

# Book Review

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**Guzmán, Tracy Devine.** *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity After Independence*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2013. Print.

Tracy Devine Guzmán's excellent book begins with a discussion of "brincar de índio," or "playing indian," an expression that at first refers to child's play. Guzmán sheds light on the expression by recalling a 1980s episode from the children's television program "Xou da Xuxa." Wearing a feathered headdress and a frilly suit more reminiscent of a Western movie than of Brazil and accompanied by a group of ecstatic children, Xuxa performed her song "Vamos brincar de índio." On this occasion, the program welcomed as special guests a group of Xavante Indians who stood in the middle of her pop Pow Wow like living props. At one point during the song, she approaches a stunned-looking Xavante man and shouts in his face: "Little ones! Let's play Indian and teach people how to respect the Indian, which is living nature!" Guzmán's pithy description of this scene launches her reflection about the contradictions between the ways dominant Brazilian culture has imagined and represented Indian-ness and the way indigenous people have managed to endure, comply, or contest those constructions. "Brincar de índio," Guzmán proposes, can serve as a concept to name the cultural manipulations of the symbolic Indian, "a malleable figure to be molded or 'played' expediently" (19)—often in ways that fly in the face of the needs and concerns of living Indians.

Guzmán traces the tensions between the symbolic renderings of Indian-ness and the lived experience of indigeneity across an eclectic array of materials ranging from literary texts to archival documents, from popular print and televisual media to an indigenist opera. The topics she discusses in the five chapters include the history of state-backed indigenist policies and their colonial underpinnings, developmental policies and projects in the Amazon, the exploitation of native populations in several historical contexts, the nature and relevance of popular notions about Indian-ness, and the indigenous struggle for self-representation.

In my view, the two most compelling case studies of the book are presented in chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 engages with the fascinating history of Antônio Carlos Gomes opera *Il Guarani*, based on José de Alencar's 1959 novel. This history allows Guzmán to bring into view the widening gap between the fates of symbolic and real Indians during the period between 1870 (when Gomes' opera was first staged) and 1936 (when the opera was commemorated as a national treasure). The increased popularization of an idealized Indian through "fables of benevolent colonialism and cordial miscegenation" represented by *Il Guarani* occurred precisely when indigenous people were subjected to tremendous violence. They were exploited in "the Paraguayan War (1865-1870); became slaves to landowners in the North and the Northeast; served as guinea pigs for legions of foreign craniometrists, eugenicists, and 'naturalists'; and were hunted like animals by settlers and prospectors in search of land and valuable resources" (67). The contradiction between the idealization and destruction of native Brazilians, Guzmán suggests, reflects the disturbing cultural logic of national development—a logic in which indigenous people are called to play a hyperbolic symbolic role precisely when they are most forcefully sacrificed in the service of "order and progress."

Chapter 4 is centered on the controversial 1950s marriage of Ayres Cunha, a state-employed indigenist, to Diacuí Aiute, a young Kamapalo woman. Cunha's request to marry Diacuí was denied by SPI officials and became a heated topic of debate in the popular press. Guzmán's fascinating exploration of public opinion at the time shows the way indigenist romantic fantasies were ingrained in the public imagination. Rio's denizens imagined Diacuí as a honey-lipped Iracema, the heroin of Alencar's 1865 eponymous novel. The outpouring of support for the marriage eventually led the SPI to overturn its decision, and Diacuí traveled to Rio to celebrate her wedding. Yet her arrival was met with disappointment. In the eyes of the public, the Kamapalo youth lacked the physical grace and harmony of Alencar's heroine. Diacuí had to go through a highly publicized makeover and was embellished with "Indian-looking" necklaces and colorful clothes, so that she could play Indian according to metropolitan tastes. This story (the unearthing of which is itself a notable scholarly contribution) perfectly illustrates the way dominant ideas of Indian-ness have trumped and overridden actual indigeneity.

The work of native writers, scholars, artists, and activists is the topic of Chapter 5. Indigenous thinking about indigeneity, Guzmán argues, puts increasing emphasis on heterogeneity and the flexibility of identity, as represented by Marcos Terena's slogan, "I can be what you are without ceasing to be who I am." Natives are refusing to play Indian, which does not mean that they are refusing to be Indians but only that indigenous identity is moving beyond questions of authenticity and becoming increasingly fluid. Yet the determination of ethnicity has legal ramifications, especially in regards to the struggle for the rights of a differentiated citizenship, such as those promised in the 1988 constitution. "The governance of democratic society must ultimately rely on some degree of categorical assumption that can suspend the infinite heterogeneity of every sociopolitical actor," writes Guzmán (157). To put it simply, in a context of increased heterogeneity of indigenous identity, who is to determine who is Indian and who is not, and based on what criteria? Guzmán leaves this question open but points to the terrain from which it emerges as the fertile ground of indigenous thought and its challenge to our understandings of identity, citizenship, and sovereignty.

One of the merits of Guzmán's book is surely the breadth and diversity of the materials it examines. Yet, because of this variety, individual readers are likely to find lacunas and omissions. For instance, one of the Xavante children featured in the "Xou da Xuxa" scene that opens the book is the young Divino Tserewahú, recognized today as a leading indigenous filmmaker. It is somewhat surprising that Divino's work, which is rather invested in questions about "playing Indian" and about the gaps between Indian-ness and indigeneity, does not receive even a passing mention in Guzmán's book. Overall, however, I find that the eclecticism and representative breadth of Guzmán's materials produces a satisfying result. This interdisciplinary and well-written book is sure to become a valuable resource not only to scholars working in indigenous studies but to Brazilianists in general.

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