

**VANESSA GROTTI.** *NURTURING THE OTHER: FIRST CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CHRISTIAN BODIES IN AMAZONIA.* NEW YORK: BERGHAHN BOOKS 2022. 212 P. ISBN: 9781800734586

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How to deal with 'alterity' or 'the other' remains an ever-relevant inquiry as we come across strangers in diverse contexts. The persistent tendency of some to view the other as an enemy is a prevalent challenge. Within the Suriname forest, one could encounter the Akuriyo hunter-gatherers, who have been regarded by the Trio living in villages as 'wild and fierce people' and hence 'remote potential enemies' (3). However, the Trio, confronted with these enemies, feel the urge to 'bring them "help" and prayers', or 'to care for them and to nurture them' (3). *Nurturing the Other* encapsulates a profound exploration of 'coming to terms with enemies' (173), which need not involve confrontation or destruction but may entail 'coercion' and 'control' (126). This book can offer us valuable insights into the treatment of the other, especially enemies, in Amazonia and beyond.

The book conveys a clear message, if not a warning, that the (well-intentioned) incorporation of the other is not always positive or commendable. Notably, the communal feasts organised by the Trio, where both relatives and the unrelated (and thus 'potential enemies') are welcomed, shed light on the intricacies of social integration. Sharing manioc beer among other socialising activities is encouraged, and a temporary yet harmonious community composed of both kin and non-kin emerges. Such feasts, from which the 'collective euphoria' arises, are held regularly (59). At the same time, the author draws attention to concerns about these feasts: as the 'host attracts people and feeds them their own processed substances' as a kind of nurture, the former 'reassert[s] a form of control over the attendants', leading to the absence of 'an even and reciprocal socialisation among nonrelatives' (82).

In an even less celebratory tone, regarding everyday life outside celebrations, the author meticulously details how the Trio 'nurture the other', especially the Akuriyo, in their quest to make them 'human' (102). The Trio make contact with the Akuriyo, bring them to the village, and teach them the skills of 'managing a garden, cooking bread and making beer – three essential features of a socialising human' (105). Through Trio's endeavours to transform or even civilise the 'wild people', the author critically reflects on the idea of nurture. She succinctly states, 'domestication (or nurture)' is 'an asymmetric relationship, an asymmetry that shifts according to social contexts and scales, but that remains inherently hierarchical' (5). This relationship necessitates questioning any 'caring and "educational" aspects of exchange' (5-6) that nurture implies. To nurture the other is to assume a superior position and assign the other a subordinate status. In this unequal relationship, the nurturer purports to possess greater knowledge and more resources.

Nurture as real-life experience is not merely unequal but inequitable. The author, not 'considering this simply in terms of political domination', emphasises that the Akuriyo 'cannot be strictly understood as subordinates', as occasionally 'their powerful capabilities come into

their own' (130). The Akuriyo obtain their strength and fierceness – regain control of their bodies – only when the 'wild people' are 'rewilded'. It is difficult not to conceive of the Trio nurture of the Akuriyo as domination. However, in reading the book in its entirety, one gains the impression that the author provides a subtle critique when it comes to the Trio practice of nurture.

At the beginning of the book, the author tells the history of how the indigenous people in Amazonia were contacted and Christianised by missionaries, and that such an ostensibly religious process was considered intertwined with colonisation (14-15). Indeed, in the Trio language, *pananakiri*, which now denotes 'coastal Creole dwellers or distant foreigners', 'was originally used to refer to white-skinned colonisers (plantation owners, missionaries, etc.)' (4-5). Efforts of Christianisation are therefore colonial in nature. Throughout the book, the author juxtaposes foreign missionary works with the 'native' expeditions to the forest and the nurturing of 'wild people' by the Trio and other sedentarised, Christianised Amerindian people.

Furthermore, the book employs terms that bring to mind subjugation and slavery when describing the relationship between the nurturing Trio and the nurtured Akuriyo. This dynamic is characterised as 'mastery' and 'predatory', with the nurturer and the nurtured likened to 'captor' and 'captive' (100-101, 106). Drawing a parallel between 'Akuriyo helpers' and dogs in their respective relations to Trio households, the author highlights the similarities in their functions (e.g., hunting and generating income) and their humble and inferior inhabitation in the periphery of the society, despite the former being recognised as non-tradable humans and the latter as saleable animals (128-129). The distinction, according to the author, lies in the ability to transform into 'thoroughly humans'. The irony is that the Akuriyo are never acknowledged as fully transformed. The Trio logic seems to be that the Akuriyo are in a perpetual state of transformation, requiring constant care from the Trio. I would suggest that the author, with much sympathy and without excessive condemnation, exposes the darker facets of Trio nurturing.

In the end, the book presents an evolved perspective on the Amerindians: they 'no longer appear as the victims of the march of progress, but rather as "real people" who shape the world around them' (166). This conclusion is of course true insofar as the Trio are concerned. They perceive people and things as 'included and implicated in each other' (137), so they distribute 'things' — such as 'public names, woven artifacts, knowledge practices, or memories' — to extend the self and diffuse their influence (164). The Trio's eagerness to appropriate such items, including those belonging to the Akuriyo (141), underscores their agency, the display of which indicates, I think, in certain situations, they are not 'people without history' but people writing history, colonial or ethnocentric. Their (new) agential ways of life and domineering forms of sociality 'not just as receivers of change, but as active seizers of ... opportunities' (173) are introduced to us in *Nurturing the Other*. This book merits attention not only for its empirical findings and theoretical discussions but also for the invitation to promising future studies.

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