

OSCAR DE LA TORRE, *The People of the River: Nature and Identity in Black Amazonia, 1835-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Oscar de la Torre's *The People of the River* tells the story of black communities in Pará, northern Brazil, a region that is not usually in the focus of historical studies of slavery, marronage, and post-emancipation society in Brazil. It covers the period from 1835, when the Cabanagem revolt wreaked havoc in the region, to 1945, the end of the dictatorial phase of the Vargas era. The study's geographical focus stands out, as does its analytical framing, which places the book at the intersection of social, cultural, and environmental history. The author approaches Paraense slaves, maroons (*mocambos*), and black peasants through the prism of their relations with the natural environments of the Amazon valley. From this angle, nature ceases to be a stage for action and becomes an integral element of survival strategies, cultural identity, and claims to citizenship. By tracing black Paraenses' entanglements with natural environments—"environmental creolization"—, de la Torre reconstructs worldviews and practices that constitute a lesser known dimension of the Afro-Brazilian tradition. He thus adds an important ingredient to the debates on ethnic identities, place, and memory that have not lost their relevance since the 1988 constitutional disposition that granted land deeds to maroon-descendants (*comunidades remanescentes de quilombos*). However, de la Torre is also careful in pointing out that these traditions are not exclusive to maroons, but characterize both *quilombo* and *senzala*-descendants (slaves freed at the eve of abolition in 1888) and, hence, a distinct black peasant culture.

Chapter 1 describes the agro-ecological landscapes of mid-nineteenth-century Amazonia and assesses the (limited) impact of the Cabanagem revolt on the region's plantation economy. It further discusses the "creolization" of its slave population, which quickly recovered after the revolt and comprised about one fifth of the province's population in 1851. Folk stories form the narrative thread of the next chapter, namely the maroons' interactions with the Big Snake, the mythical gatekeeper of the upper Cuminá River, a tributary of the Trombetas. The Big Snake, a figure apparently stemming from both West Central African and Carib indigenous folklore, is foremost a spatial metaphor delineating pre-abolition safe spaces where the maroons resisted several armed expeditions. These acts of resistance involved tactics relying on the knowledge of river courses, waterfalls, and toxic substances, for which de la Torre coins the term "weaponized nature." The demise of the snake is an analogy to how the maroons began to descend the rivers as slavery was gradually being abolished. However, as de la Torre shows, even before their resettlement closer to the Amazonas, the maroons of the Trombetas interacted with Amazonian society through trade, especially as

the incipient rubber cycle led to economic expansion and diversification, as well as through the growing presence of missionaries. Chapter 3 further elaborates on the concept of “environmental creolization” by examining the agro-ecological practices of the enslaved. This included the production of manioc flour, the tending of orchards, hunting and collecting forest items like Brazil nuts and latex, activities that often involved exchange of knowledge between blacks and Indians and opened opportunities for the slaves to trade with itinerant peddlers (*regatões*) in what de la Torre describes as a “parallel economy.” While these spaces of agency within the slave regime are a well-established theme in the historiography, they gain special significance in *The People of the River*, since it was here that environmental creolization took place, which, according to the author, “underpinned other forms of slave resistance” (p. 72).

Chapter 4 focuses on the expansion of the Brazil nut trade on the Trombetas during the First Republic. While this episode figures in the collective memory of *quilombo*-descendants as a story of loss of autonomy, de la Torre aptly elaborates the complex relationship between black peasants and merchants who expanded their claims on nut groves. This relationship involved dispossession and land grabbing, debt bondage, and violent treatment of workers, but also creative strategies of undermining the merchants’ power, such as hiding groves from them or extracting nuts clandestinely. Godfatherhood and the accommodation of locals into networks of patronage were other mechanisms by which merchants extended their power, resembling rural relations of dependence elsewhere in republican Brazil. Chapter 5 takes us to the northeastern part of Pará and analyzes how slaves and their descendants developed identities based on their engagement with particular places and landscapes. Here, de la Torre traces how black peasants acquired and used knowledge on the legal requisites of landownership, which they merged with their identity as slave-descendants to a place-specific notion of citizenship. Chapter 6 concentrates on the changing politics surrounding Brazil nut groves on the Curuá River from the 1920s to the 1940s. It shows how local dynamics on the shores of this tributary of the Amazonas reflected the transformation of Brazilian politics at large as black peasants, together with traditional merchants, adopted a nationalist rhetoric to keep foreign-born newcomers off their land or as a centrally-appointed intervenor tried—and ultimately failed—to implement the policy of putting the country’s natural resources under the control of the union.

This fabulous book draws on a vast array of sources including legal documents, inventories, government reports and correspondence, travelers’ accounts, as well as interviews with over 40 individuals. Using a variety of analytical methods and narrative strategies, de la Torre meticulously reconstructs complex land transactions, kinship structures, local folk stories, and shared memories.

The author's methodological versatility, combined with his precise and accessible prose, provide for a pleasant reading experience. Although one might wish for a more comprehensive discussion of, and self-positioning within, existing scholarship, especially by Brazilian specialists such as Eurípides Funes or Rosa Acevedo Marin, *The People of the River* makes substantial contributions to several fields: It convincingly shows how environmental history facilitates a fresh look at identity, kinship, and power. It makes a strong argument for bringing race back into rural history. Moreover, it intervenes in the field of memory studies by taking landscapes and the ways in which groups and individuals remember nature-society interactions seriously.

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MAUD CHIRIO, *Politics in Uniform: Military Officers and Dictatorship in Brazil, 1960-1980*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018.

While the coup that toppled the government of João Goulart in 1964 has been studied by a variety of scholars, few studies stand out as much as Maud Chirio's stimulating book on the event and the military regime that followed it for 21 years. Her book is a worthy successor to the analyses of Alfred Stepan and Ronald Schneider. Indeed, she has gone well beyond their work by taking the reader on a journey inside the Brazilian armed forces. While most analyses look into the barracks from the street, Chirio conducts hers from the inside. The coup and subsequent regime politicized the military to a degree far beyond previous Brazilian experiences and severely affected Brazilian society.

The book grew out of Chirio's doctoral dissertation at the University of Paris and first appeared as *A política nos quartéis: Revoltas e protestos de oficiais na ditadura militar brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2012). This book is not a translation of the Brazilian edition. It is not clear whether the two translators involved worked from the French-language original, the Brazilian edition, or both. The text has been revised and a bit reorganized, perhaps seeking to make it clearer for readers of English, who might be less familiar with Brazil. Unfortunately some of the most interesting and helpful source notes that appear in the Brazilian edition are not included in this one.

What is truly curious about 1964 and the military regime is the lack of clarity about why it happened. Was there really an active threat of a communist conspiracy? The Russian, Chinese, Cuban, even Brazilian Communists were potentially dangerous, but were they mounting a real threat to Brazil? If so, where is the evidence? Did the military and its civilian allies suffer from overactive

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