

## Culture



**Conrad P. KOTTAK, *Assault on Paradise: Social Change in a Brazilian Village*, New York, Random House, 1983. 314 pages, n.p. (paper)**

Matthew Cooper

Volume 3, Number 2, 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078144ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078144ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Cooper, M. (1983). Review of [Conrad P. KOTTAK, *Assault on Paradise: Social Change in a Brazilian Village*, New York, Random House, 1983. 314 pages, n.p. (paper)]. *Culture*, 3(2), 84–85. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078144ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1983

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

et l'uxorilocalité post-nuptiale temporaire (pp. 265 et 297-304). Ajoutons à propos de l'uxorilocalité que non seulement l'exemple étudié par J.M. Chevalier laisse perplexe (pp. 299-301, exemple d'uxorilocalité avec virilocalité du fils du chef), mais que des documents datés du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle attestent chez les Campa de l'époque d'une résidence uxorilocale (non-temporaire). Une réflexion sur les relations au territoire et sur l'identité aurait justement permis l'analyse des pratiques résidentielles et de leur transformation éventuelle.

Les Ashaninca sont menacés d'être engloutis par un monstre comme le fut jadis le fils de Pachakamai (p. 425, sq.). C'est pour sauver ce fils que Pachakamai quitta les siens à la poursuite du ravisseur et s'établit loin en aval près du lieu de sa victoire sur le monstre. Peut-être que les Ashaninca, vu la rareté grandissante de leur culture et partant de sa valeur croissante, méritaient-ils une étude plus approfondie; néanmoins cette œuvre, dans ces temps forts comme dans ces faiblesses, garde aiguë tout notre intérêt.

---

Conrad P. KOTTAK, *Assault on Paradise: Social Change in a Brazilian Village*, New York, Random House, 1983. 314 pages, n.p. (paper).

By Matthew Cooper  
McMaster University

In 1962, when Conrad Kottak first visited Arembepe as an undergraduate anthropology student the village was what Brazilians would call *um fim do mundo* (literally, an end of the world). Located on the coast about 60 kilometres north of Salvador, Bahia, the fishing village was relatively isolated and poor, the villagers largely ignorant of life outside. Today, though, it has become a seaside resort for lower-middle-class residents of Salvador, the home of titanium dioxide plant owned by a German multinational, and, a few years ago, housed a large colony of "hippies". This contrast and the processes that have brought about the Arembepe of 1980 structure Kottak's charming ethnography.

Over a period of 18 years, Kottak visited Arembepe five times. In a sense, the account of social change parallels the story of the author's involvement in his research. The naive student of the 1960's studies the people of Arembepe and finds that they are autonomous, egalitarian, and enjoy

real peace of mind. But then, returning in 1973 as an associate professor with other fieldwork in Madagascar under his belt, he feels betrayed; motorization of the fishing industry, tourism, massive industrial pollution, suburbanization through the building of a paved road to Salvador, and an invasion of "hippies" (themselves seeking the "natural" and "primitive") have blighted the village. The anthropologist retreats into research on the traditional, updating his earlier work, avoiding the disturbing present. Older and more mature, he returns in 1980 to find that the outline of change drawn up in the early 1970's was now being filled in but that the worst of the pollution had been cleaned up and that development had had benefits (of improved health services, education, raised income levels) as well as costs. Just as his understanding of the village has become more differentiated so, too, it has become occupationally diverse, divided into social classes, with new religious phenomena and previously unknown forms of deviance. "Like a thousand other places, Arembepe has grown increasingly dependent on, and vulnerable to, a world political economy of which its inhabitants have little understanding, and over which they have even less control. And provincial folk who once were impressed by, yet dared only gently probe, the novelty and strangeness of foreign ways have become eager initiates into a mass-mediated world culture" (p. 3).

One of the major strengths of this book is Kottak's largely successful attempt to integrate the personal with the general. Happily, there are for Kottak no typical Arembepeiros, only diverse individuals varying in personality, ability, and experience. Yet the ideologists that inform their thinking and behaviour and the socio-economic processes that broadly mould village life are well depicted and shown in the end to be more important for the understanding of this bit of contemporary history. Curiously Kottak's success comes despite some of the concepts he has chosen to employ. The book is not heavily theorized and it would be unfair to criticize it as if it were. But Kottak's cultural evolutionary perspective shading into a sort of modernization theory leads him, for example, to compare the changes in Arembepe over 20 years with those in the ancient Middle East that gave rise to complex civilizations over the course of thousands of years. Differences of scale and context are so enormous that the comparison is, at best, whimsical, at worst, misleading because it threatens to drown the real history of this little village in an evolutionary sea. Then, too, using concepts like the image of limited good, levelling mechanisms, and

the Protestant Ethic (in a village where there are no Protestants) no longer can be said to advance our understanding although they do bespeak Kottak's desire to deal with the dialectic of idea and action.

Yet, *Assault on Paradise* does succeed in painting a vivid picture of life in one Brazilian community over twenty years of rapid change and in showing how Arembepe "has met the increasingly common fate of the little community in the Third World" (p. 3). It also succeeds in conveying very well how one anthropologist grappled with the demands of doing fieldwork. Well-written and illustrated, this book will engage the interest of undergraduates while giving much substance for thought and discussion. I recommend it highly.

---

Yvan BRETON et Marie-France LABRECQUE,  
*L'agriculture, la pêche et l'artisanat au Yucatan: prolétarianisation de la paysannerie maya au Mexique*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981. 373 pages.

By Alice Littlefield  
Central Michigan University

This book is an exemplary study of peasant production in a region which has long been of considerable interest to anthropologists. It is exemplary in several ways: it analyzes three sectors of production—agriculture, fishing and crafts—rather than just one; it is a regional study which examines each of the three economic sectors in two or more communities in north central Yucatan; and it employs a methodology of coordinated team research utilizing a consistent body of theory and concepts in the analysis and comparison of the different economic activities and communities.

Breton and Labrecque give two reasons for expanding the concept of peasant production to include fishing and crafts as well as agriculture. First, the lowland Mayan peasantry ensures its socio-economic reproduction through differentiated labor involving several complementary economic activities within a single community or household. Second, in spite of the specificity of the labor process in each of the three sectors, there are many parallels in the relations of production and in their articulation with the dominant capitalist mode of production.

Ultimately, the second argument is more convincing than the first. Whereas craft production is

nearly always complementary to agriculture or fishing at the household level (partly because traditional patterns of division of labor tend to ascribe craft activities to women and children, agriculture and fishing to men), agriculture and fishing are not usually carried on within the same household or community. The reasons for this are largely ecological: the Yucatecan littoral is ill-suited for cultivation.

Nevertheless, the three sectors evidence interesting parallels in the articulation of petty commodity production with the dominant capitalist mode. Private and state enterprises exert considerable control over petty commodity production through credit relations, monopoly of inputs, and control of markets for products. Through these means they manipulate the terms of exchange in their favor, obstructing the accumulation of capital in the hands of the direct producers and facilitating its accumulation by the regional and national bourgeoisie.

One of the common problems confronted by economic anthropologists is the lack of reliable quantitative data on the kinds of productive activities we investigate, and the difficulties of collecting such data from producers who keep few written records (or from uncooperative government bureaucracies). The authors of this book utilize some innovative approaches which allow quantitative estimates of such variables as income, profit, and work effort, facilitating comparisons across localities and across economic sectors. Economic anthropologists, regardless of their geographical specializations, will want to examine their approaches to these problems.

Labrecque's sophisticated analysis of agriculture in four communities (Sinanché, Temax, Dzidzantun and Yobain) constitutes a theoretically significant contribution to the understanding of the rural Mexican economy, particularly the thorny problems posed by the widespread co-existence of wage labor and petty commodity production in the countryside, and by the simultaneous presence of these forms of production on both private and *ejido* (collective) lands in Yucatan.

The short-term credits provided to the state-controlled henequen-producing collectives take the form of weekly wages for work performed. These credits have a contradictory character: they constitute a government subsidy which buys peace in the countryside (most *ejidos* are deeply in debt to the state lending agency), but are also a source of surplus-value and capital accumulation for sectors of the bourgeoisie. Extensive state control of production, processing and marketing of raw henequen