

GASTÃO CRULS

A AMAZÔNIA MISTERIOSA



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UTOPIAN AMAZONS:

a communitarian matriarchy in the jungle

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ABSTRACT This article discusses the portrayal of the mythical Amazons. In the past, the legend of a fearsome all-women tribe went hand in hand with a dystopian vision of the territory as a “green hell.” I contend that, with the development of the Amazon region in the wake of the rubber boom and, especially, with the rise of environmental concerns, the Amazons become part of an idealized image of the rainforest. I analyze two modes of utopian representation of the Amazons: Gastão Cruls’s depiction of a lost tribe of women in the novel *The Mysterious Amazon* (1925); and Abguar Bastos’s vision of the promised land of the Amazons in *The Amazon Nobody Knows About* (1929).

KEYWORDS Amazons. Matriarchy. Environmentalism.

AMAZONAS UTÓPICAS: um matriarcado comunitário na floresta

RESUMO Este artigo discute a representação das Amazonas na literatura brasileira. A lenda de uma temível tribo de mulheres acompanhou uma visão distópica da Amazônia como um “inferno verde”. Argumento neste artigo que, com o desenvolvimento do estado devido ao boom da borracha e, em especial, com o advento do ambientalismo, as Amazonas tornaram-se parte de uma visão idealizada da floresta tropical. Analiso aqui duas formas de representação utópica das Amazonas: a descrição de uma tribo perdida de mulheres, no romance *A Amazônia misteriosa* (1925), de Gastão Cruls, e a visão de Abguar Bastos da terra prometida das Amazonas, em *A Amazônia que ninguém sabe* (1929).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Amazonas. Matriarcado. Ambientalismo.

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The Land of the Amazons

The feminization of the American territory, envisioned as a vast, natural expanse lying in wait for European *conquistadores* to mold and civilize it, has proven to be an enduring fiction of New World colonization. This conception inherited an age-old understanding of the environment as female, the state of nature corresponding to the human condition before the advent of social organization mediated by masculine rationality (Merchant xxiii). In the case of the American continent, land was regarded as feminine, raw, chaotic matter that, following Aristotelian principles, male colonizers were tasked to shape into an enduring, intelligible form.¹ Native American populations tended to be amalgamated with nature as just another feature of the landscape serving as a background for the exploits of the newcomers.

¹ For Aristotle, natural bodies are a combination of matter and form (II, 2). Traditionally viewed as a passive element, women have been associated to the material substratum of life throughout the history of Western thought, whereas men tend to be regarded as a formative element.

² In Ancient Greek mythology, the Amazons were an all-women society of powerful warriors. They had sexual encounters with men to produce offspring but kept only their daughters, killing or abandoning the sons. One of the etymological explanations for the term “Amazon” is that it combines the privative *-a* with *mazos*, or breast, to mean “without breast.” This goes back to the idea that the Amazons severed their right breast in order to better use their bows and spears.

The Amazon River basin did not escape this stereotypical depiction of American land. The remoteness of the region posed particular challenges to European exploration and colonization, which is perhaps the underlying reason for naming both the river and, synecdochically, the entire region, “Amazon,” after the fierce mythological tribe of women warriors who purportedly fought against Ancient Greek soldiers.² To be sure, chronicles detailing the exploits of the first Europeans to arrive in the New World were rife with news about and even sightings of the Amazons, in locations as diverse as the Islands of the Antilles, present-day Ecuador, the Yucatan Peninsula or the South of Chile (Holanda 27-30).³ The European predisposition to interpret the reality of the new continent through the lens of preexisting legends created fertile ground for imagining the presence of the Amazons, as well as a variety of other mythological creatures, in different parts of the Americas. One can only speculate why the name stuck in the case of the “river of the Amazons.” The association of the new land with femininity, and the vast and impenetrable jungle environment, where nature was more like a wild, hostile woman than a nurturing mother, contributed to cementing the idea that dangerous female fighters lived deep in the rainforest.

The first encounter with an aggressive tribe of women in the region was reported in Spanish Dominican Priest Gaspar de Carvajal's text *The Discovery of the Great River of the Amazons* (*Descubrimiento del gran río de las Amazonas*). Carvajal accompanied explorer Francisco de Orellana in his traversal of the length of the Amazon basin from the foothills of the Andes to the mouth of the river in the Atlantic Ocean in 1541-42. According to the priest, Orellana's men were attacked by a group of women, whose bravery in battle was such that they killed many Spanish soldiers with their powerful arrows and were only defeated after a long and strenuous battle (213-15). After Carvajal's narrative, the Amazons routinely made an appearance in writings about the region. French geographer André Thévet, British explorer Sir Walter Raleigh, Spanish Jesuit priest Cristóbal de Acuña, Portuguese Priest Simão de Vasconcelos, and French traveler Charles de la Condamine were only some of the authors who mentioned the powerful kingdom of the Amazons, located within the jungle.

As scholarly-driven travel to South America became more frequent, the myth of the Amazons receded into the background. Inspired by the matter-of-fact spirit of the Enlightenment, naturalists such as Alexander von Humboldt, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Walter Bates or Louis Agassiz strove to decipher the hidden mysteries of the rainforest, be they arising from its natural environment or pertaining to the history of its peoples. The existence of an all-women tribe was then easily brushed aside as yet another irrational belief of the pre-scientific era.

From a very real danger that conspired with other perils, such as strange diseases, wild animals, poisonous plants and treacherous rapids, to terrorize outsiders, the Amazons became a mere footnote in the long list of misunderstandings about the region. But as they crossed the hazy border separating reality from myth, fact from fancy, they underwent a subtle transformation. While the Amazons were, at first, still part of a dystopian conception of the rainforest, their recognition as a mere legend and, hence, no longer a threat, also paved the way for their romanticization. As the twentieth-century wore on and the view of nature as dangerous gave way to ecological utopianism, the legendary tribe of the Amazons metamorphosed into an idealized social group, prospering in its environment and devoid of the drawbacks of contemporary Brazilian society. In the rest of this article, I will turn to two modes of utopian representation of the Amazons: Gastão Cruls' depiction of an a well-organized, self-sufficient lost tribe

3 Holanda describes the transformation of the Amazon myth from the idea that the tribe lived on an island to the belief that they inhabited the American continent (28-38). The Amazon River basin, conceived as a space separated from the rest of South America for its remoteness, climate and geography, and, thus, almost like an island, is a fitting abode for the legendary women. It is worth recalling, furthermore, that many utopias, including Thomas More's, were located on islands. The utopian portrayal of the Amazons in texts from the first half of the twentieth century therefore follows in a long line of insular utopias.

of women in *The Mysterious Amazon (A Amazônia Misteriosa, 1925)* and Abguar Bastos' vision of the promised land of the Amazons, free from the social ills of his time, in *The Amazon no One Knows About (A Amazônia que Ninguém Sabe, 1929)*, renamed *Land of the Icamiabas (Terra de Icamiaba)* in its second edition from 1934.

Back to the Golden Age: Amazonian Incas

Gastão Cruls's novel *The Mysterious Amazon*, written at a time when the author had never been to the area, exemplifies the idealization of Amazonia.⁴ The text's first-person narrator and protagonist is a Brazilian doctor who recounts his adventures during an expedition into the rainforest. He gets lost in the jungle and is rescued by a group of Indians who take him and his companion to a town inhabited only by women. There he meets Doctor Hartmann, a German scientist who had been living in the territory for eight years with his French wife Rosina to conduct secretive experiments. The scientist informs the narrator that they are the guests of the fabled Amazons, descendants of a group of women from the Inca Empire who fled the violence of Spanish conquest.⁵ The matriarchal tribe keeps only their female offspring, and no men, apart from occasional outsiders like the narrator, are allowed in the group.⁶ Allying the Indian knowledge of the local environment with the technological know-how and social organization of the Incas, the Amazons are depicted as a third way between the simple existence of native Amazonians and the unbridled search for development and desire to shape nature to one's wishes characteristic of modern culture. In the beginning of the novel, the Brazilian explorer is represented as a detached and impartial observer of the Amazons' customs and of Dr. Hartmann's scientific pursuits. He later becomes emotionally involved with Rosina, which triggers the narrative's denouement, when the couple tries to escape from the area and the young woman is killed during the attempt.

The environment described by the protagonist reflects his ambivalent relationship with the rainforest, which goes back to traditional views of the area either as a green hell or as an earthly Paradise. On the one hand, he is fascinated by the lushness of the jungle that surpasses all his expectations. He comments on the "magnificent gradation of greens" ("magnífica [...] graduação dos verdes," 11) and adds, further on, that "the

⁴ Cruls later toured the region and wrote down his impressions in his 1930 book *The Amazon I Saw (A Amazônia que eu Vi)*.

⁵ The narrator describes the theory that the Amazons descended from women who had fled the Spanish when they conquered the Inca Empire. According to the German doctor, the women had either rebelled against their husbands because the latter had been defeated by Francisco Pizarro or they were vestal virgins from the Temple of the Sun, who had escaped the rage of the *conquistadores* by leaving the Andes and moving to the Amazon basin (114-15).

⁶ The Amazons had sexual encounters with males from a neighboring tribe once a year but they kept only the female offspring resulting from this union. All male children were sent to live with their fathers.

forest displays, at this point, an unmatched grandiosity” (“A floresta, neste ponto, é de uma grandiosidade sem igual,” 34). The immensity of the landscape dwarfs human measures and thwarts any attempts at cataloging or mapping the region: “It is necessary to know the immensity of the Amazon to be able to evaluate the ridiculous pettiness of geographical charts when we try to mentally reconstruct a path we have already traversed” (“É preciso conhecer o que é a imensidade da Amazônia para poder avaliar a mesquinhez ridícula que assumem as cartas geográficas, quando, diante delas, procuramos refazer algum trecho já percorrido,” 20).

On the other hand, the protagonist is sometimes bored by the monotony of nature: “Here, there is not even a gradation of greens. One sole and same somber hue permeates all vegetation [...]” (“Nem mesmo há aqui a gradação dos verdes. Uma única e mesma tinta sombria empasta toda a vegetação [...],” 18). Tedium rapidly turns into apprehension once he gets lost. The environment is now “inhospitable” and the flora turns into a “monster with a green mane that kept us within its grip” (“inóspito,” “monstro de grenha verde que nos retinha entre as suas malhas,” 37). While asleep, he conjures up a nightmarish vision of the rainforest coming to life and acquiring mobility, which is juxtaposed to the explorer’s sense of powerlessness and entrapment: “As if by magic, all the vegetal beings in the forest had lost their cellulose membrane that immobilized them, and were now sensitive beings that moved with ease and wandered freely, slowly dragging their roots, as if these were large tentacles” (“Como que por encanto, todos os vegetais da floresta haviam perdido a membrana de celulose que os imobiliza, e eram agora entes sensificados que se moviam com desembaraço e vagueavam em liberdade, deslocando lentamente o raizame, à maneira de grandes tentáculos,” 42). The narrator feels that he is in the clutches of an enormous living being that is at once awe-inspiring and threatening.

Cruls’s protagonist realizes that his divergent appraisals of Amazonia are contingent upon his precarious situation as a newcomer to the area. His interpretation of the surroundings is filtered through the works of a vast body of literature that is invoked at every turn. Francisco de Orellana (106), Hans Staden (55), Carl Linnaeus (47), Alexander von Humboldt (90), Lord Byron (29), Louis Agassiz (18), Richard Spruce (46), Henry Walter Bates (23) and Marshal Rondon (48) are some of the figures he mentions when trying to describe an environment that is foreign to him. This bookish,

second-hand knowledge of the territory that results in divergent perceptions of the environment, depending on the circumstances, contrast sharply with the immediacy of the Indians' relationship to nature. The narrator comments on the effortless with which native Amazonians move in the area: "I was immediately struck by the ease with which those people walked in the woods. Swift and skillful, one would think that the forest was made for them [...]" ("Despertou-me logo interesse a facilidade com que aquela gente andava no mato. Ligeiros e atilados, dir-se-ia que a floresta fora feita para eles [...]" 51). While the narrator's perception of nature was limited to external appearances he often could not decipher, for the Indians, "the forest [...]" became a true orchard ("a mata [...] transformava-se num verdadeiro pomar," 52), a *locus amoenus* for those who understood its inner workings.

Even though the Amazons are, like the narrator, not originally from the area—according to the text, they descended from the Andes to the Amazon basin at the beginning of the colonial period—they have, similarly to the native Indian tribes, seamlessly adjusted to their surroundings. When accompanying them in their expeditions, the protagonist reflects: "It was a pleasure to travel with the Amazons. Nature belonged to them and as much on firm land, crossing large forests, as on small rafts [...] there were no dangers or obstacles for them" ("dava gosto viajar com as Amazonas. A natureza pertencia-lhes e tanto na terra firme, varando as grandes florestas, como sobre as pequenas ubás [...], não havia perigos e escolhos que se lhes antolhassem," 269). Skillful at fishing and hunting, the Amazons are able to reap full benefits of the abundant local environment. But the narrator also emphasizes the differences between the women's tribe and other indigenous groups in the region. They live in comfortable houses in well-ordered, miniature cities, with large streets, squares and gardens (85). Furthermore, they do not depend solely on nature's bounty but have also cultivated extensive fields that yield a variety of crops (88; 98-9). Their warehouses are an emblem of their management skills: "[...] I did not know what I should admire the most: whether the order in their arrangement, or the diversity and profusion of merchandise stored that testified to the degree of development and industriousness of this people." ("[...] e não soube o que mais admirar: se a ordem que presidia ao seu arranjo, se a diversidade e profusão das mercadorias em depósito, a atestar o grau de adiantamento e operosidade daquele povo." 122).

But what the Brazilian doctor appreciates the most is the proto-communist social organization of the Amazons. Everyone works in activities appropriate to their age and ability, and everything is held in common: “goods belong to the community and are evenly divided according to the needs of each person” (“os bens pertencem à comunidade e são irramente divididos, conforme as necessidades de cada um,” 119). It is up to the queen, who is chosen according to her qualities and changes every few years, to distribute produce and other merchandise, depending on necessity (125). In the novel, such a system is traced back to Incan social order. In a hallucinogenic-induced vision, the protagonist accompanies Atahualpa, the last Inca emperor, who shows him the capital of his empire, Cusco, from where the Amazons descended. There, as in the all-female tribe, there was no private property and therefore no need for any form of money. The narrator comments on this economic arrangement: “under the regime of such a wise communism, the nation lived cohesive and prosperous, in the general communion of its goods and beliefs and without ever having known the hatreds and passions that feed on social inequalities and oscillations of fortune” (“sob o regime de tão sábio comunismo, a nação vivia coesa e próspera, na comunhão geral dos seus bens e das suas crenças e sem jamais ter conhecido os ódios e as paixões que se nutrem das desigualdades sociais e das oscilações da fortuna,” 164).

The protagonist calls the Inca kingdom “that extraordinary communist empire, which, still today, and for various reasons, could serve as paradigm for the more just aspirations of humanity” (“esse extraordinário império comunista que, ainda hoje, e por vários aspectos, poderia servir de paradigma às mais justas aspirações da humanidade,” 163). He paints the portrait of a highly advanced, utopian Incan society in pre-Columbian America, the Amazons being the last remnant of this idealized reign that managed to survive with its communitarian institutions precisely because it was never conquered.⁷ “Eager for profits, hungry for material gains, and in a permanent delirium of wealth that unleashed their basest instincts,” colonizers were diametrically opposed to the communal-oriented Incas (“Ávidos de lucros, famintos de proventos materiais, num permanente delírio de riquezas que lhes desaçaimava os instintos mais torpes,” 168-9). According to Atahualpa, the greed of Europeans was responsible for the destruction of most of the “blessed continent,” together with its native inhabitants, and “countless tribes [...] were completely exterminated [...] throughout Brazil” (“continente

⁷ Cruls goes back to Edenic discourses in his description of pre-Columbian America, through the eyes of Atahualpa: “This was a blessed continent that God graced with every favor, giving it all the climates, a soil that is rich and fertile, boundless treasures, very high mountains, the largest rivers and immense lakes. It was not without a reason that Columbus, when he arrived in the New World, believed he had found Paradise, and thought that the Orinoco was one of the four large rivers that [...] came out of Eden to irrigate the recently formed world” (“Isto era um continente abençoado e com o qual Deus se desmediu em prodigalidades, dando-lhe todos os climas, um solo rico e feraz, tesouros inesgotáveis, altíssimas montanhas, os maiores rios, lagos imensos. Não foi sem razão que Colombo, ao chegar ao Novo Mundo, supôs ter descoberto o Paraíso e julgou o Orinoco um dos quatro grandes rios que [...] saíam do Éden para banhar a terra recentemente formada.” (166-7).

abençoado;” “não se contam as tribos [...] que foram totalmente exterminadas [...] por todo o Brasil,” 166; 171). The protagonist realizes that the communism practiced both by the Incas and in the tribe of the Amazons was a better form of government than the one prevalent in the society he comes from, which inherited the rapaciousness of the first colonizers. By contrasting the social harmony that reigns amongst the Amazons to the constant conflicts that plague the Western world, the novel weaves a strong critique of early twentieth-century values.

8 The German doctor explains that the Amazons were traditionally considered to be belligerent because they had to fight with local tribes for their territory when they descended from the Andes into the Amazon basin (116). Since then, they have lived in peace with their neighbors.

9 The Amazons channel their energy into communitarian activities. When they come from work, their organized manner of walking reminds the narrator of an army, but this is a peaceful formation returning from agricultural and similar tasks, not from battle: “Judging by the way they all marched, in a distinguished manner, at the same distance from one another and without speaking, they looked like small platoons which observed the strictest of disciplines. [...] Those are the *ccossanac*, the virgins returning from work” (À maneira por que todas marchavam, em postura garbosa, equidistantes e sem falar, tinha-se a impressão de pequenos pelotões nos quais se observasse a mais rigorosa disciplina. [...] Aquelas são as *ccossanac*, as virgens que voltam do trabalho,” 99).

The correlation between Western-style civilization and barbarism is nowhere clearer than in the references to the First World War, a “breath of madness that stained with blood the most civilized countries” (“sopro de loucura que ensanguentou os países mais civilizados,” 29). The narrator calls it “the most horrible of wars” when he describes the conflict to the Frenchwoman Rosina, while they walk amongst the orderly workshops where Amazons weave, cook, prepare preserves and make their pottery (“a mais horrível das guerras,” 140). The contrast between a Europe engulfed in war and the peaceful diligence of the laborious Amazons could not be starker.⁸ The Amazons, routinely portrayed as barbaric, ferocious warriors by past chronicles, epitomize in the novel a superior culture that, having embraced communitarianism, is free from the “demented ambitions to rule and dominate” that led Germany to war (“desvairadas ambições de mando e predomínio,” 140).⁹ The traditional roles of the civilized and the barbarian, of the developed and the primitive are inverted in Cruls’s narrative, where the utopian kingdom of the Amazons constitutes an example for the rest of the world, peacefully uniting the social cohesion of indigenous tribes with the economic progress of European society.

The Amazons have managed to attain a felicitous equilibrium not only in their socio-political structure but also in their relationship to nature. As described above, they have perfected agriculture and reached a high degree of material comfort, while still living in symbiosis with the environment. Conversely, Doctor Hartmann’s experiments encapsulate the downside of the Western drive to rule over nature and to mold it to humanity’s wildest fantasies. The German tries to keep his scientific pursuits a secret but the protagonist soon finds out about his research. He devotes his time to crossbreeding different animals, including humans, in an attempt to prolong life and rejuvenate vital organs, as well as to show the flexibility of what are usually con-

red to be fixed traits from a given species. For instance, he produced a being that was half-human, half-monkey. Even though he did not ask for permission from the Indian woman who gave birth to the creature, he argues that she stood to gain, since the procedure regenerated her body to such an extent that she became a “mother” when she was sixty years old (230).

While the Doctor is undoubtedly proud of his achievements, the narrator is considerably more skeptical about the experiments. He writes of the scientific creations he is shown: “From then on, in a succession of coops, cages and pens, passed in front of my astonished eyes, in a truly apocalyptic vision, the most curious and unpredictable forms of animals, starting with the unconceivable hybrid of a cigana bird and a lizard, a kind of mythical and disconcerting griffin [...]” (Daí por diante, numa sucessão de gaiolas, jaulas e cercados, passaram aos meus olhos estuporados, numa verdadeira visão apocalíptica, as mais curiosas e imprevisíveis formas animais, a começar pelo inconcebível híbrido da cigana e do jacuarú, espécie de grifo fabuloso e desconcertante [...]) (231-2). After seeing cross-bred creatures involving reptiles, rodents, birds, Cetacea and primates, the protagonist exclaims, “But this is chaos in nature,” to which Doctor Hartmann replies: “Not chaos! order... because these crossings will never be produced spontaneously. Order because, in this way, phylogeny can be proven through experience” (“Mas isso é o caos na natureza;” “O caos, não! a ordem... porque esses cruzamentos nunca se poderão produzir espontaneamente. A ordem, porque assim nós temos a filogenia comprovada pela experiência”) (232).

The German scientist, who had moved to the Amazon in order to have easy access to human and non-human specimens for his experiments, follows in a long line of fictional creations such as Doctor Faust or Victor Frankenstein, who dream of playing God so as to bend the rules of nature.¹⁰ The parallel with H. G. Wells’s scientist from the 1896 novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is particularly glaring, and the protagonist himself compares Doctor Hartmann to Doctor Moreau when he first learns of the experiments (209). But, while Wells’s character transforms non-human animals with the explicit goal of making them ape human traits, thus evincing a clear humanist bias, Cruls’s researcher is even bolder, experimenting across all species to learn about the dominant characteristics of each. His unscrupulous methods are denounced by his own wife, who accuses him of experimenting on healthy humans, including a

¹⁰ The German doctor needed human subjects to perform his experiments and decided to move to a remote region, where tribes often sacrificed their prisoners of war, in order to use these prisoners in his scientific pursuits. He also used twins, since local tribes usually killed one of the twins at birth, children with physical disabilities, who were also killed at birth, and the male offspring of the Amazons (220-23). Even though the Professor tries to persuade the narrator that his experiments are ethically sound, the latter is never fully convinced.

¹¹ Rosina recounts that her husband also experimented on healthy subjects, including a Syrian merchant who, like the narrator, arrived at the city of the Amazons by mistake. After the experiments, the Syrian lost the ability to speak Portuguese and the use of one of his arms. Furthermore, the German doctor tried to persuade his wife to give birth to a being that would be half-human, half-monkey, an experiment he later performed with one of the Amazons (249-51).

merchant who had reached the tribe of the Amazons by chance, just like the narrator.¹¹ The Doctor himself has an inkling that his work will not be well received by the larger scientific community. Using the influence he had acquired by living for many years amongst the Amazons, he prevents the Brazilian from leaving the tribe, so that the explorer would not misrepresent his research once he reached the outside world (235-7).

The German nationality of the eccentric scientist, which may be explained by the anti-Teutonic sentiment fueled by World War I, presciently reminds today's readers of the abhorrent Nazi experiments in eugenics that were to take place later in the century. More to the point, however, Doctor Hartmann's efforts evokes that widely espoused conception of the Amazon as a land still in construction, with infinite natural resources that human beings are tasked with developing. In his misguided experiments, the Doctor is merely taking the mandate to exploit all possibilities of the bountiful Amazonian nature to its last consequences. The apocalyptic scenario the narrator encounters in the German's lab is the corollary of the drive to dominate nature and to fashion it according to human whims. The inhuman experiments conducted by the scientist reveal, once again, the bestial side of outsiders, who had already shown their cruelty when they first arrived in the region. Doctor Hartmann's attempts to undermine nature and to pursue his research no matter what show that Westerners are the real barbarians when compared to the Amazons.

¹² The connection between Cruls and the protagonist of his novel comes through in the travel book *A Amazônia que eu vi*, where he writes: "What if on a turn of the river we were imprisoned by one of those tribes who protected the *Land of the Amazons* and I was taken once again to Professor Hartmann?" ("E se a uma curva do rio fôssemos aprisionados por uma daquellas tribos que guardavam o *País das Amazonas* e de novo eu me visse levado à presença do Professor Hartmann?" 214).

Unlike other authors writing during the rubber boom period, Cruls does not consider progress at all costs to be worthwhile. He decries the more disruptive aspects of modern science and technology in favor of the harmonious relationship to their surroundings that the Amazons represent. It is significant that the novel's protagonist was trained as a medical doctor but had abandoned the profession, much like Cruls himself.¹² Unlike modern scientists, the Amazons use technology without trying to overstep natural constraints and have built a highly developed civilization that is in tune with the environment. The female tribe is depicted as a people frozen in time, in that they have kept the customs of their Inca ancestors intact and survived in isolation from the rest of the country. In *The Mysterious Amazon*, then, the forward-looking, utopian thrust that points the path towards a better future, involves a return to the past, to the Amazon's Golden Age of communist organization: a third way between primitivism and modern civilization offered as a social model both for Brazil and for the rest of the Western world.

By setting his communal, jungle utopia in a matriarchal tribe composed only of women, Cruls is implicitly adhering to a series of stereotypes about gender while, at the same time, reconfiguring the usual valuation of these characteristics. War, greed and corruption are tacitly linked to the patriarchal organization of the West, as is the destruction of nature brought about by modern science, embodied in Doctor Hartmann. The German stands for the quintessential male researcher, oblivious to the consequences and side effects of his experiments. Conversely, cooperation, communal work and harmony with one's surroundings are perceived as female characteristics. The author suggests that his utopia could only come true if qualities usually regarded as feminine were to be incorporated in modern society, while unrestrained progress and the taming of nature, typically seen as masculine pursuits, would have to be scaled down. Still, *The Mysterious Amazon* is not a feminist text. The Amazons are defined by a lack, as "women without husband" ("mulheres sem marido," 64), the main characters are male, and the narrative does not openly advocate for women's empowerment in society at large. At stake is, rather, the juxtaposition of two social forms of organization: Cruls resorts to the myth of the Amazons to describe an advanced society free from the violence, selfishness, environmental destruction and other drawbacks of the contemporary world.

¹³ The word "Icamiaba" derives from a Tupi language expression that means "broken breast," an allusion to the legend of the Ancient Greek Amazons, who supposedly mutilated their right breast. More likely, Icamiaba refers to the name of the region that the Amazons supposedly inhabited, as already hinted at by Acuña in the seventeenth century. Cruls mentions this etymology in *The Mysterious Amazon*: "One of the areas where one finds more green stones is in the mountain of Itcamiaba, and that is why the Amazons are also called Itcamiabas" ("Uma das zonas em que se encontram mais pedras verdes é a serra Itcamiaba, por isso se chamaram às Amazonas também Itcamiabas," 111). The "green stones" were gifts that the Amazons purportedly bestowed upon their lovers when they visited them once a year. "Itcamiaba" then became shortened to "Icamiaba."

Utopia in the Land of the Icamiabas

More than in Cruls's text, the Amazons appear as a vanishing signifier in Abguar Bastos's *Land of the Icamiabas*. The novel recounts a series of episodes in the life of its protagonist, Bepe, who is forced to abandon the studies he was pursuing in the city of Belém because of his father's debts, and to move to the small town of Badajoz, in the Amazon rainforest, where he lives off the land. When he is about to be expropriated from his property thanks to a legal technicality, Bepe puts together a makeshift militia and tries to resist. Faced with the imminent prospect of defeat, as reinforcements from the Brazilian army arrive to fight against the rebellious group, Bepe decides to lead his men to the fabled land of the Amazons, where he hopes to build a better society, a utopian republic free from avarice and from exploitative practices. The Amazons that give the book its title – "Icamiabas" is just another name for Amazons –¹³ do not make an appearance

in the narrative. Based upon the legend of an all-women tribe, Bastos reduces his Icamiabas to a symbol of a thriving, wealthy community. The fact that Bepe wants to found his utopian city in the land of the Amazons singles him and his men out as the inheritors to the promise of prosperity that the legendary tribe of women stood for.

Land of the Icamiabas shares with *The Mysterious Amazon* a suspicion of modern society that comes through in the contrast between decadent city dwellers and the more vibrant existence of those who work the land in the rainforest. Urban landscapes bring forth degeneracy, hypocrisy and deceit, epitomized in the fate of Bepe's two friends, Rejinaldo and Jeremias, both of whom succumb to their amorous disillusionments. The first, a lyrical poet, only loved incorporeal, sickly women who had a tendency to die of tuberculosis (27-8). The second, a Romantic writer, falls for a married woman who is assassinated by her lover once he learns of her relationship with the poet (35).

But the moral corruption of the modern city goes beyond dubious love relationships. The novel's third-person narrator condemns the cosmopolitanism of city life, where foreigners usurp the riches of the land from native Brazilians. The author of a nationalist manifesto titled "Flami-n'Açu," or "the great flame," written as a reaction to the Modernist movement, Bastos was a rabid opponent of foreigners, and used his novel as a platform to denounce what he considered to be the negative

consequences of mass immigration to the country.¹⁴ The text includes a series of rants against those who "abuse the hospitality" of Brazilians ("abuso de hospitalidade," 106).

In a telling passage, the narrator exhorts his region to use its "columns of Amazons" to "hurl its blow" in a fight against deleterious foreign domination, so as to "create a Brazilianness of feeling" ("colunas de amazonas;" "arremata o teu golpe;" "faz a brasilidade do sentimento;" 95).

While Amazonian cities are perceived as permeable to foreign values, the rainforest appears in the novel as a last bastion of Brazilian traditional values. The protagonist's retreat into nature, after his short passage through Belém, thus acquires particular significance. For "Bepe has only one family: his Fatherland. He has only one religion: his Nature" ("Bepe só tem uma família: a sua Pátria. Só tem uma religião: a sua Natureza," 22). The jungle "teaches him, slowly, the terrifying secrets of genesis" ("[...] ensina, lentamente, os segredos terríveis da gênese" 39). In the novel, then, Brazilian culture, embodied in the figure of Bepe, derives directly from a close kinship between

¹⁴ The narrator writes, in one of the novel's tirades against foreigners: "The Brazilian is irreplaceable. Still, every day, ships unload in national harbors packs of foreigners. They bring no money" ("O brasileiro é insubstituível. No entanto, todos os dias os navios despejam nos portos nacionais matilhas de forasteiros. Não trazem vintém," 94).

the people and the environment. Fatherland and nature are presented as two sides of the same coin and the narrator is mistrustful of extraneous customs that corrupt the link between Brazilians and their land.

Bepe's troubles begin when foreign influences start to reach beyond city limits and spread into the jungle. He loses his land to an immigrant, who is supported by local political leaders, thus revealing the dishonesty of government officials. This is the point in the narrative when the protagonist and his followers depart in search of the land of the Icamiabas. Bepe, the "genius of the place," is glorified as a liberator who will guide the group to a bountiful, new region, akin to the Biblical promised land ("gênio do lugar," 8). It is telling that Bepe chooses the territory of the Amazons as the location where he wishes to establish a new society. Unable to find justice within the reality of contemporary Brazil, he pursues his dream of founding a civilization free from corruption and true to genuine Brazilian values in the midst of the rainforest. The Amazons appear in the novel as symbols both of a place uncontaminated by extraneous influences and of authentic Brazilianness. In aspiring to occupying a space that once belonged to the mythical female warriors, Bepe hopes to honor both their connection to the land and their pugnacious spirit, which drove them to battle against invaders trying to encroach upon their territory, in the same way as foreigners were, according to Bastos, invading the cities and even the countryside in Brazil.

In a curious twist, though, the novel portrays Bepe and his men as new *conquistadores*, ready to take over the land that once belonged to the Amazons like the explorers of old. They are guided by a man called "Columbú," a clear reference to Columbus, the only one who "knows where the mysterious land is located – the land that guards the treasures of the men who came from the sea. He knows of its hills of gold, its singing forests, its warrior ants" ("sabe onde fica a terra misteriosa – a que guarda os tesouros dos homens que vinham do mar. Sabe das suas colinas de ouro, das suas florestas que cantam, das suas formigas guerreiras" 155). Bepe, in his turn, "starts to envy the halo of the discoverers and glimpses in historical traces, the crosses, flags, marks, hieroglyphs [...]. He dreams of the sailors who, in the bow of sailboats, crossed the abysses of the oceans" ("começa a invejar a auréola dos descobridores e entrevê, nos rastros históricos, as cruces, as bandeiras, os marcos, os hieróglifos [...]. Sonha com os marinheiros que, na prôa das caravelas, transpuseram os abismos oceânicos [...].")

175). In Bastos's text, the legendary Amazons and the first explorers of Amazonia are brought together in a synthesis to represent the origins of Brazilian culture, in a move similar to the union of Iracema and the Portuguese soldier Martim in Alencar's novel mentioned above. The feminine and masculine elements are merged, erasing the historical friction between American land and its native people, on the one hand, and the colonizers, on the other. In the narrative, Bepe and his followers are portrayed the true descendants of this original, unproblematized union. Threatened by foreigners, they retreat to the land of the Icamíabas, retracing the footsteps of their European ancestors, in search of the source of authentic Brazilianness emanating from the rich wellsprings of Amazonia.

In spite of his confused identity politics that amalgamates colonized and colonizers and refuses to acknowledge the contributions of new immigrants to the country, Bastos's novel links the Amazons to a utopia that stands in contrast to the rest of Brazilian society. Bepe "dreams of a miraculous Republic," where people will be required "not to wipe their feet but to wipe their spirit" before entering it ("sonha com uma República miraculosa;" "não limpem os pés, limpem o espírito," 156). This utopian land, half way between the city of god and the city of men, is "close to heaven" and combines religious, messianic, and secular elements ("perto do céu," 156). It will have no courts and public offices, since "God is everything" and human institutions are necessarily imperfect (156). Nevertheless, the narrator points out, somewhat contradictorily, "the city will astonish travelers less for its luxury than for its laws" ("a cidade espantará os viajantes menos pelo seu luxo do que pelas suas leis," 156). In this novel city, laws do not need to be coercively enforced, since the moral fiber of its inhabitants, tempered by their Christian beliefs, will ensure that justice prevails.

Similarly to Cruls's narrative, Bastos's text emphasizes the communitarian nature of the new utopian land. "We have killed envy. We have killed avarice. We have killed egoism," proclaims Bepe ("Matámos a inveja. Matámos a avareza. Matámos o egoismo," 160). In the absence of greed and selfishness, money becomes unnecessary and goods are given to whomever needs them: "There is no money, in exchange for performing a task. There is simply practical compensation [...]. Because everything is possible when the community is not excluded" ("Não há dinheiro, a troca de funções. Há simplesmente compensações práticas [...]. Porque tudo é possível quando não se

exclui a comunidade,” 157). In another passage, the protagonist announces: “Here we do not sell to anyone. We give, with the right to a reciprocal gift” (“Aqui não se vende para ninguém. Dá-se, com direito a uma oferta recíproca,” 156). The narrator describes the creation of a new society in language that echoes the communist revolutions of the beginning of the century: “The Amazon is being rejuvenated by the warrior song of the oppressed” (“A Amazônia está rejuvenescendo no canto de guerra dos desamparados,” 182). The inheritors to the land of the Icamiabas are the Brazilian masses of the dispossessed, who will establish a communal polity based upon the sharing of Amazonian nature’s plentiful gifts amongst all.

The book engages in a thought-experiment, imagining how the new utopian community will be remembered long after it disappears: “Here lies the subterranean conscience of a naked and simple Brazil, which, if one day found again, will be larger, and larger will also be, in that moment, the glory of all of its children” (“Aqui repousa a consciência subterrânea de um Brasil nu e simples, que, se um dia, de novo, for encontrado, estará maior e maior será, nesse instante, a glória de todos os seus filhos,” 160). The group stands as a repository of Brazilian virtues, unadulterated by extraneous powers, whose memory will outlive the existence of its individual members. When, “one day, these parts will change their panorama and all will be of a hallucinating splendor,” says Bepe in a speech to the multitude of his followers, “no one will talk about the obscure pioneers who undertook the gigantic work of exploration.” And he ends with an exhortation to the crowd: “Let us create, ourselves, our own history” (“Um dia, quando estas paragens mudarem de panorama e tudo for um alucinado esplendor, [...] ninguém falará nos obscuros pioneiros que fizeram a obra gigantesca da exploração;” “façamos nós mesmos, a nossa história,” 174).

The utopian community forms a blueprint for a future Brazil that will rise from the ashes of the decadent, contemporary society, and whose communitarian ideals will shine forth even after its concrete existence has fallen into oblivion, very much like the legendary tribe of the Amazons. Bastos, like Cruls before him, sees the future as a return to the past, to the mythical land of the Icamiabas that will be the birthplace of the new country of the oppressed. However, while Cruls unequivocally denounced European colonizers, who brought untold destruction to the native civilizations of the Americas, and considered the dismantling of the Western approach to social relations

and to nature as the only way forward, Bastos is more conservative in his approach. In his novel, the new society will result from a combination of native elements and the fortitude of early explorers, enervated in the present by foreign influences. The Amazons are absent from his text and function as a mere symbol of authentic Brazilianess. Still, both authors regarded Amazonia as a symbol of hope for a more prosperous and just time to come. The Amazon and its mythical Amazons become an ecological land of the future, within the greater land of the future that is Brazil.

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