

## RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

BARBARA POTTHAST, KARL KOHUT, GERD KOHLHEPP (eds.):  
*El espacio interior de América del Sur. Geografía, historia, política, cultura.*  
Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt/Main: Vervuert, 1999.

In travelling through central South America, one is struck by a particular socioeconomic condition: the general economic isolation/impoverishment of many areas juxtaposed with an increasing developmental dynamism in others. This situation is explicitly addressed by many authors in this interdisciplinary volume of papers presented at the Asociación Alemana de Investigación sobre América Latina (ADLAF) Symposium in Bielefeld, Germany, in October, 1996. As explained in the introduction, the papers were selected with the intention of revealing a part of South America that is little known, less understood, and seldom of interest for students and most inhabitants of the continent. At the same time, the intention was to emphasize that the region, while encompassing four countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay), often has survived as an integrated whole, historically and economically, since the colonial era, although infrequently viewed as such by political decision-makers in the respective metropoli. This has contributed greatly to the contradiction of apparent socioeconomic stagnation contrasted with periodic bursts of extractive energy.

In several ways, the papers portray the interior as a counterpoint to inadequate national agendas, particularly over the past few decades. The implicit and explicit question asked is: What have been the processes of historical and recent "development" in regions that are only occasionally priorities of national and international political-economic players? This is particularly relevant in relation to the recent globalization agenda that has so transfixed decision-makers in South America. An examination of this question in one volume is no easy task, and as is the dilemma of such compilations, the results are mixed.

The editors take an interdisciplinary approach, separating themes into four sections, with a variety of disciplines represented, though dominated by what appear to be human geographers. While covering four nations (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay), half of the papers deal specifically with oft-neglected Paraguay. The first section includes seven papers that address the history and politics of the region, specifically Paraguay and Bolivia. The

discussions deal with the difficulty of development and the roles of "traditional" political units and forms of action, not surprisingly indicating that development in the region has always faced the obstacles of either indifference from outside, or interest only in exploiting the region's resources to the benefit of the metropolis and/or local elites. There is some optimism seen in recent democratization and grassroots organizations, but it is clear that the effort to move away from political-economic pressures from within and outside the societies is a slow and uneven process.

A present ray of hope is seen in the formation of MERCOSUR, and this, plus the delayed Hidrovía Paraguay-Paraná, are the focus of the following four papers. These integrative projects are unusual in contradicting historical experience by explicitly seeking to integrate the region, and as such are highly important for the future of the interior of South America. However, while the analyses offer some fascinating insights into the formation and early development of the projects, they are limited by time, with MERCOSUR's problems today, particularly for small partners like Paraguay, only partially anticipated by the authors in 1996.

The third section ties some of the above together in looking at socio-economic and resource issues, including the immigration of Germans and Luso-Germans to the region and of Brazilians to eastern Paraguay. The latter immigration has been crucial for Paraguay in recent decades, and the author reveals how national and international politics have been key elements in determining the flow and impact of Brazilians in a previously remote region of that small country, and as part of the gradual economic integration of Brazil and Paraguay beginning in the 1960s. In the same section, the relatively remote and ecologically fragile subregions of the Paraguayan Chaco and Brazilian Pantanal are examined, as well as the role of coca growing in Bolivia. These studies reveal the varied difficulties of these areas to develop under conditions that preserve the ecosystem and yet also offer opportunities for inhabitants to improve their standard of living. Though the term "sustainable development" is seldom used here, it appears to be one option these studies have taken seriously, but with few suggestions of viable projects that could transcend a still dominant political agenda emanating from the metropolis.

The final section deals with identities and cultures, examining the role of the Guaraní language in Paraguay, collective identity in Bolivia, and a literary reminiscence of the Argentine Chaco. Here, the interrelated themes of continuity and change, so familiar to historians, are most clear. The studies indicate that Paraguayan identity largely revolves around descent from the "brave" Guaraní peoples who united with Spaniards to create a unique mestizo nation, valiant on the battlefield in defense of the "nation" through

the Triple Alliance and Chaco wars, and reinforced through Guaraní being the first language of the majority of the population. While a convenient national myth, living truths are less certain, and, not surprisingly, this appears to be more an historical creation of the elite than a real representation of collective identity. Still, the recent official promotion of the language in less explicit national terms is seen as a more mature sign of Paraguayan national identity. A similar situation applies to Bolivia, where there has been a concerted effort in the recent open political climate to preserve traditional Andean values while not entirely rejecting international influence where it can be useful. These essays, in fact, come the closest to uncovering how the people of the region adapt, and have adapted, to change over history.

Overall, this compilation is a welcome contribution to the relatively sparse literature on the interior of South America, though there are some issues I wish had been more fully explored, lacunae that can be explained given the mixed nature of a symposium. I agree that, historically, the region has frequently functioned as an integrated whole, often the case for peripheral areas that share international boundaries. However, this has not come through adequately here. More studies of cross-border integrations over time might have revealed that condition more clearly. This relates to my wish as an historian for more historical background, especially for the period between the colonial era and the more modern political transitions of the 1990s. While addressing the period in part in some papers, most do not trace clearly the tortuous process of development (or lack of it) from the beginning of the nineteenth century, hence leaving gaps in understanding the path the region has taken over time. At the same time, there is little discussion of the position of native peoples, except in the case of identity in Bolivia and the historical examination of the role of the Jesuits in Paraguay. With the exception of Bolivia, indigenous peoples are a minority in the region, yet its development has depended on their participation, and the pressures the region is now facing have already affected many Indian nations negatively. Throughout the world, the experience of aboriginal peoples frequently acts as a microcosm of the bigger regional picture –where integration into the global or national milieu develops, these are the people who often feel the effects first. Hopefully, more studies of indigenous people's roles in central South America will be forthcoming.

Ultimately, the position of the interior of South America in today's global society continues to be precarious, but with dynamics that have transformed and will continue to transform the region in the future. In this sense, it is little different from other regions around the world, except that here we still have the opportunity to observe the transformational process in action and, more importantly, to draw on experiences in more "developed" regions for lessons

in terms of possible future decisions. There are some indications that local decision-makers are heeding the negative social and ecological signals, but the process is slow and not necessarily certain. Fortunately, this volume has contributed a great deal toward a better understanding of the interior of South America and pointed the way for further studies. Hopefully, it is just the beginning.

Robert W. Wilcox

Northern Kentucky University

SANDRA MCGEE DEUTSCH: *Las Derechas. The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil and Chile*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Sandra McGee Deutsch, ya conocida para los lectores de historia de América Latina por su *Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900-1932: The Argentine Patriotic League* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) y numerosos artículos en revistas especializadas, emprende en su nueva obra el ambicioso proyecto de escribir una historia comparada de las derechas extremas de Chile, Argentina y Brasil durante las primeras cuatro décadas del siglo. Ambicioso no sólo por la envergadura, la cantidad de fuentes primarias y secundarias empleadas, la extensión geográfica y cronológica de la obra, sino especialmente por el hecho de entrar en un área sumamente complicada como lo es la historia comparativa.

Antes de entrar de lleno a la obra, debemos preguntarnos sinceramente si este área de estudio realmente existe y tiene validez científica. En las ciencias sociales, donde el uso de modelos y de parámetros cuantitativos hace más fácil las comparaciones, a menudo encontramos que, mas allá de lo institucional propio o dimensiones fácilmente mesurables —elecciones, producción económica, publicaciones de prensa o datos sobre comportamiento poblacional u opinión pública, para mencionar algunos ejemplos—, es sumamente difícil establecer comparaciones. Esto se debe a que cada fenómeno, además de su mesurabilidad cuantitativa, siempre posee un claro aspecto cualitativo muy difícil de medir, y por ende de comparar y apreciar con respecto a fenómenos que parecieran similares a vuelo de pájaro. Y cuando uno se pregunta qué, en lo cualitativo, establece las diferencias, la respuesta es, en gran parte de los casos, la particularidad del desarrollo histórico. Aquí encontramos una de las grandes dificultades con las que McGee Deutsch se enfrenta en su obra. Aun si aceptáramos que Brasil, la Argentina y Chile poseen un cúmulo de similitudes básicas sobre las que se apoya la comparación, el propio desarrollo histórico del período examinado dificulta mucho la tarea. A esto debemos agregar la salvedad de que siendo