

Jeffrey Alan Erbig, Jr., *Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met: Border Making in Eighteenth-Century South America*, David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020, 280pp. ISBN 978146965048. Price \$24.95.

The title of Jeffrey Alan Erbig's monograph will probably raise high expectations among most scholars interested in relationships between colonial sovereignty, intercultural encounters, and knowledge production. Erbig's nuanced analysis meets these expectations perfectly. The author investigates practices of border-making in the context of Portuguese-Spanish boundary commissions in the second half of the eighteenth century, concentrating on the Río de la Plata region. Erbig asks how interimperial borderlines could be constructed and materialized in areas controlled not by Spanish and Portuguese authorities and settlers but by itinerant indigenous communities and their caciques. He focuses on the so-called *tolderías*, a term used for the portable encampments of these communities. Although *tolderías* were "mobile center[s] of authority" (24), which dominated the region's vast countryside, they have been little studied up to now. In order to trace these in the historical record, Erbig analyzed approximately 700 documents from 27 archives and libraries in Spain, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Portugal, France and the United States.

The Spanish-Portuguese boundary commissions were a significant turning point in the history of territorialization in Latin America. Spanish and Portuguese commissioners set out together to map the exact course of the interimperial borderline according to the guidelines of the treaties of Madrid (1750) and San Ildefonso (1777). Erbig interprets the territorial imaginations and the mapping practices of these commissions against the background of an epistemological shift in the Age of Enlightenment. Previously, territorial possession was seen as a consequence of "interpersonal relationships" (48), which found expression in the forms of "enclaves and corridors" (47). Thus, good reciprocal relationships and alliances with influential autonomous caciques and *tolderías* were regarded as crucial preconditions for sovereignty and territorial claims. However, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, these territorial imaginations were increasingly replaced by the "idea of contiguous territories divided by precise borderlines" (48). As a consequence of this ideal of "territorial exclusivity" (40), indigenous territorialities were increasingly ignored and *tolderías* were more and more regarded as an impediment to sovereignty. Erbig stresses that cartographically fixed borders were more than just "fictitious expressions of imperial desire" (6). His study demonstrates very clearly that the new spatial concepts introduced by the treaties and the boundary commissions had significant impacts on interethnic relationships and regional territorialities.

However, Erbig does not describe the reactions of *tolderías* and their caciques in terms of common “categories of resistance or accommodation” (134). He rather argues that their activities gave the border a “material life” (5) in the first place. Even though native communities did not share Spanish and Portuguese ideas of interimperial borderlines, they were nevertheless aware of the specific spatial practices connected to these ideas. As a consequence, they were able to use changing “settlement patterns, trade routes, resource extraction, policing [and] assertions of lordship” (5) to their own advantage.

In chapter one, Erbig discusses local power relations and dependencies in the Río de la Plata area before the boundary commissions. Sources from this period usually describe the region as a series of multiple consolidated territorialities of Portuguese, Spanish and Jesuit-Guaraní-missions, although they were rather “collections of discrete settlements tethered to a shared governor” (15). The areas in between colonial settlements were controlled by *tolderías*. Settlers, seeking to ensure their own access to resources, depended on good relationships with native mobile communities. Chapter two deals with the arguments and territorial imaginations Spanish and Portuguese authorities employed to make and legitimate territorial claims. Erbig stresses that legal arguments strongly contradicted actual power relations on the ground. After the Treaty of Madrid, vassalage of *tolderías* was no longer regarded as a precondition for territorial possession. Now the opposite held true. For colonial authorities, the question of whether *tolderías* were under Spanish or Portuguese sovereignty depended on which side of the borderline they were located. As a consequence, attempts to incorporate *tolderías* peacefully became less relevant to them. In chapter three, Erbig focuses on the mapping practices of the boundary commissions and on the ideological changes that resulted from them. He discusses depictions of geographical spaces in visual and textual media produced in connection with the commissions. Moreover, he points out the crucial role indigenous communities played during the expedition and how they also limited the reach of the boundary commissions by hiding knowledge or refusing access to certain areas. In chapter four, Erbig analyses the impacts of the new interimperial border on local power relations and interethnic relationships. He traces two different, but concurrent, developments: on the one hand, many caciques and their *tolderías* were forced to leave their territories to settle, for example, in missions. Erbig identifies an increasing “tendency toward aggression” (119) and a growing number of military campaigns especially by the Spanish against non-sedentary communities living in greater distances from the border. On the other hand, *tolderías* in the immediate vicinity of the new interimperial border found new ways to maintain or even expand their own authority, for example, by controlling the prospering contraband trade. In the last chapter,

Erbig investigates why *tolderías* and individuals living in them suddenly disappeared from sources of the nineteenth century. He refers to the intensification of violence in the form of raids and captive-taking against *tolderías* and to the dissolution of legal borders in the early nineteenth century, which made the border region uninhabitable for *tolderías*. Especially relevant are his considerations concerning the “discursive disappearance” (147) of the Charrúas and Minuanes. By tracing individuals’ movements from mobile communities to colonial settlements, Erbig demonstrates that the invisibility of Charrúas and Minuanes cannot simply be explained by their social disappearance, but, rather, it owed to a particular ethno-geographic vision promoted by the border treaties and boundary commissions.

The book provides an extremely coherent and comprehensible analysis of a very complex topic. The author neither gets lost in details nor uses unnecessary repetition, making his 170 pages-long study a pleasant read. By analyzing local practices of border-making against the background of European and indigenous spatial concepts, Erbig contributes considerably to recent debates on indigenous agency and indigenous knowledge in colonial history and in the history of science. His study goes far beyond the observation, shared by many scholars, that border-making and mapping were cooperative undertakings to which both European and indigenous actors contributed. The main merit of the study is that Erbig manages to link this observation in a very nuanced way to analyses of local power relations and thus provides valuable new perspectives, which can help to deconstruct the imperial imaginations of Latin American geography and history which are still present today.

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