Review of Native and National in Brazil (Comparative Studies in Society and History)

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/tracydevinguzman/29/
doi:10.1017/S0010417515000316

Devine Guzmán’s multidisciplinary book is a contribution to the literature on race and nation in modern Brazil and the study of indigeneity in the Americas and beyond. The book is focused on the period since Brazilian independence (1822–present) and employs the toolkits of cultural criticism, literary studies, anthropology, and history. The author charts the persistent gap between romanticized representations of “Indians” and the varied “indigenist” bureaucratic practices that have accompanied them, and lived experiences of “indigeneity.” Devine Guzmán amply demonstrates that this disjunction has worked against indigenous people’s meaningful belonging and active participation as national subjects. She also highlights attempts by self-identified indigenous people to critique and unravel the colonial logic behind these representations, and to argue for ways of being both Native and national that challenge conventional Western ideas of citizenship and national sovereignty.

One strength of the book is its placing of analysis of Brazil into engaging and sophisticated conversation with the literature on indigeneity in other parts of Latin America and in North America, while also flagging similarities and differences. The chapters are organized in a chronological narrative spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, each analyzing a selection of key texts or moments. By taking both a broad national view and an extended timeframe, the author exposes striking recurrences of local and transnational tropes and images about “Indians” as they have shaped state policy, public opinion, and the strategies of indigenous activists over a wide range of political landscapes. Devine Guzmán is particularly successful at illustrating “indigenist” imaginaries as they intersected with “overlapping and sometimes competing paradigms of mixture and change across the Americas.” These range from nineteenth-century notions of “whitening” and “improvement,” to early twentieth-century ideas of “assimilation,” “acculturation,” and “transculturation,” to more recent concepts of “heterogeneity,” “middle ground,” “hybridity,” “multiculturalism,” and “interculturality” (132).

Particularly for students of Brazilian history and culture, the book provides insights into indigenous activism and the shifting place of indigenous people in the national imaginary. This matters in a country for which the
literature on race and nation, diversity and discrimination, and activism and restitution in the post-independence period has been dominated by a focus on Brazilians of African descent. Yet the author’s arguments about indigeneity would have benefited from more explicit engagement with scholarly literature on Afro-Brazil, and from consideration of the relative position of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people in the national imaginary. An example would be ideas of *mestiçagem* or “mixture” in discussions of slavery or claims for inclusion and human rights. Afro-Brazilians are oddly absent in the book or are part of a flat backdrop.

The book draws on diverse sources, from canonical literary and artistic works, to mass media and popular culture, to state archives and the productions of self-identified indigenous intellectuals. This rich corpus is one of the book’s strengths. That said, given this multitude of sources readers might wish for more cues within the text and the argumentation as to which evidence (archival, media, another scholarly work) supports which conclusions. The very short footnotes force readers to crosscheck the bibliography to reconstruct this crucial information. Similarly, the text introduces important historical actors, agencies, concepts, and events in an almost incidental manner, and key aspects of context could have been laid out more effectively in a few strategic places. These stylistic choices may make the book more difficult to follow for non-Brazilianists, but its many insights and analytical strengths certainly make the effort worthwhile.

———Paulina Alberto, University of Michigan


*Nature of the Beasts* represents an important and timely contribution to the growing number of works in Japanese Studies, from James Bartholomew’s pioneering *The Formation of Science in Japan* to Brett Walker’s award-winning *The Lost Wolves of Japan*, which adopt a cultural historical approach in analyzing environmental, scientific, and technological developments.

*Nature of the Beasts* tracks shifts in conceptualizing human-animal relations through the lens of Tokyo’s Ueno Zoo from the nineteenth century to the present. In contrast to “ecological modernization,” which presumes progress and rationalization, Miller turns to “ecological modernity” as his structuring concept, one that leaves room for considering conflict and contradiction. Indeed, for Miller, the “defining irony of this culture was that even as it intensified the human exploitation of the natural world through the mechanics of industrialization and the expansion of the market, it imagined real nature to be elsewhere … a culture … that remains in force to this day” (p. 2).