


## Case Study

# Indigeneity, land and labour in Paraguay

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## Abstract

This article is focused on the politics of indigeneity, which is an increasingly important concept and a central area of dispute in a globalised world. Indigeneity encapsulates the friction between ethnicity and class identities, which cannot be understood without a full consideration of differences and relationships between landowners, other economic sectors, non-indigenous workers and indigenous people. The text specifically deals with the circumstances of Paraguay, whose process of nation building is directly related to longitudinal attacks on its indigenous peoples and the unresolved problems of land, labour and rights. The case study investigates the long-term tendencies of Paraguayan society, in particular, the ongoing expansion of agribusiness and land grabbing in the northeast of the country that tragically affect the Paĩ Tavyterã indigenous people. The discussion is based on qualitative, engaged research over several years, which considered the indigenous population as co-investigators and active socio-political players. The conclusion is that, despite the fact that Paraguay is a major exporter of primary commodities, the prevailing geographical force is the accumulation of multiple forms of social, ecological and even economic degradation. Against those perverse trends, the important reaction of the Paĩ Tavyterã, as well as of other indigenous peoples, and their struggle to recover their land and socio-ecological relations greatly complicate national politics and challenge the hegemony of export-oriented agribusiness.

**Keywords** Land conflicts · Agribusiness · Paĩ Tavyterã · Guarani-Kaiowa · Indigenous peoples · Agricultural frontier · South America · Environmental justice

## 1 Indigeneity, land and development

Indigeneity is an increasingly important concept and a central area of dispute of late modernity and in a greatly globalised world. It encapsulates the friction between ethnicity and class identities, which cannot be understood without a full consideration of differences and relationships between landowners, other economic sectors, non-indigenous workers and indigenous people. Indigeneity is also a nexus of resistance against the exclusionary tendencies of mainstream development, spreading from the local to the national and international scales of socio-economic and political interaction. Those widespread spatial tendencies help to understand the many dilemmas faced by a country such as Paraguay, which has had its geography produced out of asymmetric processes of nation building and economic growth that systematically excluded and penalised its indigenous population. Like most South American nations, Paraguay is paradoxically a country with vast territories and major socio-political shortages, particularly in relation to the ancestral inhabitants of the land. Its national borders, as currently depicted on any cartographic map, are testimony of accumulated losses and hardly fought legacies. Squeezed between Brazil and Argentina, in politico-economic terms, Paraguay is a subordinate

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state par excellence, at least since the end of the devastating continental war of 1864–1870 that decimated the population, took away a large part of its territory and destroyed a hitherto thriving economy. Nonetheless, Paraguay managed to secure and maintain its precarious independent status, despite the initial lack of international recognition (in the early nineteenth century), the perennial threat of Argentinean and Brazilian sub-imperialism (as in the case of the generation of hydroelectricity) and geopolitical pressures exerted especially by the United States.

The overall result is a highly unequal national society that only partially benefits from the questionable expansion and vibrancy of its agribusiness-based economy, which thrives at the expense of social and ecological abuses. After two centuries of independent history and geography, politics and the economy are now dominated by the powerful interests of export companies and landowners, what has forged a decisive synergy with illegal trade and, increasingly, drug traffickers associated with politicians and senior authorities. At the centre of those contradictions lies the violence and racism against the native population. There exists a persistent driving-force of exclusion and discrimination of indigenous peoples, hence the ontological and political importance of indigeneity. The tragic history of indigenous groups in Paraguay and throughout the American continent is well known, initially under the auspices of colonisation by the European crowns and, later, according to the pattern of a racialised power exerted by national governments after independence [1]. This involves the appropriation, transformation and return of epistemes able to subvert racism and oppression imposed through the 'colonial matrix of power' [2]. The rejection of the perverse twins 'modernity and coloniality' (given that Western modernity being inseparable from the logic of coloniality) calls for a double translation between critical positions nurtured within Western modernity and the land-based radical alternatives as those embodied by indigenous peoples (such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Bolivian plurinational experiment, among others, despite the challenges faced by those alternative socio-economic development pathways).

Amidst sustained discriminatory trends, the 19 remaining indigenous peoples of Paraguay have entailed a long struggle to survive, what includes highly sophisticated socio-spatial knowledge and specialised community practices. The country's Indigenous population is formed by 122,461 individuals separated in five linguistic families [3]. They are the descendants of the original inhabitants who witnessed the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish colonisers, struggles between Catholic priests, encomenderos and landowners, and, in the nineteenth century, the formation of a nation state marked by sustained assimilation strategies. Sheer genocidal violence has been mitigated by populist concessions and the formal acceptance of indigenous rights, but racism and neglect continues to characterise the intervention of public authorities and the main economic sectors. The exploitation of indigenous labour and the grabbing of ancestral areas reveals how racial capitalism is woven into the social fabric of settler colonialism and its spatial proclivities [4]. On the other hand, notwithstanding the vulgar image of passivity and penury, all indigenous nations of Paraguay have mobilised their communities, forged alliances and reacted to exclusionary policies and practices [5]. Among the nations more severely impacted by recent rounds of land grabbing, and by violent attacks by state and paramilitary forces, but also responsible for significant acts of resistance, are the Paĩ Tavyterã people in the Department (province) of Amambay, located on the border with Brazil (where the same ethnic group, known as Guarani-Kaiowa, lives in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso do Sul [6–9]). The Paĩ Tavyterã and the Guarani-Kaiowa constitute one of the sub-groups of the large Guarani population that inhabited and continues to occupy hundreds of locations [10].

In the early decades of the twentieth century, their territory still amounted to around two million hectares but it has been reduced to less than 100,000 hectares, according to data published in 2020 [11]. It will be discussed below how the Paĩ Tavyterã became confined to a remote corner of the country that has become a hotspot of agribusiness, land grabbing, resource extraction and drug trafficking [12] and, in addition, how their situation is relevant not only for indigenous studies, but to question the basis of agro-neoliberalism and conservative development [13]. Before that, it is crucial to present the methodological approach and the research ethics that underpinned this investigation.

## 2 Research ethics and methodological approach

This discussion on indigeneity and on the partialities of national development is based on a research project on the land struggle of the Paĩ Tavyterã/Guarani-Kaiowa and is more directly related to fieldwork conducted in 2023 in Paraguay among Paĩ Tavyterã communities. It is basically a relational storytelling text informed by narratives provided by various social players, events and situations, as well as documents and archives, to describe a broad array of complex practices and socio-spatial trends [14]. The investigation followed a strict ethical standard for research involving indigenous partners that entailed an active and autonomous involvement of the indigenous communities as true co-investigators since the formulation of research questions and the preparation of the whole investigation. There were important ethical,

methodological and interpretative questions that had to be considered when doing participatory research involving marginalised social groups and, in particular, indigenous peoples. The condition and the experience of indigenous peoples certainly have major consequences for the preparation and implementation of research projects. Consequently, the methodological approach employed to do research with and for indigenous peoples was a contingent and combined ethnography that tried to integrate all opportunities available to accumulate information, learn together and make sense of deeply politicised processes that produce lived and contested spaces. It aimed at knowing the world from a standpoint of deeply politicised socio-spatial relations and is predicated upon decolonisation and the pursuit of restoration and justice simultaneously in the Global North and in the Global South.

The whole research process was iterative and non-linear, which means that things were recorded as they were observed during the engagement with the indigenous communities, but further participation benefited from the cumulative joint learning and led to revisiting and rethinking what was being interpreted. A contingent and combined ethnography should attempt to relate, working with indigenous participants and taking interpretation as translation, the more immediate experiences with the totality of space, time and politics. It is an engaged, committed ethnography that questions conventional academic research, typically forged through power relations that continue the project of colonialism, and seeks more critical understandings of the causes and consequences of problems that evolve at multiple and interrelated scales of interaction. An engaged research is not necessarily less rigorous or worse than more traditional research, most of all because it is further scrutinised [15]. It strives to incorporate indigenous views but it is still obviously situated within an academic context in terms of funding and presentation of results (which in any case should be always conducted according to the ethical and political commitments of a critical research). As a result, the relation between the various participants may be sometimes awkward, but has a lot to offer to each other. Our departure point was the indigenous geographical politics and the politicised geography of the Paĩ Tavyterã, which provided a solid, meaningful and inspirational direction amidst highly complex tendencies. This critical, reflexive exercise should be part of the necessary effort to decolonise knowledge through a dialogue across social sciences, as much as the recognition of the positive contribution of the relational basis of indigenous knowledge and their environmental ethics based on reciprocity.

In the main, conducting critical research on indigenous matters requires not only a proper ethical and methodological perspective, but the very foundations of scientific practice are significantly impacted by the lived reality and the concept of indigeneity. Indigeneity is a relational concept that refers to the condition of being indigenous and various forms of interaction with other social groups and peoples. The notion of indigeneity is constantly evolving around the core dimensions and experiences held by being indigenous, which present different meanings in changing contexts of territorial and social relationships. The value of indigeneity is likewise a form of protest against the discrimination that exists towards them and the multiple mechanisms of exclusion, racism and exploitation. Beyond essentialist, romantic and reductionist positions, researchers and readers should be constantly concerned for the politics of ethnicity, as well as questions of representation and the ideological construction of various racialised 'others', in favour of conceptualisations that are time and place specific. Having discussed the main ethical, methodological, theoretical and political elements of the research approach, the next section will deal with the long-term trends and more recent impacts of conservative nation building and national development.

### 3 Old trends and recent experiences of 'Paraguay-building'

The main effect of colonisation and nation-building since the early period of colonisation of Paraguay has been the production of a reality smaller than the sum of pre-colonial parts, given that both the European and South American societies were downgraded by their forced interaction. The main impact was certainly on the indigenous peoples and on their unique socio-ecological relations. Since the sixteenth century and the conquest of the centre of South America by the Spanish Crown, Portuguese invaders and Catholic missionaries, the indigenous peoples of Paraguay, in particular, have been subjected to this attack on their ancestral world, which is predicated upon their conversion into non-subjects and confined to an increasingly belittled space. The indigenous inhabitants have been, like other marginalised social groups (including mestizo rural people and non-indigenous peasants), considered a *homo sacer* who can be killed or even genocided, but not sacrificed for the reason that is placed beyond divine and human law [16]. Their 'capacity to be exterminated' is inherent in their liminal, bare life condition and in the invisibility of their existence. Violence is also based on tacitly excepting the indigenous person, who is not formally excluded from Paraguayan society, but not included either. "*The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included*" [16, p. 25]. This powerful force,

which continues to underpin the nation-state and the heterogeneous national society, has been imposed through a systematic attack on the indigenous world and the containment of political reaction. Despite their ubiquity, the indigenous population remained the eternal, subordinate other prone to be undermined. The Guarani population are often referred to as the cornerstones of Paraguayan society, but there is a major contradiction in the face that they never took any meaningful part in national affairs, as the country remains functional according to a constant actualisation of the colonial past in the form of violent land and labour grabbing.

That contradiction was already recognised centuries ago by Voltaire [17, p. 34] in his novel *Candide*, already mocked the vast extensions of land seized from the Guarani by the Jesuits when Cacambo, one of the main characters, explains that “*Los Padres own everything, and the people own the rest; it is a masterpiece of justice and reason.*” With the precarious process of independence initiated in 1811 [18], the country had its image distinctively associated with Guarani symbols, but it was a controlled narrative of indigeneity. This ambiguous indigenist symbolism of the young Paraguayan republic provided ample populist legitimisation for a small military-bureaucratic ruling elite. Paraguay emerged amidst a superficial rhetoric of liberalism and liberty, but the “*originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment*” [16, p. 29]. Indigenous labour was essential in colonial farms and towns, as much as for the exploitation of quebracho and yerba-maté from the second half of the nineteenth century, typically in the form of seasonal jobs [*changa*] on *estancias* [large-scale farms] or with large forestry enterprises. Their condition was an aporia between law and justice or, what is the same, between formalist citizenship and real life. The Paraguayan leaders were self-serving players and there was a systematic appropriation of opportunities at the expense of the majority of the population and indigenous peoples in particular [19]. In the decades since the 1870s, there was increasing selling of land to foreign companies and the attraction of (preferentially) white colonists [20]. The first half of the last century were a period of great political instability, which included another major war with Bolivia, but already in the 1940s several agrarian colonies were organised in the Easter region, leading to increasing deforestation and displacement of Guarani communities from their ancestral territories.

The attack on common lands, especially those held by indigenous peoples (but also by non-indigenous squatters and peasants, mostly mestizos), was directly associated with the subjection (or abandonment) to a narrow development agenda. Agamben shows in that regard, following Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (Book Theta), that even then the sovereign state does not act, it is a clear demonstration of its immense power (as potentiality) to control and oppress [16]. As explained by Hegel, the ‘immediate movement’ (direct relations) is as much a ‘mediated movement’ that presupposes itself [21], that is, in the South American case, the grabbing of Paraguayan land (the direct outcome of territorial denationalisation) was also mediated by the elimination of politico-spatial alternatives. In the same way to the previous colonial and early republican phases, the main contact between the national state and the indigenous population was through violence and always for the disbenefit of the ancestral dwellers [22]. The old exclusionary tendencies intensified due to the agenda of international development and the Cold War. With the strengthening of Alfredo Stroessner’s authority after the 1954 coup d’état and the sharing of the proceedings of illegal activities with other generals and political leaders, it was possible to promote a highly conservative and authoritarian process of national and rural development [23], partly funded by the North American government and aimed at concentrating land and specialising the units of production [24]. For many generations, the Paraguayan agriculture had been largely based on small family farming and most of the land maintained its original vegetation, what started to change in the second half of the last century with agrarian development programmes and extensive land grabbing.

The international experience of the Green Revolution was translated, in the 1960s, into the *March towards the East* that promoted the occupation, deforestation and conversion of borderland with Brazil into private properties. A new Agrarian Law was passed in 1963 and established the formal principles for the distribution of land among peasants, particularly in collective units, although it also led to the seizing of large private areas by political allies. The aim was not to produce food or agrarian justice, but export commodities, speculate with land and contain the indigenous population in dwindling enclaves. The government also used agrarian reform as a strategy to secure political support and also to compensate members of the regime, especially senior officers of the armed forces [25]. The land transfer to the allies of the regime became known as ‘*tierras malhabidas*’, totalising around seven million hectares [26]. These areas were meant to be transferred to peasants and indigenous people as agrarian reform beneficiaries during the Stroessner dictatorship; instead the land was illegally awarded to private actors. Indigenous and non-indigenous communities evicted by land grabbing lost their land illegally, because their entitlements were recognised under the national Agrarian Reform plan. Nonetheless, their claims are systematically challenged by landowners who run large scale agribusinesses and, as a result, contribute to acute hunger and malnutrition problems. The misleading agenda of agrarian reform and ‘neoliberal developmentalism’ (since the 1990s) paved the way to what has been happening in the last decades, which is strongly based on anti-commons and anti-indigenous trends.

The Paĩ Tavyterã were left dispersed throughout 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> of farms and towns, mostly in the Department of Amambay, as consequence of centuries of migrant wage labour in ranches and plantations [27]. The collective ownership of land by extended indigenous families was gradually replaced by refuges and settlements on isolated parts of large latifundios, until the increase of agrarian pressure since 1960s due to the conservative land reform. In 1972, the Paĩ Tavyterã Project (PPT) was launched as an attempt to regularise the most urgent indigenous lands; its operation was approved by the Institute of Rural Wellbeing (IBR—*Instituto de Bienestar Rural*) and “with this authorization in hand, the project’s survey team determined that 31 communities, taking in some 80% of the Northeast’s indigenous population, could be secured on the basis of the 1963 agrarian reform law [27]. The main result of PPT was a partial protection through confinement of the Paĩ Tavyterã population in uncertain enclaves (around 100 encampments and reservations) that nonetheless remain under attack by farmers and speculators [28]. The uneven regional geography of the east of Paraguay became increasingly fragmented and left the ancestral population under attack, not just by the national state but also by anti-state guerrillas associated with drug trafficking. Since 1990s, with the demise of the Stroessner administration and growing insertion of Paraguay in the market-based globalisation of the post-Cold War period, there has been a growing reconcentration of rural land and the expansion of cattle ranches and transgenic soybean plantations. The downfall of the proto-fascist Stroessner administration was not due to popular uprising or democratic pressures, but it was rather a pre-emptive, internal adjustment by the ruling coalition [29].

Not by chance, there have been renewed pressures to further subtract—that is, grab and commodify—land and resources in more recent decades. IWGIA [30, p. 30] explicitly denounces that “although Amambay department has been the scene of widespread violence linked to the production, transit and illegal sale of drugs for decades, the current situation seems to have reached new levels of concern and threats to the lives of the communities.” More than 16,000 hectares of forest were cut by invaders between 2001 and 2018 in areas that lawfully belong to the Paĩ Tavyterã [11]. The operation of land grabbers and state authorities is often clearly violent and illegal. According to the Law 904, of 1981, an ancestral land must be bought back from the current private landowners and transferred to the indigenous communities (which must attain legal personhood status to claim their land) and then maintained as collectively property (it cannot be rented, subdivided or resold). The removal of the vegetation in indigenous lands has even more negative consequences than elsewhere, because their way of live (*teko*) includes as social agents both the plants and the ecosystems, although public authorities typically postpone or avoid taking measures to address socio-ecological degradation caused by farmers and landowners. The indigenous population has suffered from the lack of potable water, deforestation and fires caused by neighbouring farms and the contamination caused by pesticides and by a nearby ethanol industry [31]. There are even attempts to commercialise indigenous areas, what is tacitly tolerated by the authorities and systematically denounced by the impacted communities [32, 33]. The Paĩ Tavyterã were left with a tiny fraction of their original territory, struggling to recover more of their land grabbed in the name of development and nation-building.

#### 4 The disturbing nexus: agribusiness-illegality-traffic

The old and recent impacts on the indigenous world are associated with what Badiou has described as the production of ‘truths’, which are not only articulated with and through the world but are also excepted from it [34]. Absence is also an integral element of world truths and tells a great deal about its organisation and functioning. The truth is, for that very reason, invested with an absolute and eternal capacity to change any given circumstance. In that sense, the most pronounced socio-spatial truth of Paraguay, as analysed above, has been the imposition of a perverse, exploitative order that relies on the restricted space to transform relations and structures. It is a truth that emerges out of the tendencies of mainstream development that, according to Badiou, can only be meaningfully reached by breaking with the established criteria for judging opinions and understandings, which prevent change. In other words, those movements do not lead to a total removal or complete destruction of reality, but dialectically retain the possibility of a radical transformation. Nationalist and economic progress are, thus, politicised and contested, as both an expression of power control and the anticipation of restrained change. The reality of the world is the dialectical ‘one split into two’, fraught with truths but without a totalising whole. For Badiou, the real is what passes through by the force of scission, but this split (the main law of the dialectic, the ‘One divided into Two’) has the seed of new determinations and takes forward new limits [35, p. 14]. This follows the algorithm ‘scission-determination-limit’, what gives rise to unpredictable outcomes, either to the right (conservative politics) or to the left (transformative politics).

One of the most acute manifestations of a selective platform of nation building in Paraguay today is definitely the operation of its agribusiness sector, particularly the export of meat and soybean. Private farms currently occupy around

75% of the country (33 million hectares), most of these as cattle ranches and export-oriented plantations. It is a typical example of a 'playboy, macho economy' that bloats due to growing international demand and the facilitated access to common and indigenous land in South America. Soybean, in particular, was converted from a flexible legume and a nutritious crop into a new 'fossil fuel-like resource' coming from the vast landscapes in the centre and south of the continent and encroaching the ancestral areas of the Guarani and other indigenous peoples. Soybean has become a key socio-natural actor of the current agro-neoliberalist *durée* of the South American economies, increasingly deindustrialised and inserted in the logic of transnational corporations, global banks and agro-industry. Soybean production is a form of anti-agriculture where large sums of capital circulate but only a small fraction remains in the production zones and, instead of staple food, it produces agro-industrial commodities to be sent away. The agronomic technology involved in soybean cultivation is perilously dependent on heavy use of agrochemicals, machines, genetically modified seeds and foreign digital equipment. Hetherington argues that "soy is always a conspiracy", it is everywhere in Paraguay, it is a new version of the old colonial violence—*la soja mata*, 'the soy kills'—a vast socio-economic poison for which it is supposed to be a remedy [36, p. 80].

The novel pressures of development have entailed the conversion of an economy historically characterised by small family farming into large agribusiness operations. The agribusiness frontier that transformed the Alto Parana region in the 1980s has been expanding to the northeast of Paraguay where the majority of the Paĩ Tavyterã areas are located [37]. The negative impacts of agribusiness are not just associated with the monoculture production system, but also related to land speculation and on the unrestrained degradation of ecosystems [38]. Agribusiness is, therefore, part of a broader exclusionary nexus fuelled by resource grabbing and rent-seeking. Also part of the same nexus is the worrying synergy between the advance of agribusiness and the strengthening of a largely illegal economy based on drug traffic and the smuggling of goods. It is no coincidence that the most influential and destructive players involved in the contemporary advance of agribusiness have been Brazilian settlers in alliance with the Paraguayan political elite (14% of the Paraguayan territory is currently owned by Brazilians). In addition, it has been a process of neo-colonisation with a strong element of racism, given that most Brazilians come from the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul and have German ancestry [39].

The crucial politico-economic relevance of agribusiness in Paraguay is basically a very pronounced element of the institutionalised corruption that defines national politics and state interventions. The separation between legal and illegal activities is highly debatable in a geographical context dominated by the violence of agribusiness, the connivance of the national state and prominent politicians and the widespread operation of militias and drug mafias [40]. What prevails is a political regime that includes a high tolerance for the various manifestations of corruption, explicitly authoritarian or demagogic tendencies among political leaders and generally despondent attitudes toward elections. It is what Tucker describes as an 'outlaw capital' which "is a mode of accumulation that works through dealmaking and rule breaking. (...) Like Marx's general category of capital, outlaw capital is both a social relation and the product of those relations. (...) [It] helps us to better apprehend capitalism as a complex and mutating social formation working through worlds beyond wages and productive labour" [41, p. 1459]. An illegal state has typically the veil of legality and pretends to observe the constitutional order, but really justice only arises when what is supposedly illegal becomes the legal norm [34]. Illegality and institutionalised corruption have been the main catalyst of national politics and policy-making, the only think that 'really works', at least from the perspective of landowners and businesspeople. It is no surprise that during the 2023 presidential campaign, the defeated candidate Efraín Alegre, of the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico, declared that "We run the risk of a 'Mexicanization' of politics, the consolidation of a mafia state that impedes normal development" because of persistent corruption, drug trafficking and regular assassinations [42].

It is no secret that the association between agribusiness, the large conservative majority of politicians and the activity of illegal gangs (including the cultivation of marijuana in indigenous lands). Around 80% of the drug smuggled into Brazil comes from Paraguay (notably through Pedro Juan Caballero and Capitán Bado, the main areas of the Paĩ Tavyterã) and large-scale farmers are not involved in drug smuggling into the Brazilian territory, but invest in land and cattle to launder money in Paraguay. There have been regular assassinations of indigenous individuals by drug dealers and a notorious trafficker, Jarvis Pavão, even had plans to create a sort of 'zoo' for tourists with the indigenous communities as the main 'attraction' [43]. Institutionalised violence is another form of rent extraction or in the words of Tucker, it is basically a mechanism of "accumulation by transgression" [41, p. 1461]. Perhaps above all other forms of institutionalised corruption, it is the relation between the indigenous nations and the Paraguayan State that better demonstrates the subversion of legality and its transmutation into the dominant law at the expense of all justice and liberty. It is certainly encouraging that Articles 62 and 67 of the national constitution explicitly recognises the existence of indigenous peoples, including their ancestral rights over their land and customary, community rules. In practice, however, those constitutional guarantees have proved to be almost mere false promises and contained by the power of an agribusiness-based development.

After a period of protests and actions to demand their rights, the national social movements entered a moment of lethargy, without having obtained a positive response to or favourable progress in its demands. Not by coincidence, the Zavala-Riera Law was passed in 2021 to institute harsher penalties for land occupation and, in practice, constitutes another instrument to criminalise the struggle for land under the guise of protecting private property. In addition, since the start of the pandemic, the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the national economy have led the Ministry of Finance to call for cuts to the budgets of public institutions. These cuts have resulted in inaction in the face of inequalities that have widened abysmally during the pandemic. The already small budget of the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute (INDI) covers only the institution's running costs and some specific assistance programmes, and has been clearly insufficient to promote the minimum conditions of well-being and dignity for Indigenous Peoples. Unlike the previous government, there are no plans to directly address the problem of land and territory for peasants and Indigenous people, and the National Institute of Rural and Land Development (INDERT)'s budget has thus been reduced by 25.84% and that of INDI by 16.38% [3, p. 458]. In the end, the interventions of the state remain firmly biased in favour of the landed elites and fail to guarantee basic rights of access to land, but prevented indigenous and peasant rights from being respected.

## 5 Conclusions

It was examined above the perverse basis of Paraguayan socio-spatiality from paying attention to the exclusionary tendencies of neo-colonialism and nation-building. This highly hierarchical process has relied, primarily, on the grabbing of the indigenous world and its conversion into the politico-economic exclusion of the majority of the national population. The most pressing problem of Paraguay nowadays is precisely the illegal appropriation of peasant and indigenous areas [44]. The production of the Paraguayan space has been also based on the self-serving inclinations of its ruling elite, which compromised the national territory in tragic wars with the regional neighbours and, since the end of the nineteenth century, the selling of land to foreigners and international companies. Those long-lasting tendencies are now especially evident in the northeast of Paraguay and along the border with Brazil. Agribusiness have become consolidated in the northeast of the country, following what happened in previous decades and organically associated with drug traffic and the smuggling of goods, what creates a new wave of impacts on the remaining areas of the Paĩ Tavyterã nation in the Department of Amambay. The resulting social split between indigenous and non-indigenous members of the national Paraguayan population, living side by side in the same locations has been consolidated in an almost unsurmountable hierarchical national society. Despite the fact that Paraguay is a major exporter of agribusiness commodities, the prevailing geographical force is the accumulation of multiple forms of exclusion. Paraguay, as most other Global South nations, is inserted in globalised markets with a baggage of accumulated deficits and unfulfilled grassroots demands.

On the other hand, the reaction of indigenous peoples and other sectors of the working class has been increasingly prominent and complicates the precarious legitimisation of mainstream political and economic trends. Indigenous and non-indigenous workers have a central role in the functioning of the national society, but remain excluded from the crucial decisions and the sharing of economic results. Being is not resistance in itself, but being as multiplicity in the world conditioned by events can lead to the subversion of a given socio-spatial order. The struggle of the Paĩ Tavyterã has been happening in the form of coordinated denunciation of abuses, national and international protests, alliances academics and NGO activisms, recruitment of lawyers to represent them in the courts (sometimes lawyers of the indigenist agency INDI) and, more important, cross-community and family support. Those measures have represented an active effort to overcome persistent genocidal pressures and to maintain key elements of their world through the recovery of ancestral areas lost to rural and regional development. The violence of mainstream policies is the most devastating experience any social group could endure, but it can be resisted through the mobilisation of spatial and ethnic core identities and, more importantly, it reinforces the willingness to fight and the importance of united political action.

Contrary to this mainstream argument, a bottom-up defence of crucial socio-spatial differences not only guarantees the endurance of indigenous people as such, but is also the cornerstone of their political struggle against a profoundly exclusionary reality that tends towards dilution of the most fundamental features of their existence. It is not a coincidence that indigenous reactions are primarily informed by their claims of difference, as a form of resistance to dominant contemporary attitudes that both disregard their difference and attempt to incorporate them through subordination. Indigenous peoples have been able to creatively mobilise treasured elements of their collective existence and take them to diverse political arenas, reaching increasingly broader audiences with the support of social media. This movement reveals that alterity is not merely the final outcome of social interactions, but something that pre-existed, and is integral to, social relationships. Indigenous difference is, thus, not simply a qualification, but the subject of processes

of convergence or divergence between individuals and social groups, which take place in specific spatial settings and produce space anew. The east of Paraguay had become a contemporary frontier of coloniality and global agribusiness trade, but the Paĩ Tavyterã have resisted and consistently tried to maintain ethnic and class-based differences on their own terms as the key element of their struggle to recover and preserve their sacred ancestral land.

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**Data availability** The availability of data for this study is restricted due to privacy and ethical considerations.

## Declarations

**Competing interests** The author did not disclose any potential competing interests.

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