

on the Internet, or more generally on a theory of the geography of information.

For some reason, the relatively large number of books treating the geography of the Internet, and published in recent years, have not been cited (by Cairncross, Castells, Graham and Marvin, Kellerman, Wheeler and Aoyama, Wilson and Corey). Despite these shortcomings, Zook's book provides an important contribution to the study of the Internet at large and to the geography of the Internet in particular.

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WAITING FOR RAIN: THE POLITICS AND POETRY OF DROUGHT IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL by Nicholas Gabriel Arons. The University of Arizona Press: Tucson, 2004.

This book gives a most remarkable account of people living in the drought vulnerable Northeast of Brazil, the *Nordeste*, a vast semi-arid to dry sub-humid region of 1.5 million square kilometres, which is home to one-third of Brazil's population, *i.e.* 45 million people. The young author, a graduate of Yale University, received a Fulbright scholarship for a year of study in Brazil. His aim was to investigate the impact of drought through the experience of the people by listening to them and by reading folk literature and poetry. Thus he travelled extensively through the region, using public transportation, hitching rides with farmers and living in small communities. The resulting book is not a typical social science report, but a moving description with a captivating literary style, in which three narratives are woven together: the social history of drought, the literary expressions of the people describing their suffering in social and political contexts, as well as the personal adventures of the author.

The book is composed of 17 chapters, elucidated by extensive endnotes, followed by a glossary of Portuguese words used in the text, a significant bibliography featuring many Brazilian publications and an index. The only negative items in the book are the sketches in the Preface related to global events, other continents and physical geographical aspects of drought and global warming. Here the author lacks depth and a sound judgment of complex phenomena, as he adopts a popular brush approach. It would have been better if he had omitted these items from the Preface, as it might turn readers off. Otherwise, the young writer has produced a valuable and extraordinary book.

The *Nordeste* has a long history of drought, which in 1877 caused the deaths of about half a million people, according to the most conservative historical estimations. This is the worst case recorded. The terrible 1877 drought drove the surviving people southward, away from the Northeast, which hitherto had been the political, economic, cultural and religious centre of Brazil. The large-scale emigration led to

a permanent geographic shift in national power from the Northeast to the Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo areas.

Drought is a recurring phenomenon in the region, separated by intervals of about three years with normal or more humid conditions. Severe drought strikes the *Nordeste* once in 12 years on a long-term average basis. The 20th century witnessed a number of catastrophic droughts in the region. The drought in 1932 resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, while the 1952 drought led to mass migration from the countryside to the cities along the coast. In more recent times, the multi-year drought of 1979-1983 led to starvation and hunger-related diseases that killed hundreds of thousands of Brazilians.

The author makes it clear from the outset that the impact of drought is directly related to the marginal socio-economic conditions of a large part of the rural population. Drought causes system collapse amongst the many poor members of the agricultural sector, lacking sufficient land, water and financial resources. The few rich farmers, on the other hand, are usually less affected by drought, as they control most of the resources and have financial reserves. The distribution of wealth in Brazil is extremely polarized. Most of the land, 70 percent, is owned by just three percent of the population. The poor 50 percent of the population gets merely 10 percent of the national income.

The author gives a poignant description of the effect of drought on the poor and the manipulation of drought by the rich and the politicians: "In the Northeast, farmers are excluded from consuming the crops they cultivate. During droughts, while children routinely die of starvation and malnutrition, the region continues to export great amounts of food... the drought was found to be a major boon for politicians. It became the explanation of rural poverty, the means of attaining cheap labor, the rationale for securing international loans, the basis for obtaining federal grants, the excuse for failing policies, and the strategy to buy votes" (p. 3).

An interesting part of the book is taken up by the local *literatura de cordel*, meaning literature on a string. The name relates to the way the booklets were suspended from strings stretched between two posts, customarily sold in market stands. The cordel poetry expressed the voice, survival and meaning of the *Nordeste*, according to Gilberto Frey, the father of Brazilian anthropology. The poet will often sing his works in front of the market stand to attract customers and sell enough booklets to earn some income for his family.

One such a cordel from the Northeast, self-published, unsigned and not dated, has the following enlightening poetry about drought through the eyes of the local population, as translated by the author from Portuguese into English:

The drought reveals,
It shows what is behind the curtain
Drought tears away
the situation's mask
Showing the poverty

that exists without the drought.
The drought worsens
what is already so terrible
With or without the drought...
the rural workers are
always becoming poorer. (p. 62)

The mild drought of 1998 required government assistance in food and water supply, which was not forthcoming. People protested and carried out occupations of government and private offices; landless peasants occupied farms. The Armando Ribeiro Dam is supposed to supply water to 1,000 municipalities, but 70% had no water in April 1998, while political leaders used the reservoir for vacation. Food-ration baskets had been given in May 1998 only to 50 out of 1,209 municipalities and infant mortality rose by 30 percent. These data from one of the last chapters fit well with the above poem.

In conclusion, the author has written an outstanding and unusual book, presenting a moving description of life in the *Nordeste*, where drought exacerbates the already bad socio-economic condition of much of the rural population. The political manipulations of drought by the officials and the poetry of drought by the people produce an almost surrealistic mixture that reflects reality in the region.

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PERFORMING TOURIST PLACES by Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, Michael Haldrup, Jonas Larsen and John Urry. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Performing Tourist Places fills a void in both geographic and tourism literature by placing a common and increasingly significant phenomenon, namely the tourist experience, in a spatial context. As its authors note, the objective of the book is to represent the making and the consuming of places in the contemporary world and specifically how tourism performances of production (industry) and consumption (tourists) make experiences and places. Few studies have in fact examined how tourist places are formed and produced in practice. Although the case studies happen to be located within Denmark, the general concepts deal with the intersections of places, performances and peoples in a much wider context. While tourism and tourists are often presented or discussed in terms of a lack of geographic or spatial context, it is essential that the role of space and of 'places' be understood when the tourist experience and the tourism phenomenon are being analyzed.

The book is part of a series entitled "New Directions in Tourism Analysis" published by Ashgate and edited by Kevin Meethan and Dimitri Ioannides. The aim of the series is to fill the gap between the development of the field of tourism studies