soon became vehicles for disseminating cultural ideas from abroad [...] and for emphasizing human rights and democracy in Latin American countries” (Roniger et al., 2021).

Indeed, *Paraguay Exterior* and its guarania never abandoned their cultural roots. They are like a sturdy tree rising to unprecedented heights. It blossoms and branches out until it reaches the skies above *Paraguay Interior*, from where it drops its fruit and seeds onto the fertile soil of “a barren country, deep inside,” as Lincoln Silva (1945–2016) refers to *Paraguay Interior* in his poem *No te diré el lugar [I Will Not Tell You the Place]*.

In several countries in the region, the landscape was likewise reshaped under the influence of sociocultural exile:

Through our study of the policies implemented by Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay to regulate exile and return, and through the information gathered, we trust that our readers have been able to recognize one of the central objectives of our book: namely, to assess the role and impact of exiles, expatriates, migrants, returnees, and residents during periods of political and cultural change, with particular attention to the process of rebuilding public spheres, civic responsibility, and democratic values. (Roniger et al., 2021, p. 377)

Paraguay Exterior and *Paraguay Interior* mutually nourish and reinforce one another. This synergy forged a powerful component of the social forces that brought down Stroessner’s 35-year dictatorship in 1989 and laid new foundations for decolonizing forms of coexistence and for the reclamation of national symbols such as tereré and guarania.

Discussion

After examining the *big bang* of guarania, we may draw the following conclusion: a central aspect of its morphology is the interplay of two competing rhythms, which gives rise to a polyrhythm consisting of six beats per measure in the melody and three beats per measure in the accompaniment.

At the same time, guarania reclaims the identity-defining song of the forest, while drawing on the European phrasing of *bel canto*.

After mapping the *guaranía boom*, we find that the exile imposed on intellectuals and artists by governments and political upheavals paradoxically rewards those subjected to it by unintentionally granting them creative freedom. This freedom, however, is constrained by repression beyond national borders, namely *pyragüeato* (informing), abduction, and murder.

Far from intimidating the exiles, repression stimulates their philanthropic and patriotic motivation, strengthening their courage and triggering an explosion of resilient talent from *Paraguay Exterior*.

Unraveling the *guaranía boomerang* allows us to conjecture that *Paraguay Exterior* played a leading role in Paraguay's liberation by stimulating the democratic aspirations of *Paraguay Interior* through protests and proposals channeled clandestinely into the country. This cultural action had a significant impact on political changes such as those of 1989, which marked a turning point in Paraguay's social development.

The leading exponents of *Stroessner-era songs* also became the principal performers of previously banned songs following the *democratization* process that began in 1989. This brought about a radical transformation, turning them into the most visible vehicles for bringing this music back from exile. It should be borne in mind that, by then, the creators and performers of *Paraguay Exterior* were either dead and therefore unable to return, or had returned but remained unknown or forgotten in *Paraguay Interior*.

From these dialectical tensions between opposing poles, it follows that guarania represents an act of

resilience on the part of the practitioners of the musical genre examined in this study.

Since the formal emergence of guarania in 1925, its practitioners have embraced the mission of advancing a *decolonial rebellion*, understood as a process of empathetically reclaiming Paraguayan identity in the face of colonial and neocolonial impositions. Their expressive devices were Guaraní-inspired messages of work, peace, and love, which still resonate as anthems of a homeland in a permanent process of (re)construction.

Ñemity (*Sowing*) is paradigmatic of this mission: a metaphor for Paraguay's advancement as a society, whose final line—conceived by Flores to crown Abente's poem—proclaims: "to uplift the nation." Indeed, the history of guarania is also the history of Paraguay's struggle to free itself from the chains of colonialism.

It is worth recalling that, upon gaining independence from the Spanish Crown in 1811, the patriots led by Dr. Francia firmly rejected the offer made by the Buenos Aires Junta to annex Paraguay to the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata. This commitment to sovereignty enabled the country to emerge as the *giant of the Americas* during the nineteenth century, until the *War of the Triple Alliance* (1864–1870), promoted by British interests, sought to thwart the example of *decolonial rebellion* that Paraguay represented in the region.

Following its defeat, the country was subjected to the rule of the *legionarios* imposed by the victors. Against this backdrop, in the early twentieth century José Asunción Flores brought guarania to life as an instrument of a new *decolonial rebellion* aimed at reclaiming the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Paraguayan identity. The earliest guaranías, written in Spanish and Guaraní, reflect the struggle to affirm national culture in the aftermath of the *Great War* and during the *Chaco War* (1932–1935), allegedly a war over Chaco oil (whose existence was never verified) between the multinational companies Standard Oil (*pro-Bolivia*) and Shell (*pro-Paraguay*).

During the first half of the twentieth century, emblematic guaranías by Flores emerged, including

Kerasy (*Nightmare*), the first guaranía to evoke suffering and hope in the face of adversity; *Arribeño resay* (*Tears of the Wanderer*), imbued with patriotic emotion; *India*, which became a cultural anthem of identity; *Panamby verá* (*Butterfly with Shining Wings*); and the aforementioned *Ñemity*, works that exalt nature and the Paraguayan land as symbols of social progress. Along the same lines, Herminio Giménez composed the guaranía *Cerro Corá*, with lyrics by Félix Fernández, immortalizing the final battle of the *War of the Triple Alliance* and Marshal López's sacrifice as an emblem of national resistance.

For much of the twentieth century, Paraguay was governed by regimes subordinate to foreign powers such as the United States and Brazil, which suppressed national identity and promoted dependency. Those most severely persecuted by these regimes were precisely patriots, intellectuals, and defenders of Paraguayan culture, who suffered imprisonment, torture, exile, and murder under dictatorships such as Stroessner's. Far from abandoning their cause, however, they intensified their decolonial struggle, convinced that the government served foreign interests contrary to those of the Paraguayan people.

The *decolonial rebellion* and *social revolution* were channeled to a considerable extent through the culture of *Paraguay Exterior*, with guaranías expressing both protest and proposals for change. This culture was reproduced within *Paraguay Interior* through initiatives such as the *New Song Movement*. This unfinished rebellion/revolution brought about, and will continue to bring about, transformations such as the ousting of Stroessner and the reinvention of Paraguayan national identity. A living example is *Memoria Viva*, a civil society initiative that champions guaranía as a revolutionary form of identity heritage by organizing concerts in Asunción's *Plaza de los Desaparecidos* [*Square of the Disappeared*].

On February 2, *Memoria Viva* commemorated the coup against Stroessner with an event entitled *DesStronizate* [*De-Stroessnerize Yourself*]. Guaranía thus reaffirms itself as a cultural weapon of struggle and a central pillar of the process referred to in this

study as *decolonial rebellion/social revolution*. The struggle continues, and guaranía endures.

Acknowledgement

The author offers a modest tribute to guaranía as a posthumous expression of gratitude to José Asunción Flores, his first teacher of Paraguayan music, without whose invaluable contributions this research would not have been possible: his own musical work, *Asunción che amor, yo soy la guaranía de la humanidad* [*Asunción, My Love, I Am the Guaranía of Humanity*], by Méndez-Mazó (2025b), available on Portal Guaraní.

Article notes

1. The three beats per measure (represented by three musical notes, generally quarter notes) define the rhythmic pattern of the waltz, which, strictly speaking, is not the same as that of the polka, whose rhythmic structure is more complex (polyrhythm).
2. Two beats divided into triplets consist of three beats fitted into a rhythmic unit (measure) that would normally contain two beats (like a cake divided into three portions even though it was originally marked to be divided into two):

Normal pattern: ♩ ♩
Triplet: ♩ ♩ ♩
3. Syncopation occurs when a note sounds outside its expected position. It occurs when an accented sound is anticipated or delayed so that, instead of falling on the corresponding strong beat, it falls on a weak beat. Imagine clapping along with a piece of music:
Normal: clap – silence – silence.
With syncopation: silence – silence – clap.
4. Melody: 6 beats (6 eighth notes) per measure: ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪.
Accompaniment (assigned to the bass): 3 beats (3 quarter notes) per measure: ♩ ♩ ♩
5. The expression *ostinato bass* refers to a rhythmic pattern (the 1, 2, 3 played by the bass or double bass) that remains unchanged and is constantly

repeated. *Ostinato*, translated from Italian into English, means *obstinate*.

6. *Tempo* is the speed of the music; it indicates how fast or slowly a musical work is performed.

Research data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study derive from publicly available documentary and bibliographic sources. These sources are duly cited and included in the reference list of this article. No additional quantitative datasets were generated.

Review comments

This article underwent an anonymous peer-review process in accordance with the journal's editorial transparency policy. The reviewers, who participated anonymously in this process, consented to the publication of the comments they provided during the review.

Review Comments 1: It is recommended that the article not be published in its current form. However, the author is encouraged to consider a comprehensive rewriting of the manuscript, paying particular attention to the critical issues identified in the attached material, with a view to submitting it in a future call for papers. The topic deserves to be developed with the rigor required of academic research, and the empirical material collected has the potential to support a significant contribution to the field of Latin American cultural studies, provided that the structural and conceptual shortcomings identified herein are addressed.

Review Comments 2: It is recommended that the submission be accepted for publication.

Review Comments 3: Publish once the author has made the adjustments specified in the review recommendations. Final recommendation: Publishable with revisions. Comments have been included in the text of the document.

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