HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS
A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education

ISSN 2203-7543 | Double Blind Peer-Reviewed | Open Access | www.hej-hermes.net

Bolivian settlers and Toba Peoples: Appropriation of Indigenous lands on the Chaco Plains in the 1800s

Marcela Mendoza
University of Oregon

ABSTRACT

This article analyses settler encroachment on Indigenous peoples' lands in the Chaco region of Eastern Bolivia. It is an understudied story, rarely interpreted from a perspective inspired by settler colonial studies. My analysis explores policies promoted by the emerging Bolivian state to address its 'Toba problem' along the Pilcomayo River, where for three centuries hunter-gatherers ignored the colonial authority and continually defied the power of the new nation. The story is situated in the mid-to-late nineteenth century when administrators of the Republic distributed small tracts of land along the river with the intention of expanding ranching and consolidating the country's international border. My analysis focuses on the contentious interactions between Toba and ranchers in a marginal area of Bolivia. Describing 'settling' from a non-Anglophone perspective, this approach expands the framework of settler colonial theory, offering innovative ways to read Indigenous dispossession and extermination in the Bolivian Chaco.

KEYWORDS

Settler Colonialism, Bolivian Chaco Region, Pilcomayo River.

CITATION

Mendoza, M. (2023). Bolivian settlers and Toba peoples: Appropriation of Indigenous lands on the Chaco Plains in the 1800s. *Historical Encounters, 10*(2), 38-51.
https://doi.org/10.52289/hej10.204

Introduction

Soon after independence from Spain in 1825, Bolivians confronted tension on the borders with Argentina and Paraguay which reflected a general ambivalence about their nation's institutions (Barragán Romano, Lema Garrett, & Mendieta Parada, 2015; Barragán Romano et al., 2015; Gordillo, 1877). The economic development of the administrative colonial district *Audiencia de Charcas*, which became the modern nation of Bolivia, focused on exploiting the mining resources of the Andean Highlands. Thus, the political centre of the emerging Republic was situated in the Highlands where colonial administrators had been able to harness the labour of sedentary agricultural populations.

During the early republican period, promoting the expansion of the nation's borders, Bolivian Minister Félix Frías (1845) identified the southeastern Chaco lowlands along the Pilcomayo River as particularly suitable for colonisation. The Toba, Weenhayek, Chorote, Tapiete, and other Indigenous groups lived there, but the region was viewed as marginal desert lands from the central administration, inhabited by an indeterminate number of peoples widely considered to be "savage" (Herndon & Gibbon, 1854). The region's economic potential was acknowledged, although it remained unexplored and unoccupied until the 1890s.

The existence of a boundary between conquered territories and unconquered territories such as the Chaco lowlands was indicated in colonial documents by the word *frontera*, or frontier or border. The *frontera* started on the fertile mountain valleys of the foothills between the Highlands and the Chaco plains and were fiercely protected by Avá-Guaraní warriors. The Avá-Guaraní, called *Chiriguanos,* were farmers who planted maize and other crops. They initially lived in villages with large longhouses, but later scattered into smaller and more defendable settlements. For centuries, they maintained an uneasy co-existence punctuated by mutual raiding with settlers who primarily raised cattle. The cattle destroyed the villages and maize fields, and in response the Avá-Guaraní killed the cattle and colonists (Langer, 2009). Meanwhile, mobile hunter-gatherer peoples mounted their own challenge to the advance of colonisation on the Chaco plains.

I developed below a historical account of the violent dispossession of the lands inhabited by the Toba, an Indigenous people who fiercely opposed the advance of settlers, and whose property rights were ignored by the Bolivian state. In the 1920s, just before the first hostilities that initiated the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932-1935, c.f. Farcau, 1996; Niebuhr, 2018), many Toba families decided to cross the international border and settle on the right margin of the Pilcomayo River, in Argentina, in an area that they also considered their own. Their reasons for making such an important decision remain opaque to today's authors. From the viewpoint of the neighbouring Weenhayek people, the Toba were overpowered and expelled by the militias and the army (Alvarsson, 2012, p. 65). However, some Toba stayed in the area and a few live today in the Bolivian territory that they used to call as their own.

The early republican frontier

When small settlements and cattle-posts of *fronterizos* (frontiersmen) reached the outskirts of the Chaco plains around the town of Tarija, they were sometimes attacked by alliances of Toba and other warriors. Toba warriors had a history of undertaking "marauding expeditions, plundering, and murdering the surrounding populations" (Reclus, 1894, p. 876). The fear of 'savages' on the frontier was also a matter of numbers. The first national census of the Republic, published in 1847, identified 1,373,896 people "under the sovereignty of the Constitution and the laws of the Republic" and 760,000 *infieles* or non-believers (Dalence, 1851, p. 202). Later sources, for example the Bureau of American Republics (1892) and Keltie (1890) noted a further 500,000 individuals of mixed European and Indigenous descent known as mestizos. In addition, there was one million Indigenous peoples, one-quarter of whom lived in "a savage state" (Keltie, 1890, p. 386). The decline of the Toba population offers an insight into where colonial policy invariably led. Alcide D'Orbigny (1839) estimated that the Toba population of Bolivia in 1830 numbered almost 6,000

people. Franciscans Cardús (1884) and Pifferi (1895) later placed their number at fewer than 4,000. In the 1900 national census (Bolivia, 1902), Franciscan missionaries estimated that the overall population of tribal peoples in the Chaco region along the Pilcomayo River to be about 5,000. In 1912, Rafael Karsten (1970 [1923]) estimated that the number of Toba had declined to about 1,500. In 2012, the Bolivian population census listed only 86 Toba people, the majority established in a rural area of the Department of Tarija (INE, 2015).

Materials and procedures

Most of this research is drawn from nineteenth century publications about Bolivia written by state administrators, army officers, missionaries, and travellers. These are held in digital collections, for example, Internet Archive (www.archive.org), Hathi Trust Digital Library (www.hathitrust.org), the Repository of Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (http://repositorio.umsa.bo), or are accessible though interlibrary loans. Some documents were published by historians who produced edited collections and others were published by early twentieth century Bolivian authors. This article concentrates on the Toba living along the Pilcomayo River. In it, I study the arguments of scholars and government officials, and review state policies that (a) legally sanctioned the colonisation of Indigenous territories, (b) militarily supported the ranchers' occupation of Toba lands, and (c) justified the violence against Indigenous peoples during the mid-to-late 1800s. At the local level in the area around Pilcomayo, I explore the viewpoints of settlers, army officers, and missionaries towards the Toba. The perspectives of Toba people remain uncertain, beyond their obvious desire to check the advance of ranchers, willingness to engage in peace agreements, and grief at the abduction of young people. Thus, my analysis utilises an approach that combines historical and ethnographic methods to shed light on an understudied process of Indigenous dispossession, rarely interpreted from a perspective inspired by settler colonial studies.

A history of postcolonial dispossession in the Bolivian Chaco

The doctrine of uti possidetis

The first official map of the Republic of Bolivia, published in 1859 (Roux, 1993), represented the largest assumed extension of the State's borders. By applying the principle of *uti possidetis de jure* ("that who owns by law"), Bolivia transformed the administrative boundaries of the colonial *Audiencia de Charcas* into the international border of the Republic. Based on a legal precedent with its origins in Roman Law, the poorly defined administrative district previously governed by the Royal Court provided a blueprint for the extension of the new country (Fifer, 1972). Although there was no consensus as to where the eastern boundaries of the country should be drawn. Spaniards from Asunción, Paraguay, had settled the fringes of the Chaco plains in the 1540s, and the newly independent Republic of Paraguay disputed ownership of part of the Chaco region, including the northern margin of the Pilcomayo River's middle and lower course. Paraguayans based their claim on the principle of *uti possidetis de facto*, arguing that they had political and economic control of the area, while Bolivians had yet to occupy it.

For the new Republics, the doctrine of *uti possidetis* gave the expropriation of lands inhabited by Indigenous peoples a historical legality. Bolivian diplomat Santiago Vaca Guzmán (1881) argued that Bolivian nationality was thereby based on three principles: the right of possession or *uti possidetis* that defined its borders, the constitutional right that ruled its sovereignty, and the principle of balance of powers that ensured the country's independence and territorial integrity. Asserting political control over the Chaco or any other unoccupied region implied that the national territory was just a portion of land between the previous boundaries drawn by the colonial power. Bolivian administrators assumed that a cosmopolitan democratic state could function within any borders, disregarding the Indigenous people's cultural connections to their own homeland. The

tribal groups living between the Pilcomayo and Paraguay rivers thereby "belonged to the district" of the colonial *Audiencia* (Ríos, 1925, p. 23). The doctrine of *uti possidetis* ignored the deeper cultural significance of the land for tribal groups living in the new democratic postcolonial state. Bolivian scholars and lawmakers realized that effective possession of the Chaco region required occupation and colonisation of lands considered vacant during the colonial period and still beyond the control of the new state. In their quest for effective occupation, they ignored the land rights of the Toba and other mobile hunter-gatherers who lived along Pilcomayo River because their societies and cultures were viewed as inferior. The Indigenous peoples were not 'civilized' enough to have legal ownership rights to their homelands. Thus, the theory of the state's right to possession justified by *uti possidetis* was not applicable to mobile hunter-gatherers, for it was only applicable against them (Gilbert, 2016).

Distribution of 'vacant' lands

In 1832, General Francisco Burdett O'Connor, an officer with distinguished service during the war of independence, was appointed head of the recently created Department of Tarija, which included Toba territory. He quickly began to distribute land previously owned by the Spanish Crown. The government offered lots of one square league (one Spanish league measured approximately 5 km) as concessions to settlers. Grantees were required to establish ranches with livestock within a period of five years, otherwise the conditions of the land grant would expire (Lavandez, 1925). The legislation made a distinction between land owned by Avá-Guaraní agricultural communities on the mountain valleys of Tarija and land considered vacant or *res nullius* on the Chaco plains. Only 'vacant' lands could be granted to former Bolivian soldiers who were veterans from the War of Independence.

In the 1840s, during the presidential administration of General José Ballivián, the government developed a colonisation plan that included (a) exploring whether the Pilcomayo - a river originating in the mountains - could be navigated from the place where it entered the Chaco plains up to its mouth on the Paraguay River, (b) establishing colonies whose settlers would be protected by garrisons stationed on the riverbanks, and (c) enticing Bolivian settlers by granting them 10-year exemptions on taxes and mandatory service in the national army. It was a clever method for occupying land at little cost to the Bolivian government, but at great expense to Indigenous inhabitants of the plains. Military officers could receive lots of one square league and soldiers could receive lots measuring one-quarter square league near the forts where they served. This type of land grant to military personnel, however, was later annulled and soldiers were rewarded with pensions instead.

To attract *fronterizo* settlers—mostly poor Bolivians skilled in open-range cattle ranching and small-hold agriculture—to the Pilcomayo area, in September 1844 the government opened a register for settlers at their nearest police stations. Any citizen who wished to take responsibility for 'savage' individuals who had been abducted (called *cautivos* or captive individuals) from the Chaco tribes by army or militia operations could assign them to work in domestic service or ranching. This proposal was inspired by the old Spanish *encomienda* system that extracted labour from the Indigenous agricultural communities in the Andes and the mountain valleys. According to the 1844 government order, anyone could request authority over captured individuals, with the result that many Toba women and children were pressed into domestic service and the men were either captured or killed (Langer & Bass Werner de Ruiz, 1988). This period was marred by increased violence between ranchers who gradually occupied the area with cattle-posts and allied Toba warriors who opposed their encroachment. It was clear even at the time that the Pilcomayo might one day contribute to the prosperity of Bolivia, but government officials first needed (a) to ascertain whether large ships could navigate the river's entire course, and (b) to alienate or civilise the Toba tribe, whose annual incursions were wreaking havoc on the area and would become a persistent threat to new ranches. Though the area was recognised for its geopolitical significance - the border with Argentina was "no more than 50 or 60 leagues away" - from the Bolivians' point of view "no industry, no culture existed" (Anónimo, 1851, pp. 47-48)

In 1880 the government determined that 'vacant' lands could be sold to settlers or granted as compensation for Bolivians who had lost their assets because of the ongoing war with Chile (Lavandez, 1925). The so-called *Guerra del Pacífico* (War of the Pacific, 1879-1883) resulted in Bolivia's loss of access to the Pacific coast. It reduced the country's territorial limits and left it landlocked. In response to the nation's need to open access to the Atlantic coast for commerce, the government ordered an exploratory expedition from Tarija to Paraguay that would include building forts along the way and obtaining precise and detailed data on the land that would then be sold to settlers. New military garrisons would protect the area against the raids of the 'savage' tribes. In 1886, the administration of President Gregorio Pacheco created the land and colonisation office (*Oficina de Tierras y Colonización*), which almost twenty years later became the Ministry of Colonisation and Agriculture. The office was given authority to distribute land, collect statistics related to 'vacant' land, collect data obtained during explorations on colonisable land, and establish colonies without regard for the land rights of Indigenous peoples (Langer, 1989).

Cattle-ranches, forts, and mission-stations

Legislation sanctioned by the administration of General José María Achá in the 1860s created opportunities to establish large cattle estates in the Department of Tarija. Early in 1863, Aniceto Arce, chargé d'affaires for the Republics of Paraguay and Argentina, learned that the Argentines were organizing an expedition to explore and occupy the pastures around Pilcomayo River. The state government immediately directed the chief officer of the Chaco region to organize a military expedition that could reach the Pilcomayo before the Argentines (Valdez, 1878). The Bolivian expedition would travel on the river's south bank up to 150 leagues downstream, start a colony, and build a fort to prevent Argentina from claiming the right of first occupation. Parcels of land were promised to any volunteers willing to participate as well as neighbours of the city of Tarija who provided food and supplies for the expedition (Ortiz, 1863). In November 1863, a group of *fronterizos* and volunteer militia men, commanded by Colonel Andrés Rivas, helped in the construction of Fort Bella Esperanza. Rivas also enlisted some Avá-Guaraní workers, who had trained in Franciscan missions, and Toba and Weenhayek helpers from nearby tribal camps. Franciscan missionary José Giannelli—who was stationed at a mission-station built upstream for Toba Peoples in 1860— accompanied the expedition. Gianelli also enlisted the same workers to build a new mission-station for Weenhayek People near the Bella Esperanza Fort (Alvarsson, 2006). Both the fort and the mission were eventually abandoned but the initiative deterred the advance of the Argentines. Diplomatic negotiations set the south bank of the river as the international border between Bolivia and Argentina. The concern over borders was reflected in historian Sotomayor Valdez's (1878) argument that the administration needed to focus attention on the activities of neighbouring countries, not on the 'savages' who occupied the Chaco region, whose arrows were not at the service of any state but who were enemies of Bolivian and Argentine settlers alike.

Planning for the 1883 expedition to Pilcomayo River

Manuel Othon Jofré and other local leaders in Tarija conceived a plan in 1883 to advance the frontier over the 'vacant' land along the Pilcomayo. Their plan would facilitate acquisition of land for cattle ranching and ensure the safety of the large cattle estates near Tarija, already quite depressed due to the exhaustion of the pastures and frequent assaults by 'savages'. The Junta of Notable Neighbours of Tarija planned to use the funds raised by public sales of the land to support the exploration of new routes to Paraguay or for the building of forts. Construction of forts to colonise the area would, it was hoped, accomplish "the peaceful conquest of the wandering tribes" (Bolivia Ministerio de Hacienda, 1882, pp. 38-40). Wandering tribe was far from being the most negative assessment of the Toba. Officer David Gareca, who participated in the expedition to the Pilcomayo, characterised them as the "Chileans of the East." They deserved "war without a truce,

if possible until exterminating them" (Bolivia Ministerio de Hacienda, 1882, p. 55). Official correspondence blamed the Toba for their own demise: "They were victims of their own barbarism, no one else can be blamed. The same would happen in North America if an expedition set out, as fearlessly as ours did, to explore the country of the Redskins" (Bolivia Ministerio de Hacienda, 1882, pp. i-iii). These views were far from being an anomaly. Eulogio Raña, Subprefect of the Province of Gran Chaco, wrote a letter to the Prefect and Commander General of Department of Tarija in which he argued that these "savages will always be enemies of Christians, and progress, and civilization" and as such "the national government must require expeditions to annihilate the savage nations" (Bolivia Ministerio de Hacienda, 1882, pp. 44-455). Colonel Andrés Rivas, Subprefect of the Chaco, in a letter from Caiza to the Prefect and Commander General of the Department of Tarija likewise argued that "it is necessary to carry out other raids on the savages, if not to exterminate this [Toba] race, at least to intimidate and drive it away, so that the exploration and colonization that we propose can be carried out safely" (Bolivia Ministerio de Hacienda, 1882, p. 19).

A wide-ranging plan for colonisation

The system of colonisation conceived by Bolivian administrators included building forts and selling or granting small lots of land to settlers and military personnel, while also supporting the establishment of new Franciscan missions (Guzmán, 1886). Such a plan would achieve control of the Chaco, a region neglected since colonial times "because of hostile Indians or lack of interest" (Alarcón, 1905). Bolivian lawmakers and scholars envisioned developing a sort of *frontera viva* (live frontier) that could advance state dominion and sovereignty. They had in mind a broad objective: (a) affirming the doctrine of *uti possidetis de jure*, (b) encouraging expansion of international commerce, and (c) important geopolitical concerns related to potential clashes with neighbouring countries. In 1892, for example, Bolivian scientist Manuel Vicente Ballivián excluded the Chaco region from his estimates of the total territorial extension of the Republic because legal possession of the Chaco north of Pilcomayo was still contested by Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina (Bureau of American Republics, 1892).

By the turn of the twentieth century, local administrators had supervised construction of five forts on the Pilcomayo River area. The official 1907 report of the Office of Land and Colonisation stated that the forts were staffed by four squadrons of cavalry. The area remained "perfectly calm, and the periodic invasions of the savages have ceased. … Only one Toba chief, who acts as a link between the civilised and savage populations on both banks of the Pilcomayo, usually presents himself with hostile and aggressive pretensions" (Ballivián, 1907, p. 10). The same report claimed that "as for the conquered Indigenous population, efforts are being made to regroup them in urban centres and instil in them habits of sociability, giving them the means and facilities to build their houses and cultivate their fields" (Ballivián, 1907, p. 11). Encroachment by ranchers was extensive, but there were few estimates of the number of livestock because the cattle was kept "in the bush," nearly in a wild state, and was only rounded up for sale (Schmieder, 1926, p. 157). One ranch owner in the province of Chaco had managed to gather six thousand heads of dispersed cattle, one thousand five hundred mares, and three hundred two-year-old colts (Ballivián, 1907). Five years later, Mariano Aparicio, Subprefect of the Chaco province, estimated from data collected during his administrative visits to the settlements that the settlers owned about 20,000 heads of cattle; 4,000 horses; 2,000 donkeys and mules; 3,000 pigs; and 4,000 sheep (Aparicio, 1912-1913).

Encroachment and violence on Toba territory along the Pilcomayo River

The Toba

Franciscan Antonio Comajuncosa (1884) recorded Toba assaults on the grasslands around Caiza as early as the late 1700s. Those unexpected attacks cemented in the colonial imagination an

image of the Toba as "[c]ruel and bloodthirsty" (Olsson, 1899, p. 82). Because robberies and revenge-attacks continued to occur even on the ever-shrinking frontier, the Toba continued to generate fear in Bolivian settlers. A rare description published at the beginning of the twentieth century by the national office for *Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica* (Bolivia, 1903) observed that the Toba were "savages [who were] fierce and daring to the point of recklessness." When war was discussed, the women were "the ones who go around camp inciting the men to fight, brandishing the trophies of their previous victories, generally consisting of skulls or scalps" (pp. 119-120). Mounted warriors from different bands organised surprise-attacks on small colonial settlements and isolated cattle posts on the edges of the mountain valleys. Aiming at targets situated far away from their territory, they killed, plundered, and took livestock before returning to their camps.

The settlers and soldiers

Attracted by abundant pastures for their cattle, Bolivian *fronterizos* steadily encroached on the savannas. The cattle were roaming, almost wild, on open ranges near the posts. As Franciscan Angélico Martarelli (1918) observed, "instead of being colonised by men, the frontier has been colonized by cows" (p. 303). Complaining about the moral state of the *fronterizos* he described settlers who "in their customs and religious ignorance differ little from the savage tribes; tucked away in desolate woods and ravines, following their cows, scattered here and there in their shacks" (Martarelli, 1918, p. 124). The forts on the frontier were staffed mostly by recruits from the highlands commonly known as *cuicos*. For poor Bolivian men, participating in military service could earn them social and economic rewards, forge patronage relations, prove their manliness, and earn the opportunity for making claims on the State as veteran soldiers eligible for pensions. The obligation of serving in the national army had existed on paper since the country's independence, but the laws allowed for many replacements, and exempted from military service those Indigenous peoples of the highlands who were already paying tribute to the State. Conscription laws prescribed terms of five years or more of service (Shesko, 2020). The garrisons serving in the forts of the frontier, however, experienced very high rates of turnover and desertion.

General Manuel Rodrigues Magariños, who led the first military expedition to the Pilcomayo in 1843, ordered the commanders of forts on the frontier to refrain from violence directed towards the Indigenous peoples. Magariños wanted to avoid any unexpected retaliation from Toba warriors. Later, in his report on the unsuccessful expedition, published in local newspapers, Magariños included the names of Toba leaders who had approached him and received presents from the explorers. After another failed military expedition the following year, the Toba revolted against the settlers. Magariños' directive for army officers commanding forts in the Chaco made it clear that violence between the *fronterizos*, the soldiers, and the Toba was already widespread in the 1840s.

Officer J. Vicente Sosa expanded on Magariños' directive and sent it to the commanders on November 13, 1843, forbidding the commanding officers of the forts from killing "a savage who comes with the intention of making peace" (Langer & Bass Werner de Ruiz, 1988, pp. 265-266). Sosa reasoned that when 'savages' asked for peace, there was no legal basis to deny it to them. If the forts were shorthanded, and the frontiersmen and *nacionales*, whose work was vital, had to leave the garrisons to take care of their crops because of the approaching rainy season, then officers must welcome potential peace treaties. The treaties should contain conditions favourable for the Christians, so that they could work freely on their trades. Nevertheless, the 'savages' had to be watched because they were ignorant of the law of nations [*jus gentium*, Roman law applicable to all people] and therefore could never be considered reliable. Sosa explained how this peace was to be established:

> Have ten or twelve chiefs come to your fort and celebrate the peace agreement as it is customary among them, and demand guarantees from them, but also prevent the settlers from faulting the terms of the treaty. Let me know when you

> make a peace treaty, so that I can notify the superior authority and obtain approval. (Langer & Bass Werner de Ruiz, 1988, p. 266)

During the nineteenth century, the national army was small and received insufficient professional training. The military strength of the Republic, instead, consisted of well-organized militias, called Guardias Nacionales. In 1892 about 20,000 militiamen were serving the country, a number which could double in case of war (Appleton, 1893, p. 61). Nevertheless, the manpower of the National Guard had to be aligned to that of the Army. For example, on June 30, 1893, the recently organized Minister of Government and Colonisation (Bolivia, 1893, pp. 169-170) ordered that the troops of the national guard organised in some settlements of the south bank of the Pilcomayo "defend private property from very possible attacks by savage tribes, and to provide national service contributing to the government's colonisation plan, [these troops] should obey the [newly created] office of Superior Chief of Colonies." Thus, most accounts of violence on the frontier involved militiamen collaborating with soldiers.

Violence on The Frontier

Violence on the frontier escalated during the second half of the nineteenth century. Jorge Mendoza González (1933) estimated that "The outcome of military expeditions were several thousand victims, including the dead, the wounded, and the prisoners" (p. 235). Violence reached such a level of intensity that on April 6, 1876, the Ministry of Government in La Paz sent an emergency order to the sub-prefect of the Chaco commanding him "to refrain from exterminating the nomadic tribes" and limiting his actions to "safeguarding the assets legitimately acquired by the [Bolivian] inhabitants of the Pilcomayo riverbanks". These orders were approved by the President of the Republic, ostensibly "as an act of true humanity" (Sanjinés, 1876, p. 62). The settlers were less concerned with acts of humanity and more with their cattle. They suspected that Toba were stealing cattle from their ranches and assaulted their camps with the purpose of retrieving livestock, killing people, and abducting women and children. Toba warriors, sometimes allied with other tribes, responded in kind, robbing, killing, and abducting women and children to negotiate "prisoner" exchanges (e.g., Oviedo, 1884). Colonel Rivas (1882) observed that in the Chaco, it was very common for *fronterizos* to abduct Indigenous women and children "for speculation business," meaning what it would be called today "human trafficking." If militiamen and soldiers persecuting the 'savages' on the savannas were able to surprise some families, said Colonel Rivas, they "snatched the children to sell them in other areas, always preferring the little girls and young women, called *cuñas*. This has been the most serious reason why those Indians have a deep grudge and hatred towards the whites" (p. 12).

Official documents and letters published by Franciscan missionaries are often the most common evidence of violence on the frontier. For example, at the end of 1846, in retaliation for an alleged theft of cattle, volunteer militias from Caiza attacked the band of Toba leader Chocoriqui, killed nine or ten men, including Chocoriqui, and murdered all the families in the campsite. In another raid, militiamen attacked the camp of leader Imacá in Caranditi-Guasú, killed the men, took some women prisoner, set the campsite ablaze, and retrieved horses allegedly stolen from settlers. These raids were in the eyes of the Franciscan Alejandro Corrado, tantamount to a declaration of war. From July 1847 to January 1859, the names of thirty-one Bolivian victims of "the indomitable furore of the Toba" were recorded in necrology books of the parish in Caiza (Corrado, 1884, pp. 399-400). Émile-Arthur Thouar (1906) estimated that Toba warriors had killed more than 50 Bolivian men between 1882 and 1900 (p. 23). Franciscan Doroteo Giannecchini (1882), who participated in a military expedition commanded by Colonel Rivas, reported that Toba warriors killed one officer and one soldier, and stole 250 horses from the expedition. The theft was interpreted as a vendetta raid because the previous month militiamen on their way to join the expedition had killed the Toba leader Socóo and fifteen men and captured a Toba boy. Giannecchini (1882) witnessed the soldiers' immediate revenge: The soldiers shot and decapitated a Weenhayek chief and thrown corpses of thirteen Toba men into the river. Rivas

declared a war of extermination on the Toba, authorising soldiers and militiamen to "kill them [Toba] wherever they may find them" (Campos, 1888, p. 641).

Settler encroachment brought not only violence and cultural and environmental change to the frontier, but also epidemic diseases. Influenza, pneumonia, and smallpox ravaged the Indigenous population. For example, in 1880, smallpox spread among Avá-Guaraní and Toba families in the San Francisco Mission, and fifty-two people died (Calzavarini Ghinello, 2006, p. 1244). Epidemic diseases affected the settlers as well. Officer Cornelio Ríos was credited with using corpses of smallpox victims in a deceit "to save the Christians from the fury of the savages" (Ríos, 1925, p. 50). However, not all encounters were violent. Sometimes ranchers would approach Toba camps on their own and request help to handle the cattle posts or would bring goods to the families asking to trade for food. Toba men and women did the same when approaching ranches, forts, and mission-stations. However, few settlers and officers appear to have learned words in Toba. Franciscans did not produce a Toba grammar as they did for Avá-Guaraní language, possibly because few, if any, converted to Catholicism in the missions. Communication in the area used Avá-Guaraní or Weenhayek languages as the *lingua franca*. Toba women were instrumental in creating consensus to bring missionaries to the area. Women were often the brokers facilitating prisoner exchanges, because some women learned Spanish in the settlements working as (unpaid) maidservants for the settlers. Through time, some Toba women married *cuico* soldiers and lived in the colonies around the forts (Chervin, 1908). Some young Toba men began working as farmhands on the ranches. They started dressing with hand-me-down *fronterizo* clothing and learned to speak the local variant of Spanish. Importantly, during the last decades of 1800s, many Toba men began to migrate seasonally on the sugar cane plantations of the Argentine side of the border. Toba people made the trip to the plantations together with Ava-Guaraní families. At the end of the season, they brought back to the camps mules, goods, clothing, and occasionally also firearms received as payment for their labour.

Conclusion

Administrators and lawmakers in the emerging Bolivian Republic understood that claiming legal possession of the Chaco plains—an area beyond the control of the state—would require planning and investment. Nevertheless, it was considered a necessary geopolitical project because the unexplored plains would extend the national territory to the southeast up to the still unresolved international borders with the Argentine and Paraguayan Republics. Administrators presumed the economic potential of the Chaco savannas for breeding and raising cattle but acknowledged that the presence of mobile hunter-gatherers prevented the advance of settlers on the region. The tribes had to be subjugated to use their lands for farming. Toba warriors were singled out as the main obstacle to colonisation. The country's boom and bust cycles of economic development during the 1800s were punctuated by (a) exploitation of silver, tin, and rubber; (b) internal political instability; and (c) ongoing interest in exporting the riches of the highlands through the Pacific coast. During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, settlers on the Chaco frontier showed renewed impetus to colonise the area due to, according to Langer and Bass Werner de Ruiz (1988), (a) revamping of the mining economy, which increased demand for cattle in the mining centres on the highlands, (b) gradual consolidation of the political and military power of the Bolivian state, and (c) new firearms available to the settlers. Military forts and some private posts managed by volunteer militia protected the ranchers and conducted punitive expeditions. Franciscan missions opened in Tarairí Valley for Avá-Guaraní families and on the Pilcomayo for Toba and Weenhayek families.

As state representatives began consolidating their power, they supported the frontiersmen's appropriation of Indigenous lands on the margins of Pilcomayo by granting land title on small lots along the river. To contain or eliminate outright the threat of Toba resistance, lawmakers funded military expeditions and the construction of forts. Local frontiersmen formed militias to protect their ranches. Government officers also favoured establishing missions as Franciscan evangelism on the frontier had proven very effective at pacifying the Avá-Guaraní, although the missionaries

did not get similar results with the Toba. The history of the settlers' penetration on the Pilcomayo River area and the role played by militiamen and soldiers during the mid-to-late 1800s have been understudied. The Franciscans, who were their own chroniclers, wrote substantive narratives, leaving extensive records of their work. The missionaries' influence over Indigenous peoples and settlers in the area was considerable, but perhaps because the Franciscans' viewpoint was well documented, it enjoys a greater prominence than it might otherwise have enjoyed (Schmieder, 1926).

Through these initiatives, Bolivian state administrators secured not only control of the land and its resources, but also which side's history would be recorded. Nineteenth century government documents often concealed the violence towards the Toba and articulated a state sanctioned version of territorial occupation that ignored Indigenous peoples' rights to the land. During the earlier part of the century, Toba warriors were able to prevent the occupation of their territory. Small-scale cattle rustling, as well as the theft and smuggling of horses to northern markets, were profitable for a while. But the Toba were overwhelmed by the combined strength of military and militia forces. As a result, by the late 1800s, the extension of available land for hunting and gathering was shrinking, and the Toba were selling their labour on agricultural plantations in Argentina to contribute to the sustenance of the communities. By the early twentieth century, the Bolivian state had effective control of the Chaco region.

Since the 1930s, administrative documents and academic papers reported that the Toba people left Bolivia. Nonetheless, 86 individuals self-identified as Toba in the 2012 National Census, the majority established in a rural area of the Department of Tarija. The Toba have not participated in the Indigenous movements to reclaim legal property of their land, as the neighbouring Tapiete and Weenhayek did. In 1993, for example, the state granted the Weenhayek property of their territory along Pilcomayo River. Several Indigenous communities now uphold collective property of their land in the Tierra Comunitaria de Origen Weenhayek, (Colque et al., 2011, Peñaranda Barrios et al., 2011). A small number of Tapiete also have collective property of the Territorio Indígena del Pueblo Tapiete, near the town of Villamontes.

References

Alarcón, A. (1905). *Litigio Paraguayo-Boliviano*. La Paz: Imprenta de "Los Debates."

Alvarsson, J-Å. (2012). *Etnografía 'Weenhayek, Vol. 2: 'Nuestro camino' — Etnohistoria e historia.* Universidad de Uppsala.

Alvarsson, J-Å. (2006). People divided by a border: National versus ethnic identity in the case of the 'Weenhayek of the Gran Chaco. *Acta Americana 14*(1), 25-38.

Anónimo. (1851). *Hidrografía de Bolivia*. Available at Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Biblioteca Central Colección Folletería. https://repositorio.umsa.bo/xmlui/handle/123456789/9900

Aparicio, M. (1912-1913). *Informe anual de la Subprefectura de la Provincia Gran Chaco, Bolivia*. Yacuiba, Bolivia: Imprenta de J. A. León.

Appleton, D. & Company. (1893). *Appleton's annual cyclopaedia and register of important events of the year 1892: Embracing political, military, and ecclesiastical affairs; public documents; biography, statistics, commerce, finance, literature, science, agriculture and mechanical industry* (Vol. 32). Forgotten Books.

Ballivián, M. V. (1907). *Informe Territorio Nacional de Colonias en el Chaco*. La Paz, Bolivia. Available at Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Biblioteca Central Colección Folletería. https://repositorio.umsa.bo/xmlui/handle/123456789/16974

Barragán Romano, R., Lema Garrett, A. M, and Mendieta Parada, P. (Eds.). (2015). *Bolivia, su historia: Los primeros cien años de la República, 1825-1925*. Vol. IV. La Paz, Bolivia: Artes Gráficas Sagitario S.R.L.

Barragán Romano, R., Lema Garrett, A., Mendieta Parada, P. and Peres-Cajias, J. (2015). El siglo XX mira al siglo XIX. La experiencia boliviana. *Anuario del Instituto de Historia Argentina*, *15*. https://www.anuarioiha.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/article/view/IHAn15a05

Bolivia, Ministerio de Hacienda. (1882). *Documentos referentes a la exploración del Gran Chaco Boliviano, estudiar el rio Pilcomayo y su posible navegación y comunicación con los países vecinos a ella.* La Paz: Tipografía de La Tribuna. Available at Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Biblioteca Central Colección Folletería. https://repositorio.umsa.bo/xmlui/handle/123456789/7166

Bolivia, Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica (1902). *Censo de la Población de Bolivia, 1900*. Vol. 1. La Paz: Tipografía J. M. Gamarra.

Bolivia, Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica (1903). *Sinopsis Estadística y Geográfica de la República de Bolivia*. Vol. 1. La Paz: Tipografía J. M. Gamarra.

Bureau of the American Republics. (1892). *Bolivia. Bulletin No.55.* Government Printing Office. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.%24b723778&seq=5

Calzavarini Ghinello, L. (ed.). (2006). Presencia Franciscana y formación intercultural en el sudeste de Bolivia según documentos del archivo Franciscano de Tarija 1606-1936: IV Centenario de la Fundación del Convento Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles (Colegio de Propaganda Fide 1755-1918). Vol. VI: Época Republicana 1826-1936. Tarija, Bolivia: Centro Eclesial de Documentación. Pp.1235-1902

Campos, D. (1888). *De Tarija a Asunción: Expedición Boliviana de 1883*. Buenos Aires: Jacobo Peuser.

Cardús, J. (1884). Las misiones franciscanas entre los infieles de Bolivia: Descripción del estado de ellas en 1883 y 1884, con una noticia sobre los caminos y tribus salvajes, una muestra de varias lenguas, curiosidades de historia natural, y un mapa para servir de ilustración. Barcelona: Librería de la Inmaculada Concepción.

Chervin, A. (1908). *Anthropologie Bolivienne*. Vol. I. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.

Chesterton, B. M. (Ed.). 2016. *The Chaco War: Environment, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Colque, G. et al. (2011). *Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos en Bolivia*. La Paz, Bolivia: Fundación Tierra.

Comajuncosa, A. (1884). Manifiesto histórico de lo que han trabajado los Misioneros de Tarija así entre los fieles como entre los infieles desde el año de 1755 hasta el de 1810, escrito por el P. Fr. Antonio Comajuncosa. In *El Colegio franciscano de Tarija y sus misiones. Noticias históricas recogidas por dos misioneros del mismo colegio by A. Comajuncosa & A. Corrado*. Quaracchi, Italy: Colegio de S. Buenaventura. Pp. 75-278.

Corrado, A. M. (1884). Continuación de la historia del Colegio Franciscano de Tarija y de sus Misiones desde el año de 1810 hasta él de 1882. In *El Colegio franciscano de Tarija y sus misiones. Noticias históricas recogidas por dos misioneros del mismo colegio by A. Comajuncosa & A. Corrado*. Quaracchi, Italy: Colegio de S. Buenaventura. Pp.279-506.

Corrado, A. M. (1861). *La religión entre los Tobas en 1860*. Sucre: Imprenta de Beeche-Arrendada.

Dalence, J. M. (1851). *Bosquejo estadístico de Bolivia*. Chuquisaca, Bolivia: Imprenta de Sucre.

D'Orbigny, A. D. (1839). *L'Homme Américain (de l'Amérique Méridionale).* Vol. 1. Paris: Pitois Levrault.

Farcau, B. W. (1996). *Chaco War: Bolivia and Paraguay, 1932-1935*. Praeger.

Fifer, J. V. (1972). *Bolivia: Land, location, and politics since 1825*. Cambridge University Press.

Frías, F. (1845) Nota dirigida a S.G. el señor Don Tomás Frías, ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Bolivia, por Don Félix Frías, cónsul de la misma República en Chile. Valparaíso: Imprenta del Mercurio.

Giannecchini, D. (1882). Diario del viaje del padre D. Giannecchini, capellán castrense de la expedición terrestre al Chaco central en 1882. Tarija: Imprenta de "El Trabajo"

Gilbert, J. (2016) *Indigenous peoples' land rights under international law: From victims to actors.* (Rev. 2nd ed.). Brill. https://brill.com/display/title/33562?language=en

Gordillo, M. (1877). *Breves Apuntes para la Historia de Bolivia*. Oruro, Bolivia: Imprenta de "La Libertad."

Guzmán, A. (1886). *Geografía de Bolivia*. La Paz: Imprenta de El Nacional.

Herndon, L., & Gibbon, L. (1854). *Exploration of the valley of the Amazon: Made under the direction of the Navy Department.* Robert Armstrong. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044004714564&seq=13

Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE). (2015). *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2012, Bolivia, Características de la Población*. La Paz: INE.

Karsten, R 1970[1923]. *The Toba Indians of the Bolivian Gran Chaco*. Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora IV Reprint. The Netherlands: Oosterhout NB.

Keltie, J. Scott (Ed.). (1890). *The statesman's yearbook*. MacMillan & Co.

Langer, E. D. (1989). *Economic change and rural resistance in Southern Bolivia, 1880-1930.* Stanford University Press.

Langer, E. D. (2009). *Expecting pears from an elm tree*. Duke University Press.

Langer, E. and Bass Werner de Ruiz, Z. (1988). *Historia de Tarija (Corpus Documental).* Vol. V. Tarija, Bolivia: Universidad Autónoma Juan Misael Saracho.

Lavandez, J. (1925) *La colonización en Bolivia durante la primera centuria de su independencia*. La Paz: Talleres Gráficos de la Intendencia de Guerra.

Martarelli, A. (1918). *El Colegio Franciscano de Potosí y sus Misiones.* 2nd ed. La Paz: Talleres Gráficos "Marinoni."

Mendoza González, J. (1933). *La Tragedia del Chaco*. Sucre, Bolivia: Imprenta y Litografía Salesiana.

Niebuhr, R. (2018) The road to the Chaco War: Bolivia's modernisation in the 1920s. *War & Society, 37*(2), 91-106. https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2018.1433601

Olsson, E. (1899). *The Dark Continent . . . . at Our Doors: Slavery, heathenism, and cruelty in South America*. M. E. Munson, Publisher.

Oviedo, C. (1884). *Un Rescate: Relación que hace de su cautiverio Doña Cecilia Oviedo*. Tarija: Imprenta de "El Trabajo".

Peñaranda Barrios, E. M. et al. (2011). '*Weenhayek. Cuentos y Relatos de la Gente del Río "Tewok-Lheleyh,"* vol. 1. Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia: ORCAWETA – El País.

Pifferi, S. (1895). *Diario de la visita a todas las misiones existentes en la República de Bolivia, escrito por su secretario y compañero de viaje Padre Zacarías Ducci*. Tarija: Tipográfica de la Porciúncula.

Reclus, E. (1894). *The earth and its inhabitants: South America* (Vol. 1). [A. H. Keane, Editor]. D. Appleton.

Reyes Ortiz, F. (Comp.). (1863). *Anuario de Leyes y Supremas Disposiciones de 1863*. La Paz: Imprenta de La Opinión.

Ríos, C. (1925). *Los derechos de Bolivia sobre el Chaco Boreal y sus límites con el Paraguay*. Buenos Aires: n.p.

Rivas, J. A. (1882). *Expedición al Gran Chaco de Bolivia en 1864*. La Paz: Impr. de la Unión Americana.

Roux, J. C. (1993). Bolivia mítica y Bolivia real a través del primer mapa nacional de 1859. *Hombre-Espacio-Sociedad, 2*:77-119.

Sanjinés, J. (Comp.). (1876). *Anuario de Leyes y Supremas Disposiciones de 1875*. La Paz: Imprenta de la Unión Americana.

Schmieder, O. (1926). The East Bolivian Andes South of the Rio Grande or Guapay. *University of California Publications in Geography 2*(5), 85-210.

Shesko, E. (2020). *Conscript nation: Coercion and citizenship in the Bolivian barracks.* University of Pittsburgh Press.

Sotomayor Valdez, R. (1874). *Estudio histórico de Bolivia bajo la administración del general D. José Maria de Achá; con una introducción que contiene el compendio de la guerra de independencia i de los gobiernos de dicha Republica hasta 1861*. Santiago, Chile: Imprenta A. Bello.

Thouar, A. (1906). Sur les bords du Pilcomayo. Les Indiens Tobas. *Journal des Voyages et des Aventures de Terre et de Mer, 523*, 22-25.

Vaca Guzmán, S. (1881). *El derecho de conquista y la teoría del equilibrio en la América Latina.* B.A.: Imprenta de P. E. Coni.

Author's Note

All the English translations of publications in Spanish are my own interpretation of the texts.

About the Author

Marcela Mendoza is a research associate in the Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon. She has decades of experience studying the subsistence and sustainability practices, and social organization of hunter-gatherer societies in the South American Chaco. Mendoza studied the culture of the Western Toba Qomle'k in Argentina, investigating their family life, kinship, and the leadership of the bands. More recently, she has studied the history of other Western Toba groups located in Bolivia, whose language and culture appear linked to those of Argentina. Her anthropological investigations are used to contextualize oral narratives and strengthen current interdisciplinary analyses of Indigenous lifeways.