

If the book comprised only the first and second sections, the essays in it would still be an admirable contribution to the existing literature. Patricia Mohammed presents a comprehensive review of the theoretical foundations of the subject within a methodologically rigorous analysis of how gender relations were negotiated in Indian communities in Trinidad. Bridget Brereton argues that texts must be viewed through a gendered lens. In assessing the utility of interviews, Mary Chamberlain observes that “men and women’s narratives are constructed differently” (p. 101) and suggests that historians must evaluate uncritically what the sources are trying to convey. Hilary Beckles’ historiographical review of the state of the discipline begins section 3, but it could just as easily have been included in the methodological and theoretical framework of sections 1 and 2.

The case studies focus on various areas of the Caribbean. Digna Castañeda investigates the agency of female slaves in nineteenth-century Cuba in attempts to manipulate the Spanish legal system to their advantage. Bernard Moitt’s study of the French Antilles challenges the notion that (except for midwifery) the allocation of tasks was gender-specific, arguing that “women worked in the fields while men monopolized the specialized tasks” (p. 160). Veront M. Satchell combines gendered history and quantification techniques in investigating female landholding patterns in late nineteenth-century Jamaica. Understanding women as political actors, essays by Swithin Wilmot (Jamaica), Jean Stubbs (Cuba), and Linnette Vassell (Jamaica) demonstrate that women’s consciousness extended far beyond the boundaries of home and family life.

The editors acknowledge that “the majority of articles . . . focus on African and African-Caribbean women” (p. xv). In addition, Jamaica is overrepresented. But such concentration admittedly reflects “imbalance in the research” (p. 233) rather than bias on the part of the editors. Some critics might question the inclusion of essays dealing with non-Caribbean areas. Aside from the comparative value of such studies, though, it might be argued that gendered relations in the French Caribbean grew out of traditions originating in France; and colonialism as a mechanism of dominance and postcolonial responses was equally relevant in Africa and in the Caribbean. As in all collections, the quality of scholarship ranges from perfunctory to outstanding. That the majority of articles in this volume lean toward the latter side makes this a valuable work for all readers interested in gendered history, Caribbean history, the history of slavery, and the postemancipation period.

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Risky Rivers: The Economics and Politics of Floodplain Farming in Amazonia. By MICHAEL CHIBNIK. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994. Maps. Graphs. Tables. Figure. Appendixes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xx, 267 pp. Cloth. \$25.95.

Risky rivers. The title lays out the problem for *ribereños* of the Peruvian Amazon determined to extract a profit from agriculture on shifting sands—the seasonal

river bars that appear and disappear in a highly variable fashion. In this book, the author states that he designed his research to describe the role of small-scale experimentation in socioeconomic change. What he found was not experimentation but phenomenal variation.

That variation is the real theme of the book. There is variation in rivers, in years, in people, in villages, in markets, in human behavior, and in institutions. The underlying biophysical variation, which influences the overall pattern of subsistence activities in a given village, serves as a template for variation in the use of river versus forest resources, access to markets, cultivation of cash crops, use of government credit, and methods of recruiting extra-family agricultural labor.

The author defines *risky* to “encompass a variety of decisions in which the outcome is unpredictable and may be unfavorable” (p. 153). He found that *ribereños* are, by and large, risk-averse. They minimize risks by spending most of their work time on subsistence production of crops planted in nonflooding, forested areas. By contrast, commercial crops, particularly rice, are grown on mud bars that are subject to highly unpredictable flooding. To stimulate rice production, the government has established a series of agricultural credits that tempt producers out of this concentration on subsistence and into the risky world of the flooding rivers and the changing market.

The book is based on fieldwork in three Peruvian Amazon villages, complemented with fieldwork in other communities, on river boats, and in the important regional market city of Iquitos. The author attempts to put the riverine small-scale producers in context, not only biophysically but in terms of other small- and large-scale producers (particularly patrons) and the influence of peasant unions and government policies. In this varied context, the author attempts to understand the decision-making process of individual producers.

The book has two parts: a set of introductory chapters followed by seven chapters that provide detail on the small-scale producers. The first 72 pages present an excellent overview of the region’s history and settlement patterns. The 154 pages that follow have been discussed above. The reader wishes that a tighter connection were established between the first and second sections and that the final chapter were more of a synthesis.

It turns out that after the author completed his fieldwork, the Peruvian government changed, and the agricultural credit policy that played a leading role in the analysis was abolished. The book might have been more aptly called “Risky Institutions,” for in the end it is not the forces of nature that are the riskiest, but the forces of humans.

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