

Abstract

María Clara Medina, *Landless Women, Powerful Men. Land, Gender and Identity in NW Argentina (Colalao- El Pichao, 1850-1910)*. Department of History, Göteborg University (Göteborg 2002). Disputationsexemplar – Copy for Doctoral Dissertation. 292 pages.

This thesis focuses on the history the rural population at El Pichao, situated in the Santa María Valley, in the province of Tucumán, NW Argentina. It makes special emphasis on the social changes experienced by its population following the fragmentation of a large estate during the second half of the 19th century.

The general aim is to study a process of transformation in the Andean agrarian structures in NW Argentina (NOA) from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th. It discusses the social dynamics behind the expansion and fragmentation of large estates (*latifundios*) in the Argentinean Andes. Particular emphasis is given to the re-definition of socio-economic roles of the social actors, in the frame of the process of permanence and change in land-tenure and disposition.

The central hypothesis of this thesis is that the transformation of an agrarian system (country estate with extensive exploitation) to another (community of peasant landowners with intensive exploitation), occurring in the context of traditional agrarian structures, gives rise to the forming of new households with particular characteristics, which brings about a deep change in the socio-economic relations between the agents of the micro-region, and in the type of relations in the new productive community. The case of El Pichao is an example of the passage from an extensive exploitation system to another of intensive type, when it becomes unproductive to maintain the large estates. Therefore, a new social organization emerges, with the almost total disappearance of tenancy as form of agricultural operation in El Pichao, and the access of the women to legal land property.

At the same time, the class alliances between the old and the new landowners consolidate the representation of this local elite as a hegemonic group in a double power position: privileged before his subordinates and subordinate before the provincial and national upper-classes. In spite of the efforts of the landowners to maintain a finished, homogenous representation of themselves as a hegemonic group, the representation of them given by other social actors show the fissures and contradictions of the landowning identity. The representations of class, ethnicity and gender when focused on the identities of the subordinate groups or the underprivileged ones, would, on the contrary, be based on cultural politics of invisibility or social deterioration which have been produced and carried out from the representations that the dominating classes have of these groups.

All the documents selected for the thesis – published, unpublished, and oral documents – has provided valuable information, both qualitative (direct, contextual and evidential) and quantitative (censal and statistical). The use of different types of sources has demonstrated to be of great help.

Key words: hacienda, estancia, household, property, disposition, household, landowner, tenant, gender, class, ethnicity, identity, 19th and 20th centuries, NW Argentina, El Pichao, Santa María Valley.