Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Trans-imperial Greater Caribbean World*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017. xiii + 345 pp. (Paper US\$26.95)

In 1819, after his victory at the battle of Boyacá, Simón Bolívar said of Colombia: “Esta patria es Caribe” (this fatherland is Caribbean). What did he mean by it? We are so used to thinking of Colombia as an Andean nation that it is difficult to switch our mental maps and imagine it as a Caribbean nation. And that is just what Ernesto Bassi invites us to do. *An Aqueous Territory* asks us to see Colombia from the perspective of its Caribbean Sea.

To achieve his goal, Bassi benefits from a rich historiography about Colombia's place in the Caribbean, which has reminded us that the nation cannot be defined solely from the Andes. But this wonderful book carries that historiography in new directions. First, it takes us to the sea, aboard its ships and with its sailors. Second, it brings Panama into the picture, something that is rarely done by historians of Colombia, many of whom are still trapped by nation-bound perspectives. It also introduces new actors to the history of maps and mental maps. The geopolitics of Guajiros and Kuna indigenous peoples and the inhabitants of the Afro-Spanish cities of Cartagena and Portobelo are as important to this history as the geopolitics of Spanish governors and Creole mapmakers.

To explain how people understood and lived in this aqueous territory, Bassi takes readers back to the eighteenth century and the multiple ports of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. The book starts with the materiality of the region: its ships, their routes, and the goods they transported. The Caribbean of these ships was not confined to Spanish imperial boundaries. Ships frequently crossed them, both legally and illegally, connecting Spanish ports like Chagres, Portobelo, Cartagena, and Santa Marta with ports in the British, Dutch, and French islands. The sailors who manned them moved between ports, empires, and languages, creating a new culture and geography that can only be defined as Caribbean.

Continuing with the book's focus on the Caribbean as a space of transimperial and transcultural connections, Bassi also brings a different view of the indigenous peoples who lived along New Granada's Caribbean coast. Chapter 3, “Maritime Indians, Cosmopolitan Indians” (one of the most illuminating), takes us into the world of Guajiro and Cuna Indians. Never conquered by the Spaniards, these indigenous groups owed their strength and independence to their deep understanding of Caribbean imperial rivalries and their ability to use them to preserve their autonomy. Their knowledge of Caribbean geopolitics allowed them to purchase weapons from British merchants and, sometimes, to send their sons to Jamaica to be educated in British culture. Their

military strength and transimperial Caribbean connections allowed them to successfully defend their independence and negotiate with the Spanish Empire as equals.

What happened to this Caribbean world when Spanish rule ended in Colombia? According to Bassi, Andean republican elites began to reimagine Colombia as a Euro/Andean nation that turned its back to the Afro-Caribbean world of Colombia's coasts and emphasized its ties to the European Enlightenment. Part of this process included, for example, renaming the Caribbean Sea as the Atlantic Ocean in the new republican maps of Colombia. "Atlantic Ocean" suggested that the connection to Europe was stronger than connections to the islands of the Caribbean Sea. However, as Bassi points out, there was a Caribbean counter-narrative that challenged this vision. One of the strongest voices of this counter-narrative was the black general José Prudencio Padilla, who championed the idea of a new Colombian Republic in which Afro-Colombians would have equal rights.

Bassi could have framed the division between Andean and Caribbean national visions less as a difference between an Enlightenment-Andean one and a non-Enlightenment-Caribbean one, and more as two different versions of the Enlightenment: a black Caribbean Enlightenment and white Andean Enlightenment. After all, two of the strongest voices of the Caribbean counter-narrative were self-identified republicans like Padilla and Juan José Nieto. A history of the Enlightenment that was co-authored by black, white, and indigenous actors on both sides of the Atlantic would have only strengthened his argument.

An Aqueous Territory is a brilliant book that changes our mental maps and reminds us of the multiple ways in which people of the past have imagined their territories. It also reminds us of the many ways in which we can still imagine ours.

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