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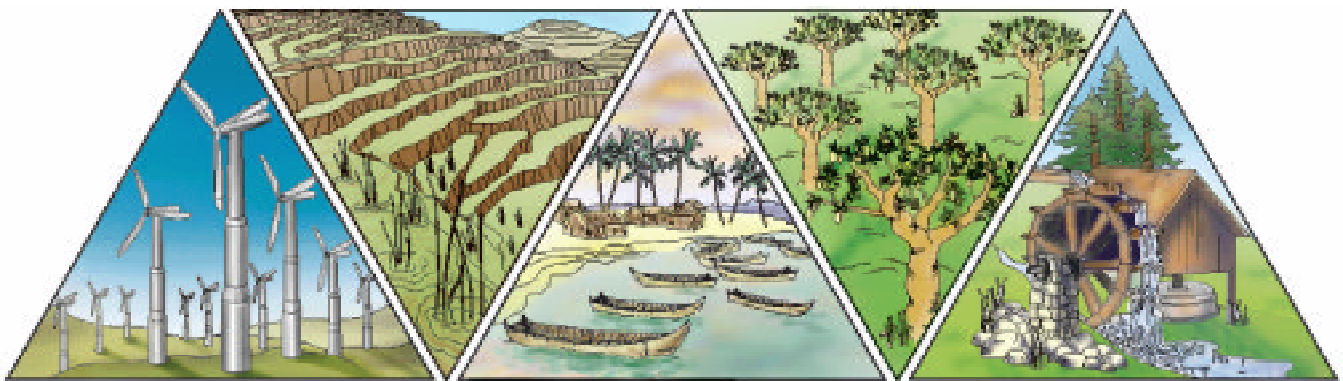
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**SOCIAL MEMORY AND THE
POLITICS OF PLACE-MAKING IN
NORTHEASTERN AMAZONIA**

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SOCIAL MEMORY AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE-MAKING IN NORTHEASTERN AMAZONIA

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The term origin does not mean the process of becoming of that which has emerged, but much more, that which emerges out of the process of becoming and disappearing. The origin stands in the flow of becoming as a whirlpool...

Walter Benjamin

Like “nature,” “culture,” and its glamorous sibling “global,” “local” is one of those deeply compromised words our language will not relinquish. So central to so many anthropological projects it is unlikely to be transcended, instead it continues to be both fought over and reinvigorated. In this essay, I imagine the topography of what we might call a methodology of locality. In trying to understand how we can do our thinking about the local, I begin with a disarmingly transparent question: How, in all its specificity, does this place that holds our attention come into being? Pursuing this puzzle provokes ripples of association that shape interpretation like contour lines on a map, destabilize naturalized binaries, and shadow the unruly series of concentric circles through which a place is tied into multiple worlds.

The most proximate circles are also, as Benjamin suggests, immediate sites of danger and confusion. We find, for example, a dark confluence of whirlpools at the very heart of the story of Igarapé Guariba, the small place in the Amazon estuary I describe in what follows.¹ There is, for one, the giddy vortex of Brazilian national politics during the 1960s, a trauma which produces the regional dislocations of modernist highway construction, the violating histories of land conflict and expropriation, and the eventual florescence of international deforestation discourse.² Then there are the shifting networks of translocal political economy, the fluctuating markets in forest commodities, and the assertion, breakdown, and reconstitution of local forms of governance and control. And then—as we shall see in some detail—there is what has now become the ur-problem of the Amazon: nature.

In what follows, I have drawn on the particularities of Igarapé Guariba to offer a reading of the local that is also an argument for “local theory.” By this, I mean an analysis generated from the

1. I conducted fieldwork in “Igarapé Guariba” in the northern Brazilian state of Amapá in March 1993, June-August 1994, and from September 1995 to November 1996. Names of locations (excepting major cities and municipalities) and of people mentioned in the text have been changed.

2. Amongst the large number of general accounts of this period, see Hecht and Cockburn 1989a, Schminck and Wood 1992, Branford and Glock 1985, and Mendes 1989. I am not trying to suggest here that transnational “deforestation discourse” is derived from the contemporary preoccupation with Amazonian rain forest. For a historical treatment of conservation narratives, see Grove 1995.

ground of ethnographic specificity, from something distinctive about this particular place. That distinctiveness always and ultimately resides in people. Locality is both embodied and narrated, and is, as a consequence, often highly mobile: places travel with the people through whom they are constituted. Locality then, should not be confused with location. It is rather a set of relations, an ongoing politics, a density, in which places are discursively and imaginatively materialized and enacted through the practices of variously-positioned people and political economies.³

In thinking about the production of Igarapé Guariba, my attention has been caught by a cluster of three relations, that, in different ways, have guided my interpretation. Each mediates the constitution of this particular place, its production as a locality, and its insertion into a geographically and culturally wider world. They are not in themselves *definitive* of Igarapé Guariba; their very arbitrariness precludes such claims. Nonetheless, what they do enable are effective “local” points of entry to an understanding of locality. I can list these as follows: a certain kind of patron-client relationship very familiar in the Amazon and known historically as *aviamento*;⁴ a marked mobility of traveling individuals constituting embodied networks among geographical locations;⁵ and a dynamic instability and fluidity in nature, both biophysical and discursive.⁶ The task of the present paper is to communicate locality by refracting the first two of these relations through a discussion of the third: that is, by reading Guariba’s cultures of economy and travel through the politics of nature.⁷

I work here with what are becoming commonplace positions in the discussion of locality. It is a long time since John Berger’s famous photo caption inspired Stephen Daniels to talk about the “duplicity of landscape” (Berger and Mohr 1969: 13, Daniels 1989), and it is clear that there is now no question of imagining locality as simply the biophysical, or even representational, stage on which social actors huff and puff. Superimposed along the top of a Jean Mohr rendering of English pastoralism—two people fishing on a lake, their row-boat reflecting in the still water, rolling hills behind them emerging from mists—Berger has written:

Landscapes can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place.
[Berger and Mohr 1969: 13]

Berger’s way of asking us to think about the social construction of landscape was subtle and unsettling, and more powerful than it might at first appear. Writing in the late 1960s out of a tradition of British humanist Marxism that would resist the allures of both Althusser and Foucault, he

3. I owe this formulation to conversations with Jacqueline Brown.

4. Given its regional importance, there has been remarkably little written on *aviamento* (from the verb *aviar*, to supply), a widespread mercantile system based on personalist debt relations. For descriptions, see Hecht and Cockburn 1989a, McGrath 1989, Reis 1953, Santos 1980, Ono and Miyazaki 1958, Oliveira Filho 1979, and Weinstein 1983.

5. On personal mobility in Amazonia more generally, see Cleary 1993. My thinking of this type of travel in terms of “networks” draws heavily on the work of Bruno Latour, particularly Latour 1987 and 1993.

6. Amazonian fluvial dynamics and associated agricultural practices have been the subject of significant recent ecological and human ecological research. See Hiraoka 1992, Kalliola 1992, Sponsel 1992, Chibnik 1995, Pinedo-Vásquez 1995, 1999, Padoch and Pinedo-Vásquez 1999.

7. I address questions of economy and travel in detail in Raffles in press.

was ruminating on representation as ideology. The resurgence in landscape studies among cultural geographers and, more recently, anthropologists (see particularly Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995, Mitchell 1996, Basso 1996, Bender 1993, Barnes and Duncan 1992, and Carter 1989), and the vast, often sophisticated, literature on nature that is now blooming in the academy, might make the contemporary reader unwilling to engage with such an apparently rudimentary conceptual apparatus.⁸ But Berger makes a move that is of considerable importance as scholars struggle with the legacies of post-structuralism.

Turning the page, we meet another doublespread monochrome image by Mohr. The perspective is different; the viewer more distant. This is a populated somewhere, but there are no people visible. It is a reclusive landscape. We see a thunderous-looking sky, wooded hills again, and whitewashed farmhouses, more than a few of them, set back amongst the trees. There is what looks like a church on its own, near the ridge. The light is dim; it could be dusk, although it feels more like dawn, and across the bottom right-hand quadrant, Berger has continued:

For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtain, landmarks are no longer only geographic but also biographic and personal. [Berger and Mohr 1969: 17]

Berger wants us to think about people as social individuals who make their own biographies. The entire book—“the story of a country doctor”—while dedicated to giving us a way of seeing one man as both producing and produced by his social world, reserves the space of the doctor’s interiority. Berger and Mohr ask us to consider this man’s emotional life, his private moments, his affective commitments and compromises, as powerfully constitutive and definitive not only of the doctor himself, but of this place and of local society. There is another recently familiar argument about locality here: local places are continually and often self-consciously produced by their inhabitants and others.⁹ And Berger has a further point to make: such production occurs not only in the noise of “public” action but also in the murmured moments of “private” experience.

When I think about Igarapé Guariba, my thoughts whir trapped like dazzled insects amongst the intersecting threads of lives-in-progress. And, what concerns me here is something really quite basic: despite all the creative energy thrown into scholarship on locality in recent years, there is still no adequate conceptual apparatus with which to describe the ongoing coming-into-being of this one small place in terms which acknowledge its constitution through the regionally-located projects of globalization whilst simultaneously giving due centrality to the compelling biographical complexities of “local” life.¹⁰ How, without such tools, can we effectively approximate the meaning of the local?

8. For a different invocation of this same passage from Berger, see Watts 1992. I am grateful to Donald Moore for insisting that despite my allegiance to the intellectual tradition that includes Berger, E.P. Thompson, and Raymond Williams I am using their work in the service of a rather distinct project. In Berger’s reading of the landscape as a reflection of social relations, there is scant attention to forms of difference other than class (Rose 1993). My particular interest is in building on the possibilities Berger provides for an analysis of the materiality of affect and biography precisely through multiple modalities of social relations and representation. It is in these terms that I introduce below Williams’ (1977) evocative notion of a structure of feeling, at the same time as my account works to undermine its singularity and implicit homogenizations to suggest that such “structures” should also be thought of as multiple and subject to both process and positionality.

9. This point is signaled but left undeveloped in both Rodman 1992 and Appadurai 1996.

10. For important anthropological work on place and locality that has propelled the argument of the present paper, see

LOCATING GUARIBA

Igarapé Guariba has trouble getting on maps. The community itself, now a straggle of twenty-four houses along the banks of the Guariba river, is never labeled. More obscurely, the river, a familiar sign of human occupation in Amazonia, is often marked only by its absence. On the specialized marine and fluvial navigation charts drawn up by the Brazilian navy, with their over-confidently shaded areas of aggrading land and beguilingly precise notation of water depth, the Guariba river is neither named nor clearly distinguishable. As for the authoritative *Projeto RADAM* (later *RADAMBRASIL*) surveys of the 1970s—a giant project that used radar to map the entire Amazon basin as a prelude to its promised integration into the national economy—these charts often assign a name which belongs to a different waterway several miles to the northeast.¹¹

There is a straightforward solution to this mystery of a river's invisibility. Up until about twenty-five years ago, this feature from which the community takes its name was a stream too small to cross the threshold of cartographic scale. It did not, in effect, warrant such formal location. Nowadays, on the most recent maps of Amapá, though still unnamed, this creek that is now a waterway of some significance is clearly traceable.

In finding its way along the trails that lead to map-based representation, Igarapé Guariba underwent a localization that was predicated on a radical remaking of nature. And, as surely as the state cartographers at the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatísticos* (IBGE), it was the people who lived along the Guariba river who put it on the map.

In some respects there are few things truer about Igarapé Guariba than this claim of local agency in the production of locality. As I describe below, the biophysical production of this place was markedly instrumental, and involved such materialities as axes, hoes, machetes, and hard, persistent labor. But the implicit acknowledgment of an agenda, an aesthetic, and a practice—something we could gloss as a “local knowledge” (Geertz 1983, Turnbull 1994)—that belongs to the technicians at IBGE and RADAM and that is critically constitutive of Guariba's emerging location, is a clue to something else. And that is this: the production of (a specific) locality involves all kinds of people in all kinds of places. Some of them may not even have heard of the place they work to localize, while others spend most of their lives there. A locality emerges in complex ways through the multiple practices of numerous individuals working in the midst of various situated projects. Its location is never secure, and always in need of reaffirmation and redefinition. It relies on different people at different moments for materialization, and its concreteness is achieved in the interplay of disparate meanings, all of which are radically dependent on the contexts in which they are deployed. Let me elaborate these claims ethnographically.

Although I was always looking, it was rare that I met people in Macapá who could talk with

Appadurai (1988a, 1988b, 1996), Carter 1989, Rodman 1992, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Basso 1996, Feld and Basso 1996, Stewart 1996, Brown 1998, and Moore 1998. Also critical to my thinking is the work of geographer Doreen Massey; in particular, Massey 1994.

11. There is as yet no study of RADAM that does justice to its ambition or significance. Most helpful is Rankin 1985: 375-376.

conviction about Igarapé Guariba. One who had no difficulty was Octávio da Gama, an ex-logger living out enforced retirement in a large, secluded house in an upper middle-class neighborhood of Macapá. Octávio had never actually been to Igarapé Guariba, but from his air-conditioned office overlooking the port of Santana, a boomtown less than twenty miles from Macapá, he had purchased wood for many years from the small family sawmill that used to sit at the mouth of the river.

A powerful, heavy-set man in his mid-50s, a man accustomed to giving orders and seeing them carried out, Octávio had been a manager for Bruynzeel Madeiras S. A. (BRUMASA), the Dutch corporation that dominated the Amazon timber trade from the beginnings of the logging boom at the start of the 1960s through to the 1980s. BRUMASA bought up vast stretches of the estuary, and built a state-of-the-art sawmill at Santana. It processed high-value timber for export, either to the south of Brazil, to the United States, or to Europe, and sold cheaper lumber for construction in the local market. It operated by contract: buying logs from independent third parties who set up poorly-capitalized, inefficient, and mostly short-lived sawmills at the mouths of distant rivers. BRUMASA's operations extended from Santana past Manaus, nearly a thousand miles upstream. It bought wood cut in Guariba until there was no more worth buying. And from his dealings with residents, Octávio felt secure in asserting the typicality of Guariba and confident in narrating the place's history and future.

Octávio began by explaining that he, too, was an “*índio*” (Indian). His blood was just as contaminated, his spirit as base, as those who lived in the countryside and whom, he told me, I could find drinking themselves stupid down by the docks or wandering through town looking lost. In fact, everyone here in the Amazon, he told me, was *índio*. The *patrões*—the landowners—were the same, he said, even if they did not look it. What I had to realize was that he, Octávio, had escaped in a way that these other wealthy men had not: they may be bosses, but they were people of the *interior* (interior, hinterland), and they had never fully broken away. He, on the other hand, had been moving in a completely different world; working for a major international corporation, running the largest sawmill in the eastern Amazon, transforming his thinking and his character. He had, as Amazonians say, “*mudou a cabeça*” (“changed his head”).

Octávio was unabashed in his characterization of the *ribeirinhos*—the people who live along the Amazonian rivers. “They spend ninety percent of their time looking for food. They don't work. They put up their little houses, make their little fields, get themselves a woman, have a bunch of kids, and *pronto!* When they're 65,” he concluded with vigor, “they get their pension from the government and live like kings—*vagabundos!*”

Although a lively enough topic, discourse on race and destiny was little more than an ambient agenda. Sipping Cokes in the coolness of his walled garden, what Octávio really wanted the two of us to acknowledge was that there was nothing special about Igarapé Guariba, nothing that made it worth studying.

“The story of Igarapé Guariba,” he explained carefully, “is the standard Amazonian story. Some guy puts up a sawmill in the interior. There's never enough labor out there so he builds a bunch of shacks and contracts workers from somewhere else. After a while there's no more wood left to cut. The sawmill closes down, but there's still this remnant of a town and so people stay on. They collect their fruit, catch their fish, hunt their animals; and soon there's nothing left. Then they pack up and

move to the city.” He produced a satisfying narrative of inevitability, far from resignation: “Igarapé Guariba won’t be there for long. You’ll see.”

This first meeting with Octávio brought me abruptly face to face with a new Igarapé Guariba, a place that at once seemed radically opposed to, but no less realized than, those I had encountered *in situ*. And it made me think seriously about the materiality of Octávio’s narrative. There was more at stake here than rambling nostalgia filtered through the bitterness of prejudice. In fact, I soon realized I had heard naggingly similar tones in conversations with residents of Igarapé Guariba itself. And I began to see that my interpretation of this type of assertive self-negation as an expression of positioned political maneuvering largely internal to this place was at best only partly justified.

Igarapé Guariba and other notionally rural Amazonian places are often constructed through what Arjun Appadurai (1988b) identified as a carceral notion of a static and bounded local. It is not just outsiders and academics who do this. My best friend in Guariba regularly and evocatively referred to herself as living on “*o rio esquecido*” (“the forgotten river”); and she rolled out this phrase with very little apparent irony, despite my chidings. Such language is, of course, always situated, and, for my friend, the overwhelming backwardness—a favorite adjective was “*triste*” (sad)—of Guariba was a function of her own powerful desire to return to the urban life in which she spent her teenage years and in which she feels complete. Her isolating experience of Guariba as “incarcerating” (Appadurai 1988b: 37) was produced precisely by her ability to regularly step outside this local prison and travel across cartographic boundaries. It was the present inevitability of return from the city—a gendered constraint in which her mobility was subject to her husband’s control of transport—that always generated her dismay. Yet her voluble coming and going along a range of variable-distance networks is one of the practices that constantly re-guarantees that Guariba is not “forgotten.”

I am keen here to break down further what, in this context, seem thoroughly inappropriate ideas of bounded localities. I want to do so by emphasizing material and imaginative translocality (see Massey 1994), and by drawing attention to both the contingency of locality and the hard, often deliberate work of place-making. I aim for an ethnographic reading of what, paralleling human geographers’ understandings of the simultaneity of place (e.g. Soja 1989), Margaret Rodman (1992) has called “multilocality.” Rodman has talked about dispensing with unitary notions of place and recognizing more or less individual, overlapping “social landscapes,” an idea that emphasizes the anthropogenic prefiguredness of the ecological context in which people live. There is clearly a tension here between this welcome fragmentation and proliferation of a unitary concept of locality, and the fact that locality is always—to some extent, and in complex ways—shared. For Guariba, “place” (which I use in a restricted sense as the site of the production of local subjects and the construction of local identities), and “locality” (which encompasses the embeddedness and locatedness of place) are anchored in narration, and, specifically, in narratives of nature. In what follows, I track these narratives to begin my own mapping of the locality of Igarapé Guariba, not in an effort to find boundaries, but as a way of understanding the productive work of people who take themselves outside (or already stand outside) the topographic perimeters of a cartographically institutionalized local.

Octávio’s account is an obvious starting-point. Most of the middle-class urban Amazonians I know iterate their strong kinship connections with the countryside through talk which casts the people of the interior in sentimentally-nostalgic terms—as nobly folkloric, if deeply-flawed figures.

Octávio's narrative speaks to a different but similarly potent current. He figures blood ties as subject to transcendence, and locates himself on an uneasy border. It is a realm where, though his body may be saturated with the genetic stain of the indigene, his spirit can soar, south to São Paulo, north to Miami, perhaps east across the Atlantic. In his stories, I hear echoes of the Amazonian travel accounts of Victorian natural historians, with their descriptions of the easefully decadent life of the interior and the inability of rural people to perform what, in post-Enlightenment terms, was the definitively human action of asserting their will over nature through transforming it into culture. Similarly, I sense the narrative traces of the hegemonic Amazonianist cultural ecologists and archaeologists of the 1950s, 60s and 70s—from Julian Steward and Alfred Métraux to Betty Meggers and Daniel Gross—with their parallel depictions of a descent into nature; although here it is the draining enervations of the “tropical forest culture area” (Steward 1948, Meggers 1957) rather than race or psychology which determines decline. There are important distinctions, of course, but there is also an epistemic correspondence. Both these discourses shared with Octávio what David Spurr (1996: 158) has recognized as a Rousseauian-derived system of differences: one which identifies non-European people with nature, and then places nature in opposition to culture.

Notwithstanding its lack of nuance and its overdetermination by stereotypes of race and class, Octávio's account was in many ways more sophisticated than either of these influential narratives. He, at least, understood that the production of locality involved the work of constant reproduction. And, moreover, that it was characterized by tenuousness and insecurity. He demonstrated a rare understanding of the instabilities and incertitudes of global transformations, of the fact that space produced can later be erased.¹² This awareness stemmed partly from his rootedness in Amazonian localities. Here was a man who, though based in a comfortable office, had spent a good part of his thirty-year logging career on expeditions in the estuary searching for timber. He had dragged his cosmopolitan self through rural communities, trekking into forests, sleeping in the open, grappling with the logistics of timber extraction in difficult, uncomfortable, and technically and emotionally challenging terrain.

Octávio clearly had a local knowledge and it was one that involved a certain sensitivity to the insecurities of rural life. But it was positioned in such a way that it obscured the slightest notion of rural agency. As in the European narratives of jungle nature, his account locates Amazonian ribeirinhos as living *upon* and *off* the land, scratching parasitically at its superficial layer, subject to its vicissitudes, and destined finally to succumb, driven to flee once the shade of the patrão's protective economic order has been withdrawn. Locality, for Octávio—in this case Igarapé Guariba—was no more rooted than those ribeirinhos who were now its sole, inadequate markers. With the timber all gone, Igarapé Guariba had no meaning beyond its pitiful residue of abandoned peasants, whose commitment to this piece of land Octávio knew to be entirely transitory.

Unlike most Victorian naturalists and many post-war Amazonianist anthropologists, Octávio understood that rural Amazonian places assume at least some of their particularity through the transnational mobility of political economy. He had, after all, personally directed a sizable chunk of

12. And this, it seems, is an aspect of spatiality to which Lefebvre (1991) was largely indifferent in the context of the quasi-evolutionary schematic of *The Production of Space*. For a painstaking reading of spatial transformations as the complex instantiation of colonial imaginaries, see Sivaramakrishnan 1996.

extra-local capital as it made its blundering way into the interior chopping down forest and hauling out trees. These extractive projects of the 1970s did not just represent modernity, they actually were modernization in his eyes. And he was hardly alone in viewing the arrival of large-scale capitalist enterprises as the vehicle that would drag Amazonia and its reluctant peasantry into the modern world. This had been a strong-state project premised, like so many others in so many places, on the notion that new subjects would be created through the making of a new nature.¹³ It would be through the transformation of the Amazonian landscape that those debilitating bonds holding rural people captive to nature would be finally severed.

When the timber ran out along the northern channel of the estuary and BRUMASA was taken over and liquidated in the late 1980s, Octávio passed into that premature career twilight in which we met. In so doing, he received brutal confirmation that there is nothing permanent about Progress. In his world of unforgiving nature in which constant vigilance was needed just to stay civilized, rural places could fall out of locality far more easily than they could come to exist within it. And, he believed, once those networks of bourgeois political economy that had wrenched it into history were dissolved, there was nothing standing between Igarapé Guariba and the unforgiving jungle from which it had temporarily emerged.

13. For an exploration of this theme, see Scott 1998.

THE PATRÃO

Something especially compelling in Octávio's account of Igarapé Guariba was his conflation of rural society into a single undifferentiated *caboclo* (rural person; often, hick). What was expressed as a foundational cleavage by people in Guariba—the line between ribeirinhos and patrão—was eclipsed in his narrative. Instead, Octávio offered a view of the world in which the site of irreducible difference was the gulf between the modernization project of BRUMASA and that of the patrão of Igarapé Guariba, Raimundo Viegá.

Until a few years before he died in 1983, Raimundo Viegá was *o patrão*. This did not mean that he was simply the landowner. He had purchased the land in the 1940s after working his way as a cowboy, a rubber-tapper, a small farmer, a boat-builder, and, by some accounts as a *regatão*, an itinerant trader sailing between the settlements that dot the rivers and coastline around Macapá.¹⁴ He had accumulated a little capital, married, bought his first piece of land in the municipality of Afuá on Marajó Island, and cultivated a network of ribeirinho clients. Or rather “*partners*” as his wife Dona Rita once corrected me. In explaining the underpinnings of life in Igarapé Guariba when his father was in control, Nestor, Raimundo's son, suggested why his mother might have made this distinction:

It was a type of exchange. You have some land. You put in someone who these days we'd call a *freguês* (client). The responsibility of the patrão is to make land available to the freguês without the obligation of paying the famous rent...He plants his crops and takes them to the [patrão's] store and, with the produce he's bringing, grown on that land, the freguês buys *mercadoria* (household goods, merchandise). It was an exchange of work for goods.

This transactional framework both fostered and was underwritten by powerful emotional ties and obligations. To Viegá's family, real leadership of Guariba involved more than merely managing economy. It was an experiment in modernist social engineering, an enactment of enlightened humanitarianism, and a continuance of traditional forms of Amazonian solidarity. The terms in which Nestor and his mother frame the story of Igarapé Guariba were powerfully expressed twenty-five years earlier in the local newspaper column written by Edinaldo Gomes, a journalist and family friend:

It was only because of Raimundo Viegá's will (*fibra*) that people came to help with the occupation of Igarapé Guariba, an area unknown until 1940. That was when the brave pioneer, impelled by circumstance, resolved to drag it from a state of abandonment and exploit the potential that was already there only awaiting courage and the absolute willingness to work—two virtues Viegá possesses even today.¹⁵

14. An important account of Amazon river-traders is Goulart 1967. Also see Reis 1953: 124-126, Weinstein 1983, Yungjohann 1989, McGrath 1989, and Moraes 1987: 71-75. Moraes writes with venomous anti-Semitism, which spills over into his accounts of Islamic traders (who “spread like rats” [Moraes 1987: 72]). This rhetoric reflects widespread xenophobia in the Amazon during the early twentieth-century which manifested in periodic explosive violence directed against Jewish *regatões* and Jewish-owned *aviamento* houses. This interdigitation of race and political economy points to major gaps in Amazonianist scholarship. For brief comments, see Weinstein 1983: 50-51, 306 n. 4. Compelling and detailed accounts of Jews who succeeded in establishing themselves as significant commercial figures can be found in Samuel Benchimol's generously-illustrated and important *Manãos-do-Amazonas: Memória Empresarial, Volume I* (1994).

15. Grappling with the ethics of representation and confidentiality, I have chosen not to provide a citation for this passage. “Edinaldo Gomes” becomes an important figure in what follows, and is a well-known public intellectual in

For Gomes, this effort was a collaboration. The people who “came to help” were the ribeirinhos, who, I was told many times, by some residents of Guariba as well as by members of the Viega family and their associates, prospered under the paternalist regime that was soon established.

The great Brazilian historian of Amazonia, Arthur C ezar Ferreira Reis, writing in the 1950s, described the Amazon patr o as follows:

[H]e is neither an opportunist nor someone who has got where he is by dint of birth or money. Originally, he was a backwoods scout, a forest explorer, who succeeded through possession of the virtues and qualities needed for victory. Experienced in the forest, ambitious, capable of imposing himself to willfully discipline men, successful in gaining the confidence of his suppliers. Sometimes he was the founder of a plantation (*seringal*), sometimes an ex-worker (*seringueiro*) who had managed to climb among his comrades and substitute himself for the former patr o, inheriting, by legal means, ownership rights to the plantation. [Reis 1953: 113]

Reis is talking specifically about the rubber trade. But his militaristic construction of the patr o in self-made heroic terms corresponds remarkably closely to the language used by Gomes and by Viega’s family. The discourse of struggle is not just tied to that of enlightenment, it constitutes it. Viega understands his fregueses because he himself was once where they are now. Moreover, their dependence on him imposes responsibility. As Nestor told me:

Papai always said: “One hand washes the other, and both wash the face.” So if you help me, I’ll help you. In those days when he was helping [his fregueses], *papai* understood that everybody needed each other. There’s no mystery in this.

Reis continues his discussion by outlining another aspect of the construction of the patr o: his violence.¹⁶ This was a politics repudiated by the Viega family: in a well-run community, there is no need for heavy-handed enforcement. Yet, in describing this side of what he effectively conveys as the self-fashioning dualities of the emergent peasant boss, Reis throws light on Oct vio da Gama’s account of undifferentiated rurality:

We need to understand the social milieu from which [the patr o] came and in which he lived. In contact with only men, subject to the anguish that comes from isolation in the forest, he is hardly going to be the drawing-room type, with refined gestures, exhibiting a perfect education...He has to be dynamic, rude, perhaps tyrannical. Any weakness, any indecision could spell disaster. He needs to exercise power without the least hesitation.

Macap . The passage cited was republished in a collection of his writings on rural life in Amap . A regional resonance here is with the pioneer *bandeirantes* of the 17th century who led brutalizing expeditions of primitive accumulation into the forest in what is now often celebrated as a key moment in Brazilian nation-making. Both here, and in the memories of his close family, Viega emerges as a modern (in its fullest sense) pioneer-explorer. The ambivalence connected with the slave-raiding *bandeirantes* is, of course, absent, and authority is expressed in the language of collaborative paternalism. For a useful introduction to the *bandeirante*, see Hemming 1978: 238-282. As will be seen, the trope of wilderness on which Gomes is drawing recurs frequently in accounts of Igarap  Guariba. For definitive, though quite distinct, historical treatments in relation to European settler frontier discourse, see Carter 1989 and Cronon 1996. For Amazonia, see Slater 1996. Also of interest is Malkki 1995: 112-114.

16. For a particularly graphic account, see Taussig 1987: 3-135.

When we are trying to understand him, we need to remember that he generally has little education, and has not spent time in refined environments...He is a friend to his *companheiros*. He stands shoulder to shoulder with them in difficult times. He feels their problems, problems he himself experienced when he was a simple *seringueiro*. Brave in the times of most uncertainty, he knows how to face the natural and social world [*o meio geográfico e social*]. [Reis 1953: 114]

This is the expressive ambivalence of the “simple man,” the “*pessoa simples*,” the salt of the earth. It is a masculine idiom with strong regional roots, through which many successful middlemen I met in Macapá define themselves, at least in commercial contexts. Used by middle-class urbanites in relation to the *ribeirinho*, it has a sentimental flavor implying a naïve honesty coupled with lack of education. Used by *ribeirinhos* to describe city-folk, it is a categorical compliment, though with the potential for the ironic deflation of those who imagine they can rise above their class without compromise. Used by self-fashioning urban merchants to construct their own identities, it enables the simultaneous assertion of authenticity and rurality against the fact of urban prosperity, affirms their ability to communicate with the *ribeirinho* man-to-man, and announces their willingness to engage faithfully in the personalist obligations of *aviamento* economics.

Viega’s surviving family emphasize his roots in poverty,¹⁷ and the selfless devotion and love for place, the *carinho* (a tender, protective affection) through which he built up Igarapé Guariba and, with it, the lives of his *fregueses*. In these accounts, the index of devotion is the obstacles overcome; and the greatest of these was Amazonian nature. Dona Rita, Raimundo’s wife, told me that when she first went to Guariba, “there wasn’t even an *igarapé* (stream) there. It was just forest and dense grassland.” Lene, her daughter, picked up the theme:

When papai bought that land it was virgin forest (*mata virgem*). It was really wild (*Era bruto mesmo*), dense forest, so dense that a person couldn’t penetrate it. There was an area of *tiririca* (a thorny scrub) which would just cut you up all over...All the boats had to stop at the entrance [to the *igarapé*] because they couldn’t get in. It was closed, so narrow that there was no way for a large boat to get down—only those tiny little canoes that you can take right into the forest, bending down and dragging them. That’s what it used to be like.

As I describe below, Raimundo Viega and his *fregueses* remade the nature of Igarapé Guariba. In the process, Raimundo built a store, a school, a chapel, and other facilities out of the commodified resources taken from the forest and rivers. For a short while, Igarapé Guariba really was on the map. Yet the apparent success of Viega’s project only masked the internal contradictions which were to finally drive him out. The social contract collapsed: the Macedo family—*ribeirinhos*, emblematic *peessoas simples* who had come from Afuá to work with Raimundo in Guariba—changed the rules. His “community” came crashing down, and the meaning of the transformed nature of Igarapé Guariba was revealed as bitterly contested and troublingly ambiguous.

17. Though details that family members gave of Raimundo’s early life became confused and contradictory at times, and it was clear that the destitution was over-dramatized, perhaps considerably. Prosperous relatives stressed Viega’s poverty, the few impoverished ones that I came to know referred insistently to his inherited wealth. One recurrent signifier of poverty was racial: the assertively-made comment that his mother was Afro-Brazilian, the descendant of slaves.

NATURE-MAKING, PLACE-MAKING

Locality is premised on the elaboration of what Raymond Williams called a structure of feeling (1977: 128-135).¹⁸ Through both daily and exceptional practices, it witnesses the construction of local subjects: the making of people who think of themselves (at least sometimes) as belonging in and to a place. In Igarapé Guariba, as in many rural places, much of this locational identity is tied up with the immediate environmental context. There are stories people tell over and over again that reinforce a personal connection to critical moments of group action involving the landscape.

There is, for example, the one about a huge snake, an anaconda, that was killed in 1993 during the demarcation of land controlled by the newly-formed Residents' Association. It was long enough for the large group of men hacking a trail through the swampy grassland with the land reform agency official to stand in a line and fix the moment—posing for a photograph, one behind the other, with this monster held up, stretched above their heads in dramatic gesture, using a moment of assertion over landscape to draw the boundaries of difference that excluded unwelcome nature, and uninvited landlords.

With members of the Macedo family as both President and Secretary, the Association represented an explicit institutional consolidation of a *de facto* political leadership. Backed by the Rural Workers' Union, it emerged as residents temporarily cohered to challenge the right of Raimundo Viega's heirs to cut heart-of-palm on what both parties considered their land.¹⁹ The implications of legal victory and the act of boundary-drawing which followed were not entirely satisfactory to all the people living in Igarapé Guariba. Accustomed to hunting and fishing freely over a large area, Guariba residents were now under court order to restrict their activities to the demarcated area or else be classified as invaders and poachers. The anaconda, the most hostile, the least transformable to economy of the landscape's animal occupants, became an appropriately ambivalent metaphor for a victory which created a new set of concerns, and initiated a new series of external definitions of "community."²⁰

Ten years previously, a bitter saga of confused land-dealings, contested indemnification, and the threat of physical violence had led residents to abandon their homes and gardens on the north bank of the river and relocate to the south side, ferrying over what they could in canoes and motor-launches. Viega had recently died, and his children, squabbling over their inheritance, went back on a commitment residents claim he had made: within months of his death these heirs had sold the land on which their father's fregueses were living, forcing them to move.

18. Although, as this account makes clear, it is contextually appropriate to speak of multiple, overlapping, processual, and *located* structures of feeling. See n. 8 above.

19. This conflict arose in relation to the *açaí* palm (*Euterpe oleracea*), the fruit of which is a staple in the ribeirinho diet, but which is often harvested destructively for heart-of-palm.

20. The anaconda (*sucuriju*) grows to fabulous proportions in stories of the unpredictable and highly mobile *Cobra Grande* (Great Snake). For discussions, see Slater 1994, Paes Loureiro 1995, Smith 1981, Rodrigues 1992.

People sometimes dramatized this history by showing me the structural beams of their houses: decay-resistant wood they had brought with them from Afuá, forty years earlier, and which does not grow in swampy Guariba, but which provides imaginative and emotional continuity within a narrative of dislocation. These knotted beams have come to express the persistence of locality, even as they embody the trials of eviction and forced mobility. In this story, so different from Octávio's, locality resides in people rather than in economy, or even geography. And it is rooted in shared experience.

It will be no surprise that, though shared, this story of departure from what people always call “the other side” has no unified consensual narrative: it is always crosscut by images of betrayal and opportunism, and continues to conjure bitterness in its telling. People talk diplomatically about their “*falta de orientação*” (lack of political sophistication) at this time. But in context it stands as a coded critique of those who broke ranks and set sail across the river. These memories are profoundly diagnostic of local division, and whatever shared-ness there is in the experience seems to have settled in as a shared shame, continually fueled by the proximity of the formally inaccessible opposite bank, where their fruit trees have long since been cut and their gardens gone to seed, just there, across the river.

That shame can be tied up in local identity is hardly surprising for a class of people who are popularly known in Amazonia by the pejorative term *caboclo*.²¹ “Caboclo” is often wielded with assertive irony in Guariba, but the pervasive awkwardness in this narrative of eviction allows no irony. Instead, these memories become a stick with which to beat the present community leaders, people then active in union politics but nonetheless ineffective, and whose families—some imply—were the main beneficiaries of the indemnification. In this way, through their mobilization and repetition, such stories are used to intervene in the often acrimonious politics surrounding the Association, and to express arguments for the pursuit of one out of several potential futures. The work of reproducing locality can be seen here in a contested and ongoing project expressed through the idiom of shared pasts.

Stories of this type call on proximate nature to reinscribe local identity, and they anchor place, yet dispute its meaning. Another, the story of the re-making of nature in Igarapé Guariba, describes an originary moment in local history. And it involves, in radical form, the imprinting of locality on landscape.

Raimundo and Rita Viega bought the area that included Igarapé Guariba in the 1940s. By this time, Raimundo was a well-known businessman who owned a large store in Macapá that sold hardware and the tools needed for settlement in the interior. He had three or four boats, a venture close to the port of Santana where he processed rice, and several landholdings on the islands that form the municipality of Afuá. When you look at him in photographs—smartly but casually dressed, taller, and more powerfully-built than his companions, his whiteness accentuated by his shiny bald skull—you meet a self-assured *patrão* who stares straight into the lens with the combative proprietorial eye of the “man of action” evoked by his son, Nestor.

Everyone who knew Guariba in these early years agrees that its attractions were obvious. The woods were packed with valuable timber and the river itself was teeming with fish and wildlife.

21. For important recent discussion of the regional implications of the term *caboclo*, see Nugent 1996, 1997, and Harris 1998.

When you set fire in the fields, “turtles ran from you like cockroaches,” one long-time resident told me. The chatter of scarlet macaws and the bellowing of howler monkeys were so intense you might not get to sleep. “You just had to lean down and dip a basket in the river to bring it up full of heavy, fat fish.”

But at first this abundance was only potentiality. What dominates accounts of those days is wilderness—the menacing wild forest into which only the very brave would venture, and into which strode Viega—a patrão driven by a transformative vision.

There was a long period during which Viega did little with the land. He had a guard living at the mouth of the stream, and he would have his boats sailing between Macapá and Afuá stop off with supplies to keep him going. He would take out timber now and again, and the guard would cut rubber, and grow bananas. But he was just letting Guariba tick over. His real interest at this time was in the next river, the Rio Preto, purchased in the same deal, where he had a rice plantation employing a hundred and forty wage-workers.

It was only when the project on the Rio Preto faltered that Viega turned his attention to Igarapé Guariba. He harvested just one crop of rice and then had his workers plant pasture for cattle. His men cut narrow trails through the forest and savanna and drove the animals to pasture, close to the Guariba river. Then he began recruiting fregueses from his land on Afuá.

It was 1958 when the Viegas finally arrived in Guariba. They built a tile-roofed house on a low bluff at the mouth of the river, and they brought in their son Chico, a physically imposing man, as policeman. They built a warehouse to receive forest and agricultural products, a store which—as somebody in this roadless world joked—sold “everything except cars,” and they assembled the single-machine sawmill. Their boats began stopping off with manufactured goods bought on credit from one of the Viegas’ own patrões in the city of Belém, up to seven days by sail across the bay. And after stocking the store, the boats would head off with the contents of the warehouse, making a circuit of the couple’s properties and calling in to trade in Macapá on their way back across the estuary.

Four families moved at first from Viega’s properties on Afuá to Igarapé Guariba. They included Benedito and Nazaré Macedo and their eight children. They built a house near the store and cleared a garden. They planted their first year of bananas and water-melons. They mapped out new rubber trails, and they worked in the forest hunting, collecting oilseeds, and cutting timber. It was not that different from Afuá. Igarapé Guariba though, Benedito Macedo remembers, was “*farto*” (plentiful, excessive). There was more timber, as much fish and meat as you could want, and the land was fertile. The Macedos settled once more into the type of clientelist arrangement that had spread through the Amazon during the nineteenth-century rubber “boom” and that is still a widespread form of social organization. As their fregueses arrived, the Viegas advanced them materials to build, hunt, and farm. In return, they would sell all the products of their labor only through the Viegas and their agents. Anything these clients needed to purchase, they could find in the store, available on terms of exchange that were monopolistic but not unusually punitive.

Long-time residents describe the Rio Guariba of the early 1960s as a “*besteira*” (a joke, a silly little thing). It was a short and narrow river, probably about 50-75 yards wide at its mouth, where it met the Amazon, and shallow and safe enough for children to wade or swim across at low tide. It

ended in a low waterfall: a feature usually described in the diminutive, a *quedazinha*, a *cachoeirazinha*. Hunters would haul their canoes over or around the rocks to arrive in the midst of an open grassy landscape formation known as *campo alagado* (flooded savanna). Such areas are often dominated by the grassy *pirí* (*Cyperus giganteus*), and, accordingly known locally as *pirizais* (*pirizal*, sing.).²² Poorer families in Guariba cut *pirí*, from which women make mats that sell in bundles of ten for R\$1 (then US\$1) to the local boat-owners. In Guariba, the *pirí* can form a dense barrier, often in association with *aninga* (*Montrichardia arborescens*), a woody aroid that can easily stand six or seven feet high.

Within a few years of the families arriving and the sawmill starting up, it became clear that the valuable resources at the mouth of the river—animal skins and timber particularly—would soon be exhausted. Moreover, the difficulty of communicating between expanding Igarapé Guariba, Viega's upstream cattle post, and the property on the Rio Preto had become a source of considerable frustration for the landowner. The *pirizal* in Igarapé Guariba stood between the commercially exhausted downstream area and an upstream forest that hunters reported well-stocked with valuable hardwoods and animals. The water in the *pirizal* was near-stationary and shallow, and dried out entirely in summer, yet residents called this and other such landscape features lakes (*lagos*).²³ To get to the forest that rimmed the densely-vegetated, swampy, seasonal lake beyond the headwaters of the Rio Guariba, hunters would have to push and drag their canoes the whole day long. And that would be unladen. On the way back several days later—if everything went according to plan—they would have salted meat strapped to their backs, or be carting sacks of seeds or fruit. The forest, productive and desired, was a largely non-functional source of value.

Raimundo Viega was proactive and thoroughly instrumental in the face of this dilemma. He organized the men of Guariba into teams. He handed round cane-liquor, gave his orders, and, in the most elaborate accounts, he climbed a large tree to supervise the work.

Benedito Macedo and the other men broke through the waterfall. On the far side they were faced with densely packed barriers of *aninga* and *pirí*. Slowly, with axes, hoes, and machetes, they dug out a narrow channel, maybe four to six feet wide, all the time enduring insects and the threat of larger animals. And, from his vantage point high above the flat landscape, Raimundo Viega kept them on track for the forest in the distance.

For close to ten years the digging in Guariba continued during the lean, dry summer months. Once the headwaters had been breached and the lago had been opened, the huge volumes of water that enter the northern channel of the Amazon estuary with the twice-daily tides rapidly swept soil and vegetation out into the main river—into what people here, in recognition of its vastness, call the “*rio-mar*” (the “river-sea”). Without a definable watershed and surrounded by land too flat for a drainage area, the Rio Guariba functions as a long, narrow inlet, repeatedly washed by the erosive tidal action of the Amazon. With the barrier of the waterfall removed and a channel opened into the low-lying campo, the flood of the Amazon poured into the upstream basin, excavating and widening

22. Pires and Prance 1985: 142-43 consider the *pirizal* endemic to Amapá and Marajó.

23. Such a term seems to embody processual imaginaries: a past in which the area closely vegetated was once open water and a future in which it becomes the expansive “lake.” I owe this insight to Daniel Zarin who first pointed out the history instantiated in the term “lago.”

the main channel. Today, people recline softly on their front porches overlooking the water and watch as fallen trees, large sections of riverbank, and islands of grass flow evenly out to sea on the tide.

Transport to the upstream forest soon became possible not only by canoe, but also by sail- and motor-boat. And it was then that the residents of Guariba, independently of Viegá, and often without his knowledge, began to cut their own routes. They formed communal work-teams and they maintained the openings by taking his buffalo and driving them repeatedly through the new gullies. This, two of the Macedo brothers who had done much of the digging told me, was the only reason they consented to Viegá's punitive project in the first place. They had known where they wanted to go from the outset, they claimed. While women worked downstream—fishing, collecting forest products, managing children—men camped in the upstream forest, cleared fields on good quality land, dug out more and more canals into the forest for themselves and their neighbors, and created the gendered expeditionary spaces which I am describing.²⁴

The landscape within which these activities took place was radically transformed. The narrow mouth of the river now gapes open 600 yards where it meets the Amazon and can capsize motor-boats on a windy day; the swampy pirizal has become a sweeping expanse of water nearly a mile wide (see Figure 1); the closed upstream forest is now threaded with a tracery of creeks, streams, and broad channels (see Figure 2).

Some of this transformation can be appreciated by comparing Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 is an aerial photograph made by the *Companhia de Pesquisa de Recursos Minerais*, the Brazilian parastatal mining enterprise based in Rio de Janeiro, and is the earliest available for this area. It was taken as part of a geological survey of the eastern Amazon in 1976, well after work had first begun in Guariba, and shows both Igarapé Guariba (the upper river) and the Rio Preto. As with all such representations, we need to translate the synchronic into the processual: if we could view images from the 1960s, I imagine that the river would be barely visible. Even here, the Rio Guariba is quite narrow and the area upstream where the river fragments into small channels is poorly-defined. Figure 4 is a composite Landsat TM image on the same scale taken in 1991.²⁵ Not only is the expansion of the river quite clearly apparent, but the upstream area is now thoroughly remade.

As the three stories I have re-told in this section suggest, places come into being through praxis. In the legitimate concern with discursive practice, we need to resist the tendency to elide the materiality of the concrete transformations that people actively undertake, and remember to pay attention to fathoming events at the juncture of ideas and practices. Discourses of place and nature in Guariba are grounded, quite literally. Residents of Guariba actually did these things: place, nature, and locality were transformed—invented, even—through physical, corporeal action.

24. For accounts of similar genderings of landscape spaces through the division of labor into that based around the home and that based on expeditionary travel, see Fortmann 1996 and Pigg 1992.

25. These images are directly comparable. Seasonal variation has been eliminated by using images from the same months of different years (October/November). Diurnal tidal variation has been controlled for by the reading of exposed mud-flats as water (Daniel Zarin, personal communication). For a comprehensive analysis of images from this region see Pereira 1998.



Figure 1. The “*lago*,” Igarapé Guariba, 1996. Long-term adult residents remember this broad and often choppy “lake” as swampy grassland.



Figure 2. The view from Tomé’s retreat at low tide, 1996. This is part of the “*centro*.” The forest is behind the frame.



Figure 3. Aerial photograph, 1976. This image, one of a series of the region taken by CPRM, the Brazilian federal mining research body, was made well after engineering work had begun on the Rio Guariba (the upper river).

Yet, in moving to recover praxis, we need to recognize that the cutting of channels was also more than this. It rested on old understandings of what nature is and it created new ones. It drew energy from political economic and cultural projects that tied Guariba into temporarily coherent transnational commodity circuits and it reinvigorated embedded networks of short-distance trade. It relied on a shared story of a nature in Igarapé Guariba that began impossibly wild but could be made to surrender its abundance. And, in enabling a present that relies for legitimation on constructions of the past and projections of the future, a discursively and physically plastic local nature became subject to co-optation and incorporation into the mobile narratives of contemporary politics.

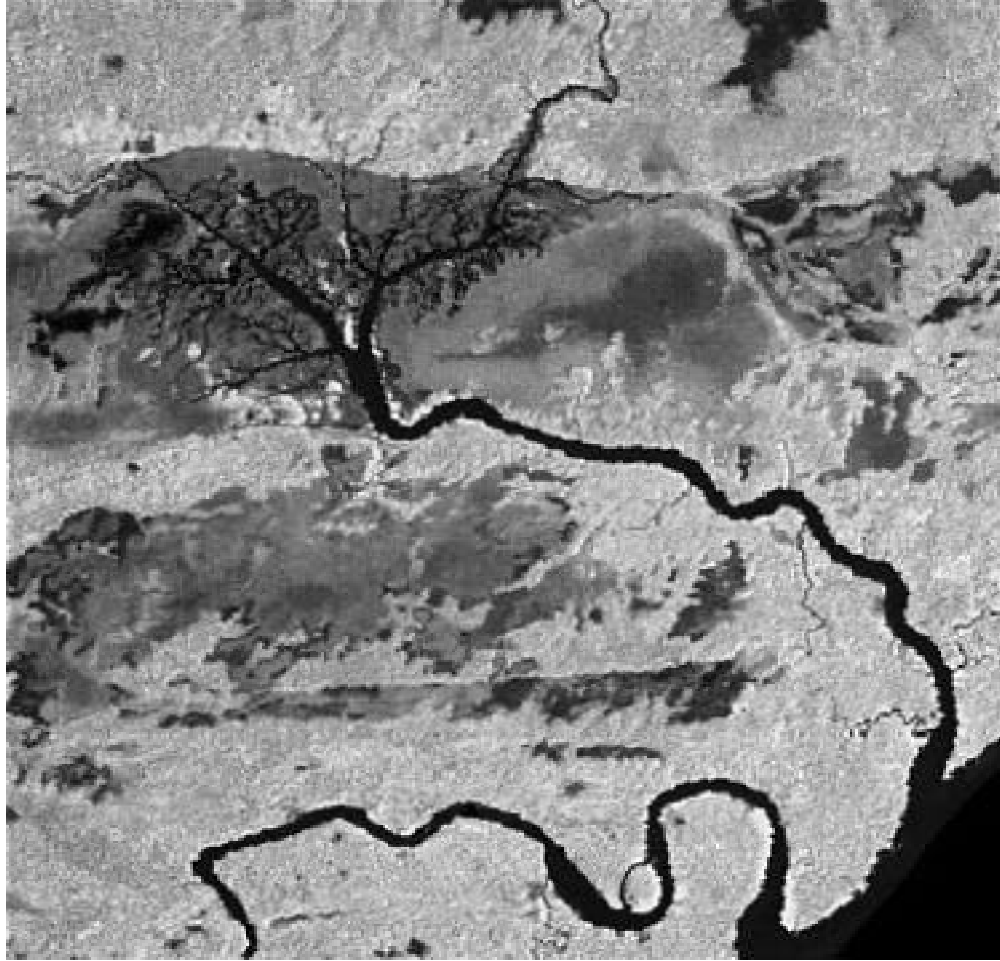


Figure 4. Composite LandSat TM image, 1991. This satellite image is to the same scale as Figure 3. Note the comparative width of the Rio Guariba (the upper river), and the proliferation of stream channels in the upstream area on the upper left of the image.

THE CABOCLO

During the course of twenty-five careful years, Benedito and Nazaré Macedo and their family succeeded in displacing the Viegas, strategizing to exploit the spaces implicit in their personalist regime, discovering pathways between subjection and subversion.

The upstream area in Figure 4 that shows such proliferation of stream channels is a critical location in this part of the story. It was this area—now known as “*o centro*”²⁶—that was to become the focus of the engineering activity I am describing. The purpose of Raimundo Viega’s project was to link this region with Macapá and Belém, via both the downstream Guariba community and the Rio Preto. Nestor Viega says that this activity was driven by his father’s need to get buffalo to the slaughterhouses in Macapá in good condition. Raimundo’s widow and daughter are less instrumental: It was his “curiosity to see what was there” that drove him on, they insist.²⁷ It was to get bananas to Macapá, says his grandson Miguelinho. Old Dona Terezinha on the anthropogenic igarapé that links the centro with the Rio Preto, standing there in rags, gripping my arm, by herself now that her husband’s run off again, remembers something else: He did it to carry his family in style by motorboat from the sawmill to the road they were building from Macapá that passed by the Rio Preto. No, states Benedito Macedo matter-of-factly, he did it to get the timber.

Viega knew the commercial potential of this good quality land for bananas, corn, water-melon, and the marrow-like *maxixe*, and he understood the value of the forest resources that visiting hunters had reported. Viega’s fregueses were similarly informed, and participated in the same project, recognizing the same potential. Yet, critically, many denied the legitimacy of his claims to governance, and used their occupation of these upstream lands as the source of income that enabled them to free themselves of the burden of debt, and as a basis for their subsequent successful land-claim that pushed the patrão off the river.²⁸

Viega should have been prepared. José Macedo, Benedito’s son, had accumulated considerable expertise in years as a traveling representative of the *Comunidades de Base*, the Catholic community organizations that preceded the Rural Workers’ Unions in Amapá.²⁹ And he was not alone. Igarapé

26. “O centro” translates literally as “the center,” but Jacob (1985: 43) pins down its meaning in the present context: “The heart of the forest. A place remote from settlement. (*Ámago da mata. Lugar afastado da povoação*).” There is room here for revelatory interpretative analysis of comparative notions of “centrality.”

27. “I think it was a curiosity to see what was there (*curiosidade de ver*),” Dona Lene told me. “In those days you didn’t have airplanes. He thought that the way to see further would be to open a stream and go have a look.” “Yes, it really was curiosity,” joined in Dona Rita, “without studying or anything...real curiosity.”

28. I am reminded of Scott’s (1990) metaphor of the “hidden transcript” of the discourse of resistance when thinking about these events. Did Viega’s inability to “read” through the disarming public discourse of acquiescence turn out to be a fatal limitation, bestowing on his apparently dedicated clients the strategic advantage and cover of surprise? For alternative interpretive possibilities, see Mitchell’s (1990) important critique of notions of the sovereign self and autonomous (power-free) space.

29. On the role of traveling leaders in constituting rural communities, see Tsing 1993: 72-76. On the *Comunidades de Base* and church politics during this period, see Mainwaring 1986, and, for an interesting sociological case-study from the Amazon, see Bruneau 1986.

Guariba had produced a generation of sophisticated political operators, including Martinho the Goat, who had learned the mechanics of the Viegas' operation from the inside—as the teenage clerk in the store and receiver at the warehouse—before studying populist Marxism and refashioning himself as feudal landlordism's relentless nemesis.

The Macedos dug channels. And while Viegas mapped out a route for the Rio Preto, they headed for the centro, pushing their way towards the shiny crops they envisioned growing in the mata virgem (see Figure 5).

There was no inherent conflict in these coinciding projects. One hand was still washing the other, and, for a while at least, both were washing the same face. Better land effectively meant higher rents, as more produce entered the warehouse and more goods left the store. But the Macedos knew something Viegas did not know they knew, and may perhaps not even have known himself. Through their political contacts in Macapá, José Macedo and Martinho the Goat had accessed the landlord's files at the *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* (INCRA), the federal land reform agency, investigated his holdings and confirmed their suspicion that he was exaggerating his claim.

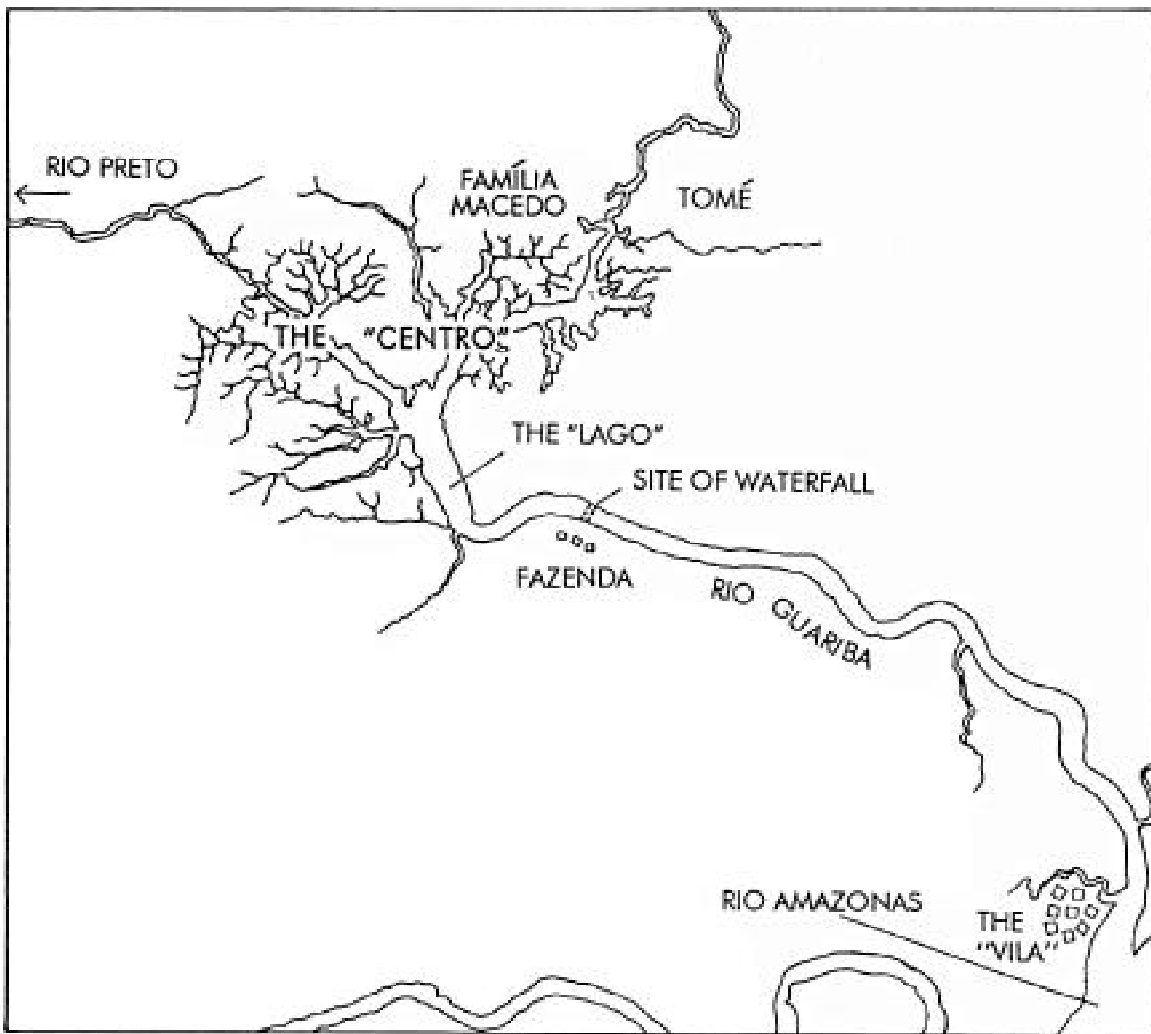


Figure 5. Igarapé Guariba showing sites described in the text; map drawn from Figure 4. The “vila” was where the sawmill, store, warehouse, and workers’ houses were located.

The *título definitivo* (outright title) Viega had bought in the deal that gave him the Rio Preto and Igarapé Guariba extended only twenty two hundred meters from the confluence of the Rio Guariba and the Amazon, nowhere near the land upstream towards which the canal-diggers were steadily heading. And, what was more, in an affirmation of the concrete significance of abstract argument about invisibility and anthropogenesis, this upstream land had the legal status of unoccupied land, open to petition from the state as *terra requerida* (petitioned, petitionable land).³⁰

It seems that for some time no-one in Guariba breathed a word to the patrão. In June 1969, one of the original fregueses, Seu Tomé announced that he was petitioning INCRA for a large parcel of land, a forest island upstream on which he had built a simple work-post. Viega reacted angrily, dismissing Tomé, asserting his own right to land that he had legally and honorably purchased whether he had written title or not. Tomé went straight to Macapá and stayed until he had extracted the requisite documents from INCRA. He returned to Guariba. Raimundo again dismissed him, this time giving him written notice to remove himself and his pigs from the property within sixty days. Tomé left again, but soon returned with INCRA personnel. Viega backed down. Miguelinho, Raimundos' grandson, ended this dramatic narrative on a sour note: "This is our land, this land of [Tomé's]. It was land that we bought. There was nothing *requerida* about it." Nestor Viega, in a commentary on the long unraveling that begins with Tomé and that reads like a threat, but which was delivered with a resigned bitterness, told me—and I am sure he is right—that in the south of Pará they would have settled this business by killing the whole lot of them: "But the Viega family are not that kind of people."³¹

Within a few years, Viega had lost control of most of the area upstream. Following Tomé's success and the absence of violent repercussions, Benedito Macedo filed for title, multiplying his holdings by claiming in the names of his sons. The other families also petitioned, but for those who approached INCRA after the Macedos, pickings were slim.

When I was first told about these events, I assumed they represented a radical shift of power in Igarapé Guariba. Yet things continued much as before. Although they had land, the fregueses continued to treat the store and warehouse as their principal commercial *entrepôt*. Chico Viega continued to police the river, inhibiting all the outside trade he could. The families continued to live downstream near the store, on his father's land. And the bonds between the patrão and his fregueses appeared to deepen. When this upstream land produced bumper crops of water-melon and bananas too large for his transport capacity, Viega brokered deals for them with other merchants. And he did something else: he advanced Tomé the money to buy the motor for a boat.

As Martinho the Goat informed me when I expressed surprise, there was nothing unusual about enforcing indebtedness. It took Tomé twelve years to pay off the money, and, in the meantime, he continued to sell through his patrão. His boat, on which Viega was earning rent, became an addition to the landlord's fleet at a time when he needed extra capacity. It was clear that transport in itself was

30. In a protracted if often surprisingly straightforward (at least in Amapá) process, title to *terra requerida*, is available by demonstrating to INCRA that the area in question is currently unused or uninhabited. *Terra requerida* can not normally be sold as the definitive title remains with the state. It can, however, be inherited.

31. For a graphic account of land violence in the south of Pará during this period, see Branford and Glock 1985.

not the key to political-economic authority. Although a transport monopoly—never entirely complete in any case, given the professionalism of the river-trader—was a powerful technology, it could be surrendered with no immediate loss of hegemony. What was critical was the use to which a boat was put.

Viega still had his eye on upstream timber. He had access, but he no longer had the land. The wood he wanted was a tall grove of *andiroba* on the Macedos' new property. Raimundo and Benedito talked. They had an intimacy that came from thirty years of association. Viega bargained, Macedo balked. Viega offered a good price, Macedo rejected it. The patrão asked him what he wanted. Without hesitation, Benedito replied: a river-boat.

Viega advanced the money at low interest. Benedito and his family cut the trees and carried the wood and boatload after boatload of bananas direct to Macapá. Within two months they had cleared the debt, and started to buy produce from their neighbors. This, then, was the formal collapse of monopsony. I had to ask Nestor about it:

Hugh: So what happened between you and the Macedos?

Nestor: What happened was that they...well, today...they're there. It's their land isn't it?

Hugh: So they buy from the community then?

Nestor: That's right. It looks to you like the community's not going anywhere, *né?* You think that society doesn't grow with this type of business? I know what you want to say: you think this is all just a vicious circle. Am I right?

Hugh: No, not really. Look, so far as I can tell...it's hard to explain...It looks to me like the Macedo family has more or less occupied...

Nestor: ...the space the Viegas used to occupy! But that's it exactly!

There is endless fascination in this lingering tale of justice and betrayal, this story of social transformation woven through narratives of the transformation of nature. The physical and imaginative remaking of nature has been central to the reinscription of locality in the context of the sociological and discursive reinvention of Igarapé Guariba. This new Igarapé Guariba that was brought into being through the machination of political intrigue and the rhetoric of resistance relied on a transformed nature both materially, by underwriting the struggle for political control with the cash crops that paid off debt, and discursively, as the battlefield on which was played out an historic drama of liberation. As Igarapé Guariba gradually re-emerged in the form of a juridically-secured "community," the web of translocal relationships within which it had traveled through the person of Raimundo Viega have been largely thrown off by the family of Benedito and Nazaré Macedo. Instead of the middle-class social clubs mined by Viega, Igarapé Guariba circulates now through the offices of the Rural Workers' Union and across the desks of land reform bureaucrats at INCRA. Instead of residents carrying their forest products to exchange in Viega's family store, the Macedo family distributes them along reconfigured clientelist networks in Macapá. Igarapé Guariba, then, has in certain ways become an entirely different place, requiring a different order of local self-consciousness, and, at the same time, another locality, situated in and constituted through a different set of translocal cultural and political economies.

Nevertheless, what I—and the Viega and Macedo families—all construct as the new Igarapé Guariba is no less differentiated than the old version. And, what is more, it is a place in which, retaining an affective link with the old patrão, the dominant emotional register for more than a few is not progressivism, but nostalgia.

PROLIFERATING LOCALITY

Place-making in Igarapé Guariba still relies on the hard work of nature-making. This is not just because nature, in its biophysicality, is never in stasis, although it does have something to do with the way this forces a constant reinvestment and reinvention of labor, debate, and knowledge. Nature, also, becomes a vibrant actor in the contemporary politics of place-making and the ongoing struggle to mark and claim Guariba. As different claims on nature proliferate, so different Guaribas come into view. As individuals travel with their stories, narrating this placed nature and its associated histories, so these proliferations spread, becoming mobilized simultaneously in different contexts and with disparate meanings. This is perhaps what Rodman might have been pushing for with “multilocality.” Let me return briefly to Raimundo Viegas.

I described Viegas as a well-known businessman from Macapá. But we can think more carefully about what that may have meant. Before he bought the land from Miranda, Viegas, then a young man, had set up a rice-processing plant at Forteleza, close to the port of Santana. He had some luck, because just as the business was failing, huge manganese deposits were discovered inland and the state stepped in, expropriated his land, and paid compensation.³² He spent part of the money buying this no-man’s-land in Igarapé Guariba, provisioning his store, and setting up the sawmill. And he used part to build a three-story house on the main street of Macapá.³³ He inserted himself in an emergent local society that sensed the winds of opportunity blowing through the region as the military government launched its campaign to open up the Amazon, and foreign capital, through companies like BRUMASA, once more began reaching into the interior. He sent his sons away to college to come back as doctors and lawyers and to run for political office. And he found a place for himself amongst a sympathetic group of nonconforming, hard-drinking, self-consciously-Amazonian middle-class men: a group who have since started a social club they call the *Fraternidade dos Maraunis*—the Brotherhood of the Marauni, after the once-powerful indigenous occupants of the area.³⁴ Aside from drinking and gossip, their energies go into the recovery and promotion of what they identify as local culture and folklore.

Nestor Viegas socializes with the Brotherhood, and so does Edinaldo Gomes, the journalist who took Viegas out of the forest and into his newspaper column. Apart from a short stint as a political aide to the conservative Governor Annibal Barcellos in the early 1980s, Gomes’ career has been based on writing rural life. He constructs the countryside for his urban readers through a rhetoric of stunning immediacy that resonates with authenticity. He treats his audience to first-hand accounts of his adventures in the interior, stealing across borders with clandestine migrants, hunting crocodiles and jaguar by flashlight—etching finely-drawn encounters with ribeirinhos that emphasize their cautious wisdom and wily quirkiness.

32. On industrial mining in Amapá, see Mattoso and Fleischfresser 1994.

33. Although in order to pay for Igarapé Guariba, it appears that Viegas had to liquidate the capital held in at least one of the Afuá properties. According to gossip in Igarapé Guariba, Viegas spent the same amount of money buying Igarapé Guariba (and the land on the neighboring Rio Preto) as he did building his house in Macapá.

34. I have disguised this name. Ethnohistorical accounts of pre-European populations of Amapá can be found in Harcourt 1928. Also see Meggers and Evans 1957: 567, and Gillin 1948: 817.

When Gomes talks about Igarapé Guariba, he vividly recalls the day sometime in the early 1970s when he traveled there with a different Governor to inaugurate the new school Viega had built. Residents of Guariba still remember the unexpected sight of the politician's plane touching down at the mouth of the river. Gomes describes a thriving and grateful community and a table groaning under the weight of rural delicacies—*paca, tracajá, açaí, tambaqui, maniçoba, tacacá, bolo de macaxeira*—delicious foods that signify a plentiful Amazonian Arcadia.³⁵ In Gomes' stories of Raimundo Viega and in the evocative black-and-white photos he brings out to support them, we meet an Igarapé Guariba thoroughly located in regional political and social networks: an affluent, modern community, a center in the area, with electric light flowing from an oil-fired generator, a medical post, a new school, and the largest and best-stocked store on any of the proximate rivers.

For Gomes, as for the surviving members of Viega's family, such moments stand at the pivot of a history of subsequent decline that we can think of as the un-making of locality.³⁶ Indeed, the same can be said of those residents of Igarapé Guariba who now find themselves hemmed in by the new (albeit leakier) Macedo monopsony—a regime made even more irksome by the absence of glamour in a leadership possessing none of the aura that comes from ownership of a big house in Macapá and children in the professional class.³⁷

The old-time Igarapé Guariba evoked by Edinaldo Gomes, the surviving family of Raimundo Viega, and these dissident residents, felt secure as a place and as an embedded locality. While still not inscribed in publicly-available maps, it had traveled through the mobile bodies of the Viega family to the highest offices in the territorial administration. It was tied into the types of social patronage networks that form the only guarantee of public sector credit in the region, and that can gain the ribeirinho a not-too-hostile hearing behind the doors of a government ministry. It was linked into well-connected drinking clubs and cultural events. It figured, albeit peripherally, on the cognitive maps that mattered.

Yet, to someone like Octávio da Gama, the ex-logger who positions himself transregionally, never part of the interior and having somehow transcended Amazonian society, such networks were never more than chronically provincial. Raimundo Viega, to Octávio, was never more than an índio. And, by pointing to what he sees as the corrupting parochialism of Amazonian society, Octávio reminds us that locality is constructed through a hierarchy of retreating communities—Igarapé Guariba, (the backwoods of) Amapá, (which is a byword for backwardness in) Brazil, (which is in a Third World part of) the world. Each of these representations is more remote than the one before,

35. Of course, the symbolic value of some of these foods has only appreciated since bans on their trade and urban consumption were imposed by the federal state through the environmental agency IBAMA, the *Instituto Brasileiro de Recursos Naturais Renováveis e de Meio Ambiente*.

36. And also, as I have suggested, in the language of a parallel conversation, as the erasure of globalized space.

37. Here I am using "glamour" as a gloss on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capital (e.g. Bourdieu 1977: 171-197). In their account of the failure of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT/Workers Party) to capture the Brazilian Presidency in the 1989 national elections, Sader and Silverstein (1991) suggest that Lula's unwillingness to embody such cultural resources—his strategic self-presentation as a self-consciously working-class figure—lost him critical support among an urban and rural poor accustomed to clientelist political modes. For a far richer ethnographic discussion of the Brazilian political process in these terms, see Linger 1993.

and identity within any one of them emerges through mobile emplacement at particular points in this series of ever-widening concentric circles.

The production of locality in Igarapé Guariba, then, can also be understood as a production of modernity—at a time when Amazonia’s status in the national imagination was of a fearfully backward region destined only to be dragged (kicking and screaming, índios and all) into the time-space of the modern world, and in which the key to modernity was integration in the nation-state.³⁸ Amazonia’s backwardness was signified by the indistinguishable wildness of its nature and of its Indians. And, as Octávio points out, anybody who lived there was an índio.

For Octávio, Igarapé Guariba never approached either modernity or effective locality. For the survivors of Raimundo Viegá, for Edinaldo Gomes, and for a number of its residents, Igarapé Guariba passed through a sparkling moment of possibility, only to revert temporally and spatially to a shadow of a remote hinterland.³⁹ For these people, the nature brought into being during this brief experience of modernity is even today highly problematic. Gomes, the urban journalist, for example, ascribes the changes in the landscape to a series of violent tidal episodes that, he insists, nearly wiped out the community, but which no-one living in Guariba at the time now considers of any significance. Dona Rita, Raimundo’s widow—elderly, dressed permanently in night-clothes and thick, dark eye-glasses, living upstairs in her bedroom in Macapá as if in exile—also downplays the importance of human intervention in the changes to the land. Protective of her husband’s memory, sensitive to international environmental discourse, she imagines a foreigner’s reading of landscape reorganization on such a scale as brutally destructive of the wonder that is Amazonian nature.⁴⁰ When her daughter Lene tells me that “most of that destruction in Guariba wasn’t done by people, it was done by nature itself,” Dona Rita agrees: “It was only pirizal there,” she says, “no-one cut any *trees* down.” Her son Nestor, flirting good-naturedly with the weary prostitutes over a drink in the town square, has a slightly different explanation: there was only one channel cut on his father’s orders, the one that links Igarapé Guariba to the Rio Preto. The others were the work of the “tremendously destructive” buffalo. Orlando, another son—in an interview just after he lost his job as the resident doctor at the land reform agency—concur: “If it did happen, it was those caboclos who did it,” he complains, going on to remind me of the hundred head of buffalo mysteriously spirited off his ranch alongside the lago.

To today’s disgruntled residents of Igarapé Guariba who work to circumvent the Macedo family’s economic reach through tying themselves to new patrões in Macapá, who remember Viegá’s

38. I invoke “time-space” with reference to David Harvey’s exploration of the experience of space and time under post-Fordist regimes of accumulation (Harvey 1989: esp. 201ff, also Massey 1994).

39. And this intimation of Amazonian impermanence echoes David Cleary’s (1993) important analysis of the instabilities of regional political economy—work which stands as a powerful critique of the conventional use of the frontier metaphor in the Amazonianist literature.

40. There is a growing literature on the impact of transnational environmental discourse on Amazonian politics. Much of this focuses on the ambivalence of co-optation: the complications that ensue from the attempt—often highly sophisticated—of indigenous groups to (counter-)appropriate discursive space created by narratives of deforestation. For recent discussions, see Conklin and Graham 1995, Conklin 1997, Veber 1998, and Turner 1999. Discussions of these issues in relation to ribeirinho actors are much rarer. For an intervention that focuses on the perceived attempts of US environmentalists to reconfigure Amazonian class politics in environmental terms, see Hecht and Cockburn 1989b.

community as a bustling, vibrant center, and who now characterize the place as a “cemetery,”⁴¹ nature is unappeasable. The chain of ecological effects set in motion in the name of progress is causing houses to fall in the river, fields to turn to swamps, fruit trees to sink into muddy banks, and fish to pick up and move to other rivers.⁴² Nature is complicit in an ongoing tale of decline, and its recalcitrance is grist to the millstone of political intrigue.

Yet, for those people I have identified as contemporary leaders, the transforming of the land is a foundational epic. As if viewing their critics’ history in negative, for them Igarapé Guariba is even now emerging from the darkness of “slavery” to make a place in the light of a modern future. These leaders’ project is to transform past structures of locality through the wrestling of this place onto alternative routes among the networks that tie the retreating circles of interpenetrating localities one to another. They want to position Guariba in a forward-looking Amapá, and move through the resources of Amapá to Brazil the nation-state. And they intend to connect via Brazil to the world. From the union office in Macapá they can short-circuit these stages and link by e-mail direct to NGO and academic contacts in the United States and Europe. Through alternative political patrons they can negotiate to reconstruct the electricity grid and health post that collapsed after Viega’s departure. Through union-brokered talks in Santana they can strike deals with the new palm-fruit cooperative that is large enough to take all the produce they can ship from Guariba, and promises to send their fruit to Rio, São Paulo, even Japan, side-stepping the seasonal bottlenecks and sharp practice at the quayside in Macapá.

So, while for some of its interlocuters Igarapé Guariba is a place that has fallen out of locality, for others, it is, for the first time, beginning to locate itself. Whereas for some, Igarapé Guariba surrendered its ties to the modern world when it broke with Viega, for others, it is only through self-location that it can enter within the compass of modernity. Whilst at first blush the material contours of modernity may appear strikingly similar in both narratives—health, education, transport, electricity, tv, refrigerators—for the Macedo family there is also this existential component: modernity and locality (both) are embodied self-determination, underwritten and secured by the transformation of wild nature.

As I have suggested, though, the locality of Igarapé Guariba is both too shared and too contested to be so easily appropriated. The complication for the Macedo family is that the new, remade nature of Igarapé Guariba, though dramatic, inspirational, and, arguably, utilitarian, was fundamentally vitiated at the moment of its coming-into-being. And it seems impossible for its inheritors to construct the foundational story of its transformation as one of renewal. Even when Benedito

41. Other words applied in this context are *acabado* (finished) and *parado* (stopped), definitive comments on local “development.”

42. And it is likely that an aggregate longitudinal analysis of ecological change in the area would support their claims—some of which are at least partly echoed by Macedo loyalists. There can be little doubt that the long-term hydrological effects of stream-cutting have resulted in a net loss of available cultivable area and other key resources both upstream and downstream in Igarapé Guariba. Yet the notion of *access* is key to local understandings of the changing landscape, and an analysis in aggregate terms overlooks intra-Guariba relations of power, assuming an idealized “community” in which resources and incomes are equitably partitioned. In contrast, the analysis presented here emphasizes the historical and power-laden processes of allocation through which present-day social relations are constituted and reconfigured (this type of argument has now been effectively staked out by political ecologists, see, for example, Peluso 1992, 1996).

Macedo tells me that he didn't take "one *centavo*" in payment from old Raimundo Viega for the work of digging canals, he says it with the uncertain vehemence of one who knows the power in blind Dona Rita's bitter charge of "*sacanagem*" (betrayal, back-stabbing). Such are the wages of slave-holding, Seu Benedito might well say. But even this would not disguise the fact of collaboration and the problem of authorship: the pervasive sense that even now, fifteen years after he died, this landscape and the locality it embodies belong as much to Viega, the pioneer, as they ever will to Macedo; that in the very whirlpool of their origin, place and nature were marked by collaboration, dissent, and deceit.

THE MAJESTIC AMAZON

This essay has grown slowly out of my troubling meeting with Octávio da Gama that summer afternoon three years ago in Macapá. Even though he did not know about the remaking of nature in Igarapé Guariba, Octávio would not have cared anyway. He saw Guariba as already on a one-way slide into the estuary mudflats. It was the cynicism in Octávio's erasure of locality that pushed me to think about what it was that made Guariba into Guariba, and what that state of "being Guariba" actually meant. Almost immediately, I became alert to the considerable complexity of the Igarapé Guariba evoked by those who did know it. Part of this complexity arose because people were not simply constituting Guariba through such stories. They were also constituting and locating themselves, and negotiating the tension between the shared-ness of locality and its fragmentation in the face of the competing political projects of which it is both subject and outcome.

Such stories of Igarapé Guariba point to the discursive proliferation that occurs within the narration of locality. As place becomes configured in narration, not only multiple places, but multiple natures come into view and become implicated in claim and counter-claim. Octávio's tale of BRUMASA, for example, describes the production of locality as the technology of extraction passes through the estuary. Yet, in the pursuit of coherence, his narrative is forced to deny (both the possible pre-existence and) the persistence of rural society. Indeed, such a recognition would require an unacceptable admission of ribeirinho agency. Nature is subject only to the Company in Octávio's telling. Successful intervention both defines and is predicated on a certain level of personhood that he expresses in strict racial-hierarchical terms.

Is this an assumption shared by Edinaldo Gomes—advocate for the legitimacy and integrity of rural culture, and connoisseur of all things caboco—who studies the map of Amapá on the wall of his study in Macapá, shakes his head, and points out where the *pororoca*, a seasonal tidal phenomenon, attacks the coastline and causes rivers to change course?⁴³ My suggestion of local interventions produces agitation, irritability, and a discourse on the power of the Amazon—"O Amazonas majestoso" ("the majestic Amazon") as a friend of mine murmurs with awe and pride every time we turn the corner at the top of the hill in Macapá and see its sluggish brown mass filling the view to the horizon. For Edinaldo, at least, there is a thoroughgoing autonomy inhering in nature that transcends any petty class determinations of subject-formation.

A few days later and a couple of miles across town, when I raise the same issue with Dona Rita and her daughter Lene in the presence of their two elderly family servants, there is a similarly uneasy response. Dona Rita loved Guariba with that same intense carinho she describes in her dead husband. And, even though it is more than ten years since she visited, that affective link is simultaneously a territorial claim and a mark of the injustice of her exile. It is the natural beauty, the wildlife, the river, that she recalls most vividly. Dona Rita is willing to acknowledge fluvial manipulation but she is also keen to establish its limited character. She too talks about tides and the *pororoca*. But her language is more guarded: Nature is prepared to undergo all kinds of alterations by all kinds of people, and, yes, I have seen the drastic changes. But this is no way to think about my husband and what he built in Guariba.

43. Alfred Russel Wallace's dramatic description and careful explanation (with visual support) of the *pororoca* has still not been superseded (Wallace 1911: 89-90).

Reading locality through narratives of nature and person, tracing its imbrication in the multiple practices of place-making, searching for “local relations” through which to draw understanding out of lived immediacies: these strategies help us recover a sense of the complex and unpredictable density of locality. They offer a way by which we can situate places in the crosscurrents of traveling practices, whilst avoiding imagining them as haunted by the overdeterminations of a distinct global. And they let us gain an open-endedness, an incompleteness that sites lives in continuing histories, that may ultimately defeat the urge to closure, and help us resist writing the local in the language of obituary.

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