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# Some Other Amazonians: Perspectives on Modern Amazonia by Stephen Nugent, Mark Harris

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government policy makers' (p. 135) in the early 1930s, an attitude that would only be reinforced during the dictatorship of the Estado Novo. Thus, he concludes, 'worker agitation was as much if not more a *caso de polícia* under Vargas as it had been during the First Republic' (p. 139).

*Drowning in Laws* is an excellent discussion of – and engagement with – several of the most important threads in the historiography on Vargas and Brazilian state-labour relations, reflecting French's substantial experience in this field. It is, however – somewhat surprisingly if we are to judge by the title – less about labour law. French points out the often paradoxical reference to labour law in workers' rhetoric as, on the one hand, an ideal and a hope, and, on the other, as a fraud. But even if this discursive element – how the law is talked about – is important, it can only be a starting point to finding out how the law actually worked. Here, French offers little more than the general reflection that there existed an abyss between the CLT on paper and the CLT in practice and that the slow process of the labour courts often prevented workers from obtaining their legal rights. While this is plausible, it does not help us understand more about the nature of Brazilian labour law. How did severance pay, pensions, accident compensation, union recognition and collective bargaining work in practice? Were there differences – and what were they – between the individual and collective aspects of labour law? How did interpretations of the laws change over time? How did the federal nature of the Brazilian state influence the workings of labour law? What were the legal strategies used by employers to circumvent the laws?

And what were the legal strategies attempted by workers to enforce them? These are all questions the answers to which would have helped us understand more, both about the nature of the CLT, and why workers simultaneously rejected and idealised it. We might even understand more about why workers resorted to the labour courts in increasing numbers in the period following the courts' establishment, in spite of all the evident obstacles they faced.

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Stephen Nugent and Mark Harris (eds.), *Some Other Amazonians: Perspectives on Modern Amazonia* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, 2004), pp. ix + 211, £14.95; \$19.95; €20.00, pb.

*Some Other Amazonians* poses a simple but critical question: if most ethnographic research in the Amazon has focused on Amerindian groups, and more recently on the socio-ecological impact of 'development', what other social realities have been missed? Each of the authors of this collection's nine articles addresses that question, revealing the Amazon to be a diversely populated region, with multiple, and often poorly understood, local histories. As might be expected from Stephen Nugent's and Mark Harris's prior pioneering work on *caboclo* communities, *Some Other Amazonians* challenges common stereotypes of the Amazon as a region where 'nature' prevails and 'civilisation' is destructive. The anthropologists, historians and economists that the editors have assembled write of *other Amazonians* – other people, economies and connections that help define a specifically Amazonian modernity, other Amazonians who do not fit the dominant scholarly and popular moulds for the region.

*Other people.* The strongest articles in *Some Other Amazonians* undermine what the editors call ‘the hegemony of ... primordialism and modernization’ in regional scholarship by bringing people other than Amerindians and developers into ethnographic focus (p. 6). Nugent’s history of Sephardic Jews in the Lower Amazon since the 1820s is a case in point, as it demonstrates the long and continuous habitation of Moroccan Jews in the region. His research in Belém and Santarém fills an important ethnographic gap and also contributes to Jewish diaspora studies, as he explicates a hierarchy of prestige within the socially and geographically dispersed Jewish community in the Amazon. Nugent deftly explains how *santareno* Jews are marginalised by *belenenses*, who in turn are held peripheral by São Paulo Jews.

Similarly, Rosa Elizabeth Acevedo Marin and Edna Maria Ramos de Castro follow the conflicts that have marked the formation of *quilombos* (communities descended from escaped slaves) in the Trombetas region. Their history shows that, both well before and long after the tumultuous *Cabanagem* rebellion (1835–6), *quilombo* communities were able to maintain their integrity and resist domination by external political or economic forces. This work is timely due to the growing conflict over land claims in the Trombetas region, and the general lack of ethnohistorical scholarship available to support *quilombolas*’ claims.

Harris’s contribution also has a political goal in mind, as it approaches ‘other Amazonians’ through the framework of ‘the agrarian question’ posed throughout Latin America, but, as he points out, rarely asked in the Amazon. Histories of land and labour in the Amazon have been approached too broadly, he argues, and scholars would do well to explore the empirical realities of the diverse migrants to the region, provisionally comparing Amazonian *caboclos* with other peasantries. Harris’s intervention is a refreshing countercurrent to most scholarship on the Amazonian floodplain, which, rather than tracing the *longue durée* of the developing peasant landscape as he proposes, tends to frame social processes in terms of natural resource management and community conservation.

*Other economies.* Three of the volumes’ authors develop critiques of orthodox economic history in the region by pointing out Amazonians’ agency in the development of endogenous and export-driven markets. Gregory Prang chronicles the development of the ornamental fish industry along the Rio Negro, and asks broader questions of the possibilities for innovation within the *aviamento* debt system. He notes that the global ornamental fish market developed at a time of significant economic uncertainty in the region – the end of the late nineteenth-century rubber boom – and offered a degree of freedom from patron/client relations. Scott Douglas Anderson highlights another post-rubber industry in his discussion of sugar cane, which flourished in the lower Amazon from 1930s–1970s. The Amazon supplied sugar and rum to markets throughout Brazil, and Anderson’s study challenges prevalent assumptions about the region’s peripheral status. As Amazonian rum and sugar met their demise via government interventions (highways and inflationary economic policies), the Amazon has in effect been *de-industrialised*, and thus re-naturalised, as a result of external intervention.

In his explication of the vital role that *regatões* (itinerant river traders) have played in the economic history of the Amazon, David McGrath foregrounds the perspectives of these controversial middlemen in the *aviamento* system. Rather than positing the *regatão* as an instrumental tool of the wealthy patrons, McGrath tells of the relationships that developed between *caboclo* extractivists and river traders as they conspired against the bosses downriver. McGrath mines the economic and social

history of the region to show that the conventional view of merchant capitalism is flawed in its assessment of *caboclos* and *regatões* as powerless, opposing interests.

*Other connections.* A third theme developed in the volume concerns how social scientists have inadequately documented practices of social reproduction unique to the Amazon. For example, Raymundo Herardo Maues's short chapter on the genealogy of a uniquely Amazonian concept, *malínezza* (evil), nicely illustrates how social analysis might follow practices *out from* the Amazon, as opposed to assuming that the region's cultural life is only comprised of the shreds of other locales. Maues relates *malínezza* to other Brazilian concepts, and argues that it is more apt than the similar and widely discussed *panema* for exploring the local significance of evil and sorcery. Also concerned with describing the unique elements of Amazonian social life, Deborah de Magalhães Lima documents how small communities in the Middle Solimões, facing threats of external intervention, have developed an expansive, yet endogamous, kinship system to control land tenure. Kinship is not defined by blood, but rather indicates a strategic connection; Lima notes that this differs from other rural kinship practices throughout the world, where 'relatedness' is often defined much more narrowly.

Finally, in her article addressing the social legacies of 1960s–1970s development initiatives, Neide Esterici notes a prominent connection between the Amazon and the global liberation theology movement in the development of the Catholic Church in the Araguaia region. By revisiting the role played by the church in the region's land conflicts, she contends that the alliance between Araguaia colonists and church activists echoed throughout the Brazilian Catholic Church. Over subsequent years, Amazonian pastoral politics played a decisive role throughout Brazil in organising rural workers, mostly through the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), a Latin America-wide initiative of priests and labourers that started in the Amazon.

In sum, all students of the Amazon will find *Some Other Amazonians* useful: its interdisciplinary breadth is impressive and instructive. Latin Americanists more generally, and scholars interested in the regional, national and global reach of local histories, will also appreciate the attention to the details of Amazonian social history. The volume's project is innovative and important, successfully complicating 'primordial' and 'modernising' suppositions about the Amazon, it shows the way for scholarship and policy that might take the diverse inhabitants of the region more seriously.

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Jennifer L. McCoy and David J. Myers (eds.), *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela* (Baltimore, MD, and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. xx + 342, £35.50, hb.

Political scientists offered two basic explanations in the 1990s for Venezuela's political crisis, which was put in evidence by two abortive coups in 1992 and the impeachment of President Carlos Andrés Pérez the following year. One group of writers blamed the rigidity of political institutions that were set in place by inter-party pacts at the outset of the modern democratic period in 1958. Others attributed the crisis to Venezuela's dependence on oil income. This book presents a broader