

In memoriam
Esther Beatriz Iglesias Lesaga

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Esther Iglesias has passed away. She is now part of the collective memory of Latin American exile and at the forefront of those who have made oral history a fertile tool for the understanding of the agrarian world.

She was a protégé, colleague and friend of Tulio Halperin Donghi, Sergio Bagú, Enrique Tandeter and José Carlos Chiaramonte, perhaps the greatest historians of her native Argentina, where she studied and taught rural history at the Universidad Nacional del Sur (Bahía Blanca). Shortly thereafter, she continued her research on the PhD program at the Université Toulouse Le Mirail in France, where she graduated with honors with a thesis on the “*Crisis agrícolas del sudoeste pampeano*” (The agricultural crises of the southwestern Pampa), a work which for the first time combined an established discipline (economic history) and a novel approach (the analysis of oral history). Her promotion of Pampean studies among French historians and geographers dates from that period and influenced the work of the Latin Americanist Romain Gaignard, future rector of the same university.

Prevented by the 1976 coup d'état from returning to Argentina, an event that initiated a period of terror, persecution and assassinations in her home country, that same year she joined the research staff of the Institute of Economic Research (IIEc) at the invitation of Arturo Bonilla Sanchez, its then Director.

The turn her life was taking led her to redefine her methodology in relation to a scarcely studied region: the last survivors of the agave haciendas and henequen cultivation in Yucatan. This scientific work lasted several years with the support of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the School of Economics of the University of Yucatan, resulting in the monograph: “*Yucatán, monocultivo, oro verde y decadencia henequenera*” (1984), which was awarded and published by El Colegio de México, as well as three other books, a documentary compilation entitled “*Voces de los henequenerales*”, as well as around twenty articles and chapters. She also trained researchers on a local and national level.

Throughout her rich intellectual life and her numerous publications, Esther Iglesias addressed several topics of study, unconnected or different from her main research project. The latter included the footwear industry in Guanajuato. Together with her team, she created a network of producers and small companies, and after extensive research, she published *La industria del calzado y la curtiduría* (1998), her most widely cited and reviewed book to date.

At a time when academic research on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) consisted basically of superficial criticisms, she provided concrete guidelines and objectives for the improvement of the sector.

As researchers, we often find that reading is a necessary accompaniment to our intellectual production; however, in Esther's case, reading was a natural state, allowing her to deploy her fine critical observation, her great memory and her erudite handling of data, which in no way lessened her self-imposed standard of excellence.

When she took over the leadership of the *Problemas del Desarrollo* journal in 2002, her friends knew that it was a decision that would have far-reaching consequences. For eight years, she devoted body and soul to making this publication the best in our language and, from my perspective as a reader, the editing of several academic journals and my participation in the group of experts of the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT), I know that she succeeded.

With a fantastic team of collaborators, she created a new design that renovated the format, sections and covers with the painstaking detail that only love can afford. She eliminated delays in printing and sought to improve every element of editing, approval and contact with the authors. At the same time, she strove to provide international visibility to the journal, not only through circulation, but also through ConoSur, a selection of the best articles co-published with the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) Argentina.

Esther Iglesias was and will always be, for those of us who knew her, an endearing individual of impeccable intellectual honesty. Her conversation could be fiery, erudite, serene and reflective. She had the youthful spirit of the young woman she once was and the fighter she never ceased to be. She bequeaths to the world her example as an editor and the person she loved most: her son Pablo. And the memory of a people she rescued from oblivion.