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## FROM THE EDITOR

Recent events in Chiapas, México, remind us that democratic transition and economic integration processes in Latin America have a very real human element. Rising gross national production, better exchange rate values, and increased voter participation can be used to quantify change in the region, but numbers often do not shed light on the human condition of Latin American residents. From Buenos Aires to San Salvador, and from Patagonia to Chiapas, Latin Americans are facing the realities of life in an increasingly competitive global system. Reality for millions throughout the region includes disease, grinding poverty, lack of basic infrastructure, discrimination, and continued human rights violations. For rural dwellers, these problems are especially acute.

In recent decades, however, the focus of much academic research and government action has been on urban areas, urban problems, and urban issues. The industrial and service sectors receive vast amounts of money and attention, while agriculture and rural infrastructure consistently are neglected or ignored. Cities, to be sure, present myriad management problems to national and local governments. Yet neglect of rural issues could become the Achilles heel of many national economic and social reform programs. The Mayan protests in Chiapas, if nothing else, have raised the general level of consciousness about the problems embedded in rural life throughout Latin America.

A renewed focus on rural issues is needed immediately. Rural problems require broad interdisciplinary solutions, not sectoral or specialized programs. Building or repairing a road in rural Ecuador will not help local or regional development sufficiently unless part of a broader intra- and interregional development strategy. Programs such as land reform, access to finance capital, improved agricultural infrastructure, tougher environmental legislation, and devolved political power, among others, must become part of any development or improvement strategy. One will not work without the other. Holistic solutions are needed, which means we must cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries and 'territorial' rivalries if we are to contribute positively to change in Latin America.

Economists, geographers, sociologists, historians, bureaucrats, politicians, and agricultural scientists must join forces and seek out new ways to address Latin American issues. We must strengthen further our relationships with colleagues north and south of the 'border,' and we must share information, techniques, and technologies willingly and openly. And more than anything

else, we should remember that a vast swath of the Latin American realm is rural in nature and should not be overlooked in our research agendas. The bright lights of the big city may be seductive and appealing, but rural Latin America also merits our attention.

Enjoy the northern hemisphere summer or the southern hemisphere winter. Until our next issue of *Intercambio*, hasta luego y un fuerte abrazo.

David J. Keeling, Editor  
Department of Geography and Geology



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Manuscript contributions are welcome from anyone interested in Latin America and hemispheric cooperation and exchanges. Articles may be in English, Portuguese, or Spanish. Send your contributions (hard copy and 3.5" disk, DOS, WordPerfect 5.1) to: Center for Latin American Studies, Office of International Programs, Western Kentucky University, 1 Big Red Way, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101.

## BEYOND DEBT: LATIN AMERICA CONFRONTS NEW CHALLENGES

JAMES WILEY

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For more than a decade Latin Americans and Latin Americanists have focused their attention on the foreign debt crisis that has shackled the region. While debt continues to be an important subject, the great changes that have occurred within and without the region since 1982 provide many new challenges for its leaders and an increasingly diverse research agenda for those who study it.

"South America Today," an occasional program sponsored by the Fulbright Commission, offered twelve faculty the opportunity to participate in a traveling seminar for six weeks during the summer of 1993. Selected from institutions across the USA, the twelve included four economists, seven political scientists, and one geographer. The seminar visited four South American countries - Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay, and Colombia - besides a two-day stopover in Buenos Aires, though Argentina was not one of the seminar hosts. In each of the four, the series of programs included meetings with the local academic, political, business, and popular communities. The goal of the seminar was to update the participants about the current issues and realities facing the continent. What follows is a very brief synopsis by country of some of the major subjects identified.

### From privatization to indígenas and bananas in Ecuador

Only in Ecuador was the external debt issue still of great consequence. Ecuador maintains a very high debt-to-GNP ratio, about one-to-one, with each near \$12 billion. A continued heavy state presence in the economy, with the many subsidies that entails, has reduced the country's ability to service its debt. Though privatization of the economy is underway, it progresses gradually, slowed in part by the large military-run economic component within the state sector. Thus far, the military has shown little disposition to withdraw from the economic role it carved out for itself during the last period of military rule (1972-79), a role preserved in the 1979 constitution that provided for the return to civilian rule.

Perhaps the most exciting development in Ecuador today is the rising profile of the indigenous peoples who remain an important component of the population in two of the country's four regions: the Sierra and the Oriente, the Andes and Amazonia, respectively. Until now, they have remained a classic underclass, marginalized by the colonial experience and by the national culture that followed it. The 1992 observance - decidedly not a celebration - of the Columbus quincentennial prompted the political mobilization of many Ecuadorean *indigenes* for the first time. A march on Quito by many thousands received widespread me-

dia coverage provoking great surprise and, eventually, some positive concern among the mainstream population. Ultimately, success will depend on their ability to challenge the country's development model. Based on resource exploitation, the model provides the most direct threat to cultural survival for many indigenous groups, especially in the Oriente where Ecuador's petroleum resources are located.

The banana issue is one that Ecuador shares with Colombia, as well as with Costa Rica, Panamá, and Honduras. On July 1, 1993, the European Union (EU) placed restrictions on the importation of bananas from the "dollar zone" (Latin America). This was motivated by a complex series of considerations, including the need to move toward the Single Market, as stipulated in the 1991 Maastricht Treaty. Other factors included the desire to protect banana production within the EU, notably in Spain (the Canary Islands), France (its Caribbean islands), and Portugal (Madeira), and to fulfill its Lomé Convention obligations. The effects of this decision are likely to be greatest in Ecuador, the world's leading exporter of bananas. Within the country, impacts will be selective by region, primarily affecting coastal lowlands that are home to both plantations and the smaller scale growers who sell to the large foreign companies.

### Chile: a regional model?

Chile, today, is often mentioned in other Latin American countries as the model to follow, an economic success story that merits emulation. There is, however, considerable disagreement about how successful the country's neo-liberal economic path is and what its costs have been to Chilean society. Thus, the various dimensions of the country's export-led development model are important issues in Chile today.

Trade represents one of these dimensions. Chile pursues an independent path, shunning direct involvement in regional trade organizations such as MERCOSUR and the Andean Pact. Instead, it focuses its trade policies on bilateral agreements, such as the recently negotiated treaty with Mexico. It also hopes to establish a similar arrangement with the United States, which it views as a natural outgrowth of the NAFTA arrangement. Meanwhile, it has managed to achieve a nice balance among its major trading partners, with exports divided approximately equally between Europe, North America, and East Asia.

The country's export profile remains skewed toward primary sector commodities, including many agricultural products that are not traditionally Chilean. This situation is viewed as stage one of the export-led development model. The emphasis on agricultural exports has led to changing agrarian structures, with historic land tenure systems giving way to agribusiness and highly mechanized cultivation. Thus, the country's growth sector is not leading to increased employment opportunities; rather, the opposite is happening, with the displacement of many people from rural areas adding to a predominantly urban population. Many remaining

in the countryside have been cut off from their traditional relationships to haciendas or other landholdings and are now proletarianized, migrating with the harvest among Chile's agricultural regions. Meanwhile, a growing urban population remains unaffected by the export boom and awaits more positive results from the second, industrial, stage of the development model.

Chile's politics also offer several interesting themes. The return to democracy continues to be a fragile process, although one that shows great promise. Unlike its neighbors, the country seems unwilling to forget its past as it plans for the future, and the human rights violations of the military regime remain a high profile issue. Other themes include Pinochet's continuing presence along with several other enclaves of authoritarianism that effectively restrict the government's maneuvering space, the unresolved subject of the Chilean diaspora, and a programmed decentralization of authority toward the country's thirteen administrative regions.

### Uruguay: Days of Future Past?

Uruguay exemplifies a country whose historical geography is exceptionally relevant to its present. Often described as a time warp, it lives in its past, frozen in time with a self-image that defies many current realities. This idealized Uruguay is very white, virtually totally European, prosperous, well-educated, the democratic "Switzerland of South America," a cradle-to-grave welfare state, and, perhaps most importantly, the 1950 World Cup soccer champion, a fact often repeated in conversation today.

This self-image neglects the economic stagnation that has afflicted the country since the mid-1950s, the presence of several minority groups, an educational system not well-synchronized with the economic needs of the country, the interruption of democratic processes by a military dictatorship from 1973 through 1985, and increasing poverty among the nation's populace. The gap between image and reality often prevents Uruguay from dealing with its problems and constitutes a very real issue today.

Other issues include privatization of the economy and the MERCOSUR trade pact. Like many of its neighbors, Uruguay began a privatization program during the 1980s but, uniquely, held a referendum on the subject in 1992. Its voters soundly rejected further implementation of the program, reflecting their continued longing for the security of the welfare state and the better days of earlier decades, while leaving the government in a state of flux. If Uruguay can emerge from its current morass, it will likely be due to its membership in MERCOSUR, a trade pact with Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. The essential asymmetry of the group, a matter of great concern in Uruguay, may prove to be its greatest opportunity if the country sees its disadvantageous situation as a political buffer state become an advantageous position capitalizing on two large markets.

### Colombia: the image and the reality

Image is a primary concern to Colombians and with good reason. The country's dual *violencias* and substantial *delincuencia* are the modern manifestations of a historical legacy and render it the most violent country on earth, surpassing even the USA with more than 29,000 violent deaths in 1992 alone. The negative one-dimensional image held by most foreigners, however, is costly to more than national pride. It places limits on international contacts in many realms, ranging from business to tourism and education and prevents the country from realizing its tremendous potential. Changing the image, or at least making it more reflectively multi-dimensional, is a national priority at all levels.

Another set of issues involves the new constitution, adopted in 1991. This document potentially can become a negotiated revolution that may forever change Colombian society and politics. It was written by a specially-elected assembly representing a broad spectrum of society, included indigenous peoples who had long been excluded from the political process. Among other things, it seeks to transform Colombia's political geography by distributing power away from the central government.

These changes will provide greater authority and financial resources for the country's distinct regions and provinces. This is of particular interest along the Caribbean coast, where many feel slighted by the central authorities in Bogotá. Measurable inequalities exist among the five major Colombian regions, many of them attributable to strong political centralization in a country whose historically fractious nature contributes to fears of decentralized authority.

Recent improvements in transportation infrastructure now contribute to national integration. Historic north-south patterns of transportation in Colombia are changing as new east-west routes allow spatial interaction among provinces that earlier were linked through Bogotá. Also, three essentially "new" regions are opening up: Amazonia, the Llanos Orientales, and the Pacific Coast. The development models used in each of these areas will be interesting subjects to study, as will Colombia's continuing efforts at trade diversification and the exploitation of its petroleum resource.

### Conclusion

Limitations of space prevent the inclusion of many additional subjects worthy of comment, such as the emerging Pacific Rim identity and the growth of environmental awareness. The fact that much of the above is problem-focused is not intended to diminish optimism about the region or its future, only to suggest that its challenges are now changing. But there is substantial cause for optimism. A new generation of leadership in a variety of fields is now surfacing that comes into its roles with better educations and clearer understandings of the region's past and contemporary problems. These leaders may well produce changes that would

have been unthinkable a generation ago.

Those changes must, therefore, also be reflected in the efforts of those actively involved in researching the important issues facing the region today. Past analyses of Latin American geography must be reworked to take into account the substantial forces currently transforming the region. A reality is emerging that cannot be explained by simple references to Iberian heritage; more complex relationships must be identified and understood. The task of the Latin Americanist is to keep abreast of these developments as they occur so as to be able to carry on with the fascinating work of interpreting this dynamic region.



### **GENDER ROLES, PUBLIC OCCUPATIONS, AND THE NEW AMAZONS?**

Richard B. Pace

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In 1542 the first Spanish explorers descended the Amazon River from its headwaters in Peru to its mouth in Brazil. Among the many marvels these explorers reported from their journey were tales of a strange tribe completely dominated by women warriors living somewhere near the river (Hemming 1978). The Spanish explorers identified the tribe as the Amazons, after the Amazons of Greek mythology. The New World Amazons were described as a militaristic society completely devoid of men. The society was perpetuated by temporary unions with males of neighboring tribes. Only the female offspring were kept. As a result, women dominated all aspects of life. Further exploration by Europeans in the New World, failed to locate the mysterious tribe and eventually the Amazons were relegated to the world of mythology--although the river and surrounding forest still bear their name.

In 1983 when I first ascended the Amazon River en route to conduct anthropological fieldwork, the mythological Amazons were far from my mind. My research goal was to study the impact of recent economic development efforts by the Brazilian government on one small farming and extracting community along the lower Amazon River. The community was Gurupá, which is best known from the writings of Charles Wagley (1976) and Eduardo Galvão (1955). Upon my arrival in Gurupá, however, I came face to face with an apparent variation of the mythical Amazons. I was surprised to learn that the community was seemingly run by women--which was not the typical Latin American pattern I had read about. Women held the positions of mayor, vice mayor, two of the five municipal council seats (including the president of the council), judge, prosecutor, physician, dentist, nurse, biochemist, school teacher, president of the rural workers union, and postal worker. With such total domination of public office and the judicial, education, and health professions, I could not help but

conjure up notions of the lost society of Amazons presently residing in Gurupá.

Women's domination of public office and the professions in Gurupá brings up several pertinent questions. Is this pattern particular to Gurupá, or common throughout the Brazilian Amazon? Is there historic precedent for this pattern, or is it a recent phenomenon? What are the underlying factors creating the pattern? In the first part of this paper I describe the community of Gurupá, I provide an overview of women's role in the public sphere of Brazil, and I discuss community views of women. In the next issue of *Intercambio* I conclude the paper by offering several hypotheses to explain women's public roles in Gurupá.

### **The Community of Gurupá**

Gurupá is located on the southern bank of the southern fork of the Amazon River in the state of Pará. It is some thirty-six hours upstream by river boat from the coastal city of Belém. There is no road to the community. Gurupá is a sparsely populated, poor, and relatively unimportant place. The town has a population of 3,603 and it is surrounded by a 9,309 square kilometer municipality which has a population of 17,011. The community suffers from underemployment, periodic food shortages (especially meat), high malnutrition rates (68% of children aged 5-9 in Gurupá suffer from some degree of undernutrition), frequent bouts with malaria, dysentery, hepatitis, and amebas, and an infant mortality rate of 42/1000 (Pace 1992; SESPA 1990).

People make a living through subsistence farming (manioc, corn, rice, beans, bananas) and forest resource extraction (timber, rubber, cacao, palm heart). There is very little industry in the municipality beyond a few small saw mills and several small palm-heart processing enterprises. Most extracted resources are sent downstream for processing in neighboring municipalities or overseas.

### **Women and the Public Sphere in Brazil**

Within this setting of poverty and regional unimportance, women in Gurupá now occupy the major public positions. In terms of women's access to public spheres in Brazil as a whole, this appears as a unique phenomenon. Much has been written on the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, or the home, as opposed to the public sphere of life--the sphere of the formal market, the professions, and politics. Within the domestic sphere women perform a wide range of tasks such as child rearing and socialization, household management, unpaid domestic labor, and informal and intermittent income generating activities through petty commodity production (selling of food, laundry services, etc.). Work outside the home, such as wage labor, is traditionally frowned upon unless economic necessity demands it, or affluence and the presence of domestic servants facilitates it. Even when women engage in non-domestic wage labor, their work is generally interpreted in the national ideology as a simple extension of

the domestic sphere. Women's work is conceptualized as only "help" or a "complement" to the domestic budget (Blay 1978).

Entrance into the public sphere is traditionally denied to women. The exceptions have been few. In politics, the greatest penetration is at the municipal level. Here women make up 4.0 percent of council members and 1.7 percent of mayors (Blay 1981). In the state of Pará, Gurupá's mayor is the only female mayor. While this degree of participation at the national level represents a tremendous surge over participation rates before 1960, overall it is still miniscule.

Women lawyers, judges, and health professionals are more common in Brazil. Modest pay and moderate social status attracts ambitious women to these positions. At the same time, these features may not attract ambitious men who will seek more wealth and higher social status in business or politics.

### Historic Precedent for Women in the Public Sphere in Gurupá

The present day domination of politics, government, and the professions is without historic precedent in Gurupá. The first female mayor took office in 1982. She was succeeded by her vice-mayor in 1988. These are the only two women mayors in Gurupá's nearly 400-year history. Women as council members, judges, lawyers, and doctors are also a recent phenomenon not predating the military revolution of 1964. During the 1950s, however, women did occupy minor public positions such as office workers in the health post, notary in charge of civil records, post office worker, and school teachers. A few women also were active in business, especially if their merchant husbands had died (Wagley 1976).

### Community Views of Women in the Public Sphere

Community-wide views of women holding public office and working in the professions in Gurupá are mixed. On one side, negative remarks abound. A common derogatory remark is that the community of Gurupá has gone "to the kitchen," meaning the realm of the women. Other critics state that a strong husband would never let his wife work in a public position. Many people feel that women lack the aggressiveness and respect to make or enforce decisions required of them as office holders or professionals. Another form of critique is made by members of the opposition Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) or PT. PT members point out that women in the public sphere are nearly all members of the local affluent class. As such, their political or professional agenda is oriented toward protecting the status quo of the upper class' privileged position. Opposition members maintain that the majority of women in Gurupá, who are lower or working class, benefit little from the success of these women in the public sphere.

Not all views of women in the public sphere are negative. Some male politicians will publicly defend

the right of women to hold office and pursue professional careers. Other people state that women are likely to be less corrupt and are likely to treat individuals more justly than men. A river boat captain residing in Gurupá once commented that it was not until Gurupá's female mayor took office that municipal projects were completed. The classic example he gave concerned construction of the infamous city hall building, which began during the rubber boom (1910) but was only completed in the 1980s under the guidance of the town's first female mayor. Women politicians, he said, steal less public funds so there is more money for public projects.

These types of positive, or at least neutral, attitudes have led to a measure of acceptance of women in political and professional positions. This is indicated in a 9 percent random sample survey of adults 16 years and older in the town I conducted in 1985. For the following professions, over fifty percent of those questioned responded that the occupation was appropriate for both men and women: lawyer, engineer, physician, nurse, teacher, merchant, and farmer.

What factors, then, might account for women's domination of public office and the professions in Gurupá? In the second part of the paper, I will look at socioeconomic conditions and male emigration, the expansion of public bureaucracy, and the image of Gurupá as a safe and near-by place.

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## WKU AWARDS LATIN AMERICAN STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

Arlene Escobar from Belize was the recipient of the 1994 Latin American Student Scholarship Award. Students are awarded \$200 applicable toward the purchase of books for the Fall 1994 semester. The award is given in recognition of the student's excellence in scholarship and contribution to international understanding. The award was presented at the University Awards Ceremony in April, 1994.



## LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER SPRING CONFERENCE

On April 21, 1994, Western Kentucky University hosted the Latin American Studies Center Spring Conference. Dr. David Sheinin, professor of History at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, was the conference speaker. Dr. Sheinin gave an informative and fascinating talk on "Argentina's Rebirth: The Decline of Populism in the Post-Military Era, 1980-1994." Members of the local community, students, and university faculty attended the conference and had an opportunity to meet Dr. Sheinin at an informal reception that followed the conference.



## WKU FACULTY ACTIVITIES

**Dr. Richard V. Salisbury**, Chair of the Latin American Studies Committee and professor of history at Western, has been busy teaching, writing, and conducting research this year. Since the last issue of *Inter-cambio* Dr. Salisbury has presented "Great Britain, the United States, and the 1909-1910 Nicaraguan Crisis" at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association in Orlando, Florida, November 1993. He also gave a paper titled "Through a Glass Clearly: A British Perspective on U.S. Policy in Central America, 1900-1930" at the Latin American Studies Association annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, March 1994. Dr. Salisbury organized a series of four public lectures on Latin American topics this Spring, and presented "Cortes and the Conquest of the Aztec Empire" as part of the lecture series at the Bowling Green Public Library. He also participated in a panel discussion on NAFTA.

**Dr. David J. Keeling**, Department of Geography and Geology, is continuing research on social and economic change in Argentina. As chair of the Chamber of Commerce International Relations subcommittee on Sister City ties with Ecuador, he is attempting to reestablish ties between Bowling Green and Santo Domingo de los Colorados. At the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, held in San Francisco during late March, Dr. Keeling presented a paper on "Regional Integration in the Southern Cone: Transporting MERCOSUR to Success." He also participated in the public lecture series organized by the Latin American Studies Program, presenting a talk titled "In the Footsteps of the Conquistadores to Northwest Argentina." In addition, Dr. Keeling took part in a panel discussion on the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement on México.

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