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Historia Agraria de América Latina

Alberto Harambour, *Soberanías fronterizas: Estados y capital en la colonización de Patagonia (Argentina y Chile, 1830-1922)*. Valdivia: Ediciones Universidad Austral de Chile. 384 pp. ISBN: 978-956-390-091-0

State colonization is an ongoing and lively academic topic that challenges standard histories of nineteenth-century nation-building in Latin America. *Soberanías Fronterizas: Estados y Capital en la colonización de Patagonia* by Alberto Harambour falls within that historiographical heritage, demonstrating that a transnational history guided by postcolonial theory can offer a fresh interpretation of archival documents and historical events. *Soberanías Fronterizas* is a trans-Andean history that uses a global framework, examining the process of state colonization by the republican governments of Chile and Argentina in the southernmost Patagonia territories of Magallanes and Santa Cruz (and Tierra del Fuego), respectively, from 1830 to 1922. The book is organized into four thematic chapters; the first two explore the judicial constructions that were used by the dominant forces to colonize the territory and the second two analyze the development and institutionalization of the new economic and political powers.

Harambour approaches Patagonia as a discursive territory whose ‘internal’ colonization narrative, as defined by the Chilean and Argentinian states, rested on the republican elite’s reformulation of colonial ideology that described the recently settled region as being within its sovereign rights; a development that the author calls *judicial fictions*. He uses sovereignty to ground postcolonial redefinitions about national borders and territory, underscoring how the new judicial fictions challenged the Westphalia Peace of 1643 that established a system of peaceful coexistence among sovereign European nations as a shared understanding of international relations. *Soberanías Fronterizas* uses the notion social sovereignties—or popular societies outside of the newly created Latin American nations—that formed anaerobic sovereignties that lacked state “oxygen” to flourish but ultimately fertilized those popular societies to continue and grow. For Harambour, these jurisprudence and theoretical questions function as the foundation for his argument that the state-led colonization of Magallanes and Santa Cruz broke

internationally held beliefs about sovereignty to justify genocide against native peoples and ease the expansion of the agricultural frontier.

Soberanías Fronterizas's first chapter examines how colonial representations of Patagonia and its Amerindian inhabitant by explorers and imperial officers informed Argentina and Chile's postcolonial policies. Elites and intellectuals described the territory as "empty" and the Selk'nam and Yagan peoples as "savage," justifying their rapid expansion and colonization of southern Patagonia in the 1870s and 1880s. Harambour underscores that during the colonial period, European travelers from Antonio Pigafetta to Charles Darwin contributed in different ways to the construction of an outsiders' account about those far-reaching Patagonia lands and native dwellers. Explorer after explorer affirmed the previous traveler's findings, contributing to an alterity narrative.

The formation of Latin American nation-states in the early nineteenth century following the wars of independence from Spain shifted long-standing judicial, political, and social beliefs regarding the native-controlled territories; in particular, understandings about land ownership, the frontier, and national borders. Harambour places the replacement of *uti possidetis iuris* (as you possess under the law) with *res nullius* (nobody's possession) as legal precedents in international law by Latin American nations, a significant institutional shift that gave the green light to its extra-territorial reach. Preceding that expansion, Harambour notes that a series of wars that extended the Argentinian and Chilean national borders opened the way for the colonization of Patagonia. The wars' success gave the elites and military leaders from both nations confidence, as well as seasoned soldiers. The Chilean and Argentinian elites embraced the imagined Patagonia, constructed by European explorers as savage and wild, and viewed their expansionist projects as harbingers of civilization. Both nations claimed ownership over Patagonia but excluded the original inhabitants of that territory as citizens of their nations. Furthermore, by comparing and placing these state colonization projects side-by-side, Harambour is able to highlight the shared civilization narrative purported by both nations as they carved out the territory for their economic, political, and military interests.

The second chapter analyzes nascent state colonization schemes. Argentina decided to establish a penal colony in Ushuaia inspired by the British Empire's colonization of Australia. The Chilean government also experimented with a penal colony; however, its efforts quickly focused on convincing landless farmers and peasants from the island of Chiloe, known as *chilotes*, to settle in Magallanes after they were pushed off their land in favor of European settlers. Harambour expands his race analysis in this chapter by describing how the transnational colonization project transformed a racial colonial society into a racial ethno-state. The Argentine press and state officials, for example, described the state's prisoner-colonizers that included political prisoners as "new Indians." Such a policy that forced prisoners to take on the role of colonizers was also employed by the French government after the arrest of thousands of communards in the aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune and, as punishment, were sent to colonize New Caledonia under military

supervision. The Chilean case, however, presented a more overt racial project. The Chilean government recruited German settlers to settle in the Araucanian region in southern Chile and later in Magallanes to displace the mixed-race *chilotes*. European settlers received significant amounts of land in contrast to Chileans and were seen as civilizing and entrepreneur agents. The *chilotes*, however, had more opportunity for social mobility in contrast to the Selk'nam. Harambour offers a reflection on Chilean racism by stating, "Light skin people have greater mobility, but darker-skinned people with education and money do not face discrimination." (p. 522). It is essential to add that an indigenous last name might function as an impediment to social mobility in nineteenth-century Chile and Argentina, even if one were wealthy.

Chapter three focuses on the role of British capital, political corruption, and global economic networks that molded Patagonia into an oligopoly. *Soberanías Fronterizas* traces Tierra de Fuego's Exploitation Society (*La Sociedad*) and Patagonia's Anonymous Importer and Exporter Society (*La Exportadora*) founded by European and European-descent families to export their livestock-related products. Harambour describes the concessions offered to British capitalists to invest in the region and facilitate the integration of their international shipping and financial networks. The wealth and power of Patagonia's dominant families on both sides of the border increased as this small elite group intermarried, consolidating land and capital.

The fourth and final chapter observes the merger of economic and political power in the region by state and capital, highlighting how the murder and removal of Selk'nam people allowed for the accommodation of 800,000 sheep, meant as a blunt reminder of the human cost of colonization. *Soberanías Fronterizas* describes the development of Magallanes customs, ending its existence as a free-market port that intensified class conflict between small producers and oligopoly families. These changes in the market economy also brought about the emergence of the "labor question" and the repression of the labor movement, supported by the central government of both countries. Harambour argues that violent repression, resource scarcity, and the affirmation of the local elite's hegemony in conjunction with their respective state governments brought about the closure of the colonial period by 1922; a closure for state colonization but not for indigenous peoples. *Soberanías Fronterizas* offers a useful postcolonial analysis of republican state formation that was coupled with the economic wants for land and natural resources and, in this case, the expansion of agricultural and livestock production. Rather than treat these developments as two distinct historical time periods—state colonization and agricultural expansion—Harambour places them in conversation as a stark reminder that one led the other. His discussion of racial hierarchies and discrimination is novel since it is still an understudied topic, particularly in Chile. A criticism that can be made of the book is that it was difficult to follow which events took place in the Argentinian side versus the Chilean. The book emphasized developments on the Argentine side in the beginning, especially discussions about the influx of British capital, and settled more on the Chilean situation in

the latter half of the book to discuss the Braun family and the repression of the labor movement. Overall, the book is a necessary contribution to agrarian and state-building studies, and a reminder of the lack of monographs that explore the roots and permanence of racial hierarchies in Argentina and Chile.

Romina A. Green

Centro de Estudios de Historia Agraria de América Latina (CEHAL)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3889-1948>