



A TOWN OF WATER

T

he Avá Guaraní Paranaenses did not know hunger, disease, or borders until the end of the 1970s according to Carmen Sixta Martínez, one of the women who lived in the other community of Puerto Sauce in the Alto Paraná department at that time, and who is spearheading recovery of lands for the rebirth of Tekoha Sauce village.

Speaking mostly in Guaraní, she explained that life was calm and abundant with fish and food at that time. At one point, a Portuguese came, and explained that if they were traveling to the Brazilian side to visit relatives and vice versa; they could use the way to cross river by the Portuguese taxis which were canoes, in addition to exchanging products with the other villages through the sacred Paraná River with whom they maintained a close relationship of material and spiritual dependence.

She recalled that there was work at surrounding mills, but mainly the abundance of farms, woods and the river gave them a good life. Tearfully, she reflected on returning home and dying were what she desired since her ancestors were there.

The historical and anthropological studies ordered by Itaipú before beginning work had anthropologist Bartomeu Melià involved in stage one, but he said that he only managed to make a couple of trips and participate in a report, because he was later ex-



FACTSHEET

CASE: Tekoha Sauce

LOCATION: Limoy Reserve, San Alberto district, Alto Paraná.

SUBJECT/HUMAN RIGHTS

AFFECTED: 2- Agribusiness/2.3- Titling and land affairs.

JUDICIAL/GOVERNMENTAL STATUS

OF THE CASE: Itaipú sued the indigenous people of the Tekoha Sauce community.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE

AFFECTED: 43 families.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Tekoha Sauce is part of the 38 Ava Guaraní Paranaenses communities exiled by the Paraguayan Brazilian hydroelectric plant Itaipú in the early eighties during the military dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. Five years ago, they began a judicial process of resettlement to their ancestral lands, suffering a first eviction in 2016 by action of the soybean producer German Hutz (in-laws of the Colorado senator, and former vice president Juan Afara), and are currently under threat from the actions of the Itaipú Binacional. However, the support of organizations and parliamentarians opened a possibility of settlement.

iled by the military dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989).

It was the military dictatorships of Paraguay and Brazil which began the process of exile of the Ava Guaraní in both countries, starting with the Act of Foz de Iguazú in 1966, and then the Treaty of Itaipú in 1973 that was signed to build the largest hydroelectric dam in the world.

In compliance with the treaty, Paraguay approved Law No. 752 in 1979 by which 165,000 hectares of land were expropriated between Hernandarias and Salto de Guairá (Canindeyú and Alto Paraná departments) to make them an area of use and work for the hydroelectric plant, thus affecting various population sectors that are 38 indigenous communities. Puerto Sauce is one of the studies of Mariblanca Barón.

The preliminary studies for great engineering work are in Itaipú library, detailing¹ that in 1975, Puerto Sauce was made up of 36 families (190 individuals) in an area known as Paraguay Pyajhú on land belonging to the State under the title of Reserve 8 of the then IBR, Instituto de Bienestar Rural [Institute of Rural Wellbeing].

Regarding land tenure, the report addresses the complex situation of the indigenous people obtaining property titles of their land, and how state officials tried to deceive them.

"In Puerto Sauce, it has been slanted towards a regime of equating the indigenous people to the Paraguayan colonist in a land transfer made by an official that was neither competent, nor authorized to conduct that type of work. In some cases, arrangements have practically not been made. Only some people passing through the places give some hope to the indigenous people, and in the best of cases, they recommend that indigenous people do not leave their places, that they become strong in the occupation because it is the only way that they could support their demands"².

Melià himself stated that the Itaipú study was never completed, and that the Avá Guaraní Paranaenses indigenous people deserved to have their rights restored after being exiled. The binational itself does not recognize the total number of affected communities which according to the studies were 38 communities³.

1 Historical, Sociocultural and Archaeological Investigations of the Itaipú Area. Final Report First Stage, Asunción, 1975. Itaipú Binacional Library. Page 70.

2 Ibid. Page 74.

3 "The Avá Guaraní Paranaenses. A systematic ethnocide". Mariblanca Barón. Ceaduc. Asuncion, 2017.

The traumatic story of the exile of the Avá Guaraní Paranaenses occurs in the early 1980s during the military dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, and of General João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo in Brazil.

Paraguay and Brazil had signed the Itaipu Treaty in 1973, a document by which the conditions were established to build the largest hydroelectric plant in the world at that time, and one of those conditions in article 17, established the expropriation of land in the so-called “Area of Hydroelectric Use”.

On the Paraguayan side, it consisted of an area of 1,524 square kilometers that runs from Hernandarias, Alto Paraná department, to Salto del Guairá, Canindeyú department. The expropriation established through Law 752/79 determined an area of 165,000 hectares in total, and among the hundreds of those affected were the Avá Guaraní communities who lived on the banks of the Paraná River.

Cristóbal Martínez, current leader of the Tekoha Sauce community, said that he was a child when those from the so-called “Guaraní Project”, responsible for the transfers of the communities affected by Itaipú, arrived. His father was the community leader at the time, and he remembers that they did not want to leave; that they were the last to be transferred in the trucks because they did not believe in the threats that everything would flood; and that they would have nowhere to go.

Carmen Sixta recalled that those of the Guaraní Project promised them that they would return if the lands were not totally flooded, that in fact the lands were not totally flooded, but the promise which in that moment of despair was a light of hope was never fulfilled and in truth nothing but an empty promise of deception.

They got onto the trucks that Itaipu provided for the eviction with the few belongings they could carry on their backs, full of fear because they did not know where they were being taken. The apprehension only increased as they left the river banks to go hundreds of kilometers inland. According to Julio Martínez’s account, those of the Guaraní Project came to give money to some indigenous people to leave, but very small amounts compared to the land which they were forced to abandon.

The study ordered by Itaipú recommended creating 23 new settlements, but the binational distributed the 38 communities in eight settlements where other groups already existed, on lands that were mostly bought by the Catholic Church according to the research of Mariblanca Barón, published by the Ceaduc, Centro de Estudios Antropológicos de la Universidad Católica de Asunción [Center for Anthropological Studies of the Catholic University of Asunción], in 2017.

The Law No. 63/68 which ratified the convention on protection and integration of indigenous peoples established at that time indigenous people had to be transferred onto lands with the same characteristics they possessed, riverside in this case, but their sto-

EXILE AND THE DIASPORA



ry is they were left far away from a river with nothing in a dry area without woods.

Carmen Martínez reported that it was all a great deception, detailing that they were trucked out at night, in darkness, to a place called Vacareta. From there, they had to walk several kilometers to Yukyry, a 3,200-hectare community (now inhabited by 40 families with several attempts of occupation by peasants and politicians). There was no water, woods nor food, and it was already occupied by other groups.

"They honestly tricked us because they took us to a place to die; many old people, and children passed away," she said, detailing that just 2 weeks later, the first woman named Ña Juana expired, then large numbers deceased who could not even be buried in a box because no wood was available, so tree bark wrapped bodies.

"I had written down the names of all the dead, but we have moved so many times, that I have lost all the papers," she said.

81

It is important to highlight that the Ava Guaraní, and other Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Paraguay, began to lose territories from the time of Spanish Colonization. Especially after the great sale of public lands following the Great War (1864-1870), when foreign businessmen grabbed thousands of hectares of land from the Paraguayan State with populations existing on them, both indigenous and peasant.

The diaspora of the Avá Guaraní Paranaenses, as well as of other groups, worsened with the crash of the yerba mate business, when foreign businessmen, owners of large areas, began to sell off their land in parts, mostly to Brazilian producers.

The so-called brasiguayos obtained credits from the Brazilian State itself to buy arable land in Paraguay, in this case in Alto Paraná and Canindeyú according to Alberto Alderete, former president of the National Institute for Rural and Land Development. The destruction of the Atlantic Forest of Alto Paraná, and of other ecosystems in the region destroyed the natural habitat of the indigenous people, and the absence of specific public policies allowed, and still allows, the violation of their fundamental human rights.



Cristóbal talks of people dying of sadness as they were so bereaved in a totally different place from where they once lived, and he emphasizes an Aché Guaraní group also were inhabitants, but the resettled group could not endure and left.

He relates that years later, as an adult, they decided to move to Arroyo Guasu, a community that also received Avá Paranaenses indigenous people affected by Itaipú. He said that they did so with the assurance that they would return to their original lands since they knew that not everything had been flooded, and that several soybean producers were allowed to remain where the Avá Paranaenses had lived like the place, Kiritó.

THE RETURN AND SEARCH FOR THE TEKOHA

Kiritó is another of the 38 Ava Guaraní indigenous communities that were displaced by Itaipú, and whose lands, like Sauce, were not flooded, but remained in the hands of Brazilian soybean producers according to the members of that community. In Paraguay, the fake titles endorsed by Justice persist with SNC, Servicio Nacional de Catastro [National Land Registry Service], with a greater volume of land than actually exists has been characterized as national territory is registered with SNC.

In 2015, after identifying the place where the old cemetery of the Puerto Sauce community had been before Itaipú, and encouraged by information that there was a fiscal surplus in the area, Cristóbal and his group entered land that was later claimed by soybean businessman German Hutz, an in-law of former vice president of the Republic (2013-2018) and senator (2018-2023) Colorado party (ANR), Juan Afara.

82 The fiscal surplus increased due to a judicial measurement car-

ried out German Hutz himself, that proved that there were remnants of public land within his property in the area of Alto Paraná meaning that it could be claimed by people of agrarian reform such as peasants and indigenous people.

Finally, the community managed to settle in this place for a year, set up their houses, church and school as well as their farms and animals monitoring simultaneously to see if there were any complaints at the Public Ministry or Court regarding their occupancy according to Amada Martínez, teacher and leader in the community.

However, Friday September 30, 2016, the eviction order that spared nothing arrived; twelve patrol boats with agents of GEO, Grupo Especial de Operaciones [Special Operations Group], National Police, a Mounted Police squad, officials of INDI, Instituto Nacional del Indígena [National Institute of the Indigenous People], arrived, then government agents razed and burned everything, stealing their belongings.

Not far from the supposed lands of Hutz (since a survey indicates that he occupies public lands)[4], the community decided to take refuge at another point before the police arrived, and thus, they reached the place where they are now which is a small portion of the security strip of Itaipu, near the Limoy Reserve in the district of San Alberto, Alto Paraná department.

Itaipú Binacional began a judicial process, seeking to evict the indigenous people without hearing to their complaints as the entity had already done with the notes that were presented in previous years. The scandal was exposed detailing the excessive force with which the Sauce community had been evicted. Repercussions in the media and social networks, as well as the intervention of members of Congress, forced this intended action to be postponed.

The various publications in local and international media brought the Sauce case to a public attention which became the





impetus for a historic claim affecting thousands of Avá Guaraní Paranaenses' families.

This case is currently under study jointly by the Indigenous Peoples Commission of the Senate, Amnesty International, FAPI, Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas [Federation for Self-Determination of Indigenous Peoples], among others. Itaipu's position is the community was already resettled at the time, although their story does not coincide with the indigenous people's version, and they maintain that indigenous people do not deserve compensation as they are considered illegal squatters.

The proposal of the Senate Commission of Indigenous Peoples, which is being reviewed, is to modify the category of about 5,000 hectares of the Limoy Reserve by law to be ceded to the indigenous people, maintaining its category of wild reserve and using a special Management Plan, a proposal which Itaipú Bina-

tional has reservations.

This Reserve is located within ancestral territory of Avá Guaraní Paranaense of Puerto Sauce who presently call themselves Tekoha Sauce. The Binational fears that it must stand up to other future claims and this is just one of the 38 affected communities, although the original families ended up scattered, and new nuclei were formed by new generations; each one knows its history and will have motivation.

According to anthropological studies, around 20,000 indigenous people in Paraguay, and 40,000 in Brazil were affected by the hydroelectric plant. In Paraguay, the history of organized struggle goes back to the formation of the Avá Guaraní Association of Alto Paraná and Canindeyú, which presented a letter to then Paraguayan director of Itaipú, Miguel Luciano Giménez Boggiano on April 29, 1997.

The letter requested that Itaipu return indigenous lands, but the still weak organization finally withdrew its request in October 1997. This however marked the beginning of a historic claim that would later morph into other forms and continue.

The territorial claim and complaint of the violation of human rights suffered by the Avá Guaraní Paranaenses appears in the Report of the CVJ, Comisión de Verdad y Justicia [Truth and Justice Commission], which began its work in 2004, and presented its final report in 2008, detailing the violations of Human Rights committed by the Military Dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989).