

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Indigenous Groups in the Heart of South America

Erick Langer

Georgetown University, Washington, DC, US
Email: erick.langer@georgetown.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

Colonial Kinship: Guaraní, Spaniards, and Africans in Paraguay. By Shawn Michael Austin. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Pp. xv + 365. \$85.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780826361967.

The Grandchildren of Solano López: Frontier and Nation in Paraguay, 1904–1936. By Bridget Maria Chesterton. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 192. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780826353481.

El Chaco Invicto: Las expediciones bolivianas al Pilcomayo (Siglo XIX). By Isabelle Combès. La Paz: Editorial El País/CIHA Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Antropológicas 2021. Pp. 175. Bs 90 paper. ISBN: 9789997419095.

Warisata en la selva: El núcleo escolar selvícola de Casarabe entre los sirionó, 1937–1948. By Anna Guiteras Mombiola. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona; Cochabamba: Taller de Estudios e Investigaciones Andino-Amazónicas, ILAMIS, Itinerarios Editorial, 2020. Pp. 307. \$36.87 paper. ISBN: 9788491683872.

Reimagining the Gran Chaco: Identities, Politics, and the Environment in South America. Edited by Silvia Hirsch, Paola Canova, and Mercedes Biocca. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021. Pp. x + 349. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9781633402862.

Don't Cry: The Enlhet History of the Chaco War. Edited by Hannes Kalisch and Ernesto Unruh. Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. Pp. xx + 291. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780228011682.

Landscape of Migration: Mobility and Environmental Change on Bolivia's Tropical Frontier, 1952 to the Present. By Ben Nobbs-Thiessen. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 323. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469656106.

New World of Gain: Europeans, Guaraní, and the Global Origins of Modern Economy. By Brian P. Owensby. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022. Pp. xv + 378. \$32.00 paper. ISBN: 9781503628335.

The Guaraní and Their Missions: A Socioeconomic History. By Julia J. S. Sarreal. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. Pp. x + 335. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780804785976.

The center of South America, in the region including the Gran Chaco and its surrounding areas, is emerging as a place where much innovative research is taking place. Seen from the more densely populated (and much more studied) places such as the Andes mountains and the Atlantic coast, the region has long been marginal in terms of understanding and did not receive much attention until recently. At best, the Guaraní peoples of Paraguay have held interest for scholars because the Spanish organized the conquest and settlement of the Atlantic coast, and the Jesuits created their impressive mission system with them. The Guaraní continue to stimulate conceptually interesting research, as we will see.

The Gran Chaco and its surrounding areas present an extremely diverse region. On the western side, the densely forested Andean foothills provided for relatively large populations of maize farmers, such as the Chiriguano (now called Ava-Guaraní) and the Chané. In the center of the Chaco, mostly dry forest with large biodiversity, indigenous groups such as the Toba and the Enxet made their living through hunting and gathering, while in the southern portions, in verdant southern Paraguay, the Guaraní lived in small villages, also relying on maize agriculture.

No one has calculated the number of people at the start of the European invasions in the sixteenth century, but it was at least in the hundreds of thousands and probably much more. For example, preconquest estimates of the Guaraní population on the southeastern borders of the Chaco are of a million or more; the Ava-Guaraní population of what is now Bolivia numbered about a quarter million. By the mid-twentieth century, this figure had dwindled considerably, although mixture with Europeans and acculturation, especially in Paraguay (where Guaraní is still widely spoken), make it difficult to measure the indigenous population. In the Gran Chaco region, the decline in indigenous people has meant that some groups, such as the Yuqui, have almost disappeared.

Although indigenous demographic decline occurred before, a large break and major reason for the indigenous decline was the Chaco War (1932–1935), the largest armed conflict on the South American continent in the twentieth century. The war led to the penetration by national societies into the Chaco and the displacement of indigenous peoples on a massive scale. Ostensibly about the control over petroleum reserves in the western part of the Chaco, Bolivia fought a losing war with Paraguay in which more than fifty thousand Bolivian and thirty thousand Paraguayan soldiers died. Tens of thousands of Bolivian soldiers ended up as prisoners of war. The war reverberated far beyond the battlefields, as the Bolivian defeat was one of the major causes of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, one of the great social revolutions of the twentieth century.

The neglect of the region by historians on any topic other than the war includes that settlers penetrated the Chaco and surrounding area in the late nineteenth century. Integration through settlement by nonnatives occurred relatively recently, most of it less than a century ago. Thus, written records for the region are relatively hard to come by, and most remain in the region rather than in the national archives of the respective countries. A fluorescence of research has come about only over the past few decades as scholars have found and researched local archives.

The neglect by historians has not been mirrored by anthropologists, although the discipline itself came into being only a bit more than a century ago. Indeed, some of the founders of modern ethnography, such as Erland Nordenskiöld and Alfred Métraux, did their research in the Chaco region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After some decades of quiescence, this anthropological tradition revived in the late twentieth century, resulting in important studies of indigenous peoples of the region, as the books in this review attest.

Despite this flourishing of studies over the past decades, the fact that the region is divided among three countries has made it difficult to establish a conversation between scholars divided by national boundaries. Only lately have scholars been joining across borders to share data and studies, as the volumes reviewed here exemplify. These studies

were also marginalized in many cases because the Chaco and its surrounding regions are, with the exceptions of the Guaraní area in Paraguay, seen as the far ends of the country. The capital cities are far away, and most governments see those territories as marginal. Because knowledge production and exchange are mediated in large part in the capitals of each country, this left many scholars working on the region doubly marginalized.

For this review, it is best to start with the Guaraní, the best known of the colonial-period cases. There have been many studies of the colonial Guaraní; the case has intrigued scholars for centuries. Despite the longtime focus on this indigenous group, new insights continue to appear. A new and exciting addition to the literature on the Guaraní is Shawn Michael Austin's *Colonial Kinship*, which deals with the early colonial period in Paraguay. This is the best history of this period that I have read. It provides much context, based largely on judicial records, to the relations between the Spanish and the Guaraní peoples. Austin asks how it was possible for the Spanish to establish themselves in a largely indigenous world where the number of Europeans (and Africans) was vanishingly small in a sea of Guaraní peoples. With ethnohistorical sensitivity, the author argues that the relationship between the Spanish and the Guaraní was mediated through the concept of *cuñadasgo*, where the Guaraní chiefs accepted the Spanish as sons-in-law of their daughters. In Guaraní political culture, even before the Spanish invasion, the chiefs created alliances through the exchange of women relatives. The Guaraní incorporated the Spanish newcomers conceptually by doing what they had always done with powerful outsiders: offering them their women and thus allying themselves with them. As a result, the Spanish picked up this custom in an otherwise resource-poor environment. Early colonial Paraguayan society was polygynous, where the European men maintained many indigenous women as concubines. Austin argues that the relationship between indigenous and Spanish society was mediated through the provision of indigenous women.

The author deals briefly with the population of African descent, which few scholars have done. As he shows, they represented 15 percent of the population of Asunción in 1682 (1,120 of 9,675 inhabitants) and 54 percent a century later (2,703 of 4,941 inhabitants) (13).¹ Unlike other scholars, Austin asserts, mainly on the basis of judicial cases, that enslaved peoples and those who were free worked mainly with the Guaraní and thus had more in common with the indigenous population than with the Spaniards.

Austin's work informs part of Brian Owensby's ambitious tome on the Guaraní in the colonial period. Owensby includes Austin's insights into the role of women but makes larger points that he ties to the rise of capitalism, or "the world of gain." For Owensby, the Paraguayan example was essential for Europeans to work out an understanding of the intellectual development of capitalist ideas. To show this, the author ranges from the early colonial period to the eighteenth century. Although he covers Austin's insights on the trade of Guaraní women as the economy of power within Paraguay, his main contribution lies elsewhere.

First, Owensby contrasts the Guaraní political economy with that of the Spanish. Owensby shows how the Guaraní emphasized community and reciprocity, whereas the Spanish attempted to impose, not always successfully, a regimen in which individual gain was privileged. When the Jesuits established their missions in the early seventeenth century, the missionaries adopted part of the Guaraní ideas about how society should work, at the same time protecting the indigenous peoples from the predations of the Spanish colonists. Thus, Owensby's focus is different from the pathbreaking work of Guillermo Wilde, who emphasized in his 2009 book (published in English in 2019) the

¹ The author provided only the percentages of Afrodescendants in the book. The totals come from Rafael Eladio Velázquez, "La población en Paraguay en 1682," *Revista Paraguaya de Sociología* 9, no. 24 (1972): 128–148, and "Diario del Capitán de Fragata Juan Francisco Aguirre [1793–1798]," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Buenos Aires) 17–19, nos. 45–48 (1949–1951), respectively. My thanks to Ignacio Telesca for providing this information.

cultural and political aspects of the missions, especially that of the Guaraní.² The missions, according to Owensby, were a mix of what the Jesuits considered Christian charity and Guaraní concepts of social living. According to Owensby, the missions worked because they built on the moral economy of the Guaraní that found solidarity in community.

The second focus of *New World of Gain*, and where Owensby makes his greatest contribution, is how European intellectuals understood the Paraguayan example and how they used it in their treatises that led to the definition of what we today call capitalism. He shows that the Guaraní were very much on the minds of the European intellectuals, from Rousseau to Adam Smith (and many in between), who debated the lessons of the Guaraní and their economy versus that of the commercial economy that had emerged in Western Europe. These intellectuals contrasted the Guaraní's "savage" way of life with that of the Europeans, whose superior ways were characterized by commerce and the constructive use of avarice. Thus, the peoples of the central part of South America were crucial to the development of economic thought as a counterexample that still dominates modern ways of thinking about how society should and should not work.

Brian Owensby knew of and incorporated Julia Sarreal's work from her *The Guaraní and Their Missions* (which appeared in 2014) into his book, but her take on the missions is about the missions themselves rather than the intellectual debates raging in Western Europe. Sarreal's economic history is a detailed analysis of the missions based on the account books of both the Jesuit period and after 1767, when the Spanish Crown suppressed the order. She claims that the missions were economic successes during the Jesuit period in part because of the subsidies the Crown and the order provided. This success was based on a hierarchical society—nothing like the imaginations of some Europeans far away. Once the missions were turned over to secular administrators, a combination of corruption and lack of subsidies doomed the former missions to economic decline. In particular, the misappropriation of the cattle herds of some of the most prosperous former missions made them economically unviable. The study takes on other works, such as that of Barbara Ganson, who wrote about the aftermath of the missions but ascribed more of the decline of the former missions to the migration of the Guaraní to the towns and cities of the Río de la Plata region.³

These three studies complement and take us further than previously, with their focus on indigenous peoples and especially the Guaraní, both in the Jesuit missions and in their aftermath. Unlike the colonial Guaraní, the nineteenth century has been much less studied until relatively recently. It is only in the early twenty-first century that a plethora of studies appeared that finally brought a light to a period in the indigenous history of the Chaco region that had previously been obscure. One of the most important scholars who has contributed to the field is Isabelle Combès, a France-born Bolivian ethnohistorian who is producing some of the most consequential studies on this region and its indigenous inhabitants. One of the works is *El Chaco invicto*, in which she takes the reader into the Gran Chaco from the Bolivian (northwestern) side and shows why, in the nineteenth century, all but one of the expeditions into the region failed. This is key to understanding the resilience of indigenous groups in the Chaco, as no state, whether Bolivia, Argentina, or Paraguay, was able to effectively penetrate the region up to the late 1920s. The Bolivians arguably spent the most resources and launched the largest number of expeditions into the Chaco, as the state continued to search for new ways to access the oceans. This was especially the case with the advent of the War of the Pacific (1879–1884), when Chile grabbed Bolivia's Pacific coast and the Bolivian government scrambled to find alternative ways, this time through the river system to its east, from the Chaco to the Atlantic. In the end, it was all for naught. As Combès shows, even the 1883 expedition that made it to Asunción, Paraguay, never established a route that others could follow. This set up the Chaco War (1932–1935),

² Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poder en las misiones de Guaraníes* (Buenos Aires: Sb Editorial, 2019)

³ Barbara Ganson, *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

an unmitigated disaster not just for the loser, Bolivia, but even more so for the indigenous peoples in the region who were murdered, expelled, and mistreated by the Bolivian and Paraguayan armies that invaded their territory.

Combès demonstrates that geographic obstacles, the weather, or the attacks by indigenous peoples were not the only reasons for the failure of these enterprises. She highlights the sheer incompetence and infighting of most of the expedition leaders. Arthur Thouar, a French adventurer who participated in two expeditions (1883 and 1887), comes in for an especially scathing evaluation. He consistently went the wrong way, refused to listen to the advice of indigenous or local colonists, and made up or lied about many of his endeavors in his published travelogues.

Bridget Chesterton's *The Grandchildren of Solano López* examines the Gran Chaco from the Paraguayan side for a slightly later period than Combès. Her valuable book, which is mostly about the multifarious ways that Paraguayan nationalism grew in the region in the early twentieth century, also examines the explorations into the Chaco by Paraguay. She argues that a new Paraguayan identity shaped through the Chaco, with the slow exploration of the region by Paraguayans, emerged only in the early twentieth century. As in the case of Bolivia, it involved military, scientific, and religious efforts, and those were generally more successful than the Bolivian ones. The most promising enterprises were the exploratory parties launched by Juan Belaieff, a White Russian military officer who had fled to Paraguay after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. In turn, various religious organizations, such as various Catholic orders, the Anglican Church, and the Mennonites also entered the Chaco to establish missions and, in the case of the Mennonites, settlements for themselves.

The Mennonites were the most prosperous settler group, and they loom large in the Paraguayan Chaco, colonizing much of the northern half of what is now Paraguay. In part this was because after the Chaco War, few other people settled in the region. The victorious Paraguayan government tried to give newly acquired land to the veterans, or, as they called them, agriculturalist-soldiers. Few of the ex-soldiers wanted to settle there. Instead, it was the Mennonites who continued to spread out and, as it turned out, take the land of the natives who had survived the war.

The fate of the native population during the Chaco War is the centerpiece of Hannes Kalisch and Ernesto Unruh's *Don't Cry: The Enlhet History of the Chaco War*. The book provides a deeply disturbing view of the devastating effect of the Chaco War on the Enlhet indigenous peoples. The Enlhet lived on the border where Bolivian and Paraguayan forces encountered one another in the 1920s. Most of the fiercest battles of the conflict took place on Enlhet lands, and most of the natives were killed, enslaved, or escaped to become homeless refugees. The book, originally published in Spanish in 2012, made waves in Paraguay. The authors show that the Paraguayans were the ones who did most of the abusing and killing of the natives, not the Bolivians. The book seriously revises our understanding of native suffering during the war, a topic that others, such as the contributors in the compilation by Nicholas Richard, *Mala guerra*, have begun to explore in the past few decades.⁴ The image that scholars had before this book was that the Paraguayans had been kinder to the indigenous Chaco peoples than the Bolivians, given their common lowland culture and the Paraguayans' use of Guaraní, the lingua franca in much of the Chaco. The Mennonites do not come off much better either; the evidence that the authors collected showed how the Mennonites often let the natives starve, exploited their labor, forced them to convert to Christianity, and mercilessly appropriated their land.

The authors delve deeply into indigenous testimonies of survivors and their children, interspersing their analysis with poignant eyewitness testimony. At times, they seem more like editors of the book, as they reproduce eyewitness after eyewitness to make their

⁴ Nicholas Richard, ed., *Mala guerra: Los indígenas en la Guerra del Chaco 1932-1935* (Asunción: Servilibro, Museo del Barro, CoLibris, 2008).

devastating points. Kalisch, who recently passed away, was married to an Enlhet, and Unruh is Enlhet himself. This, I am sure, made it possible for them to collect intimate information for a wide range of Enlhet men and women. The book shows how, by listening to indigenous voices, we are able to revise our understanding of such fundamental events as war in surprising ways.

Although a bit outside of the region that concerns the other books, Anna Guiteras Mombiola's *Warisata en la selva* fits because of the exploitation and ethnocide described in some of the other books on the Chaco. The Sirionó, of the lowland riverine plains of the Beni and Santa Cruz departments of Bolivia to the north of the Chaco, who speak a variety of Guaraní, are the subject of this book. Guiteras Mombiola shows the negative effects of Bolivia's government-imposed schooling in the 1930s and 1940s on this semisedentary ethnic group. The masterful case study shows how the well-meaning Bolivian national government, run by "progressive" leaders, destroyed Sirionó culture by imposing the Warisata schooling model from the highlands. The Warisata school in the high altiplano near La Paz had developed as a model for indigenous education, which tried to inculcate Andean values into the curriculum for its indigenous Aymara children, who came mainly from peasant households. It was one of the most important examples of its time in rethinking indigenous education. However, it was disastrously applied to semisedentary lowland peoples. To re-create this example in the lowlands among the Sirionó, a commission rounded up indigenous families from surrounding estates and forced them to settle around a school built for them in Casarabe, in Beni department.

Educational reformers such as Carlos Loaiza Beltrán tried to "civilize" the indigenous group through schooling, which would make them more "useful citizens." At no point did he or his collaborators think about asking what the indigenous peoples, under pressure from drought, disease, and ranchers, wanted. The school imposed a regimen of new routines, life in adobe housing, different kinds of clothing, a new diet, and other practices that transformed the previously semisedentary peoples. The experiment lasted until the 1940s, when Loaiza Beltrán was forced to leave. In the end, despite its secular origins, the effect on the people was very similar to that of the religious missions in that it profoundly altered the Sirionó's way of life, what one might today call a kind of ethnocide. It also followed the life cycle of the missions. The school was first established to aid in domesticating the indigenous peoples, but in the end, it devolved into a struggle between the school administrators and the settlers, who desired the indigenous manual labor that the establishment could provide. In this case, however, many of the remaining Sirionó moved back into the forest to subsist on the land that remained outside the grasp of cattle ranchers (and the school).

The attempt at maintaining a semblance of autonomy is a recurring theme in the collection of essays, *Reimagining the Gran Chaco*, edited by Silvia Hirsch, Paola Canova, and Mercedes Biocca and thus presents a common theme with the other works under review. The book includes essays from anthropologists and sociologists who have worked on the indigenous Chaco, demonstrating the revival of anthropological interest in the indigenous peoples of the region. The eleven essays are all high quality, showing issues that indigenous peoples have of surviving in a Chaco that has largely dispossessed them from their land and made them poor. The Chaco War, surprisingly, comes up very little in the accounts that mostly take place in the "ethnographic presence" of the past few decades. The lone exceptions are the first two chapters, which are historical. Federico Bossert examines how, in what is now Argentina, the Itiyuro Chané lost most of their lands. Bolivia had claimed the territory, but in 1904, the government ceded the Itiyuro Valley to Argentina. Bossert claims that the Bolivian authorities had treated the Itiyuro Chané better than the Argentineans had by supporting indigenous land claims over those of the settlers (this jibes with the Kalisch and Unruh volume). The Argentine government did not. In another essay, Bret Gustafson argues that the Chiriguano were not a mixture of Guaraní invaders and the sedentary Arawak-speaking Chané but that instead the two are distinct

ethnic groups. This argument goes against the scholarly consensus going back to Nordenskiöld that the Guaraní migrating from the Atlantic coast conquered the Chané to form a new ethnic group, the Chiriguano.⁵

The rest of the volume is ethnographic, with different contributions from groups that reside in Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia, countries that claim parts of the Chaco. What emerges is a sense of commonality of experience, of how after the Chaco War the settlement by outsiders and the exploitation of the meager resources of the region led to the dispossession of indigenous lands. Nowadays, as the Chaco has been mostly taken over by nonindigenous and its lands deforested for ranching and agriculture, it is crisscrossed by roads that export agricultural products such as wood, cotton, and soybeans, with its aboriginal population marginalized. Hannes Kalisch, in an essay in this volume, shows how the Enlhet and Nivaclé were literally marginalized by land-grabbing settlers, being forced to live on the public rights-of-way of the highway, fencing them out of their ancestral lands. Joel Correia corroborates the Kalisch essay by showing how the Paraguayan settler ranching economy, with the use of fences, restricts another group, the Enxet, from traditional hunting and collecting activities as well as their former settlement locations. A lack of access to water means that the Enxet must use the contaminated water of stock ponds for drinking and cooking, which results in rampant disease that kills children and debilitates adults.

The Qom—or Tobas, as the colonists called them in the nineteenth century, according to Mercedes Biocca—by the late twentieth century found themselves displaced by the deforestation and the use of transgenic cotton of neighboring large corporations that poison their environment so that they themselves cannot produce cotton or keep their cattle alive. Likewise, Denise Humphreys Bebbington and Guido Cortez show that the Bolivian Weenhayek, despite legislation presumably in favor of indigenous rights, lost out during the gas boom. Eighty percent of their officially designated “indigenous territory” in fact is controlled by nonindigenous ranchers; to make things worse, the multinational companies that exploit the gas underneath the ground do not follow environmental safeguards and so destroy the indigenous habitat. The Ayoreo, according to Paola Casanova, also suffer from inadequate health care because of the colonization of the Chaco in Paraguay. Inadequate state health facilities mean more indigenous deaths. Given the discrimination the Ayoreo face, the Mennonite private health services are inadequate substitutes.

In conjunction with the usurpation of indigenous lands, Christianity in its various forms has enveloped the Chaco inhabitants. Instead of land and autonomy, the indigenous population has instead adopted the Christian religion, especially the evangelical variety. Almost all contributions in this volume delve into the colonization of the indigenous populations by missionaries. What is novel is that this religious colonization was only partial; by the early twenty-first century the indigenous turned the missionary teachings into their own version of Christianity. The Qom (or Toba) population, according to César Ceriani Cernadas, developed their own version of an evangelical church after having been missionized by various Christian denominations. The Qom evangelicals also added other ethnic groups into their faith, creating what might become a regionally hegemonic denomination based on a mixture of indigenous and Christian beliefs. Silvia Hirsch likewise documents that the Tapiete peoples converted to evangelical Christianity in the 1940s in Bolivia and Argentina and now are missionizing their relatives in Paraguay, creating a pan-ethnic unity based on religion. To complicate matters further, as Rodrigo Villagra Carron notes in his essay, there are still indigenous peoples who believe in the old ways, and there is conflict within communities between the evangelicals and non-Christians (called *cultureros*). This is the case even with the Angaité, from the Enlhet-Enenlhet linguistic group, who,

⁵ See Erland Nordenskiöld, “The Guaraní Invasion of the Inca Empire in the Sixteenth Century: An Historical Migration,” *Geographical Review* 4 (1917): 103–121. The most explicit work on this is Thierry Saignes and Isabelle Combès, *Alter Ego: Naissance de l'identité Chiriguano* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1991).

because of their long experience with wage labor for the settlers, are among the most assimilated Chaco groups, but this does not always map onto ethnic or religious identity. The essays in this book show largely how the takeover of the different nation-states of the region has been detrimental to the Chaco natives. At the same time, the contributions document how indigenous peoples have adapted, even in the face of the loss of their lands and their old ways of life. The diversity and complexity of indigenous peoples in the Chaco subsists despite the forceful takeover by settler states in this territory. As the book shows, religion both unifies and divides peoples, although the dynamism of the changes in culture even in the marginalization (or perhaps because of it) is due to indigenous activism in the constrained fields that they have left.

The last book of this review, *Landscape of Migration*, by the historian Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, takes the point of view of the settlers that usurped indigenous lands, spurred by the policies of the Bolivian government in the aftermath of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952. The new government, led by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) party, promoted as part of its policies the settlement and agricultural development of the eastern lowlands. The idea of the MNR government was to have the excess rural population of the Bolivian highlands migrate to the verdant lowlands and work to transform the forest and savanna into fields that would feed the urban masses. The MNR conceived of this plan as a permanent solution to highland land pressures as a result of the agrarian reform and also to “free” the peasant to develop commercial agriculture rather than remain on their subsistence plots. This was done in the context of the agrarian reform (1953) onward, which loosened many former hacienda peons from their land. Presumably, this would spur agrarian development at the same time that it lessened impact of the breakup of peasant lands into ever smaller pieces as a result of population growth.

According to Nobbs-Thiessen, the lowland colonization drive did not work out as conceived. While the government did create an agricultural colony in lowland Santa Cruz for highland migrants, it also promoted the migration of Okinawa Japanese (at the behest of the US government) and of Mennonites from Mexico and Canada to mow down subtropical forests and create farming settlements. In the end, the government subsidized to a much greater extent the external migrants than the highland peasants. In all of this, Nobbs-Thiessen does not discuss much the aboriginal inhabitants, many of whom had already been eliminated in much of the region under discussion. The area that the book treats is a bit north of the Chaco (and south of Guiteras Mombiola’s study), but in many ways it highlights what has happened in the Gran Chaco by the mid-twentieth century, when agricultural colonies displaced the indigenous peoples from their land (although in most places they still subsist, as evidenced by the essays in the Hirsch, Canova, and Biocca volume).

Where does this literature leave us? The volumes reviewed above are just a small sample of the dynamic studies emerging from the South American lowlands. They provide various disciplinary frameworks, primarily History and Anthropology, to understand processes that have been present in many parts of Latin America. For one, they show the change over time of the fate of indigenous peoples, common throughout the hemisphere and in other parts of the world. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the numerous indigenous populations were essential to the economic and social fabric of the region. Shawn Austin shows how the Spaniards (and those of African descent) had to adapt more to the Guaraní than the other way around. He does so with a new conceptual framework, *cuñadasgo*, that will be interesting to test out in other places where the Europeans first met indigenous peoples.

The Guaraní missions, developed from the 1690s onward, continued utilizing Guaraní concepts to make them prosperous and virtually self-ruling. Julia Sarreal and Brian Owensby show how the Jesuits adapted indigenous ways of life for the missions. This tracks well with new research on the European “conquest,” a process that turns out to be much more fraught and equivocal than the old triumphalist narratives that historians, taking Spanish and Portuguese narratives at face value, suggested. The new narrative about the early colonial

era suggests that the Europeans did not control the natives but instead had to work with and through them to establish a foothold. Only after generations did the Spanish accomplish their goal of imposing their values and governance, and even then, only imperfectly.

Brian Owensby goes even beyond that of the new interpretations of the interactions between native peoples and the Europeans. He points out that there are other lessons to be learned from the Paraguayan experience; first, that the way the Guaraní thought of sociability and the economy (indeed, two concepts that indigenous peoples closely intertwined) was fundamentally different from that of the Western Europeans, who emphasized individualism and private property. The Guaraní example, misinterpreted among European intellectuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was fundamental to the development of that Western European economic ideology as anathema to it. Owensby also challenges the scholarship on economic ideas to think about alternate ways of organizing society, explicitly questioning Smithian classical economics as the only way to consider how economies can function. He shows that the Europeans profoundly misunderstood the Guaraní way of life, because a communal focus, rather than an individualistic one, could and did work until the Spanish monarchy destroyed it after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767.

From there, we jump to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Latin American states were inherently weak and unable to control much of the territory over which they claimed sovereignty. Bridget Chesterton and Isabelle Combès's contributions on the concept of the frontier and on the Chaco expeditions illustrate this vividly. Other attempts, such as Anna Guiteras Mombiola's work on the school among the Sirionó confirm this pattern, though by the 1930s and 1940s indigenous sovereignty was waning. Her analysis of how the school functioned reminds us a lot of the religious missions, which also were meant to "civilize" what the settlers and the government considered "savages."

The turning point in the region came during large-scale warfare in the early twentieth century. We have known that the Chaco War itself was the cause of enormous dislocation and terrible suffering; Kalisch and Unruh showed that it was the victorious Paraguayans who did the worst to the indigenous peoples. This study, based on careful testimonial work and ethnographic research, has revolutionized the field because scholars had blamed the Bolivians for the most egregious abuses. The Hirsch, Canova, and Biocca volume mostly documents the aftermath of the war, when the nation-states and their nonindigenous citizens marginalized the aboriginal population by taking away their land, harnessing them to a new labor regime, and denying them the rights that other citizens of their respective countries enjoy. The book fills a large gap in the field. It shows the processes of marginalization and its consequences on ethnic groups today. It also brings together in one volume many of the ethnographers working on the Chaco. Now the larger ethnographic studies upon which these chapters are based are accessible in abbreviated form to non-Spanish speakers and the many more who can't easily get a hold of the studies published in the countries of origin. The volume also attests to the convergence of national-based studies into a Chaco-wide academic community.

Nobbs-Thiessen's *Landscapes of Migration* shows another facet of this process initiated with the Chaco War: the aftermath of the process of indigenous marginalization and, in some places, their disappearance. The Bolivian government, presumably revolutionary and progressive, in the mid-twentieth century saw the lowlands of the country as lands empty of inhabitants, territories that they could dispose of as they wanted. This ignored the fact that all lands, in one way or another, were already spoken for and inhabited by native peoples. But for the government (as had been largely the case since the Spanish irrupted into the region), the lowland indigenous groups that were not agriculturalists did not count, nor did their land claims. So the government gave away this land to people who were visible to them, to settlers from the highlands or who came from Okinawa, or in the case of the Mennonites, from Canada or northern Mexico. Ironically, the foreigners

received greater privileges over the native highland peasants. This was not at all the original intent of the MNR government, but they succumbed to the swan song of especially the United States, which built on elite prejudices that Europeans and Japanese could bring about prosperity and modernity faster to the backward lowlands. Thus, the Bolivian highland peasants, the original targets for migration for developing the agricultural potential of the land, received fewer resources and privileges than the outsiders.

The books under review document these varied processes. Their contributions are valuable to shine a spotlight on the importance of these issues, whether from the colonial period or in the ethnographic present. Anthropologists (and some historians and sociologists) have made the indigenous peoples visible to the state. But they remain marginalized, in the center of the continent. It's a long road from when the Spaniards had to adapt to indigenous ways.

Erick D. Langer is professor of history at Georgetown University. He is the author of *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830-1949* (Duke University Press, 2009) and coeditor (Milèna Santoro) of *Hemispheric Sovereignties: Indigeneity in the Andes, Mesoamerica, and Canada* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), plus over fifty articles in journals and chapters in edited books. He specializes in the Chaco frontier, the economic history of nineteenth-century South America, and indigenous issues.