



BOOK REVIEWS

Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met: Border Making in Eighteenth-Century South America. By Jeffrey Alan Erbig, Jr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2020, p. 259, \$24.95.

Colonial territories in South America, as elsewhere around the world, were mapped as they were claimed and appropriated. In this book, Jeffrey Alan Erbig, Jr. examines the complex interaction between two imperial powers and indigenous people in the making of a boundary in the eighteenth century between Brazil and Spanish South America in the area now known as Uruguay.

Portugal and Spain signed two treaties, the 1750 Treaty of Madrid and the 1777 Treaty of San Ildefonso, to determine the border between Brazil and Spanish South America. A general map of the continent was drawn up in Europe and Portuguese and Spanish diplomats drew more detailed instructions for the border. Mapmakers then traveled to South America to survey the border line. It was a massive enterprise that involved numerous teams surveying the almost 10,000-mile boundary.

This book focuses in on one region, the Rio de la Plata. It was complex space of Portuguese and Spanish colonial settlements, Jesuit missions, and indigenous encampments, *tolderías* of about 30 to 100 people. There were complex interactions in this settlement archipelago. The mobile lifestyle of indigenous people widened their access to resources in the interior, allowing them to trade with the colonial settlers and control vital trade routes. In the complex trading system that developed, the colonial settlers had to acknowledge the territorial control of the indigenous people.

Boundary-marking and border-making were not a simple projection of imperial domains onto this complex space. Border-making had to accept the diffused power in the region. It was a social process that involved the founding of forts and strategic settlements to mark and guard the boundary, population reshufflings, displacement, and new forms of interactions. The indigenous people played a major role in the complex interactions between imperial agents, religious foundations and settlers. The delimiting of competing imperial powers increased indigenous power in certain places, at least for a time. While the creation of the border involved the displacement and dispossession of indigenous people, some local groups used the process to extend their territorial reach and extend their trading networks. Indigenous groups further from the border were more firmly situated inside imperial control, while those closer to the border could leverage their liminal position to expand trade routes and subvert the border. But, over time, as the border hardened, the indigenous people were squeezed by the imperial authorities. The late 18th century

border-making provided opportunities for certain indigenous leaders, but these disappeared once the border failed to restrict the movement of imperial agents.

The book is based on a detailed study of numerous maps produced at the time and a careful reading of 700 manuscripts. The result is a very granular description of the process. At times, the granularity, when combined with shifting temporal frame, makes it easy to lose your bearings in the complex text. The book would have benefitted from either a more straightforward linear narrative or a more overt signaling of the shifting temporal context. At times the text elides over decades and centuries without much warning to the reader.

Despite this criticism, the book adds to our knowledge of the complexity of colonial settler societies and highlights the social nature of boundary drawing and border making. The work highlights an interesting shift in territorial possession from legal access to resources to legal ownership of resources. It provides a case study of the imperial monopolization of property and the drive for territorial exclusivity. The book also indicates how the maps drawn by European cosmographers, so easy to draw up from the comfort of courts in Europe, were difficult to express on the ground. The author highlights the enormous gap between imperial designs and local implementation.

There is much to find much to learn from the book. It is an important contribution to our understanding of how boundaries are made and their social consequences in settler colonialism. The author shows how border making had enormous ramifications on the complex space of settler colonialism.

Perhaps the single most important contribution is the author's excavation of the agency of indigenous peoples. The story of Rio de La Plata was not simply a story of native decline. The local people were integral to the formation of regional societies. The author has done good work in saving the history of these peoples from what the great historian E. P. Thompson described as "the enormous condescension of posterity."

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