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The Brazilian People: The Formation and Meaning of Brazil

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Each chapter in this book is extracted or reprinted from previously published work. As she explains in her preface, editor Kristina Plenderleith concentrated on Darrell's early reports concerning the ethnoecology of the Kayapó, derived, as described in Brent Berlin's foreword, from Darrell's pursuit of the "ethnobotany, ethnozoology, ethnomedicine and ethnopharmacology, ethnopedology, ethnoforestry, ethnoastronomy, and ethnoagriculture" (p. xv) of the tribe. His previous training in entomology allowed him to make detailed investigations into and observations of phenomena that would escape the notice of many anthropologists. His articles on the folk biological taxonomic systems of arthropods, prepared with his Brazilian co-author João Maria Franco de Camargo, and amazing material on the knowledge and management of stingless bees by the Kayapó, are enough alone to establish this book as a classic in libraries of ethnobiology. But there is much more, including superb articles on the management of Amazonian soils by the Kayapó with co-author Susanna Hecht. With Elain Elisabetsky, Darrell gives us a fascinating article on the use of medicinal plants for the control of fertility and sexuality.

From the first chapter—a description of Darrell's first encounters with the Kayapó in the village of Mëbêngôkre and an overview of Kayapó ethnoscience, and his highly personal account of a near-disastrous trek in the unfamiliar rainforest—to the last chapter—in which Darrell describes how he and his Kayapó friends take on the whole international development structure—there is a vibrance and authenticity in his voice that inspires us and will inspire future generations. It is not only possible to be a superb scientist and student of humanity, but it is possible to act meaningfully on values that are understood by such scholarship. Darrell Posey witnessed that fact with his life and work, some of the best of which is found in this volume.

This book will take its place in the permanent library of great anthropological literature for many reasons. The scientific work is superior and encompassing, the writing is superb and compelling, the author's engagement with the subject is intense and unselfconscious, and both the facts and their relevance to a broader struggle are immediately and transparently important. There is much rhetoric about the conflicts between development, core human values, and the need to preserve the unique natural environments of the world. These issues are joined in the most specific ways in this invaluable book.

The Brazilian People: The Formation and Meaning of Brazil. Darcy Ribeiro. Gregory Rabassa (transl.). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000. xviii + 332 pp., bibliography. \$34.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8130-1777-7. [www.upf.com]

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Darcy Ribeiro's book, *The Brazilian People*, is readable and fascinating, perhaps because it instantiates a critically modern—if “politically incorrect”—view of the origins and development of Brazil as a nation and as a people. The theme of Brazil as a comprehensible, if not holistic unit of scholarly reflection, is a long-standing one in Ribeiro's copious output, beginning with his publication in book form of the idea of a Brazilian university and higher educational system in the late 1950s. But, the objective of the present book is not so much to present a scrupulously documented, coherent argument on Brazilian ethnic and national origins, as it is to paint a vast, colorful, fluid, and well-written portrait of Brazil and Brazilians through time. Ribeiro also risks in the book some futuristic predictions concerning Brazil and the shape of the world to come.

This book is the English translation of *O Povo Brasileiro: A Formação e o Sentido do Brasil*, originally published in 1995, two years before the author's death. It is actually not his last major published work, as the author of the English preface, Elizabeth Lowe, claims (on p. ix). In 1996 Ribeiro published his field notes from research he had done among the Urubu-Kaapor (Ka'apor) Indians in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the monumental *Diárias do Campo*. Thus, *The Brazilian People* may be best comprehended as the fourth and final installment on what Ribeiro had termed the “civilizational” process. The earlier three related volumes were *The Civilizational Process*, *Americas and Civilization*, and *Os Índios e a Civilização*, appearing in that order from the late 1960s to 1970 and all originally published in Portuguese. Although *The Brazilian People* repeats some of the data, arguments, and viewpoints from those earlier tomes, and much of the bibliography of the new book may be encountered in them, the inimitable, erudite voice of the late Darcy Ribeiro on a variety of new topics emerges in these pages.

I read the book first in Portuguese shortly after it was published. I can attest to the fact that the translation by Gregory Rabassa is superb and sensitive to the original text. Rabassa understands the emotive, provocative, sometimes humorous style of Ribeiro, and this comes out in the English rendering. One drawback to this edition is the lack of an index. It is clear in translation that the book is macrolevel in scope and reflects a continuing emphasis on certain of Ribeiro's ideas and interests. The book also exhibits a retrospective tone from the outset, being that of a scholar-politician looking back on a long, productive, and memorable career.

In terms of his relevance to anthropology and anthropological theory, Darcy Ribeiro was probably the last major cultural evolutionist and culture-area theorist from Brazil, if not Latin America more generally. His late colleague, contemporary, and friend, the Columbia University-trained anthropologist Eduardo Galvão was another such theorist, but Galvão, unlike Ribeiro, never left academia—he also did not live as long. Additionally, Galvão did not undertake to envision the sociocultural totality of Brazil as a unit of analysis, not because he could not but rather because his interests focused in

considerable typological detail on indigenous and *caboclo* cultures relevant specifically to Amazonia. To a degree influenced by the neoevolutionary thinking of Julian Steward, Betty Meggers, and Marvin Harris, as well as by the folk-urban continuum concept and associated typologies of tribes and peasantries as originated by Robert Redfield, and also affected by neo-Marxist Brazilian sources such as Florestan Fernandes and Raymundo Faoro, Ribeiro's cultural evolutionism is distinctive in that all his "stages" (this term from the translation) are to be found in Brazil, and they are designed to help explain that country, its history, its place in the modern world, and its future prospects. His evolutionism is not so much ideological as it is organizational—it is neither rigid nor deductive. This seems to have been fairly clear since Ribeiro's earliest works in this macrolevel genre from the 1960s. Indeed, one can say that another source of influence on Ribeiro's thinking has been his own fieldwork experience (with the Urubu-Kaapor and the Kadiweu peoples) together with his highly diverse and original life experience—as a Brazilian novelist, anthropologist, and national-level politician and administrator. As Lowe points out in the Foreword, Ribeiro was a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and once (during the ill-fated regime of João Goulart) the Minister of Education of Brazil. At one time or another he was also founder and first rector of the University of Brasília, Lieutenant Governor of Rio de Janeiro state, and toward the end of his long political career, a federal senator from Rio de Janeiro.

The literary style is spontaneous and fluid, as are the conceptual orientations that lead Ribeiro, in the final chapter, to declare Brazil's destiny to be the new Rome. He is an unabashed proponent of a Latin-dominated future world, and he shows special sympathy for the Portuguese language as its principal means of expression. Ribeiro's future world is one of vast ethnically defined blocs of competing peoples and supranational groupings. These include the neo-Brittanian (or North American) bloc (which also may include South Africa and Australia as far as language and ideology are concerned, although in including South Africa ideologically in this *mélange*, Ribeiro's classification seems to be decidedly out of date); the Asian bloc; and the Latin American bloc. In his proposed panoply of gigantic ethnic and linguistic polities, he sees the United States *per se* as the nemesis-in-waiting of this Brazil-as-Rome of the future. It is not clear how much of this thinking ensues from the evolutionist model he employs, and how much may derive from an occasional lapse into xenophobic or, more specifically, Anglophobic impulses. Ribeiro does not seem to feel at home with foreign language sources in his literary background, and he admits early in the book to a constitutional unwillingness to learn to speak any language other than Portuguese, even eschewing learning the Spanish language during the period of his exile in Uruguay following the military coup d'état of 1964.

But foreign relations are not what drive the book and its principal arguments. Ribeiro's worldview and this book are thematically Brazil-centered. It makes good reading even if one disagrees with some of the subjective views

Ribeiro plants deliberately in his text. He sometimes knowingly tries to be politically incorrect (as is noted in the Foreword) if not even preposterous. However, his writing voice (and his public speaking voice, for those who knew it) never seemed arrogant or snide in tone. Ribeiro actually places most blame on Brazil's five-hundred-year-old (as he says) ruling elite for whatever socioeconomic difficulties Brazilians face in the modern world. I am not apologizing for his xenophobia when I say his antagonism to foreign states—especially the megalithic northern one (to which he gives credit for creativity in “reinventing” the concept of the classical republic and elections)—seems to have been inserted almost as an afterthought. There seems to be a conscious effort to be tendentious, which Ribeiro claims to be one of his aims in the beginning of the book. This tendentiousness serves as a contrast of the straw-man variety, clarifying what Brazil is not, and perhaps never will be. This tendentiousness also places Ribeiro as a man of the people, who shares with them anti-imperialistic beliefs (though if Brazil is Rome, and Rome was the seat of an Empire, it is hard to imagine whether Brazil or any other modern state would make for a kinder, gentler capital).

The posited conceptual unity of Brazil, ethnically and politically, is where the heart of the book's argument lies, and where it is probably most controversial, especially in Brazilian and Latin American academic circles, and within the context of a postmodern world. This is the reason I think many Brazilianist scholars from Brazil have criticized the book, with some going on record to say that it is definitely not Ribeiro's best book. On the other hand, perhaps this book is just the place to begin reading the entire corpus of Ribeiro's work, since it covers, however briefly, much of the terrain in his other books. As Lowe states eloquently and justly in the Foreword, Ribeiro was one of Brazil's most important twentieth-century intellectuals.

Ribeiro was a modernist and a materialist, with a basically scientific approach to sociocultural phenomena. He was not a deconstructionist or revisionist by any means. The truly controversial point of the book is Ribeiro's denial of ethnic and linguistic differentiation within Brazil. It is an old-fashioned, perhaps even stereotypical idea in Brazilianist scholarship. Brazil's conceptual unity—based on the accidental, violent, but ultimately successful fusion of three populations, the European (read Portuguese), Indian, and African—is essential for Ribeiro's argument to succeed. The fusion is seen to be a success because of the conceptual unity of Brazil as an ethnically homogeneous nation. It is the conceptual unity, not diverse origins of its people, that explains Brazil's vastness, its riches of both a spiritual and material nature, and ironically, its deeply stratified society. Ribeiro proposes that the fundamental divisions in Brazil, beyond those that all societies share (such as of sex and age) are not cultural, ethnic, or linguistic, but rather those of class above all. More recent scholars have been emphasizing Brazil's complex diversity (not only of extant indigenous communities in the Amazon Basin and their relations to the nation-state, to which Ribeiro alludes briefly, but of

communities of descendants of former black slaves; of believers in varieties of evangelical and millenarian cults; of free-thinking Jews, Arabs, Japanese and other minorities who for Ribeiro do not exist as minorities in the classic sense and are or should be otherwise assimilated to the Brazilian ethnic identity; and of linguistic differentiation of a dialect-level nature in Brazilian Portuguese, which Ribeiro claims does not exist, to name only a few trends one can detect in recent scholarship). Another reason for seeing this work in a retrospective way is that Ribeiro's bibliography contains few items more recent than the 1960s. His argumentation is nevertheless not stale. It is, perhaps not surprisingly for those who knew Ribeiro and who are familiar with his earlier works, visionary, even if it is not always based on the most recent empirical investigations that take Brazil as their principal object.

La Voz de Kultrun en la Modernidad: Tradición y Cambio en la Terapéutica de Siete Machi Mapuche (The Kultrun's Voice in Modernity: Tradition and Change in the Therapeutics of Seven Mapuche Machi). Ana Mariella Bacigalupo. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2001. 271 pp. \$18.00 (paper). ISBN 956-14-0623-2 [mriverv@puc.cl]

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Substitute the term "culture" for "kultrun" and one might well sum up Bacigalupo's dialogic ethnography about the lives, and the hearts and minds of seven Mapuche *machi* as "The Voice of Culture in Modernity." Indeed, the *kultrun* is more than merely a traditional ceremonial drum played by the *machi* (shamans) in their therapeutic sessions to aid them in ridding their patients from ills that include modern ailments such as stress, depression, lovesickness, alienation, economic problems, AIDS, and cancer. The *machi's* drum embodies the very rhythm through which culture is fashioned and refashioned as it is constantly reinvented by the Mapuche. In light of this, Bacigalupo achieves a new definition of the concept of culture, not as a form of collective corpus, but as an instrument whose tuning and timbre can be changed and whose ragas or tunes are not as much replayed, as they are played with, or can be (re)created on any new occasion. But the tuning obviously needs the tuner, and here the role of the individual (and the *Machi*, more specifically) in this conception of culture is emphasized. The same malleability is extended to concepts like identity and tradition, for the author states at the very beginning of her book: "identity, culture, and tradition are dynamic and arise in dialog, contradistinction, and identification with the other" (p. 9). Nevertheless, one should not mistakenly think that "dialog" here means some kind of rapport or colloquia between two ways of seeing the universe (one traditional, the other modern), for the author shows very clearly that her use of the term preserves