

novel and diverse ways. Their first argument is based on the observation that in traditional disaster studies, disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives, and media reporting disasters are usually perceived of as isolated and exceptional events. Such rather traditional and narrow analytical approaches tend to overlook the fact that disasters are embedded in larger social, political, historical, and spatial context. Often, they fail to recognize small and frequent “everyday disasters” which mostly have the highest priority for affected people but have the potential to overlap or add up to catastrophes.

The goal of this book is to contribute to a better and deeper understanding of disasters by contextualizing them in novel and diverse ways, taking particular account of (sometimes contested) disaster narratives and divergent processes of globalization. Covering examples from the developing as well as from developed countries, these two reoccurring topics guide the reader through the book at different levels of emphasis and depth. An in-depth discussion of every chapter would not be appropriate at this point; hence, only certain chapters will be mentioned. In Chapter 2, for example, Greg Bankoff and George E. Borinaga analyze two contested narratives of the typhoon that hit the Visayan Islands of the Philippines in 2013. The authors impressively show that the matter of the contested nature of disaster narratives essentially lies in the assignment of blame and responsibility (e.g., narratives of local people versus narratives of DRR institutions, officials, or media). Whose disaster narrative is heard and whose is ignored not only shape our perception of disaster but also our understanding of adequate disaster response. This book also rises convincing arguments for understanding disasters as global and translocal phenomena. As many of the chapters stunningly show, disasters are increasingly constructed and shaped by global economic and social forces that are exacerbating the uneven development of risk and vulnerability. For instance, Bridget Love (Chapter 5) analyzes the influence of the global economy on reconstruction efforts in coastal communities in northeast Japan in the wake of the Tsunami in 2011. In Chapter 8, Melissa Checker investigates the political economy of Superstorm Sandy (2012) and how it is connected to other disasters across time and space that gradually increased the vulnerability of Staten Island’s inhabitants.

The eight book chapters offer new and innovative analysis of recent disasters that to varying degrees are all translocal, and each chapter is carried by its own “narrative.” Nevertheless, the attentive reader will find that most chapters of this book cover isolated and exceptional events. Of course, each of them is unique and stands symbolically for the complex interplay of drivers that shape vulnerability as well as disaster preparedness and response. I highly appreciate the editors’ intention to offer broader analytical approaches for disaster studies, addressing the tackling issue of linkages between disasters and their social and cultural construction – and as such of risk – as important elements in a fairly complex and interwoven fabric of causalities. The book is providing fresh impetus not only for disaster scholars but also for DRR institutions and media. The book has exceeded my

expectations and I am eagerly looking forward to the next volume of *Catastrophes in Context* (edited by Gregory V. Button, Anthony Oliver-Smith, and Mark Schuller).

Alexandra Titz

**Caballero Arias, Hortensia:** *Desencuentros y encuentros en el Alto Orinoco. Incursiones en territorio yanomami, siglos XVIII–XIX.* Altos de Pipe: Ediciones IVIC, 2014. 200 pp. ISBN 978-980-261-149-2.

The Yanomami, inhabitants of southern Venezuela and the adjacent areas of Brazil, have been subject to publications in great profusion. They were presented as models of “contemporary ancestors” as Napoleon Chagnon put it, versus historically situated subjects (compare, e.g., Bruce Albert and Alcida Ramos, *Yanomami Indians and Anthropological Ethics*. *Science* 1989.244: 632; R. B. Ferguson, *Yanomami Warfare. A Political History*. Santa Fe 1995; G. Herzog-Schröder, *A Great Deal Has Been Written about the Savagery of the Guaharibos*. In: C. Augustat [ed.], *Beyond Brazil. Johann Natterer and the Ethnographic Collections from the Austrian Expedition to Brazil (1817–1835)*. Vienna 2012: 135–143; Alcida Ramos, *Sanumá Memories. Yanomami Ethnography in Times of Crisis*. Madison 1995). “Desencuentros y encuentros” is yet another book which sheds light on this Amazonian society. It is written by the Venezuelan anthropologist Hortensia Caballero Arias, and this fact is worth mentioning as most literature about the Yanomami originates from authors from the US or Europe, mostly non-South American scientists or journalists. Caballero Arias had been dedicated to the areas of political, economic, and historical anthropology for more than two decades and had also undertaken field research among the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco area while she was a student of the Universidad Central in Caracas. Since she received her PhD at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in 2003, she has held a position as a scientific assistant at the “Instituto Venezolano de Investigación Científicas” (IVIC). Her book, which is the subject to this review, is a publication of the IVIC.

The volume under consideration is based on her dissertation thesis. It was published in 2014 and distributed as an online publication on the Internet. Its specific focus is the early history of contact with the Yanomami people and the investigation about what is actually known about this acquaintance. In other words, what kind of colonialism did the Yanomami experience – colonialism taken in a broader sense, as the Yanomami territory of the Upper Orinoco was never actually occupied by Europeans to a great extent – and was this process a contributing factor to their notoriety of being a violent society?

The time frame her analysis covers expands from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century. This time span, been looked at only sporadically in ethnographic or anthropological works about the Yanomami so far (Ferguson 1995; Zerries and Schuster, *Mahekodotedi. Monographie eines Dorfes des Waika-Indianer [Yanoama] am oberen Orinoco [Venezuela]*. Munich 1974; Herzog-Schröder 2012), as ethnographical or anthropological investigations started

in the 1950s, and it was in the 1960s and 1970s when publications began to increase. A peak was reached around the turn of the century, with publications which largely spun around the topic of alleged extreme violence among the Yanomami and – opposing this claim – the problem of ethnographical representation. This discussion found its climax in the so-called “darkness” discussion, referring to the publication “Darkness in El Dorado” (New York 2000) by Patrick Tierney, which triggered the outbreak of a furious academic dispute about ethical conduct versus scientific methodology in anthropological fieldwork. Since at least that time, the Yanomami have become an icon of the indigenous people of lowland South America, a society in between being violent or violated, and they have become well-known far beyond the in-group of ethnographers and anthropologists (Sponsel, *El Dorado Controversy*. <[http://www.soc.hawaii.edu/Sponsel/El%20Dorado%20Controversy/MP\\_ElDorado.html](http://www.soc.hawaii.edu/Sponsel/El%20Dorado%20Controversy/MP_ElDorado.html)> 2011; Padilha, *Secrets of the Tribe*. Watertown 2009). This debate further fuelled the public image of the Yanomami as being pristine jungle dwellers. It should indeed be considered that, in contrast to other indigenous groups of the area due to their geographical isolation, most of the Yanomami communities have remained at the margin of the colonial surge until the present day. Thus, they have been spared the consequential integration into the political and social regimes of the state of Venezuela or Brazil. Until a few decades ago, the Yanomami living on Venezuelan territory generally succeeded in escaping the pressure of domination or assimilation. They were not confronted by the threat of expulsion from their land, which many other indigenous groups – including a number of groups of Brazilian Yanomami – have suffered.

The objective of the book presented here is to trace the image of the “violent” or “wild” Yanomami, which dominates public discussion, back to the times when they had not yet become the “plaything” of anthropological debate and even long before the time of early scientific investigation. Leaving this prevailing discussion ostensibly aside, Caballero Arias meticulously examines early historical sources for substantiation. She looks carefully at chronicles and documents of travellers who crossed the remote jungle area in the south of Venezuela and tests them for evidence of actual encounters. She, thus, tries to discover reliable witnesses who might confirm or justify the reputation as “violent savages.”

Along the way, an eligible overview is presented of the history of contact in this Upper Orinoco area, as it was documented by these early voyagers, whose purpose was to explore the courses of the rivers and detect the natural riches the land offers. These original ideas of the respective expeditions are covered up and it is shown that they were geographically and/or cartographically motivated. This also means that these first expeditions undertaken in the mid-18th century had political ends, as the land was to be defended and secured against other colonial forces. They were motivated by the necessity of boundary survey and the main idea of penetrating this uncomfortable area in the rainforest was to secure and demark the limits of the Spanish versus the Portuguese territories. Therefore,

most intrusions into the region aimed at determining the watersheds, which defined the land’s frontiers and, thus, it was the great goal to discover the sources of the Orinoco river, which was only finally discovered at the beginning of the 1950s.

Within this process of securing the countries’ borders, it was also important to confirm the interconnection of the Orinoco and the Rio Negro, the renowned Rio Casiquiare. Of all these Spanish soldiers, European explorers, British geologists, biologists, or cartographers, and all who had reported about this practically unknown land, none was, first and foremost, interested in the human inhabitants of this area and in their culture or way of life. The fabled “White Indians,” the so-called “Guaribas blancos” or “Guaharibos blancos,” posed a threat to these political enterprises and the legends around these people, who were only much later understood to be one ethnic group, the Yanomami, began to be spun right from the beginning.

No one had ever purposefully looked at the inhabitants of the land from an anthropological point of view until the 20th century. However, considering the writings from colonial times which Caballero Arias covers, how far was the information given about the inhabitants of the Upper Orinoco region genuine – collected by the early travellers themselves or their chroniclers – or had the reports been conceived secondhand? It is detected here from which sources this information was actually derived. The author’s third aim is to carve out the image of the indigenous which Europeans and *criollos* – Europeans born in Venezuela – constructed in their documents based on their encounters with the Yanomami. This is where the title of the book becomes decipherable: “Desencuentros y encuentros en el Alto Orinoco” – “Non-encounters and encounters” is phrased carefully, as it is questionable how many of the travellers of the late-18th and 19th century had actually met many or even any Yanomami personally. Caballero Arias uncovers the history of contact as being more a history of noncontact, and as one of image production based on an iteration of ascriptions without much basis of actual face-to-face encounters with Yanomami people. She uncovers how well the travellers were informed by other travellers or by collaborators who, in many cases, belonged to indigenous societies neighbouring the Yanomami. A lot of these statements were of a biased nature and they often obviously reflect animosities between ethnic groups, which are not uncommon in interethnic relations. Many European travellers, such as Alexander von Humboldt, however, seemed to have taken these narrations as valid information, which was then passed on and on in the literature, gaining weight and persuasive power and, eventually, funnel into current debates. The analysis alludes to the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy: The reputation imposed onto the Yanomami has ensued into a suspiciousness, which made a genuine encounter – physically and comprising a cultural understanding – virtually impossible. Thus, “Desencuentro” is open to optional readings: On the one hand, the factual non-encounter and, on the other hand, the case of “misconceiving the Yanomami” in a cultural sense.

It should also be mentioned that the publication contains a lot of valuable and very informative maps from throughout the centuries. This historical material is cherished by those who are interested in the historical perspective of the Upper Orinoco zone.

Being a German reviewer and having been one of the last students of Otto Zerries, I may be allowed to mention a morsel of critique which accounts for the problem of the German language in academic writings. As many of the first travellers in the northern Amazon, such as Alexander von Humboldt, Robert Schomburgk, Theodor Koch-Grünberg, and Otto Zerries, had published in German, they are generally cited secondhand in international publications. By doing so, misapprehensions filter into the literature, which are then passed on and on. Alleged judgments about the local indigenous population become distorted at times – this being, by the way, an interesting parallel to the main statement of the work in question. I find it particularly deplorable that the anthropological work of Otto Zerries and Meinrad Schuster, particularly the book “Mahekodotedi” (1974), is neglected here, as is done in many other publications on the same topic. Admittedly, the 1950s do not specifically lie within the timeframe the book claims to cover. However, the establishment of the New Tribes Mission in El Platanal by James Baker is mentioned extensively (pp. 19, 39, 41, and 170f.). It was exactly at this time and place, that Zerries and Schuster conducted their ground-breaking fieldwork about the Yanomami. The Yanomami settlement Mahekodotedi (today written Mahekototheri) is situated on the Upper Orinoco in the immediate vicinity of El Platanal (39), and the German scientists had been guests of James Baker. Zerries is only cited but briefly and with a publication dating from 1956 which goes back to a preliminary paper. The comprehensive scientific work he published after returning from the field and having analysed his material has regrettably not been taken into consideration, while other fieldworkers in their interpretation, such as Napoleon Chagnon or Jacques Lizot who wrote even later, were cited in much more detail. As the ten months of research of Otto Zerries and Meinrad Schuster was the first anthropological fieldwork ever done among the Yanomami (another German, Hans Becher, started a year later to visit the Yanomami in Brazil), it appears truly deficient to me that they are not mentioned adequately. This charge does not only apply to Caballero Arias but to many other authors – or, in other words, it is time to get Zerries’ work translated so that it can be more easily considered and have an impact in valuable volumes such as the one of Hortensia Caballero Arias.

Gabriele Herzog-Schröder

**Charbonnier, Pierre, Gildas Salmon, and Peter Skafish** (eds.): *Comparative Metaphysics. Ontology after Anthropology*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016. 356 pp. ISBN 978-1-78348-858-2. Price: \$ 44.95

Podría decirse que esta compilación incluye textos de dos tipos: unos bastante vinculados entre sí (los cuales

debaten sobre un mismo conjunto de temas) y otros más bien dispares tanto con respecto a las cuestiones comparadas en el libro como entre sí. En esta última categoría entrarían, al menos, tres capítulos. Por un lado, encontramos textos abstrusos como el de Marilyn Strathern (titulado “Conexiones, amigos y sus relaciones”) que, aunque fascinantes, parecen no tener mucho que ver con el resto del libro. También encontramos textos como el de Morten Axel Pedersen o el de Arnaud Macé, que se complacen una generalidad comparativa quizá excesiva (221 s.), a veces justificada como una reforma del método filológico de la antropología histórica (202), y otras como un experimento hacia una “emergente antropología posrelacional” que busca “empujar al giro ontológico hacia nuevos horizontes” (222).

El resto de capítulos (es decir, la gran mayoría), son del primer tipo. Así, textos como el de Gildas Salmon (La delegación ontológica) se esfuerzan en mostrar los varios puntos en común que guardan con el conjunto de la compilación. Comenzaremos por cuatro puntos: el concepto de ontología, una cierta adhesión a lo que Salmon llama el “programa ontológico” de la antropología (41), una suerte de reivindicación del método estructural de Claude Lévi-Strauss (43) y una cierta preocupación ética. “Ontología” es evidentemente una noción casi inescapable para los autores aquí reunidos. De hecho, su exégesis habría adquirido, según Martin Holbraad un cariz que alternaría entre una industria (142) y un “bombo publicitario” (*hype*) (133). El texto que lo trata de manera más explícita quizá sea la introducción, donde se nos recuerda que no estamos frente a una doctrina ni a una posición teórica unificada (19). La definición propuesta aquí enfatiza tanto en la diferencia radical como la equiparación entre mundos: “a way of postulating a horizontal plane on which different, noncompossible ways of composing a world that are actualized by collectives can be related” (4). La introducción también presume que la aparición del vocabulario de la ontología constituiría una “revuelta” (*revolt*) (3). Esto es, el llamado “giro ontológico” sería nada menos que una forma de reconectarse con la naturaleza subversiva (*subversive nature*) de la antropología (4). Y la antropología, en consecuencia, sería una suerte de máquina generativa de metafísica (12).

En lo que respecta al segundo punto, son igualmente explícitos los capítulos de Patrice Maniglier y de Baptiste Gille, quienes consideran el giro ontológico como una teoría crítica de la modernidad (301). Ambos autores, además, entienden la antropología como la ontología formal de nosotros mismos como variantes; es decir, como el conocimiento del sujeto tal como este puede ser inferido de la virtualidad de sus propias alteraciones (127). En resumen, concuerdan con la conocida misión que Eduardo Viveiros de Castro adjudica a la antropología (y reitera en esta compilación) de multiplicar nuestro mundo (en vez de explicar el mundo del otro) (266).

El tercer punto, la adhesión al estructuralismo francés, es quizá más notorio en el capítulo de Philippe Descola aunque permea de forma más o menos explícita casi todo el libro. Según este autor, el único supuesto adopta en su propuesta ontológica es uno que también está presente en