A Contra corriente
Una revista de historia social y literatura de América Latina
A Contra corriente
A Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America

Vol. 13, No. 2, Winter 2016, 342-346

Review / Reseña

Tamar Herzog. *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

The Contentiousness of Contingent Boundaries: Iberian Territorial Claims Making in South America and on the Peninsula

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Herzog boldly redefines the contours of how we need to understand the territorial history of Spanish and Portuguese empires. Despite papal bulls and landmark treaties, Iberian imperial frontiers—both in the Americas and in Europe—have never been clearly defined nor have they ever been static. Building on Peter Sahlin's breakthrough study, Herzog argues that borders need to be thought of as a continual process, one that is chaotic, multifaceted, and constantly up for reinterpretation on several levels, and in several places. Herzog scoured national, regional, and municipal archives and libraries in dozens of cities on both sides of the Atlantic. The solid intellectual framework employed by this study not only makes sense of thousands of territorial claims-making cases, it also forces scholars to grapple with their own assumptions about South America's historical relationship with Iberia, as well

as Spain and Portugal's relationship to Europe during the early modern period and beyond.

Herzog's study is dense, and wades through tremendously difficult material, yet it is clearly, if surprisingly, structured. The book is divided in two parts, each consisting of two chapters. Instead of starting with the 'Old World,' Herzog opens with the 'New.' This move cracks open a new world of understanding. Her reasoning is clear and convincing. For generations, the "motherland-offspring paradigm" (11) has elided the manifold ways in which the Americas affected Europe by overwhelmingly arguing the inverse. More insidiously, this paradigm invokes a value-laden comparative history, one that champions Europe as the orderly, natural space versus the clearly inferior and chaotic exploitative worlds born out of Europe's artificial colonies in the Americas. By putting the Americas first, Herzog persuasively integrates Spanish and Portuguese history within the New World and within the Old, an impressive feat. Herzog underscores how territorial claims and conflicts on both sides of the Atlantic were performed according to a widely shared repertoire. Although the territorial conflicts she studied were, by definition, contests of opposition, the individuals, families, communities, and townships involved understood that they belonged to a single commonwealth with a shared set of norms, customs, and understandings.

Herzog's first chapter, "European Traditions: Bulls, Treaties, Possession, and Vassalage," walks readers through the familiar territory of European courts, diplomatic negotiations, treaty making, and occasional wars that have dominated scholarly discussions regarding Spanish versus Portuguese claims in South America. The chapter then turns to the everyday acts that defined imperial spaces on South America's frontier. Herzog does not dismiss the significance of official European negotiations, diplomacy, and cartography that emanated 'from above'. The problem was that papal bulls, treaties, and scientific expeditions insufficiently answered pressing territorial questions posed by those 'from below.' Uncertainty forced individuals and communities, who were not necessarily versed in legal doctrine nor necessarily commissioned by one or another a king, to become hyper-vigilant (68). Their vocal, at times violent, claims needed to go on record if they

wanted to assert their right to settle, use, or pass through a territory. Denouncing those deemed to be outsiders most effectively asserted territorial claims. Rivals claimed vassalage with one or another crown, depending on which supported their specific interests more. The result was that in South American national identities entered surprisingly often into discussions over territorial claims, even after the decades-long union of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns complicated such distinctions.

The second chapter, "Europeans and Indians: Conversion, Submission, and Land Rights," thematically builds on the question of vassalage by demonstrating how Europeans treated native peoples as territory. The arguments Herzog lays out apply not just to Spanish versus Portuguese claims on lands and peoples, but also to other European empires in the Americas. Indigenous populations living in South America's interior were roped into territorial disputes that sought to define borders between imperial spaces. Religious conversion, alliance making, and war were the key mechanisms that allowed Europeans to increasingly control indigenous inhabitants and their lands. Indigenous adhesion to one or another country offered a convincing guarantee of land rights to a specific European empire, at least in European courts. Indigenous inhabitants nevertheless could, and occasionally did, pit European rivalries against each other in ways that served their own interests (132). The kind of dispossession indigenous peoples suffered in the South American interior mirrored the ways in which local peasant populations, or *fronterizos* were themselves dispossessed on the frontier between Spain and Portugal, a topic to which Herzog turns for the second half of the book.

Herzog's second section focuses the territorial scope on the much smaller contested territory between Spain and Portugal, but expands the time frame considerably. Rather than the three hundred year period of colonialism in the New World, Herzog expands her analysis of the Iberian Peninsula from the Middle Ages until the 20th century. Much like in the New World, laws and treaties failed to supply a clear solution to boundary disputes on the Peninsula. Still, significant differences between these two Iberian spaces did emerge. When in South America, Europeans needed to be hyper-vigilant of the immediate moves made by their rivals, if they were to maintain their

territorial claims. In Iberia, change over time, or, rather, proving that no change occurred was what mattered. Herzog reveals how the story of contested territories in Iberia became one of contests over how historical narratives made and unmade territories.

Chapter 3, "Fighting a Hydra, 1290-1995," underscores the significance of "time immemorial" for municipalities over an extended 700-year period. Communities at times acted as rivals and at times as allies in the *longue durée* of border making between Spain and Portugal. A diverse array of actors from the municipalities of Aroche, Encinasola, Moura, Noudar, Barrancos, and Serpa invoked memory and forgetfulness in often-contradictory ways in order to claim territory and land usage rights. The 1542 accord settled relations between three of these municipalities over a swath of land that had appropriately acquired the name La Contienda (the Contention) after almost 300 years of dispute. The accord allowed for shared use by communities belonging to two different states. By the 17th century, this accord took on mythic proportions, with no one questioning the accord itself but rather what it meant and how it needed to be implemented. Things changed after communal property increasingly came under fire during the nineteenth century. This occurred at the same time that ideas about progress for Iberia increasingly came to adopt the same arguments used to legitimate land claims and land use in the New World. Land no longer should be assigned according to who used it in the past, but rather to those who would use it better in the future (183).

The final substantive chapter, "Moving Islands in a Sea of Land: 1518-1864," deepens Herzog's analysis of how historical narratives work to stake out territorial possession by emphasizing how communities tried to made sense of what was natural and what was historical. The appearing and disappearing islands of Verdoejo, claims over the Mountains of Magdalena (to the Spanish) or Lindoso (to the Portuguese), and the 'mixed' and 'promiscuous' settlements with residents claiming to belong to both Spain and Portugal, offer fertile ground. Mutations in landscapes along rivers directly impacted fishing and navigation rights, taxation, control over trade, and jurisdiction. The significance of the impact was felt even more strongly in a

place like Verdoejo where the economic interests of a Jesuit monastery, a Spanish abbot, and a noble family were involved. Spanish and Portuguese officials believed that local conflict over land use in the Magdalena/Lindoso Mountains could be solved through reason, yet 'reason' meant different things to different people. 16th-century conflicts between the vassals of two different lords in the three villages of Santiago, Rubiás, and Meaus on the border between Galicia and Spain and Trás-os-Montes were solved through a judicial compromise. That compromise in effect made it impossible to determine who was Spanish and who was Portuguese. Efforts at gaining clarity were for naught. Herzog underscores how nineteenth-century historians relegated the cause of the confusion to a feudal past, revealing their deep-seated need to legitimate the modernizing impulses of 19th-century in Iberia. The cases Herzog selects in this chapter are illustrative, and not just for the anomalies they present. They also demonstrate the characteristics shared by several other places claimed by both Spain and Portugal. Kings did not impose the border between Spain and Portugal on locals. The establishment of a border took hundreds of years to complete (239).

Herzog forces open several distinct bodies of historical literature that have heretofore been closed off from one another. Historians of Latin America can no longer consider the dynamics of peninsular territorial conflicts between Spain and Portugal after 1492 as having no relevance to New World contests. Similarly, historians of Spain and Portugal can no longer enjoy the luxury of ignoring events across the ocean. Neither can they dismiss events occurring across the supposedly "most ancient" boundary in Europe as peripheral to their own history. Herzog's study help us better understand the complex interactions between overarching trans-Atlantic papal bulls, treaties, and laws, and the lived, constantly changing actions on the ground that challenged, defined, and continually re-defined territorial claims.