

Book Review: Space and Society in Central Brazil: A Panará Ethnography by Elizabeth Ewart

Hailed once as 'giants of the Amazon', Panará people emerged onto a world stage in the early 1970s. What followed is a story of socio-demographic collapse, loss of territory, and subsequent recovery. Reduced to just 79 survivors in 1976, Panará people have gone on to recover and reclaim a part of their original lands in an extraordinary process of cultural and social revival.

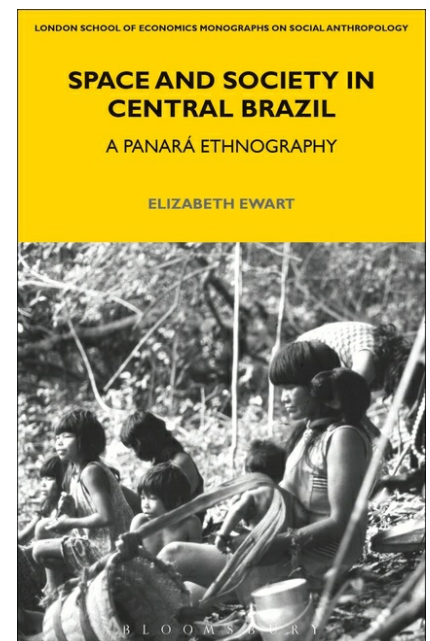
***Space and Society in Central Brazil** is an ethnographic account in which analytical approaches to social organisation are brought into dialogue with Panará social categories and values as told in their own terms. **Andreza de Souza Santos** finds that this book will appeal to students, scholars and anyone interested in the complex lives and histories of indigenous Amazonian societies.*



Space and Society in Central Brazil: A Panará Ethnography. Elizabeth Ewart. Bloomsbury Academic. November 2013.

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In this book [Elizabeth Ewart](#), Director of Studies in Archaeology & Anthropology at St Peter's College, University of Oxford, provides a compelling ethnographic account of how the *Panará*, an indigenous group living in central Brazil, understand space and society. The author explores what it means to be *Panará* and how the *Panará* perceive outsiders, with Ewart examining daily practices such as food sharing, marriage, and gardening, and the making and remaking of the space where such activities take place. Ewart includes many examples of her own fieldwork visits starting from the late 1990s, and examines earlier events to allow for reflection on the intertwined ideas of change and continuity, and of contact and avoidance for the *Panará*. This is a fascinating read that will be useful for students interested in ethnographies, indigenous groups, and the meanings and interactions of space and society.



Ewart starts off by describing how the *Panará* order the world according to dualist logic, and distinguish between *panará* (people) and *hipe* (enemy/others/white people). Readers are taken through the literature on organising the world according to this dualist method, with key texts from Levi-Strauss and Maybury-Lewis discussed. Ewart highlights that the indigenous logic of dualism is still of importance and resilient in a context of socio-spatial change, and her ethnography demonstrates the need to find out the very terms people in central Brazil are using to make sense of the world. In order to detail the spaces in which dualisms are expressed by the *Panará*, and how they have transformed over time as new ones have been created or abandoned, the author presents to readers a view from the *Panará* residential house circle and views from the centre of the village.

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In Chapter 2, "Villages – the View from the House", the author explores village space and vantage point, and shows how for the *Panará*, social organization is often expressed in spatial terms: "social organization is created and reflected by the ways in which villages are spatially arranged" (p.28). Ewart argues that the large circular villages we see on maps "ignore the lived experience of inhabiting and thus constituting the village. Although the view from above is striking, it is never the view of those who live on the ground" (p.28). Starting the description from the viewpoint of sitting outside the residential house, Ewart locates spaces of social transformation and spaces of continuity. The centres of the villages are locations of transformation, while the residential circles are locations for individual transformation, where children become adults, but these are locations mostly associated

with continuity because “women transmit clan membership and because it is they who primarily constitute clan space through their inhabiting that space throughout their lives” (p. 57). The layout of the villages allows for observing and being observed in daily practices. Through the description of daily activities and the space where they happen, this chapter engages with ideas of transformation and continuity, and will make for thought-provoking reading for anthropologists interested in these topics.

In Chapter 5: “Hipe – Enemies and Others” and Chapter 6: “Hipe Within – Witches and Witchcraft”, the author introduces ideas of otherness to explore what it means to be *Panará*. Readers are presented with an overview of historical context and events – essential for understanding how this has impacted upon *Panará* life and thinking. For example, Ewart details contact between *Panará* and non-indigenous people in 1973, which, though not the first of such contacts, “brought with it diseases, death, and social disintegration on an unprecedented scale” (p. 114). Such moments are important because they go on to transform what constitutes *hipe*. The *hipe* within is also considered: witches are “the negative, internal aspect of otherness. Their existence and activities represent the sinister side of the *Panará* existential condition” (p.148). By looking at witches and witchcraft, Ewart allows readers to understand the importance of social relations for *Panará*. Witches do not reinforce social bonds; on the contrary, the things they produce “are not produced through social exchanges of human life but are produced through the full self-sufficiency of the witch” (p.162). Witchcraft also epitomizes ongoing processes of transformation and relocations of otherness, which is well explored in the final section of Chapter 6, entitled: “When the *Panará* became Indians, the Kayapo [their enemy] became witches”. What this section demonstrates is that the processes of witchcraft accusations have shifted from within the village to other indigenous groups, and reinforces how witches are part of a structural necessity that shifts positions rather than disappears.

In conclusion, this book should appeal to students, scholars and anyone interested in the complex lives and histories of indigenous Amazonian societies. Each chapter leads the reader to understand the dynamics of change: for the *Panará*, “the recent history of engagement with Brazilian national society and the most recent version of *hipe*, namely, white people, is a history of shifting categories” (p.238). Finally, while the ethnographic description of daily practices is very rich and accessible, the sense of self and other and the dynamics between the two poles are presented with a theoretical depth to challenge our understanding of spatial ethnography. Ewart’s examination of transformations and disequilibrium in the lives of the *Panará* is particularly fascinating as the impact of historical forces on the *Panará* socio-spatial order is an ongoing process where both assimilation and transformation are examined in the *Panará*’s own terms.

Andreza de Souza Santos is a PhD Candidate at the Centre for Amerindian, Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the Department of Social Anthropology, [University of St Andrews](#).

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