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Editing Eden

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Editing Eden

A Reconsideration of
Identity, Politics, and Place in Amazonia

Edited by Frank Hutchins
and Patrick C. Wilson

University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London

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Introduction

Frank Hutchins and Patrick C. Wilson

Editing Eden traditionally has been the job of utopian visionaries, and modesty dictates that we qualify our title at the outset. The Eden around which this book is built, the great basin of Amazonia, certainly has drawn many toward excess—an excess of superlatives, an excess of embellishment, and an excess of drama. Travel writing becomes an exercise in histrionics, ethnography gets tangled in exotica, and would-be saviors of every stripe struggle to salvage the last species, the lost souls, and the pristine places. Thus the Amazon, which is as much as anything a canvas of ever-morphing imagery.

We—editors, authors, anthropologists—are not attempting here to tear apart the canvas or the painters. We are instead reacting ethnographically to new insights and more nuanced ways of thinking about the Amazon and its inhabitants and the complexity of evolving exchanges with others who do not call this place their home. Both the *American Heritage Dictionary* and *Roget's Thesaurus* connect editing with deleting or rewriting, but they also state that “to edit” can mean “to adapt.” The tone of the following chapters is closer to the latter concept, where we’ve drawn on substantive scholarship about

Amazonia to analyze contemporary issues in the region, with special attention to Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador.

Cultural, linguistic, and archaeological anthropology has produced and disassembled many Amazons. An area theorized to be absent of “civilization” (Meggers 1996) now appears to have been home to a number of complexly organized, and sometimes relatively large, cultural groups (Balée and Erickson 2006; Heckenberger 2004; Roosevelt 1997). Native people whose interests seemed barely distinguishable from the evolutionary path of the natural world that surrounded them are now understood as agents with variable objectives that are not always congruent with those of would-be allies. This book in many ways advances projects that reconsider the images, texts, and discourses on which “the Amazon” has been built. The “natives” written into these accounts are subsequently pluralized, contextualized, and humanized.

Before turning the page on the Amazon of legend, it is worth revisiting moments in history that suggest that “editing” is a fruitful endeavor. The words of Alain Gheerbrant are a good starting point, as he describes the eruption of superlatives that seemed to occur as Europeans experienced the Amazon. “Everything about this land was alien and defied conventional logic,” he wrote about these early encounters with Amazonia. “The first Europeans to set foot in Amazonia let their imaginations run away with them and claimed to actually see and hear everything they had hitherto only imagined. . . . Seldom have reality and fantasy complemented each other so well” (1992:47).

The rainforest that Alexander von Humboldt called Hyleia coaxed even men of the cloth to the extremes of imagination. Friar Gaspar de Carvajal, chronicling the Amazon River trip of Francisco de Orellana in 1541–42, wrote of the famous single-breasted Amazon warrior women and a mysterious tribe of white men (Heaton 1934). Padre Cristóbal de Acuña, who accompanied Pedro Texeira on a trip from Quito to Pará in 1639, resorted to a “mixture of fiction and direct observation” (Newton Freitas’s introduction to Acuña 1942) in his description of

vast riches, hairy fish that nursed their mothers, and elk the size of a year-old mule. Where Orellana and his men “reached a state of privation so great [they] were eating nothing but leather, belts and soles of shoes, cooked with certain herbs” (Heaton 1934:172), Acuña and his crew found an abundance of food so extensive that it could be attributed only to the “Paternal Providence of the Lord, who with just five loaves and a few fish fed 5,000 men” (Acuña 1942:43).

Explorers and scientists who followed similar routes through the Amazon produced stories with equally contrasting accounts of the wonders and nightmares that awaited in the jungle. Charles-Marie La Condamine, an eighteenth-century scientist whom Anthony Smith (1990:163) counts among “a new breed of men . . . forever ready to measure, to sketch, to take note, to examine,” arrived in South America as part of French efforts to settle the question of the shape of the earth. After losing much of his party to disease, murder, marriage, and insanity, La Condamine eventually headed home through the Amazon. His reflections on indigenous life in the rainforest describe a simple, lazy, undifferentiated people, who “are all gluttons to the point of voracity” and “pusillanimous poltroons to excess, unless transported by drunkenness” (180).

Alexander von Humboldt followed up La Condamine’s work by seeking out the connection between the Orinoco River system and the Amazon basin. Early on, Humboldt and his partner Aimé Bonpland began to document New World wonders that Smith calls “a repository of unending astonishment.” Electric fish and the drinkable sap of the milk tree were among the marvels that entertained the explorers until they entered the clouds of swarming, biting insects, leading Humboldt to scribble in his journal, “All hope abandon, ye who enter here” (Smith 1990:236).

Mary Louise Pratt identifies the discourses of Amazonian travel that emerged with the Age of Exploration. La Condamine, she writes, offers two great themes: one is based on hardship and danger, and the second on marvels and curiosities (1992:20). Pratt’s analysis in

Imperial Eyes helps us understand how these projects of exploration not only defined colonized lands through a discourse that naturalized conquest and deterritorialized natives, but also defined for Europeans their tasks of rationalizing nature and civilizing culture. Humboldt, she says, who wrote thirty volumes to cover his South American travels, achieved nothing short of the “ideological reinvention of South America” (1992:111).

Cultural geographers and anthropologists reveal how natives have been reterritorialized as myriad interest groups marry identity to place. In the process imaginary geographies are transformed into normative geographies, as documented in many of the following chapters. The creation of normative geographies, and the perception of transgressions within these spaces, can be seen through an examination of how heroes and villains are made in the Amazon. Edenic and “noble savage” discourses have defined for many what the rainforest should look like and the appropriate behavior for those who live there, native or otherwise.

The accounts of Carvajal and Acuña represent experiences from the period Joseph Conrad called “Geography Fabulous,” during which travelers based their tales more on speculation than on a pursuit of the truth. La Condamine, Humboldt, and their colleagues in science exemplify the period of “Geography Militant,” based on a global search for empirical knowledge. Conrad’s final period was “Geography Triumphant,” which “marked the irreversible closure of the epoch of open spaces, the end of an era of unashamed heroism” (Driver 2001:4). But in revisiting Conrad’s essay, published in *National Geographic* in 1924, Felix Driver contends that the era of Geography Militant is far from over. In tracing the contemporary era of Geography Militant, Driver looks to public culture, or popular geographies, such as tourism, film, the press, and fashion:

Geography Militant has thus not merely survived the processes of modernization and globalization: it has been regenerated in a variety of ever-

proliferating forms, from the pages of fashion magazines to the sale-rooms of auction houses. Rather than simply reactivating forgotten histories of imperial exploration, these enterprises are engaged in the business of producing memories: of making the past meaningful for people in the present. This memory work takes place in many different sites, often far removed from the pedagogy of the classroom or the esoteric knowledge of the library, in objects, images, buildings, places, the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life. (217)

That the Amazon is variously seen as generous or parsimonious, hellish or Edenic, authentic or imagined is evidence of the creative production of its history and meanings. It also reflects the cognitive mapping of a part of the world made extraordinary through travel writing, scientific exploration, economic exploitation, and environmental hyperbole. Complex cultural and natural systems are thus transmuted through the alchemy of the exceptional. Trouble is, people must live with the consequences.

In a chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Neil Whitehead reviews such representational practices from the sixteenth century to the twentieth to expose how Amazonia has long been “an intense object of the imagination.” But while this history reveals common threads over the centuries, it also highlights the variety of projects, interests, and renderings that lead Whitehead to conclude that “knowledge of ourselves, not others, is therefore the real discovery that is made through travelers’ tales” (2002:137).

These various portrayals of the Amazon, whether originating outside or from within the region, do not represent consistent, continuous narratives. Rather, there are gaps and contradictions in the telling that Candace Slater says reveal different historical perspectives and interpretations of what happens—or should happen—in Amazonia. These indicate differences both within and between outsider and insider stories, although there are also “points of contact” between the story lines, such as recognition by insiders of the various ways they are

tied to a larger world (Slater 2002:188). Slater's concern is that a sense of connection from the outside in is less apparent. One consequence of the failure by outsiders to see a larger Amazonian reality, she says, is an environmental and cultural pessimism that sees only a doomed rainforest and vanishing Indians. "The sharp insistence on irreparable loss that is a hallmark of the new pessimism . . . creates a great divide between the past and future, tribal Indian and cultureless beer guzzler, predatory human and threatened nature, the precious 'wild' and the unexciting 'tamed.' In so doing, it conceals a less totalizing, far less clear-cut world in which partial change and surface transformation are at least as common as is outright disappearance" (153).

While these authors suggest that the history of imagining various Amazons is also a history of imagining Euro-American identity by creating its opposite, Whitehead more directly ties these processes to specific projects and periods. What begins in sixteenth-century travel accounts as an effort to textually capture the marvels and package the wonder of geographically and culturally distant lands leads to an "aesthetic of extremes" that sets a tone for later scribes. As a cadre of writers emerges from within the now colonized Americas, their imaginations turn from a general fascination with distance and difference to specificities of people and place. Travel in and of itself is not enough; it must be authenticated by details of cultural and natural features that have fallen under the European gaze. It is at this point that the novelties of native existence beyond the colonial margins are documented alongside a debate about their imminent demise. By the mid-eighteenth century "a sense of nostalgia for the eclipse of a native Amazon . . . really begins to take hold" (Whitehead 2002:130).

As the imagined Amazon moves into the nineteenth century it becomes less a space of wonder and more a place incorporated into the processes of scientific discovery. The rainforest is subjected to empirical practice, not historical speculation, and its native peoples are eulogized, as they "have become irrelevant to the potential of Amazonia for scientific enlightenment" (Whitehead 2002:131). What

Whitehead calls the “Science of Paradise” extends into the twentieth century, revealing the Amazon as naturally pristine but quite unfit for sustained and meaningful human occupation. Ethnographers scramble to salvage what remains of native culture, while the mysteries and wisdom of indigenous knowledge are sopped up and scribbled down for posterity. Modern travel writing, says Whitehead, seeks to take us back one last time for a final check on the exotic and timeless, to reassure us that some remnants still exist. But as travel writers beat the bushes, they shake out only the essentialisms of the past, recast as peculiar anachronisms. “The forest of marvels finally becomes a playground for the absurd as the distance between possible observations and actual experiences invites parody and then plagiarism of the ethnographic form” (136).

The Amazon has frequently and throughout history been conceptualized as a frontier zone: at the edge of the Inka Empire, the untamed fringes of civilization, the margins of state and colonial control, or a vast area of untapped potential for natural resource extraction and development. What these conceptualizations share is the tendency to place the Amazon and its people consistently at the margins of, or make them peripheral players in, grander state, entrepreneurial, or development agendas. Although a specific form of Amazonian orientalism is relevant here, particularly as it relates to modernizing nationalisms in the Andes and Brazil, the “othering” of the Amazon through these representational forms is only one facet of its construction and fails to recognize the complexities and contradictions such representational forms engender. Another dimension of these representations is the Amazon as a region of reaction, responding to external state, colonial, market, or developmentalist forces, those that are thought to be ultimately foreign to, and to have no place in, a traditional Amazonian world. Yet treating Amazonian peoples as simple reactors to these forces and understanding such forces as strictly external ultimately downplays exchanges between Amazonian peoples and state agents, missionaries, capitalist economies, and

NGOs, among others. Much recent scholarship on the Amazon leads us to question simple action-reaction conceptualizations, and more general trends in anthropological theory encourage us to (once again) take seriously local cosmologies in the construction of interpretive worldviews (Sahlins 1988).

One consequence of these narrative constructions of Amazonia is that their tendency to follow specific narrative tropes has guided dominant understandings of the core characteristics of the region and its inhabitants. The schizophrenic metanarratives of noble versus ignoble savages, pristine forests versus dark and dangerous places, and massive development potential versus forested wasteland speak to ways of knowing the Amazon through incoherent yet consistent constructions of space and the capacity to create a mental map irrespective of divergent local historical trajectories. In the present these narratives and the frontier mentalities guiding them make the Amazon an exciting tourist destination, where one can encounter uncorrupted, traditional Indians in their pristine, unadulterated natural spaces while simultaneously making the Amazon and the “uncivilized savages” that inhabit it symbolic of the failure of the modernizing, civilizing missions of European countries. As such, many dominant constructions of the Amazon have hinged on what we would like it to be (or what we fear it is and wish it were not), making the region a vessel for our fantasies and nightmares. This book does not strive to achieve a rewriting of Amazonian narratives, nor does it hope to be comprehensive in its treatment of Amazonia in thematic, regional, or ethnographic scope. It does, however, center on several interrelated themes that bring the contributors together in dialogue.

Indigenities and Communities

National and transnational indigenous movements have become central subjects of analysis for anthropologists, political scientists, and human geographers, among others. Research on indigenous social movements owes a debt to the Amazon, as some of the most

visible early movements found their footing there, primarily oriented around struggles over land and resources. Not only have issues of territorial rights been central to the political agendas of indigenous leaders in the Amazon and elsewhere, but questions of these rights have been intimately tied to indigenous cultural identity more generally, as Alcida Ramos points out in her contribution to this book. In fact, territorial rights often hinge on the ability to make claims as “original inhabitants,” making indigeneity part of a political strategy employed to gain official state recognition of these lands made on the basis of ancestral ties to them (Sawyer 2004).

“Primordial” claims to land have been effective political strategies, both by making use of existing legislation for indigenous land claims and by pushing for legal reforms to enhance indigenous rights. In Ecuador, for example, both Amazonian and Andean indigenous movements made use of an antiquated Law of the Commons, put in place in 1937 to promote the organization of agricultural cooperatives as an intermediate step between subsistence farming and commercial farming (Becker 1998). This law protected communal land rights for indigenous peoples, and following the enactment of the Law of Agrarian Reform in 1964 and the Law of Colonization of the Amazon in 1977, both of which contributed to colonization, extractive development, and militarization of the Amazon, indigenous organizations forming at that time utilized the Law of the Commons as a mechanism for obtaining official recognition of community lands in large, contiguous, collectively held units. Two of the earliest of these organizations, the Federation of Shuar Centers and the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Napo, worked to organize their member communities into associations and cooperatives eligible for collective land title, helping to gain recognition of large territories (Perreault 2003; Salazar 1981).

The global indigenous rights movement in the 1980s and 1990s put international pressure on states to recognize the rights of their indigenous inhabitants. The United Nations International Year of Indigenous

Peoples in 1992 contributed to a countercelebration of the European discovery of the New World, and the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and the declaration on indigenous peoples by the International Labour Organization both provide international legal templates for addressing indigenous rights. Indigenous advocacy has led to the adoption of legal reforms in many countries with Amazonian territories, most notably Colombia and Venezuela (see Van Cott 2003), and international pressure has, more generally, been favorable for indigenous political activists who seek to carve out political space for legal reforms and the recognition of rights specific to indigenous peoples.

In fact Amazonian indigenous social movements of the past two decades have not been limited to struggles over territory, but have conceptualized territory within a broader cultural frame. Arguing that cultural expression and history are linked to territory through seeing cultural identity woven into the forest landscape, indigenous leaders have broadened their demands to include the recognition of cultural rights, including bilingual education, the right to practice indigenous medicine, and control of archaeological sites. Linking cultural and territorial rights has uniquely shaped the nature of indigenous social movements as indigenous leaders suggest that it is not land, in a general sense, that is the goal of indigenous struggles, but particular territories linking histories of people to place, or chronotopographies (Uzendoski 2005), and territories are recognized as culturally significant due to how they are made recognizable by specific land-use practices (Sawyer 2004). The success of linking environmental conservation to recuperation or recognition of indigenous land rights has led to some of the most visible of these struggles occurring in contexts in which land use is contested between indigenous peoples claiming ancestral rights and extractive corporations seeking to access forest or mineral resources (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Turner 1995).

Over time the convergence of interests between those involved in the global environmental movement or interested in sustainable

development of the Amazon and indigenous peoples seeking recognition of territorial and cultural rights has led to the growth of shared struggles between these movements. While the internationalization of indigenous movements has been a crucial factor in their ability to press demands against frequently hostile states (Brysk 1996; Perreault 2003; Yashar 1999), this interconnectedness has also had consequences for the ways that states, NGOs, and international observers more generally view indigenous Amazonians. In fact the very strength of the coalition of activists and indigenous leaders, by constructing indigeneities partially with the expectations of the international community in mind, may also be its limitation. If, as international advocates have commonly asserted, Amazonian indigenous peoples represent a key—perhaps the key—to rainforest conservation, and if delimiting indigenous territories is therefore akin to setting aside those territories as parklands, there are demands placed on indigenous peoples that they live according to Western environmental expectations. Anthropologists concerned with the implications of the indigenous-environmental alliance in the form sketched above correctly predicted the backlash by some NGOs when Western expectations were not met (Conklin and Graham 1995; Ramos 1994).

Some of the implications of the webs of interaction by which indigenous identities are constructed both globally and locally are addressed in various chapters in this volume. Contributions by Margarita Chaves and Jean Jackson highlight the complexities of “indigenous” as a category, illustrating both how it eludes easy or coherent definition and how the meanings attached to indigeness are highly malleable. Chaves examines how state understandings of indigenism have led to the de-Indianization of some groups in Putumayo, while also contributing to the re-Indianization of others. In this context the ongoing violent conflict in the region has contributed to extensive displacement and relocation of people, leading to a disruption of narrow understandings that link indigeneity to ancestral territories. Under the Colombian *resguardo* system indigeneity is recognized

when inhabitants can make a historical claim to land, yet in the war-torn Putumayo victims of the conflict have left their rural territories in favor of the relative security of urban neighborhoods, uprooting them not only from territory but, in the eyes of the Colombian state, from their very indigenous nature. These de-Indianized Indians are not granted land title in their new locales in spite of their claims to indigenous identity; instead, colonists in other parts of the Putumayo are having their land claims recognized through the *resguardo* system, ultimately “Indianizing” them in the process.

Jean Jackson provides a detailed and nuanced examination of media representations of indigenous Amazonians over the past fifteen years, identifying themes in the treatment of indigenous peoples in the major Colombian presses. Importantly, she is able to link the predominantly positive representations of indigenous peoples in this time period to the political and social climate in Colombia more generally, as spiraling violence and corruption there have led many to look for alternative models for constructing society. In this context indigenous peoples become moral foils for the malaise of modernity and the ills of Western society (Friedman 1999).

In fact the expectations tied to those occupying the “indigenous slot” become critical in determining who is and is not perceived to be authentically indigenous (Li 2000, 2003), as well as the ethical obligations associated with being a member of that group. Beth Conklin examines the tension associated with indigenous materialism, one taboo for those who are tagged by outsiders with the “indigenous” label. As she illustrates, materialism is not oppositional to the formation of “traditional” affective and kin relationships in Wari’ society; instead, materiality forms a critical component of the formation and maintenance of social relationships. When Conklin, in introductions to strangers, is tied by her friends to a litany of material goods she has gifted them, this is not to deny the affective relations she shares with them. Rather, these objects serve as physical evidence that such affective relationships exist. Michael Uzendoski (2004) has made similar

observations in the formation of kin ties through shared substances, as has Janet Chernela (2006) for the obligations indigenous leaders have to effectively circulate goods in expressions of generosity. Conklin adds to the discussion the ability of indigenous peoples to make sense of nonnatives through a local system of exchange and incorporate outsiders into meaningful emotional relationships comprehensible through the exchange of material items. Thus the attention that indigenous peoples pay to material objects should not be understood as a result of corruption by consumerism, but as a means of solidifying social relations through exchange.

The complexities associated with defining who is and is not indigenous are widely noted (see, for example, Beteille 1998; Bowen 2000), and the implications of employing indigeneity as a criterion—or the criterion—for the application of special rights have also been debated (Brown 1998; Friedman 1999). Despite academic discussions of the possible pitfalls of utilizing such a nebulous concept in the design and application of legal rights and policy frameworks, politicians, development agents, and those seeking recognition (or seeking to avoid recognition) as indigenous freely employ the label, often with conflicting and contradictory results. The contributors to this volume recognize indigeneity as a social fact, even if defining “the indigenous” and determining with any degree of accuracy who belongs in that category remain futile exercises. As such, some of the most promising anthropological work related to indigeneity explores its use in different political projects and what, exactly, the nature of the indigenous-nonindigenous divide may be.

Michael Uzendoski examines this divide, suggesting that it may not be as stark or clear-cut as it would appear in much of the anthropological literature on the Amazon. Exploring Amazonian fractality evident in stories told by both natives and nonnatives, he emphasizes the exchange of ideas, the sharing of space and sociality, and the telling of stories that intertwine people artificially divided into separate categories by external readings of ethnicity. These stories

illustrate the social landscapes of the Amazon, in which native inhabitants and colonists occupy adjacent spaces, where there are growing populations of indigenous peoples in urban sectors, and where those who self-identify as *mestizos* share in the telling of stories that contain structural and thematic similarities to stories told by those who self-identify as indigenous. The constant exchanges between these different Amazonian inhabitants has led to the emergence of shared intellectual traditions and social spaces and the formation of kin ties between groups that are often incorrectly treated separately (as indigenous and *mestizo*) in the anthropological literature.

Cosmologies of Capitalism and Development

Research on Amazonia as well as other regions conceptualized as peripheral zones has paid significant attention to the impacts of capitalism on the social organization of their inhabitants. Framing capitalism as a foreign entity, much of this research has inadvertently contributed to representations of the Amazon as timeless and its inhabitants as victims of the forces of modernity. While forces of colonialism and capitalism have certainly had severe consequences for Amazonian inhabitants at different points in history, anthropology's unique contribution lies in its ability to comprehend the multiple meanings attached to how people understand these forces in their lives. Marshall Sahlins (1988, 1999) has dedicated substantial attention to what he calls "cosmologies of capitalism," his premise being that people may construct radically different understandings of colonial or capitalist forces presumably emanating from Western metropolises, and that they may in fact transform not only the meanings attached to those forces locally but also their very expression in these different contexts. An important contribution of this work lies in Sahlins's ability to demonstrate that frameworks of domination and resistance are limiting our capacity to detect and comprehend the meanings people in different settings attach to so-called global forces in their daily lives. A failure to recognize this runs the risk of artificially privileg-

ing Western perspectives at the expense of an adequate exploration of how people in the Amazon, and elsewhere, may attach different significance to how they experience and interact with the supposedly Western forces of capitalism. In fact we should question the validity of assertions that capitalism is a Western phenomenon when at work in different sociocultural contexts; it seems apparent that capitalism itself is transformed in its appropriation and use in diverse cultural settings, as Uzendoski suggests in his chapter (see Bashkow 2000 for an illustrative case from Papua New Guinea).

This suggests that these economic, social, and informational exchanges are occurring in distinct cosmological universes, leading to quite different meanings attached to concepts or ideas that seem, at first glance, to be shared within a “global village.” This is an important insight, particularly for those who would wish to support alternative frameworks for understanding the world outside of dominant Western capitalisms. This insight guides the contributions of several of the chapters in this volume. It also represents a departure from most of the research focused on political ecology and extractive and sustainable development in Amazonia.

For example, research from a political ecology perspective has focused attention on access to and control of natural resources, as well as the implications of extractive development on rainforest ecologies and the livelihoods of those who rely on the natural resources of the Amazon for their subsistence (Bunker 1988; Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Roper 2003). This research agenda gained prominence in the 1980s concomitant with growing global concern about the impact of oil and other mining industries, logging, and cattle ranching and agricultural plantation economies on Amazonian ecosystems, and it has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of the relationship among these forces, ideologies of national development, and attempts by an array of national and international organizations and movements, including peasant and indigenous organizations and environmental and human rights NGOs, to avert extractive prac-

tices (Fisher 1994; Schwartzman 1999; Schwartzman and Zimmerman 2005). It illustrates the capacity of international alliances to advance conservation agendas and the capacity of many Amazonian groups to link their objectives to those of national and international conservation and human rights organizations. But it also tends to obscure the complexities and contradictions in the relationships between these organizations and their Amazonian interlocutors. Patrick Wilson examines some of these complexities in Amazonian Ecuador through an analysis of the multiple meanings attached to development projects by NGOs, indigenous federation leaders, and base communities of the federation and the conflicts they potentially produce for indigenous representative organizations.

María Clemencia Ramírez examines the role of alternative development projects in contributing to a “taming” of the Colombian Amazon, making coca eradication and alternative development tied to Plan Colombia quite consistent with prior concerns with the Amazon as an uncontrolled frontier zone. The NGOs responsible for alternative development suggest that their role is to transform a “perverse” into a productive social capital, thereby creating viable citizens and enhancing governance in the region. Ramírez, however, illustrates how the rationale and organization behind these development projects fail to take seriously the experiences of local inhabitants, instead criminalizing peasants by implicating them in Colombia’s drug problem. Rather than working closely with peasant organizations in the elaboration of development alternatives, the NGOs financed through Plan Colombia have tended to be wary of these organizations because of their suspected ties to the illicit drug trade or violent activity, contributing to the quick demise of the development projects while failing to support local actors potentially inclined to such alternatives.

A related field of research has examined the role of sustainable development in rainforest conservation efforts and in empowering local peoples in the development process. Sustainable development has been heralded as a pathway to environmentally and culturally

sensitive economic and political empowerment for historically marginalized peoples. These forms of development have been predicated on specific conceptualizations of the relationship between Amazonian peoples and the natural environment, leading to a plethora of projects promoting ecotourism, agroforestry, and artisan craft production utilizing renewable forest resources. Although substantial attention has been paid to the liberating potential of these projects in economic and cultural terms, only sparse attention has been directed to what these projects might signify for local peoples or what the political implications of these projects may be for indigenous organizations. Several contributions to this volume address these issues.

Frank Hutchins, for example, examines the role of indigenous-operated ecotourism in the production and consumption of culture through the paid encounter between foreign tourists and local peoples. Culture here is commodified to the extent that it is the “good” that is being marketed and sold to tourists: tourists pay to see the real Indians. Yet this very process of commodification creates tensions within the communities related to how, exactly, culture should be presented to tourists and the mundane but critical question of distribution of resources generated from ecotourism. The tourists themselves sometimes feel uncomfortable as well, suggesting that the cultural presentations are contrived or that the participants are only half-hearted in their dancing, leading the tourists to question the authenticity of the performances. This could lead one to draw the conclusion that the marketing of culture through ecotourism contributes to an eradication of cultural difference and multiple historicities, ultimately resulting in a loss of power through the commodification of culture. Yet, as Hutchins demonstrates, this process is only partial, and those involved in indigenous ecotourism construct their understanding of ecotourism from multiple frames and historicities that inform the capitalist production of culture through ecotourism, illustrating how capitalism becomes pluralized in the process.

Beth Conklin and Patrick Wilson similarly focus their attention on economic exchanges. As discussed earlier, Conklin examines the materiality and sociality of gift giving among the Wari', reconciling the discomfort many anthropologists and others feel when affective relationships with friends in the field are discussed in terms of a list of consumer goods they have given them. Her argument relates to two sides of the debate on sowing the seeds of capitalism in Amazonian and other contexts. One side is the role that capitalism has been thought to play in "modernizing" and "improving" culturally and economically impoverished Indians, which has been part of the modernizing agenda of many Latin American states, and missionaries before them (Muratorio 1991; Stutzman 1981). The other side of this debate relates to those who have greeted the incorporation of indigenous peoples into capitalism with despair, treating it as a corruption of a prior idyllic state and resulting in the loss of cultural traditions. Conklin illustrates that both of these are outsider concerns with indigenous Amazonians and tell us very little about how Amazonian peoples conceptualize their socioeconomic relationships. By taking seriously Amazonian cosmologies of capitalism, she is able to demonstrate how attention to the exchange of material goods has locally inscribed meaning that defies explanation through Western capitalist understandings of exchange.

Patrick Wilson focuses on the implications of sustainable development projects sponsored by NGOs for the exercise of leadership in an indigenous federation. Exploring notions of corruption and collaboration from the vantage points of the Napo Kichwa of Ecuador's Amazon and the sustainable development NGOs working in the region, he suggests that divergent understandings of the appropriate and inappropriate use of project resources contribute to an inadvertent undermining of leadership authority. Unlike NGO staff, who are concerned with fiscal responsibility, effective indigenous leadership is contingent on leaders' ability to mobilize and circulate desired goods in conspicuous displays of generosity. As indigenous leaders have been increasingly

removed from the development process in favor of working through intermediary NGOs, these leaders have been unable to control the flow of the projects, thereby leading to a decline in the legitimacy of the leaders and the indigenous organizations they represent.

Editing Eden had its genesis in a panel discussion at the Latin American Studies Association meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in March 2006. Since then, contributors have deepened and polished their work, and two respected anthropologists, Alcida Ramos and Neil Whitehead, have added commentaries. This volume includes insights from well-established scholars and budding ideas from junior scholars. These academics come from both North and South America. The lives of indigenous people and colonizers alike are analyzed, along with the merchants, tourists, environmentalists, missionaries, and anthropologists who move in and out of their worlds. Research and reflections in the following chapters span history and historicities. The common thread through all chapters is, obviously, the Amazon. It is the hope of the editors that, while we continue to acknowledge the contributions of scholars who helped us see the ways the Amazon is produced and represented by outsiders, we also begin to decipher the voices and actions of people going about the business of living in this part of the world.

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