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Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers

Donald Pollock

State University of New York, Buffalo

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BOOK REVIEWS

Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers. Paul Little. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. xv + 298 pp., glossary, notes, field interviews, bibliography, index. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8018-6661-8. [www.press.jhu.edu].

DONALD POLLOCK

State University of New York, Buffalo

Paul Little offers two detailed case studies in this complex ethnography—one of the Jari region near the mouth of the Amazon river, the other of the Aguarico region near the head of the Napo river in Ecuador—to explore the notion of frontiers and cosmographies in Amazonia. The result is a sophisticated and important contribution to the political ecology of Amazonia.

Little develops the notions of frontier and cosmography in particularly useful ways, noting of the former concept that Amazonia is a perennial frontier. Whatever the nature of Amazonian occupation or exploitation over hundreds of years, Amazonia is always regarded as a frontier from the perspective of an impending or alternative use. Amazonia is a kind of project that is, perhaps by its very nature, never completed. It is unlike the historical frontiers of other areas of the world, especially North America, where frontiers were sociogeographic projects that have largely been finished. Similarly, Little's notion of cosmography—which he defines as the “identities, ideologies, and environmental knowledge systems developed by a social group” in regard to a territory—allows him to differentiate and analyze (historically and otherwise) competing development cosmographies and environmentalist cosmographies in recent efforts to convert Amazonian frontiers into productive projects.

Little's primary field research focuses on the regions best known for the ill-fated Jari Project associated with Daniel Ludwig and for the Petroecuador explorations of indigenous lands. He introduces these case studies with a useful overview of post-contact Amazonian history that provides the background for the notion of the perennial frontier and for the emergence of (also perennially) competing cosmographies: conquest, settlement, missionization, etc. It should be noted that these cosmographies are not exclusively “Western.” Little's historical overview, and his case studies, illustrate nicely how cosmographies emerge from and even shape social actors from the local, often indigenous level, to the global, multinational sphere.

The value of this volume is twofold: it provides a very detailed history and case study of major development projects, and it contributes to the theorization and conceptualization of the enduring conflicts such projects engender. Little brings an impressive understanding of both local and global political economy

to bear on his analysis of the exploitation of Amazonia—in both an environmentalist and developmental sense—and his vision of the history of such processes is valuable. Unfortunately, it also underscores the difficulty—perhaps impossibility—of reconciling the two opposed cosmographies. Little's conclusions about the future of Amazonia seem pessimistic, but they offer important guidelines for understanding that trajectory.

Kinship with Monkeys: The Guajá Foragers of Eastern Amazonia. Loretta A. Cormier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. xxvi + 234 pp., notes, references, index. \$29.50 (paper). ISBN 0-231-12525-9. [www.columbia.edu/cu/cup]

NANCY FLOWERS
Hunter College

Although a number of authors have commented on the common custom of Amazonian peoples to make pets of the same animals they hunt, this book is original in its detailed and nuanced discussion of the bonds—ecological and metaphysical—that link the Guajá with the monkeys that they eat and at the same time adopt and treat affectionately as pets.

The Guajá are a Tupi people presently living in western Maranhão. Since the nineteenth century they have been known as foragers. However, it seems likely that the Guajá were once horticulturalists who then abandoned agriculture, probably several centuries ago, as attacks by Brazilian settlers and more powerful indigenous peoples forced them into increasing nomadism to evade their enemies. The Guajá even lost the skills to make fire, and were forced to carry firebrands from camp to camp.

In the 1970s, with growing regional development, the survival of the remaining Guajá bands was threatened by reduction of their habitat and introduced diseases. FUNAI (National Foundation of the Indian) attraction teams contacted a number of these groups and settled them on reserves in the neighborhood of other groups that were traditionally their enemies. Cormier carried out her study at Caru, where approximately 100 Guajá, under the tutelage of FUNAI, are making the transition to a horticultural way of life. Cultivated manioc and other domesticates have almost entirely replaced the *babassu* nuts that were the Guajá staple before contact. But they continue to rely on hunting and fishing for animal protein, and for the Guajá monkeys are the most highly valued game species as well as their favored pets.

In the second chapter of Cormier's book she points out that over the 10,000 or more years that human and nonhuman primates have been sharing the New World habitat, their interaction has had multiple effects on the ecology