

REVIEW ARTICLE

NARRATIVES OF HISTORY

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War of Shadows: The Struggle for Utopia in the Peruvian Amazon. Michael F. Brown and Eduardo Fernández. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, xv + 280 pp., 19 halftones, 3 maps. \$29.95, cloth.

War of Shadows brings new voices to discussions of Amazonian history and analyzes the narratives by which Peru's present and future are constructed. This gripping account taps indigenous, peasant, revolutionary, and official sources to describe Ashaninka resistance to the nation-state from the sixteenth century to the present. It shows how Ashaninka involvement in contemporary revolutionary struggles has been patterned on indigenous myths/perceptions of the world and its end. The book forces us to rethink perspectives that portray indigenous peoples on frontiers as passive elements in the struggle for power. In questioning the myths that have been constructed by states to explain the conflicts, the study is an important addition to recent works, such as those by Taussig (1987) and Scott (1990), which explore new ground in the anthropology of history.

The Ashaninka (also known as the "Campa") have engaged in centuries of struggle against missionaries, armies, and visionaries in Peru's Amazonian forests. Missionaries were among the first Europeans to enter the forests, and Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits struggled for Christian dominance in the region. The martyring of the first Franciscan missionaries by the Ashaninka in 1637 opened a history of hostility against the fathers. Indigenous peoples suffered and survived the epidemics, discipline, and freebooters that Catholics brought to the region.

Early Ashaninka resistance galvanized around a charismatic black man, Juan Santos Atahualpa, who entered their forests in 1742. Dressed in the flowery *cushma*, the Ashaninka accepted him as the Lord Inca. He, in turn, exhorted the indigenous groups to abandon the missions, expel the Spanish, and create an independent society over which he would reign. The movement he established spread quickly and fought the colonial government to a stalemate for some fifteen years.

Juan Santos served as the symbolic template for Ashaninka resistance to the present; he was the first in a series of figures who came from outside the forests to lead Ashaninka millennial movements throughout the nineteenth century.

more general processes by which knowledge patterns and is patterned by action. It provides a detailed argument for the importance of cultural codes, be they called myth or history, which transcend current events.

Applying Sahlins's (1985:54-55) concept of "mythopraxis," Brown and Fernández show how the mythic vision of cataclysm, outside leaders, and utopia could be used by Ashaninka to frame contemporary actions and outcomes. Myths of "official sources," the authors point out, were constructed on evidence no more persuasive than the Ashaninka belief in their outside saviors. As our own near-history fails to explain the current realities of revolutionary activity in Peru, this work points to their rationality in the context of the deep history of myths about communism, revolution, and the nation-state. Thus, the political struggles of this Amazon region are understood as mythologies of the conflicting groups.

The work shows the importance of local culture in determining the world system. Paralleling Sahlins's work in Oceania, this case exemplifies the importance of narratives of history for patterning the links that local groups create with larger systems. It shows the construction of a regional history being written by local forces on the world's periphery. This study is especially interesting in that the Amazon frontier is on the periphery of the developing world and only tenuously in the grasp of the Peruvian state. Here none of the competing groups could dominate, and, consequently, all of their various mythologies seem equally rational or, as it may be, irrational.

The ideological rationale of the Ashaninka can tell us much about periods of dramatic social change, when religious ideology provides the template for both action and reflection. Brown and Fernández's work questions whether revitalization movements or crisis cults need be replaced by responses seemingly more rational. It shows that charismatic Ashaninka ideologies were resurrected over centuries to mobilize action against colonization and development in the Peruvian Amazon. Conversely, this work shows the irrationality of more conventional political mobilization, by both revolutionaries and state systems.

Attempting to write history becomes, inevitably, a political act. This work forces the reader to question the conflicting narratives about contemporary Peruvian revolutionary struggles. To their credit, the authors provide the reader no simplistic account or easy answer to the complex problems of history.

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