



Jeffrey Alan Erbig. *Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met: Border Making in Eighteenth-Century South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 280 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-5504-8.

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Jeffrey Erbig's *Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met* is an intriguing study of a South American region in the era of border demarcation between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Covering roughly the "long eighteenth century," it traces the politics, human geography, and cultural relations of the border region with a special emphasis on the vital influence of the nonpermanent indigenous settlements known as *tolderías*. The case studies come from the southern end of the Spanish-Portuguese border, the Río de la Plata region, and foreground local and regional historical actors. The diplomatic wranglings of the Iberian empires set the stage for a much richer examination of the region's cultural and political dynamics. The monograph is original in both its subject matter and its methodological approaches. It presents a fascinating study at the intersection of political, spatial, and cultural history, and will be of interest to historians of cartography, indigenous history, colonial Latin America, and borderlands history.

Erbig presents a picture of a region in flux: a place of moving borders, mobile settlements, and changing alliances. Five chapters take the reader through the history of this border region. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the reader to the role of *tolderías*, showing that these indigenous settlements and

their land use dominated the region's politics and economies, and played an important role in the negotiation of Spanish-Portuguese rivalries in the area. Chapter 3 follows the joint Iberian expeditions established in the wake of the treaties of Madrid (1750) and San Ildefonso (1777), which observed and established a border line between Spanish and Portuguese possessions. Despite these imperial ambitions, indigenous actors and settlements remained central, since the expeditions attempted to "partition borderland territories that neither empire effectively controlled" (p. 72). Chapter 4 examines the effect of these new borders on ideas of territory and sovereignty in the Río de la Plata region. It highlights diverging approaches of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns toward indigenous *tolderías*, and indigenous participation in the new spatial politics of the late eighteenth century. Finally, Chapter 5 covers the early nineteenth century, showing how both early nineteenth-century imperial policies and the subsequent establishment of independent states in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina altered the political and cultural dynamics of the border region, with disastrous effects for its indigenous inhabitants.

The monograph is published within the David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History, and its use of spatial concepts clearly fits into and

develops this field. One of the strengths of this book is the author's use of a large variety of sources from different archives across both the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking world. As a result, the chapters take the reader seamlessly across the region, "decentering" the space and its inhabitants from previously dominant Eurocentric and imperial visions, as historian of borderlands Pekka Hämäläinen has described it.[1] Erbig declares his intent to diverge from previous frameworks of historical studies of the Río de la Plata region, moving the geographical focus of this study away from missions and coastal cities to the lands mostly controlled by indigenous groups. Indigenous actors are not passive bystanders in the face of imperial diplomacy here. Erbig demonstrates individual caciques and *tolderías* to be important historical actors who exercised power within their own political networks, controlled the countryside, and brokered alliances with imperial agents and Jesuit missionaries. He emphasizes that "Native peoples did not simply foil or adapt to imperial efforts; they altered the very structure of imperial governance" (p. 7). Throughout the text, caciques are mentioned by name wherever possible, as the author explains, to avoid generalized imperial ethnonyms that rarely corresponded to indigenous self-identification (p. 25). A tapestry of interpersonal relationships and strategic alliances emerges that remained neither static nor uniform across the space.

Spatial and geographical themes inform the monograph as a whole and run through all chapters. Most obviously, the narrative revolves around the demarcation of a boundary line between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The author shows the Río de la Plata region's transformation from a vaguely defined space in the eyes of these empires in the early eighteenth century to an increasingly well-mapped if contested border, and its subsequent *de facto* disintegration in the face of revolutionary wars. In this, Erbig makes a welcome contribution to the history of cartography (especially in chapter 3). In particu-

lar, he emphasizes the co-construction and negotiation of geographical knowledge, which has become an important feature in recent works in the field.[2] However, caciques and *toldería* members are no mere "informants" or "guides" here: the spatial practices of indigenous people and their control of rural territories were constituent aspects of the border itself, as Erbig persuasively argues. Furthering the historiography of Iberian imperial attitudes toward independent indigenous communities as previously studied by historians such as David J. Weber, Erbig relates this cultural and political framework to spatial practices.[3] The relatively small geographical area covered in this monograph enables the author to deal with concepts of possession, territoriality, and sovereignty in a nuanced way. Because mobile *toldería* settlements often stood at odds with increasingly rigid European notions of fixing the border, yet could not be ignored by imperial powers, this monograph provides a unique lens on this topic.

The author shows great sensitivity to the geographical situatedness of cultural and political interactions in the border region, employing GIS maps to illustrate the presence of *tolderías* in relation to border lines and Iberian settlements, as well as change in these circumstances over time. In total, the monograph includes twenty-two historical maps and thirteen maps drawn up to illustrate the book's arguments, most of the latter drawing on GIS data. The GIS maps provide an excellent visual representation of the area covered by these settlements. Due to the nature of the underlying data this exercise presents some challenges, which the author does not shy away from discussing. The data underlying the GIS maps is, after all, dependent on our interpretation of the source material. For instance, a map recording purported locations of indigenous Charrúa and Minuanes over time (map 8, p. 125) might appear to show that these groups moved closer to the Spanish-Portuguese border line in the early 1800s. However, as Erbig points out, it is possible that more frequent mentions of indigenous settlements

near the borderline simply reflect these documents' authors paying more attention to inhabitants of a contested area in these years. In another example (map 4, p. 32), Erbig emphasizes that a map neatly dividing *toldería* locations into ethnic groups such as "Minuanes," "Charrúas," or "Bohanes" as mentioned in imperial sources, is more likely to reflect a colonial imagination of territory than the reality of indigenous ethnonyms.

While the GIS maps are a persuasive way of representing an enormous number of data points drawn from painstaking archival research to the reader, Erbig's own comments on the nature of the source material for the maps and the challenges in drawing data from it make for particularly interesting discussions. Prompting the reader to reflect on the uneasy relationship between the presence of diverse and itinerant populations and imperial spatial understanding, they serve as excellent case study for evaluating colonial sources from new perspectives. Further discussions about the archival material also bring convincing conclusions with regard to nineteenth-century states' depictions of indigenous groups. In the conclusion (and maps 12-13), Erbig deftly draws an arc from colonial records' inability or disinterest in accurately representing *tolderías* to the misinterpretation of their role in the later national histories. He contrasts the increasingly violent campaigns against independent indigenous populations in colonial and independent nineteenth-century states with the apparent conviction of Brazilian, Uruguayan, and Argentinian sources of the later nineteenth century that former indigenous inhabitants simply migrated away from the national territory, showing that documental practices and spatial (mis)understandings underlined indigenous erasure from national historiographies.

The multitude of archival materials consulted and the sheer number of encounters between different groups and individuals documented are some of the monograph's great strengths. It is this local wealth of detail that allows the author to

weave together indigenous and imperial histories and present a nuanced portrait of a complex borderland in which different territorialities coexisted. The geographical specificity of the case studies may limit their broader applicability to other contexts in some respects, as the author admits (p. 171). The back-and-forth of changing alliances along the border and the region's continuously changing settlement patterns also do not easily lend themselves to producing a linear narrative. This in addition to the vast number of individuals mentioned (whether Spanish or Portuguese agents, individual residents, merchants, and "go-betweens" in the border region) might present a challenge to a nonspecialist reader, who may occasionally find the level of detail overwhelming, or difficult to place in a wider context. Nevertheless, the author's commitment to avoid flattening indigenous actors into essentialized imperial categories and restore their names, spatial politics, and crucial influence to the historical record is an important project and makes for a highly innovative monograph.

Notes

[1]. Pekka Hämäläinen, "What's in a Concept? The Kinetic Empire of the Comanches," *History and Theory* 52, no. 1 (2013): 81-90.

[2]. For instance, Graham D. Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[3]. David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

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