Big Water

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IN DECEMBER 1975, a group of government employees and state troopers arrived at the confluence of the Ocoí and Paraná Rivers in western Brazil to remove squatters from a public land tract. The area, located in a forested stretch at the Brazilian border with Paraguay, had been expropriated in 1971 by a Brazilian federal agency—the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA; National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform)—to receive white Brazilian settlers evicted from a nearby national park. According to INCRA officials, the area had been occupied two months earlier by a group of “invaders” in cahoots with local sawmill owners whose goal was to “steal lumber” from federal lands. With the backup of state police, the INCRA agents entered the area, arrested some of its dwellers, seized their fishing and logging tools, and burned their makeshift homes to the ground. After “clearing the area,” INCRA installed gates on the dirt roads and deployed guards to prevent the return of the “illegal loggers.” In his report, INCRA agent Carlos Antônio Letti informed that they successfully removed all “squatters” except “for six families of Paraguayan Indians,” whom they allowed to remain in the area.¹

At first glance, the removal of people from a federal piece of land perhaps seems unremarkable. After all, the repeating pattern of rural displacement is found globally throughout the twentieth century. Yet the case at Ocoí is more than just an example of peasants being kicked out by government forces. Rather,
it exemplifies the underlying themes that for nearly five hundred years have shaped the borderland region that extends along the upper Río de la Plata basin between current-day northeastern Argentina, southwestern Brazil, and Eastern Paraguay. Big Water is devoted to the historical dynamics of this hydraulic borderland, known in modern South America as the Triple Frontier (la Triple Frontera in Spanish, a Tríplice Fronteira in Portuguese). Its title borrows from the translated meaning of “Iguazú/Iguaçu,” the Tupi-Guarani name given to one of the region’s most dramatic geological features, the Iguazú Falls. The region’s water courses—most notably the Paraná River and its tributary, the Iguazú—serve as the tangible demarcation lines of the otherwise invisible political borders (see fig. I.1).

The 1975 conflict at the banks of one of these rivers, the mighty Paraná, brings to the fore several themes that have helped make the Triple Frontier one of the more important and historically dynamic border regions in all of the Americas. The first is the uncertain nationality ascribed to the “Paraguayan Indians” who had been left behind in the federal estate by the INCRA employees. Although depicted as Paraguayan—and thus foreign—in the land agency’s report, the members of the small Indian community would fight for land and communal rights in the following years as members of the Brazilian polity. Marginalized from both countries, they were, in fact, Avá-Guarani, part of the larger Guarani population that has lived in the upper Plata basin since before the arrival of the first Europeans in the sixteenth century. Historically extremely mobile, the Guarani have a culture centered on the search for a mythical “land without evil,” the Yvy Maraey. Five hundred years of contact with Euro-American society has led Guarani groups to switch back and forth between sedentariness and nomadism. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Guarani were brought onto the Jesuit missions that dotted this borderland region, where they had their imperial allegiance questioned by Portuguese and Spanish colonialadministrators. Centuries later, by depicting as “foreign” a small group of Avá living in Brazil, INCRA officials reproduced the deeply rooted taxonomy that revived anxieties over the colonial and national affiliation of the Guarani at the frontier.2

The accelerated colonization of the Triple Frontier area is another crucial feature in the background of this eviction case. Although inhabited by a population of indigenous descent for most of the colonial era, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that an intensive colonization process swept through the borderland. Beginning in the 1950s, settlers from other areas of Brazil and Europe, lured by the promise of cheap and fertile land and bountiful natural
resources (e.g., water, yerba mate, timber), started to move into this area. The rapid arrival of new rural migrants throughout the Triple Frontier led to a parallel increase in agrarian conflicts on all three sides of the border. The Avá-Guarani living at the banks of the Paraná, for example, resided in an area that had been expropriated in 1971 by the Brazilian federal government to harbor a population of white settlers removed from the Iguazu National Park. For years Brazilian federal agencies ignored the presence of the Avá in the area. But the rise of large-scale development initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s—particularly hydroelectric dam projects—brought to the fore the need to relocate not only the white settlers but also the Avá-Guarani families and other impoverished farming communities.

These sorts of localized conflicts had predominated in the region long before the Triple Frontier was officially split into three discrete national territories. Upon the arrival of Europeans in South America, the banks of the Paraná River were turned into a buffer area disputed by the Portuguese and Spanish crowns as Jesuit missionaries and royal authorities vied for control of the lands, resources, and peoples of the region. The creation of the nation-states of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay—and the official demarcation of the Triple Frontier as such—opened a new era of competition in the region. From military outposts throughout the nineteenth century to national parks in the early twentieth century and culminating in the megainfrastructure plans of the late twentieth century, the Triple Frontier has always been targeted by projects designed to increase state control over this hydraulic borderland. In the 1970s and 1980s, the history of state interventions culminated in the construction of Itaipu Dam by the military dictatorships ruling Brazil and Paraguay. The dam, which was the world’s largest hydroelectric facility by the time of its completion in 1991, radically transformed the natural, economic, and social landscapes of the Triple Frontier. Not only did Itaipu help solidify a new geopolitical landscape in the Southern Cone—in which Brazil supplanted Argentina as the region’s major power—but also the mobilization of displaced farmers in both Brazil and Paraguay showcased new forms of rural-based opposition in an era of authoritarian military regimes. While Itaipu was certainly the apex of state investment in the Triple Frontier, the broader logics behind the dam have continued in subsequent decades. In the 1990s and early 2000s, governments of various political leanings throughout the Southern Cone passed laws and encouraged new commercial ventures that helped make the Triple Frontier the heart of Mercosur, the new economic market created in 1991 with the ostensible goal of eliminating regional rivalry.
through trade integration. Yet the veneer of regional cooperation obfuscates a complicated reality of government and popular forces maneuvering between and among themselves to defend competing visions of progress in this tri-border area.

This book explores four centuries of the overlapping histories of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay and the colonies that preceded them. From the world of the Jesuit reductions in the early seventeenth century to the accelerated flows of capital and goods of contemporary trade agreements, this region has been fundamental to the development not only of each nation but of the Southern Cone and South America more generally. Although historians from each of these three countries have tended to construct narratives that stop at their respective borders, we call for a reinterpretation that goes beyond the material and conceptual boundaries of the Triple Frontier. In doing so, this book helps transcend nation-centered blind spots and approach new understandings of how space and society have developed throughout Latin America.

Running along the shores of the upper Paraná and Uruguay Rivers and made up of nearly five hundred thousand square kilometers (an area similar to present-day Spain), this area has been the site of some of the most dynamic—and least studied—developments in Latin America. For over four hundred years the region has undergone tremendous alterations to its social and environmental landscapes. A borderland par excellence, in pre-Columbian and colonial times the region was the heart of the “Guarani country,” an extensive network of indigenous communities that at its peak stretched from the western edge of São Paulo state to the north of Argentina’s Corrientes Province. In the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries established a presence in a region located geographically, politically, and culturally at the fringes of both the Spanish and Portuguese empires.

In the national period, this borderland would become a pivotal arena of the War of Triple Alliance (1864–1870), one of the largest military conflicts in the Americas in the nineteenth century, second only to the American Civil War. With over four hundred thousand casualties, the war brought profound implications to the countries involved. In Brazil, the conscription of slaves and free blacks in the frontlines contributed to the strengthening of the country’s antislavery movement, which culminated with the abolition in 1888. The war also helped to galvanize a new military elite in the country’s army, whose members carried out the coup that ended almost seven decades of monarchy in 1889. It was after the war that Brazil rose as the main regional power within South
America. Argentina had a long history of internecine conflict between provinces, and the war served to coalesce power around Buenos Aires allowing the emergence of the country as a unified nation-state. This outcome of the war, therefore, helped to lay the ground for the great Argentine economic leap of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Paraguay, however, emerged from the war in far greater disarray, with the death of a substantial sector of its population (the estimates vary widely, from 7 to 60 percent) and the destruction of much of the country.  

In the second half of the twentieth century, this borderland went from a forgotten periphery to a core region receiving much of the efforts of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay in modernization and nation building. With the construction of the Itaipu Dam, the region witnessed the establishment of a new regime of energy production that reshaped the relations between all three partners, served as a launching pad for the green revolution in Brazil and Paraguay, became the gravitational center for a newly created common economic market, and was the target of progressive visions of national parks and environmental management. Yet it is misleading to think about the Triple Frontier populations as mere receptors of national domination. The agency and creativity of the peoples living in the borderland ensure their role as protagonists in the creation of space and the ongoing construction of the landscape. In this volume, therefore, the attempts by nation-states to increase their presence along the border is reconciled with the realities of how these projects were experienced, contested, and shaped on the ground.

The essays compiled in this volume achieve a double outcome: they complicate traditional frontier histories, and they balance the excessive weight given to empires, nations, and territorial expansion in such accounts. In particular, the transnational approach employed in these chapters enables the overcoming of stagnant comparisons between national cases. More than simply highlighting the limitations of national narratives, conceptualizing the Triple Frontier as a borderland draws our attention to the specificities of crossroads. By focusing on the uniquely overlapping character of the Triple Frontier, the chapters presented here emphasize a space that would otherwise remain at the periphery of national histories. This is important not only because it unearths the history of a frontier that has been insufficiently studied but even more so for the priority
it gives to the groups that carved out their own lives within the contact zones between the Spanish and Portuguese empires and, beginning in the nineteenth century, three distinct national polities.

There are many triple frontiers in South America, but only the area between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay is widely known as the Triple Frontier in the continent. Its importance derives from its position as a contested crossroads of the Spanish and Portuguese empires and its central role in the constitution of their successor nation-states. The establishment of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay in the nineteenth century did little to reduce territorial disputes in the borderland; if anything, competing claims to the river basin and its adjacent lands have been one of the most constant features in the nearly two-hundred-year relationship between the three nations. While national governments maneuvered for geopolitical control in the Triple Frontier, groups of people moved into and across the borderland itself, changing the social and natural landscape from one generation to the next. These transformations accelerated in the 1950s, when the region served as a new frontier for agricultural settlement that serviced some of South America’s most populous and industrial areas. Farmlands in the Triple Frontier were fertile, cheap, and connected through the Río de la Plata basin to large population centers such as São Paulo (upriver) and Buenos Aires (downriver). The opening of highways in the mid-1950s amplified the connection between the interior borderland and the populous Atlantic Seaboard. In the 1970s the Triple Frontier also witnessed a mass migration into Paraguay of Brazilian citizens known as brasiguayos who eventually accounted for 60 percent of Eastern Paraguay and nearly 10 percent of Paraguay’s entire population. The rise of brasiguayos emerged in tandem with the growth of soybean production, and the Triple Frontier has since become the center of the South American soy belt. By the end of the century the borderlands had evolved into one of the biggest nodes of commercial activity on the continent. As noted by anthropologist Christine Folch, the borderland is unique in that it forces scholars of Argentina and Brazil—the two great powers of South America—to reorient inwardly, toward their landlocked borders rather than out to their port cities.

As a theme, the Triple Frontier constitutes a blind spot for historians of Latin America. There are many important studies published on different aspects of this area—from the Jesuit missions to the Paraguayan War to the building of Itaipu—but historians have abstained from defining the region as a historiographical field in its own right. One of the goals of this volume is to address this issue by framing the Triple Frontier as a historical borderland. To
be sure, the history of borderlands has a long tradition in scholarship on colonial North America. Recently, a boom of works centered in the national period has exposed the contradictions of the processes of border construction performed by the inheritor American and Mexican states. However, this perspective has yet to be adopted by historians of the rest of Latin America. This is particularly problematic in the case of Argentine and Brazilian historiography, which also have a strong tradition of studying the frontier but have failed to engage in a borderland-inspired revision of these contested areas. Moreover, scholars have yet to fully place the border populations of such intermediary spaces at the center of the historical narrative. By reconciling nation-centered visions of territorial conquest and border creation with a focus on the local, we are able to reconceive of borderland peoples as more than mere receptors of national domination. Local groups must be seen as creative protagonists in the ongoing construction of borders.

This volume, therefore, intends to define the study of the South American Triple Frontier as a new area of historical scholarship. While seeking to break new scholarly ground, the breadth of topics presented in the following chapters simultaneously engages with other established fields. From environmental history to indigenous and peasant studies and spanning the history of modernization and state building, the contributions here offer a new framework for understanding the peoples, spaces, and ideas that have helped make the Triple Frontier a landscape of dynamic and far-reaching change. As such, the book is organized in four primary themes: adaptation, environment, belonging, and development.

First, the volume explores the question of adaptation by tracing the experience of Guarani Indians in the borderlands of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires. The arrival of Iberian conquerors—and the Jesuit missionaries who soon followed—triggered the unprecedented challenge of how to maintain a local sense of cultural and social resilience in the face of dramatic change. Adaptation as a historical process was by no means the sole product of colonialism; the indigenous groups had moved throughout the borderlands long before the arrival of Europeans, always engaging with and adapting the region’s numerous social and physical landscapes. Nonetheless, the stakes of these adaptive qualities were greatly magnified under the mantle of colonialism: territorial encroachment, population loss, religious incursions, and slaving expeditions were among the many pressures placed on Guarani life. Yet these events never fully defined the Guarani. Rather, communities proved adept at
navigating the ever-changing realities of colonial life to not only preserve key components of their cultural identity but also to actually help establish the contours of how colonialism itself developed throughout the region. Understanding the role of adaptation in the colonial period is doubly important for tracing the social and political dynamics that would later coalesce in the establishment of three distinct nation-states.

Second, *Big Water* introduces a new transnational setting to Latin American environmental history.13 Most of the scholarship published in English deals with Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Central America. Only a handful of works exist on Argentina—none of which focus on the Triple Frontier borderlands—and an environmental history monograph has yet to be published on Paraguay.14 Brazil has attracted most of the attention from environmental historians working in South America; the declensionist narratives on Amazonia and the Atlantic Forest have been particularly alluring. The foundational work of Brazilian environmental history, for example—Warren Dean’s *With Broadax and Firebrand*—chronicles the destruction of the Atlantic Forest, the biome that originally extended all the way from Brazil’s northeast to northern Argentina and Eastern Paraguay, covering most of the area that is the focus of this volume.15 Yet Dean’s analysis stopped at the border, blaming Luso-Brazilians for environmental devastation despite the clear transnational span of the Atlantic Forest. This volume avoids the trap of projecting a teleological national essence onto nature by documenting the interaction between humans and the environment in a borderland setting.

Third, the idea of belonging calls attention to how nation-states are constructed and who is seen as legitimate and thus worthy of inclusion. In the context of a complex border region, the question of belonging helps explore how certain communities are allowed entry into a national polity—with its contingent rights of citizenship and culture—while others are excluded, marginalized, or in the case of indigenous groups, often sanitized as an artificial monument to a country’s romanticized heritage. To the extent that scholars have written about belonging in the Triple Frontier zone, they have tended to focus on the Guarani Indians during the colonial period and their relationships within and between the Jesuit missions and European empires.16 There have been few attempts to transpose this approach to other chronologies. By writing the history of belonging in this region with a multicentury perspective, *Big Water* helps to remove the periodization blinders that prevent scholars from finding commonalities between the colonial and national periods.17
Finally, the theme of development stands as perhaps the Triple Frontier’s most defining feature of the past century. *Big Water* charts the often-contradictory attempts to nationalize border territories through the implementation of massive infrastructure projects. The dawn of the Republican regime in Brazil saw the first timid experiment of direct state intervention at this borderland with the establishment of the military colony of Foz do Iguaçu in 1889. In the 1930s, the governments of Argentina and Brazil furthered their engagement with border development, this time utilizing the establishment of national parks at the binational Iguazu Falls to channel investment into the area. Beginning in the 1950s state intervention at the Triple Frontier area grew exponentially as national governments began to build roads in the area, settlers and urban migrants arrived en masse, towns evolved into booming cities, and the region became a hub of intense commercial activity. Especially pivotal was the role of state-sponsored development projects such as the Itaipu hydroelectric dam. Unlike the major infrastructure initiatives that have dominated international headlines in the past decade—including the Belo Monte and Hidro-Aysén dams in Brazil and Chile, respectively—Itaipu’s was built on the actual border between Brazil and Paraguay under the pretense of an equal partnership. These qualities demand that scholars look not only at the effect of development on surrounding communities but also at how neighboring governments use megaprojects as a vehicle for amassing geopolitical power. As such, this volume engages with recent scholarship on other nation-building state interventions in Latin America while giving particular attention to how the implications of these projects can extend transnationally.18

*Big Water* comprises four sections that trace, respectively, the book’s core ideas of adaptation, environment, belonging, and development. The choice to forgo a more traditional, chronological sequence of chapters is a strategic one. A thematic focus helps emphasize the continuity of historical and cultural dynamics that formed *before* the official formation of a distinct tri-border zone. By organizing the volume by theme, we encourage readers to rethink the Triple Frontier not only beyond the static boundaries of a given nation-state but also beyond the linear chronologies deeply conscribed in the histories of the nations themselves. Our goal is that the chapters of this volume offer enduring and original terrain to reimagine the spatial and temporal borders of the Triple Frontier.
The two chapters in section I reveal the adaptation of indigenous groups navigating the spaces between the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires. Shawn Austin chronicles the early colonial history of the Triple Frontier by showing how the region functioned as the geographic and symbolic frontier between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. Although the two colonial powers were initially linked by trade and patronage networks, the competition over natives soon turned the region into a highly contested space of imperial conflict. In these interactions, Spanish colonials (Guaireños), Paulistas from Portuguese São Paulo, and Jesuit missionaries all vied for control of the bodies, labor, and souls of the local native communities. Austin inverts the traditional narrative of conquest and conversion to show that the Guarani natives were mobile and adaptable in the face of Iberian coercion and ultimately played important roles in carving the socioeconomic landscapes of the region’s colonial period.

One of the outcomes of the displacement of the indigenous people by Luso-Brazilian raiders was the migration into the Jesuit missions located farther south in the borderland area. This is the object of Guillermo Wilde’s chapter, which is an attempt to understand how disruption helped consolidate two overlapping experiences of territoriality. The first lends itself to the construction of an identity rooted in the physical organization of the mission towns themselves, what the author calls an “ethnogenesis.” The second relates to the wider regional sense of space held by the Guarani Indians that inhabited the missions; although many indigenous communities spent time in the Jesuit reductions, they still maintained a wider communal mobility that brought them into contact not only with other missions and colonial institutions but also with defectors, Afro-descendent communities, and “heathen” Indians. Exploring the dual identities of territory connected to the Jesuit missions and their environs enables a deeper understanding of how spatial and social networks were constructed throughout the region before the advent of national boundaries.

Section II offers two key examples of where the environmental history of the area’s forests, rivers, and societies can only be understood in a broader transnational context. One of the most dramatic changes in the history of the Triple Frontier was the transformation of landscape from forest to farmland. This is documented in Eunice Nodari’s chapter on the colonization projects of German Brazilians in the first half of the twentieth century. As shown by Nodari, thousands of families of European Brazilians slowly migrated westward, first to the western sections of the Brazilian states of Santa Catarina and Paraná, then to the Argentine province of Misiones, and finally, to Eastern Paraguay.
This decades-long transnational migration process transformed an area of subtropical forest, part of the Atlantic Forest biome, into farmland. Settlers were attracted by logging opportunities and cheap and fertile land. Still, as Nodari points out, the newcomers reproduced the same predatory methods of clearing land and farming that they had practiced in their home state, Rio Grande do Sul. The result was a scenario of environment degradation with depleted forests, eroded topsoil, and silted rivers.

Frederico Freitas continues this analysis of environmental landscapes by charting the establishment of protected areas in the Triple Frontier. In his chapter on the creation of the Iguazú National Park, Freitas shows how protected areas were used as tools for the nationalization of border zones. The park, created in 1934 to protect the Argentine side of the famous Iguazú Falls, deviated from the national park models of the time by promoting settler colonization inside its territory. National park proponents in Argentina viewed Iguazú as both a way to prevent the degradation of natural features and a tool to promote the development of the border zone. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the Argentine national park agency sold real estate for prospective settlers inside national park lands and implemented public services for the park-controlled town of Puerto Iguazú. The case of the Iguazú National Park demonstrates how in the first half of the twentieth century, countries in the Southern Cone understood national parks, along with military outposts, as part of a viable strategy to take control of borderlands.

In section III readers are introduced to the notion of belonging with three chapters that explore how seemingly peripheral populations have navigated the contours of inclusion and exclusion across the national polities of the Triple Frontier. Michael Kenneth Huner looks at the everyday dynamics of frontier life in Paraguay’s postcolonial society. Focusing on the border town of Villa de Salvador, Huner traces the story of a local caudillo named Casimiro Uriarte to show that although scholars have traditionally emphasized the role of powerful despots in the capital city of Asunción, eighteenth-century Paraguay continued to be defined by a series of overlapping sovereignties at the local level. Far from the reach of Asunción, frontier spaces such as Salvador were built—and fragmented—by the exchanges, partnerships, and vendettas between local power brokers like Uriarte. Although the Paraguayan government attempted to maintain its presence and legitimacy along the frontier, the stories of caudillos, priests, school teachers, and other actors show that despite the establishment of an independent nation-state in 1811, power and influence remained moored
less in an attachment to a central nation and more to a constantly changing set of local realities.

In the following chapter, Daryle Williams centers his analysis on how cultural patrimony of colonial origin was appropriated and monumentalized by different actors in twentieth-century Brazil and Argentina. He chronicles the dispute to restore and attribute meaning to the remains of the seventeenth-century Jesuit reductions of the upper Plata basin. These are the same missions depicted in chapter 2 of this volume but two centuries after their heyday. In the 1930s the governments of Brazil and Argentina started to present the mission ruins—whose locations put them on different sides of the new national borders—as strictly national monuments. As tourism grew, different groups came forward to link the missions to different regional identities and jockeyed to exert local control over the archaeological sites. In the late twentieth century a new interpretation emerged at an international scale, with claims to the universality of the missions vis-à-vis a UNESCO World Heritage site title. Finally, in their latest development, the missions became a symbolic axis for the new transnational integration around the common market Mercosur—three of the union’s four core members, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, all harbored mission ruins.

Evaldo Mendes da Silva opens the last chapter of section III—the most present oriented in the entire volume—with a chapter on the spatial mobility of Guarani peoples in the Triple Frontier. At the border zone, the Guarani form a network of communities whose members are in constant transboundary motion. For these indigenous groups, wandering is a way of life that derives from their own perception of space; it is through walking that they exercise their own humanity. However, the Guarani walk a land in rapid transformation whose farmlands, cities, and newcomers pose challenges and opportunities to their way of life. On the one hand, the development of border infrastructure such as highways, bridges, and bus lines facilitate their wanderings. On the other hand, tighter border controls impose a hurdle to the movement of individuals without papers and little national affiliation. In the end, Silva reveals the radical opposition between a sedentary, Western space of predefined routes and the nomadic flat space of the Guarani, where paths are constantly being retraced.

The fourth and final thematic section focuses on development, going from the early 1960s climate of authoritarian dictatorships and continuing through the neoliberal landscapes of the twenty-first century. Jacob Blanc looks at how the race to build hydroelectric dams on the Paraná River served to fundamentally alter the geopolitical landscape of the entire Southern Cone. Beginning in the
1960s, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina all vied to harness the river’s untapped potential, and Brazil’s ability to outmaneuver its neighbors helped launch its rise as one of Latin America’s most powerful nations. At a time when all three countries were ruled by military regimes, long-standing conflicts over the boundary lines of the Paraná borderlands reemerged in the Cold War climate of development and modernization. More than just providing the geopolitical background for what would become a wave of global megadams, this history sheds lights on the meanings of political and natural borders and the relationships between Latin American dictatorships.

The next chapter continues to chart the developmentalist shift that transformed the Triple Frontier borderland into the geopolitical center of the Plata basin. Bridget Chesterton studies the significance of the Friendship Bridge that was built over the Paraná River in 1965 to connect the Paraguayan city of Puerto Stroessner with the Brazilian town of Foz do Iguaçu. Although Paraguay’s main ally throughout the twentieth century had been Argentina (its neighbor to the west), development projects like the bridge showed Asunción’s changing allegiance to Brazil (its neighbor to the east). This shift reflected both the personal attachments of Paraguay’s dictator Alfredo Stroessner and the emerging landscape of the Southern Cone wherein Brazil, and no longer Argentina, was seen as the region’s new political and financial leader. Chesterton argues that this geopolitical reorientation had profound effects on the social and cultural identity of Asunción and its citizens.

With the return to democratic rule in 1989, the city of Puerto Stroessner was officially renamed Ciudad del Este. In her study of the city, Christine Folch demonstrates how borderland zones such as the Triple Frontier can be understood as places where economic integration can assume multiple and competing forms. In the 1970s and 1980s Ciudad del Este thrived under a special economic regime, but this experience later overlapped and was partially superseded by a new and larger economic integration. Folch examines the differences between these two experiences. The first integration, a binational one, was the creation of a free-trade zone that turned Ciudad del Este into a major hub of commerce in South America and connected Paraguay to the larger Brazilian economy. The second, a supranational one, was the creation of Mercosur, which undermined the old free-trade zone and led to a waning of trade and a search for other forms of commercial activities.

Finally, a conclusion from Graciela Silvestri establishes a dialogue between the reflection about nation in the intellectual tradition of Argentina, Brazil, and
Paraguay and the geographical, social, and cultural ambiguity posited by the Triple Frontier. Much like how borderland peoples have traversed—and in the process, reshaped—the Triple Frontier, so too have ideas flowed freely and dynamically throughout the region. Especially given the history of warfare and conflict in the borderlands, Silvestri’s arguments about the embedded relationships of literature, nation, power, and space serve as a fitting close to the volume as a whole.

For over four hundred years, the Triple Frontier has served as one of the most dynamic and influential spaces in Latin America. More than just the intersection of three nations, the Triple Frontier has evolved as a borderland in the truest sense of the word. Attempts by colonial and national governments to control the lands and people of the region have been matched in equal measure by the actions and worldviews of the local inhabitants themselves. These conflicts over how to demarcate and develop the frontier’s natural and social landscapes have yielded a borderland whose influence extends throughout the region and beyond.

NOTES


4. Modern South America harbors a few other locations trisected by the borders of Brazil and two other Spanish American countries. Worthy of note are the Brazilian-Colombian-Peruvian triple frontier in the upper Amazon River and the Brazilian-Argentine-Uruguayan border at the confluence of the Uruguay and Quaraí Rivers. None of them, however, is capable of rivaling the Triple Frontier in historical relevance as a focal point for territorial intervention and nation-state building.

5. Between the 1850s and the 1890s, e.g., Argentina and Brazil disputed a 3.5-million-hectare territory located between the southern banks of the Iguazú River and the northern banks of the Uruguay River. The dispute over the area in question was resolved in 1895 with the arbitration of the U.S. president Grover Cleveland, who sided with Brazil in recognizing the area as part of the Brazilian territory. See Bradford Burns, *The Unwritten Alliance, Rio Branco and Brazilian-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

6. Most estimates of the number of Brazilians living in Paraguay fall between four hundred thousand and five hundred thousand. A commonly cited number is 459,147 from a 2002 report by the Brazilian Ministry of Exterior Relations. See José José Lindomar C. Albuquerque, *A dinâmica das fronteiras: Os brasiguaios na fronteira entre o Brasil e o Paraguai* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2010), 59.

7. The three countries were responsible for over 45 percent of the world’s production in 2012. See data on soybean production at Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, http://faostat.fao.org/.

8. The only recent work on the Triple Frontier area available in English is a sensationalist book on the region written for high school students: Daniel K. Lewis, *A South American Frontier: The Tri-Border Region* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006). On the academic side, Lorenza Macagno and her colleagues have published a volume on the Triple Frontier available only in Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, it has an anthropological and sociological approach that focuses exclusively on the present: Lorenzo Macagno, Silvia Montenegro, and Verónica Giménez Béliveau, *A Tríplice Fronteira: Espaços nacionais e dinâmicas locais* (Curitiba: Editora da Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2011).

9. The pioneer of borderlands history was Herbert Eugene Bolton, who in the 1920s proposed the study of the North American “Spanish borderlands” as a way to decenter the Turnerian narrative of the expansion and closing of the American frontier. See David J. Weber, “The Spanish Borderlands: Historiography Redux,”


12. It is beyond the scope of this proposal to review the vast and well-known literature on the Argentine and Brazilian frontiers. However, it is worth noting a volume from the late 1990s that compares Northern Mexico with the Río de la Plata basin, which includes three chapters where the Triple Frontier area is studied within the framework of the Spanish empire: Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998). Another exception to this trend is the recent work by Tamar Herzog, which explores the legal disputes behind the changes in the Hispanic-Portuguese borders in both Europe and South America. Although not in dialogue with the borderlands literature, Herzog deconstructs the nation-state inspired narratives of border creation in contested regions like the Amazon and Paraná basins. Tamar Herzog, Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).


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