

Candace Slater: *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon*

University of California Press, 2001, 332 pags.

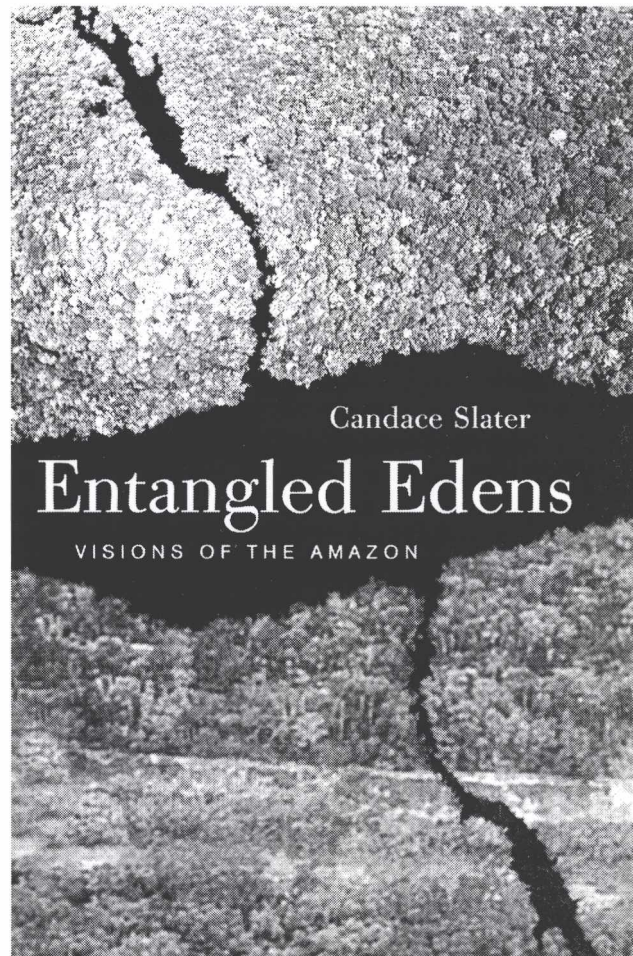
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Taking a cue from Professor Candace Slater, last week I opened a discussion on Amazonian writer Milton Hatoum's novel *Dois Irmãos* (translated as *The Brothers*) by having my students guess how many people lived in the Amazon. The estimates ranged from 500 to 1 million. Referring to Slater's introductory chapter "The Meeting of the Waters" in *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon*, I informed them that a 1992 UN report placed the population at 23 million and that recent estimates are around 30 million. What's more, is that the large population of the Amazon is not a modern phenomenon—the pre-contact Amazonian population is now calculated to be as many as 15 million. My students were shocked by these figures, and they were equally surprised to hear that the Amazon's interior city, Manaus, where Hatoum's novel is set, is inhabited by 1.5 million people.

Individual visions of the Amazon have profoundly affected the writing and reading of the novel *Dois Irmãos*. But as Candace Slater shows, visions of the Amazon affect more than just literary portrayals and readings in this region of the world. Environmentalism, international politics, and Brazilian national identity are each shaped by, and shape, a specific perspective on the Amazon. In *Entangled Edens* Slater demonstrates that these visions of the Amazon have developed and still develop along the lines of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives, with the 'insider' understanding being decidedly underrepresented. Yet, at the same time, these visions converge, overlap, and borrow from each other. Slater explains: "even as my examples newly illustrate the division between competing visions of the Amazon, they also reaffirm the fluid boundary between them."

While Slater sifts through a shoemaker's story of a dolphin shape-shifter (known as an *Encantado*) and McDonald's rain forest advertisements, she distills these visions into competing motifs. International environmentalists may concentrate on the Rain Forest (as Slater refers to these "giant" images that become symbols), but native inhabitants of the Amazon frequently refer to the *Encante*, a magical lake-within-a-lake. However, the lines between the native and the foreign become blurred as images like that of the women-warrior Amazons are reappropriated and deployed from the inside. As one man wearing a *muiraquitã*, an amulet given by the Amazons to their lovers, says to Slater, "I like to think that one of those women warriors could have given this frog as a gift to



one of my great-great-grandfathers long before the Europeans ever dreamt of setting foot here." As Slater carefully expresses, the search for origins in the Amazon often serves only to emphasize the divide, as the extinction of indigenous peoples is appropriated by an international community while the sufferings of *caboclo* or mestizo gold miners and rubber tappers often goes unnoticed.

Entangled Edens calls for a broader literary understanding of the Amazon, but also a social one. As the title suggests, these visions are entangled not only with each other, but with the international web of politics and economics. As such, Slater's analysis of colonial writings and taxi drivers' stories is not limited to its literary discussion. As the extensive bibliography, chronology, glossary, maps, and illustrations prove, this work also serves to replant the outsider's view of the Amazon and understand it as a space that is constantly contested through our views of it and those of the people who live there.