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Paranoid Styles of Nationalism after the Cold War

Notes from an Invasion of the Amazon

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Virtual World Wars

In the imaginations of its most paranoid U.S. proponents, the early twenty-first century's "global War on Terror" (GWOT)¹ is a fourth world war.² Yet, despite its many global effects, GWOT has not (thankfully) attained the world-encircling, world-threatening totality that the wars of the twentieth century brought to our planet. Nonetheless, while war in the early twenty-first century does not rage hot everywhere, it does impact politics and political imaginations everywhere. And, unlike in earlier periods of war, images, narratives, and anxieties about global war and its protagonists—particularly, the United States—circulate as they are produced and transformed instantly, globally, and nonhierarchically through the Internet. In this chapter, I examine the spread of the idea—today pervasive in Brazil and circulated through the Internet—that the United States plans a military takeover of the Amazon basin³.

Since the start of GWOT, a long-standing Brazilian anxiety about an invasion of the Amazon has become widespread, migrating, in particular, from right-leaning groups in the military to left-leaning groups outside of it. This anxiety is partially the result of historical and social conditions, including the historical and contemporary projection of U.S. power itself and the enduring importance of the Amazon to Brazilian nationalisms.⁴ But it is also the partially con-

tingent result of the spread of Internet rumor. A series of virtual (and often fraudulent) maps, textbook pages, and other pieces of evidence of an imminent U.S. invasion of the Amazon have circulated widely in Brazil, picking up tokens of authenticity and becoming central to popular nationalisms. During nearly three years of ethnographic research into the conflicts around Brazil's fraught spaceport in Alcântara, on the eastern fringe of the Amazon forest,⁵ I found that this virtual trail of evidence about a planned Amazon invasion shaped many people's understanding of the politics of the spaceport and of the nation⁶—even among people with no access to these documents or to the Internet but who had learned of them through word of mouth.

Finally, I suggest that ethnographers interested in shedding light on “order and violence in the current era,” as this volume's introduction puts it, should be attentive to the social life of U.S. power worldwide. We should address its social and material effects, to be sure, but to understand the world of Pax Americana, we need also to produce fine-grained analyses of the historically and culturally mediated anxieties and fantasies that emerge in the face of U.S. power's danger, ubiquity, and opacity.

Invasions of the Amazon

In light of this discussion of ubiquity and opacity, consider an article from the June 2002 *Week in Review Section* of the *Sunday New York Times*. Reading it, one might forget that there is any power at all operating behind the scenes in international relations:

Put reason aside, for a moment, and imagine this: American students are taught that the Amazon should be taken away from Brazil and made into an “international reserve” under United Nations administration. United States Army Special Forces are training in Florida to seize control of that zone once it is established. And, to accelerate the process, Harvard University advocates the immediate dismemberment of Brazil. All of this, of course, is pure imagination. The Brazilian Imagination. (Rohter 2002, 4)

Yet, the imaginaries that animate U.S.-Brazilian relations and Brazilian rumors of the foreign takeover of the Amazon are neither “pure” nor exclusively “Brazilian.” They are informed by a complex history.

Accusations of foreign sabotage, espionage, piracy, and imperialism in the Amazon are not new. Taking up some 60 percent of Brazil's contemporary landmass and sparsely populated, the region and its people have never been under the confident control of metropolitan elites. In 1689, for example,

Samuel Fritz, a Jesuit born in Bohemia, was forbidden from returning to the Yurimagua village where he had set up a mission. He was suspected of espionage, and the Portuguese crown was concerned about its control over the upper Solimões. Finally, after eighteen months of waiting, the crown granted permission for Fritz's return to the forest, but only if accompanied by Portuguese troops who would see to the crown's territorial claims (Wright and Cunha 2000, 352; see also Hemming 1978, 437–8).

This fear of the vulnerability of the empire's Amazonian borders and of the alterity of its inhabitants motivated a series of eighteenth-century initiatives by the Portuguese crown to transform the region's inhabitants. The abolition of indigenous slavery in 1755,⁷ the transformation of religious villages into towns with civil administration, and the encouragement of intermarriage between whites and Amerindians were attempts to secure and to create Portuguese subjects in the forest and thereby to help secure the borders against potential foreign invasion (Fausto 1999, 57).

The idea that Brazil must take measures to prevent foreigners from working with indigenous peoples in order to prevent the erosion of sovereignty in the Amazon resonates closely with concerns of many contemporary nationalists (see Faria 2007). Many of the documents that have circulated on the Internet, producing a storm of anxiety in Brazil about the Amazon's sovereignty, have their origin on a Web site entitled "*Brasil, ame-o ou deixe-o: Uma velha frase, uma nova necessidade*" [Brazil, Love It or Leave It: An Old Phrase, a New Necessity].⁸ The site, which has not been updated since June 10, 2000, prior to the start of GWOT, is run principally by retired military officers from the *Clube Militar* ('Military Club') in Rio de Janeiro (Sedrez 2000a, 29). The many articles on the site are concerned primarily with a perceived foreign assault on Brazilian sovereignty through the internationalization and invasion of the Amazon (moved along by a supposedly antinational alliance between foreign nongovernmental organizations and Brazilian indigenous peoples); the foreign acquisition of Brazilian industrial firms (particularly in military industries); and the undermining of Brazil's armed forces.

One document on the Web site, cited often in contemporary allegations of U.S. designs on the Amazon, is a supposed map drawn up by naval captain Mathew Fawry in 1817.⁹ Labeled "Most-Secret," the map is entitled, in the clumsy English that characterizes many of these documents, "desestabilization of the colony of Brazil"—an invented cognate of the Portuguese *desestabilização*. Although circulated as supposedly authentic, the map is actually from a 1994 novel, by Brazilian author Fernando G. Sampaio (*O Dia em que Napoleão Fugiu de Santa Helena* [The day that Napoleon escaped from St. Helena]), a speculative historical novel rich with international conspiracies,

in which Napoleon escapes from exile in St. Helena to Brazil in a submarine built by Robert Fulton. To a native speaker of English, the map's fraudulent character is immediately obvious, with its frequent misspellings of English words—referring to “mape” rather than “map,” for example, and picturing the “Soveiragny State of Amazon.”

In spite of its recent origin as fiction, the map is widely circulated and cited as though it were a historical document, and it conveys a kind of conceptual map of nationalist anxieties about the Amazon. The map breaks up South America into a series of parcels, some marked “sovereign” and others, “colonies.” Much of Spanish America is as one might see it on a contemporary map. Nonetheless, Ecuador finds its way to the east coast of South America in what is today Brazil's northeast; contemporary Bolivia bears its colonial name “Higher Peru,” and, echoing contemporary accusations that the titling of indigenous land in the Amazon is part of an international plot to undermine Brazilian sovereignty (see, for example, Couto 1999), neither Chile nor Argentina is sovereign over South America's southern tip: instead the area is labeled “Indian Territory.” The “Empire of Brazil” occupies only about half of contemporary Brazil's territory, in the south. The rest of the country is divided into the “Bahia (autonomous province);” the “Republic of Ecuador;” and a “Soveiragny State of Amazon,” complete with a notorious sounding “border to be disputed” and another area of “possible french occupation” in the eastern Amazon. Two “U.S. naval Stations” are located near the Amazon's eastern fringe.

Critics, Brazilian and foreign, often focus on the clumsiness of the language; it makes the task of ridicule, the construction of “pure imagination,” easier. Yet, although clearly fiction, the document is not the product of pure imagination; it reinterprets historical events. Matthew Fontaine Maury (not the aforementioned Mathew Fawry), a U.S. Navy lieutenant and superintendent of the U.S. Naval Observatory from 1844 to 1961, advocated the invasion of the Amazon. During a period of aggressive U.S. expansionism, when U.S. policy toward Latin America was shaped by Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, Maury thought the Amazon could provide a solution to what he saw as the problems of the U.S. southern states. Concerned with the U.S. South's lack of industry and high proportion of African Americans, Maury thought that the colonization of the Amazon by southern whites with black slaves could help resolve both issues at once. In a document submitted to the U.S. Congress, Maury declared that the free navigation of the Amazon must be won “peaceably if we can—forcibly if we must” (Martin 1918, 151).

Maury provided an oceanographic rationale that the Amazon belonged to

the United States—as though the very ocean currents conspired with his ambition. As Harrison (1955, 188) puts it:

In the compilation of his charts Maury noticed that a log floating to sea from the Amazon River would be carried by the currents into the Caribbean (“this sea of ours”), past the mouth of the Mississippi, through the Florida Channel and into the Gulf Stream. The winds south from the United States through the Lesser Antilles to the mouth of the Amazon were generally favorable. Hence, Maury felt that the Amazon could be considered a natural extension of the Mississippi Valley. (Harrison, 1955, 188)

Some of Maury’s writings about the Amazon were published in the *Correio Merantil* of Rio de Janeiro in 1853 (Martin 1918, 152), fomenting nationalist reactions similar to recent ones. Brazilian metropolitan elites at the time expressed both an anxiety about the distance of the Amazon from metropolitan control and a critique of arrogant U.S. power. Teixeira de Macedo, then Brazilian minister in Washington, warned:

The Anglo-American is totally convinced that he should regenerate the whole world, give a new form of government to all human society, and rule by his influence all parts of the world, of which he holds today the centre, because of his position, which dominates the two big oceans, the Gulf of Mexico and the Antilles Sea . . . In his work, Lieutenant Maury claims and proves that communications between [Amazonian] Pará and New York are easier and shorter than between Pará and Rio de Janeiro, and consequently it is easier to rule the regions served by the Amazonas River from Washington than from the capital of the Empire of Brazil. (Cited in Sedrez 2000b)

Contemporary Brazilian nationalists often find similar imperialist goals behind ostensible U.S. humanitarian or environmentalist concerns in the Amazon. In 2000, one year before rumors about the takeover of the forest began to circulate extensively on the Internet, the military commander of the Amazon, Luis Gonzaga Lessa, argued that the defense of the Amazon rain forest might be used as an excuse for the invasion of Brazil. Lessa predicted that military intervention mobilized to protect the environment would be a “tendency of the next decade.” Indeed, because humanitarian intervention has been central to post-cold war justifications of the U.S. deployment of military power, there is a *prima facie* plausibility to the idea that environmental intervention could be used as a similar justificatory strategy. Lessa and other critics of ostensibly

environmentalist or humanitarian foreign projects in the Amazon see them as a front for other less benign interests. Lessa contends that the real foreign interest in the Amazon is the forest's possession of "one fifth of the planet's available water, one third of the tropical forests, and great subsoil wealth" (cited in Folha de São Paulo 1999).

I have shown, so far, that anxieties about U.S. designs on the Amazon are longstanding in Brazil and draw, in part, on a real history of imperial projection of U.S. power in the region. Far from being the products of "pure imagination"—to repeat the *New York Times*' evocative phrase—the conditions of plausibility for fears of a U.S. invasion are based on historical experience and have deep roots. Moreover, one can see how nationalists in the military (often on the political right) and antineoliberal leftists opposed to the domination of natural resources by foreign capital might come together around such ideas. This is particularly so in a post-cold war neoliberal context, in which, (1) the cold war convergence of ideology and interest between the United States and right-wing elements in Latin American militaries can no longer be taken for granted and (2) foreign political and economic interests have influenced and sometimes controlled important aspects of Latin American policy making (see Cervo 2000; Harvey 2005; Foresta 1992; Hunter 1997; Zaverucha 2005). However, before 2001, the idea that the Amazon was threatened by the U.S. military as certainly as it was threatened by U.S. capital was not yet broadly and credibly disseminated in left-wing circles. It took the combination of aggressive U.S. unilateralism during the early twenty-first century and a series of contingent events on the Internet to produce the convergence of many on Brazil's political left and right around similar fears of a U.S. invasion of the Amazon.

Here is how some of that contingency unfolded.

The Rumors Spread

An important step in the spread of the virtual collection of documents that provide the evidentiary basis of popular ideas about U.S. power in the Amazon was taken on May 11, 2000. Until then, the following text (hereafter referred to as the "Map Statement") lingered on the Brazil, Love It or Leave It Web site with little incident or distribution (cited in Almeida 2000a, 3):

A fact that is, at minimum, surprising was revealed recently by Brazilians who observe the primary educational system in the US: in the world map that is in use in some important American schools, Brazil appears divided. In the map in question, Brazil would only exist south of the Amazonian region and the Pan-

tanal, and the rest appears as an “area of international control.” In other schools, teachers have students perform an exercise in which they assist in the execution of an intervention, and if necessary, war, to take the Amazon from the “destroyers of nature (Brazilians).” This is only one piece of proof that the foreign idea of intervention in the Amazon has already evolved into the operative phase.”¹⁰

On May 11, a professor in the Department of Ecology at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro sent this Map Statement to the widely read electronic journal *Ciência Hoje* (‘Science Today’). She had received the message from a colleague, and, skeptical of its content, she later claimed, she was attempting to verify its truth. She clearly had no intention of spreading a hoax.¹¹ Nonetheless, the professor’s message was published in the journal, lending it credibility and readership.

Later on May 11, Paulo Roberto de Almeida, minister-counsel at the Brazilian embassy in Washington, D.C., wrote to the journal in order to debunk the charges (Almeida 2000a, 4). The embassy, and Almeida in particular, continued to play a role in the electronic debates over the next few years, debunking the charges at every opportunity. Almeida also collected voluminous documents and correspondence related to the charges and made them available online.¹² It is worth noting that Almeida’s attitudes toward the accusations changed over time. In his early e-mails in 2000, Almeida wrote as though he thought that the rumors might be true in some limited form; he was simply quick to discount their general political relevance. By pointing out the size, diversity, and noncentralized character of the U.S. educational system, he emphasized that any such maps could only exist as aberrations (Almeida 2000a, 4). In an e-mail to the editors of *Ciência Hoje*, Almeida advocated seeking out the isolated “geography idiots in the American schools,” thereby undermining claims that American intentions on the Amazon were part of a consistent pattern. By October 10, 2000, however, Almeida was no longer arguing that the alleged maps were aberrations; he was arguing that they did not exist. To many respondents, and in the most explicit and aggravated terms, Almeida wrote, “THEY ARE NOT TRYING TO AMPUTATE OUR GEOGRAPHY . . . The maps DO NOT EXIST” (Almeida 2000b, 11; emphasis in the original).¹³

Shortly after the Map Statement was published in *Ciência Hoje*, the story began to pick up steam—in spite of Almeida’s debunking. Senator Marina Silva of the Worker’s Party, and from the Amazonian state of Acre, telephoned Michelle Zweede, of the University of Texas’s Brazil Center, for help in investigating the accusations. Zweede e-mailed the Brazil, Love It or Leave It Web site in order to investigate but never received a response. A few days later, the

allegations on the Brazil, Love it or Leave It site began to circulate on the Internet with one additional feature: they now appeared to be signed by Michelle Zweede and the Brazil Center of the University of Texas (Beck 2000, 73).

On May 17 or 18, 2000, the Brazil, Love it or Leave It site pulled the Map Statement from its Web site and published an apparent retraction (Beck 2000, 73). Entitled, *Retratação* ('retraction'), it stated in Portuguese that the authors of the site

Were greatly gladdened to observe the discussions that had been generated, bringing back to life the topic "Amazonia," of such importance for all Brazilians.

However, the following has been revealed: we did not cite the author of the accusation, or the source. It has now been a few months since we put up the page and when we set about to correct the problem, we were faced with the misfortune of observing the following: because of computer problems we can no longer find the source of the news (we lost the hard disk where it could have been found).

We will do all that we can to rescue the source in order to fix the notice.

After a great deal of research, it was not possible to locate the origin, or to find it on the internet, or with our collaborators. Despite there being a certain consensus in our team with respect to the author (the source), because we do not have the proof at our disposal, we have decided that it would be frivolous to maintain the denunciation on this page, and we are removing it. We hope only to do this temporarily, because we remain dedicated to clearing up the problem. (*Brasil, Ame-o ou Deixe-o* 2000)

Despite this partial retraction, which is hard not to read as an admission of fabrication, the Map Statement lived on. On May 23, Cesar Giobbi, the social columnist of the major daily, *Estado do São Paulo*, after receiving an apparent e-mail from Zweede—whom he considered a trustworthy source—published a small piece reproducing both the indignant tone and the content of the Map Statement (cited in Almeida 2000a). From this point on, allegations on the Internet about the internationalization of the Amazon in U.S. junior high school textbooks often came validated by the name of the *Estado de São Paulo*, even though the newspaper had promptly retracted the piece. Yet, despite the authority that the *Estado de São Paulo's* name lent to the rumors, for a few months there was little additional public activity.

It was not until November 2001—as U.S. bombs fell in Afghanistan and, in speeches unavoidable on television and radio worldwide, U.S. president George W. Bush denounced "evildoers" and divided the world into the forces of good and the forces of evil—that the rumors about the possible Ameri-



Figure 5.1. Fabricated U.S. geography textbook seizes the Amazon.

can invasion of the Amazon, so long the concern of nationalist thinkers in the Brazilian military, resurfaced on the Internet and spread outside of military nationalist circles, including among many on the political left.

In mid-November, a purported page from a U.S. junior high school textbook, *Introduction to Geography*, appeared on the Internet and quickly began to circulate widely (Figure 5.1). The page shows a map entitled “The Former Int’l Reserve of Amazon Forest (Finraf)” accompanied by English text as clumsy as that used in the 1817 map. This map and accompanying text, supposed to be part of a North American government propaganda campaign to ready the American populace for the takeover of the Amazon, is explicitly insulting in its description of the seven nations possessing Amazonian territory. When discussions of this map take it seriously—and there are many such on the Internet and among varied political groups in Brazil—people tend to suggest economic reasons for the imminent Amazonian takeover, particularly the control of water and other natural resources.

The text accompanying the map, in English and couched in the universalist language of protecting a treasure for humanity, reads (misspellings and grammatical errors in the original):

3. 5. 5—THE FORMER INT’L RESERVE OF AMAZON FOREST

Since the middle 80’s the most important rain forest of the world was passed to the responsibility of the United States and the United Nations. It is named as FINRAF (Former International Reserve of Amazon Forest), and its foundation was due to the fact the Amazon is located in South America, one of the poorest regions on earth and surrounded by irresponsible, cruel and confrontatory countries. It was part of eight different and strange countries, which are in the majority of cases, Kingdoms of violence, drug trade, illiteracy and a unintelligent and primitive people.

The creation of FINRAF were supported by all nations of G-23 and was really a special mission of our country and a gift of all the world, since the possession of these valuable lands to such primitive countries and people should condemn the lungs of the world to disappearance and full destroying in a few years.

We can consider that this area has the most biodiversity in the planet, with a vast number of species of all type of animals and vegetals. The value of this area is unable to calculate, but the planet can be cert that The United States won’t let these Latin American counties explore and destroy this real ownership of all humanity.

[A textbox beneath the map reads] We can see the location of the International Reserve. It took area of eight South America’s countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and F. Guyana. Some of the poorest and miserable countries of the world.

Despite its origins among nationalist groups on the political right, the message and the map began to circulate among anti-imperialist and antineoliberal left-wing groups (Almeida 2001, 18), in particular, among a group of Brazilian academics. This dissemination of the materials sparked an intense e-mail debate between Paulo Roberto de Almeida and some of those scholars.

Under criticism, two scholars distanced themselves from the map that they had circulated, arguing that by forwarding it to listservs they were simply checking its veracity. In an inversion of the logic that Almeida used in May 2000 when he argued that any such map, if extant, must be an aberration, these two contended that the existence of that particular map was, in fact, less relevant than the general pattern of U.S. domination of the Amazon. “We all know that the Amazon is a strategic region (geopolitically and geoeconomically) that is being occupied and exploited by ‘Technical Teams’ from other countries, principally by the US. Researchers argue that Latin America, and principally the Amazonian region, is the ‘fountain of life,’ and because of this,

there is international interest in exploiting and dominating it” (cited in Almeida 2001, 8).

In response to an inquiry from Almeida about the message containing the page from the geography textbook, one researcher who had been an early source for the message wrote,

It was not I who originally sent the message, but if you want to know who the original source was, a suggestion: go to the CIA, the FBI, or the White House, now that you live in Washington, and ask them . . . Those who believe that the US relations with the countries of Latin America are transparent are naïve and frivolous. As a Brazilian, I have to be alarmed at whatever news, even if it is a hoax, that refers to whatever attempt of the imperialist Yankees against the sovereignty of Latin Americans. (cited in Almeida 2001, 15)

Opacity, Conspiracy, and the Production of Reality

As these arguments developed they ceased to focus on the veracity of the evidence available; rather, the participants deployed evidence to elaborate coherent views of the world. By playing up its anomalous character, Almeida was able to make the map itself largely irrelevant to his arguments; by playing up the map’s consistency with broader patterns, the academics who had circulated the map were able to do the same.

Paul Silverstein has pointed out that, “conspiracy theories rely on a particular narrative form that prioritizes internal consistency and coherence over perfect correspondence to some referential, observable truth” (Silverstein 2000, 3; 2002). But truth in world affairs is seldom easily observable. What are American military planners thinking about the Amazon’s future? Those in Brazil who believe that the United States is set to take over the Amazon are generally quick to point out the many disjunctures between U.S. statements and actions in Latin America. Unless one accepts at face value the discussion of democracy, security, and economic integration that tend to show up in non-classified U.S. military statements about Latin America, it is extremely difficult to know what covert operations might be afoot. When power is opaque, it is not only the narrative form of conspiracy theories that prioritizes internal consistency over correspondence; correspondence becomes *de facto* impossible.

As the maps and related documents circulated on the Internet, with multiple versions landing again and again in mailboxes,¹⁴ the story itself began to exceed the criterion of internal consistency by exceeding itself. It became an external piece of evidence through which correspondence could be assessed.

Consider another text that has circulated along with the supposed textbook page. It reads:

All of us have heard it said that Americans want to transform the Amazon into a world park under the tutelage of the UN, and that American school books already cite the Amazon as being a global forest . . . Well, the didactic book, *Introduction to Geography*, by the author David Norman, a book amply used in American public schools, has come into our possession . . . Look at the attachment for proof of what is on page 76 of this book and see that the Americans already consider the Amazon an international and not Brazilian area. (cited in Shirts 2001)

As Matthew Shirts pointed out in December 2001, in the *Estado de São Paulo*, this e-mail begins with the assertion that the use of such textbooks in the United States is a piece of common knowledge (“all of us have heard it said”). But, as he puts it, “We have only heard this story in the earlier emails by the same group. The authors are inventing their own reality—via internet” (Shirts 2001). The more the story was circulated on the Internet, the more it came to seem like reality. It became, for the appropriately inclined, a part of reality, even if it had never had an existence independent of the Internet. And each new piece of evidence could be assessed in relation to that ostensibly external reality.

Of course, many of these narratives in Brazil betray as little knowledge of American politics as of English spelling or grammar. After all, who with knowledge of the Reagan administration’s politics and enmity toward environmental constituencies in the United States would offer an environmentalist rationale for an imperial stance toward South America during the Reagan administration? But that is not the point. In the mid-1980s, when the sinister FINRAF was created, the military regime that had ruled Brazil since it came to power in a coup d’état secretly supported by the United States was giving up power; U.S. intervention and counterinsurgency in Central America were at their height; and environmentalists were beginning to push on a large scale for the international protection of the Amazon,¹⁵ long held by many Brazilian nationalists to be the key to Brazilian development and sovereignty. And, at the start of the GWOT, when these messages about a U.S. invasion of the Amazon found their way into many popular nationalisms in Brazil, the United States government was declaring a planetary project of “Full Spectrum Dominance,” in the name of its own paranoid and self-referential fantasy, in which the U.S. “responsibility to history . . . [was to] rid the world of evil” (U.S. National Security Council 2002, 5; see also Kelly and Masco, this volume). U.S. power

is a real specter in all these facts, but in that power's ubiquity and opacity, its nuances are lost and do not even matter much; they are harnessed to, and partially generative of, local political concerns.

During the period of GWOT, as many of the chapters in this volume attest, U.S. military power achieved new levels of projection, opacity, and paranoia, while simultaneously the tools of media production were democratized worldwide. It should come as no surprise then that U.S. power should be harnessed to so many different political concerns and generative of so many "paranoid style[s]" of politics, to use Hofstadter's (1965) still fine phrase. And in the years that I conducted ethnographic research on the conflicts surrounding Brazil's satellite base on the edge of the Amazon (2004–2006), the maps, testimonies, and book pages that had been circulated on the Internet alleging an imminent U.S. invasion had become important elements in local nationalisms, moving swiftly from the political right to the political left and taking on their own complex political life (for further elaboration of this, see Mitchell 2008, 178–230).

Conclusion: The Ethnography of Pax Americana's Imaginaries

To explain the convergence of significant segments of Brazil's left around some of the concerns of its political right, this chapter has looked to the broader sociopolitical context of those concerns: the opaque but violently omnipresent character of U.S. power in the region and the world, a source of anxiety that traverses political divisions in the age of GWOT; a long history of metropolitan concern with the sovereignty of the Amazon in Brazil; the spread of global environmentalist networks and discourses that seem to call for the internationalization of the Amazon; and a common enmity toward neoliberal politics among the nationalist right and antineoliberal left. But I also trace lines of contingency that have made this popular convergence of left- and right-wing nationalisms around the Amazon possible: in particular, a series of frauds and accidents spread through the Internet in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Contemporary Brazilian nationalisms and ideas about the Amazon are rooted in Brazilian history, but they have also been shaped by contingent events in the age of GWOT. Those ideas, as I have shown, are often paranoid in their style and sometimes false in their claims, but the referent of their paranoia—and a necessary condition of that paranoia's widespread plausibility—is the worldwide projection of U.S. military power that, in the age of GWOT (as in that of the cold war) is itself wildly paranoid.

Recently, Lutz and others have called for ethnographers to investigate the "topography of U.S. power" worldwide (Lutz 2006, 593, 2002; see also Gill

2004; Kelly 2002). This goal is crucial. The contours of that topography are imagined as much as they are material, and those imaginaries shape the political and cultural contexts that ethnographers research. To understand the complex social life of the United States' omnipresent, opaque, and tenuous unipolarity, we need ethnographically and historically nuanced analyses of its effects in determinate social contexts—effects that are material, social, and, sometimes, fantastical.

:: NOTES ::

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1. In keeping with common government usage during the George W. Bush administration, I use the acronym GWOT (Global War on Terror), to refer to the wars that groups in that administration sometimes also referred to as the “global struggle against violent extremism” and the “long war.”

2. In this apocalyptic vision, the cold war was the world's third world war and the Iraq War, “the second scene, so to speak, of the first act of a five-act play” (Podhoretz 2004, 18).

3. This chapter is not about U.S. power in Latin America as such but about some of the imaginaries that it has helped generate in the age of GWOT. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that, as Grandin (2004, 2006) has shown, Latin America was a twentieth-century “workshop” for the U.S. strategies of military and political intervention in the Middle East, which, as this book goes to print, have so far marked the twenty-first century. A list of just a few key overt and covert U.S. military incursions into Latin America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries must include the Mexican and Spanish-American wars; a century of often massively violent occupations and coups in Central America, the Caribbean, and South America (in Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, Chile on September 11, 1973, Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, Haiti in 1994, and Venezuela in 2002, to name a few); and the George W. Bush administration's deepening militarization of counterinsurgency warfare supported by Plan Colombia, inaugurated ostensibly as U.S. support not for counterinsurgency but for counternarcotics operations. This list could, of course, go on extensively. What matters for this chapter is that U.S. military projection, in its frequent duplicity, opacity, and paranoia, is an intense matter of concern across the political spectrum and across national borders—especially and enduringly in Latin America.

4. On the importance of the idea of national territory to Brazilian nationalisms, see Burns (1995), Carvalho (1998), Garfield (2004), and Holanda (2000 [1959]); for recent analyses of the importance of the Amazon within military nationalisms, see Castro (2006), Lourenção (2007), Marques (2007), Martins Filho and Zirker (2000), and Martins Filho (2005); and for recent anthropological studies that examine national and international imaginaries of Amazonia, see Nugent (2007), Raffles (2002), and Slater (2003).

5. The spaceport, the Alcântara Launch Center, is the hub of Brazil's space program and a site of conflict over land, race, inequality, sovereignty, and development in Brazil (see Mitchell 2008).

6. I argue elsewhere that nationalist discourses about the spaceport and its relation to the Amazon tend to cluster into two broad groups (Mitchell 2008). The first I term "developmentalist nationalism." Developmentalist nationalists imagine a state-driven industrial push to create a powerful Brazil, both industrially and militarily. Bearing as it does important symmetries with the left-leaning developmentalism that gained prominence in Latin America during the Great Depression (Sikkink 1991, xii–xiii), one might expect developmentalist nationalism to have a broad base on the left. However, in contemporary Brazil, this form of developmentalist nationalism tends to be concentrated in the military, often on the political right (see Peixoto 2003). As Miller (2006, 205; see also Goebel 2007) points out (identifying Hobsbawm 1995), scholars, particularly on the left, have often underestimated the importance of conservative nationalisms in Latin America. The second, which I call "territorial nationalism," is focused on the defense of national sovereignty, especially in the Amazon. Although developmentalist nationalism today has a very limited constituency on the political left, territorial nationalism has gained wide popular support, particularly on the left.

7. The year 1755 is usually cited as marking the definitive abolition of indigenous slavery, but it is worth noting that, as Cunha points out, it had been abolished (ineffectually) on previous occasions and legal provisions persisted for the continuation of some legal indigenous slavery even into the nineteenth century (Cunha 1993). All slavery was abolished in Brazil only in 1888, making Brazil the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery.

8. <http://brasil.iwarp.com>.

9. <http://brasil.iwarp.com/mapa1.htm>.

10. This and all other translations from the Portuguese are my own. Except when I specify otherwise, all of the correspondence about the Amazon in the following pages took place in Portuguese.

11. If she is to be made a heroine or villain in the story, she is certainly an unintentional one.

12. The material is available at <http://www.pralmeida.org/04Temas/07Amazonia/00IntrDossAmaz2003.html>. I rely on the documents on Almeida's Web site extensively here, but because he is a partisan source, I have done my best to verify the veracity of the documents that I have used.

13. Almeida's use of capital letters responded directly to an earlier message with the capitalized heading, "ATTENTION PROFESSORS!!! THEY ARE TRYING TO 'AMPUTATE' OUR GEOGRAPHY."

14. I have received multiple versions from Brazilian friends and colleagues since 2001, continue to receive them today, and have often heard about these maps from rural Brazilians who do not have access to the Internet.

15. Accusations of foreign intentions on the Amazon often cite statements by such diverse world leaders as Francois Mitterrand, Helmut Kohl, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Al Gore that advocate some sort of international sovereignty over the Amazon (see, for example, Oliveira 2001). George W. Bush is now often accused of having suggested during the 2000 U.S. presidential debates that the debt of Third World nations might be forgiven if they relinquish sovereignty over their tropical forests. Indeed, during the debate of October 11, 2000, Bush did suggest that poor and indebted countries might "trade debt for valuable rain forest lands" (Commission on Presidential Debates 2000). He was probably referring to the idea of debt-for-nature swaps, whereby debt is forgiven in agreement for promises of environmental conservation. Because of nationalist concerns and Brazil's relative economic strength, debt-for-nature swaps have been repeatedly rejected in Brazil.