Environment & Society Portal

Multimedia Library Collection: Periodicals

"A Different Story in the Anthropocene: Brazil's Post-Colonial Quest for Oil (1930–1975)"

Acker, Antoine

Acker, Antoine. "A Different Story in the Anthropocene: Brazil's Post-Colonial Quest for Oil (1930–1975)." *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 (November 2020): 167–211. doi:10.1093/pastj/gtz069 .

This article aims to identify new historical causes for the making of the Anthropocene (the rise of humans to a geological force) by addressing Brazil's transformation into an oil producer and an oil-dependent country between 1930 and 1975. This example allows an escape from the essentialist explanation of the Anthropocene as the result of humans' insatiable appetite for consumption, commonly rooted in an analysis of Western industrial society, and to focus instead on the notion of freedom in a former colony. Indeed, in the context of nation-building and modernization debates, petroleum appeared to many Brazilians as an opportunity to emancipate the country from its peripheral role as global raw material provider. The rise of petroleum gave a post-colonial sense to the nation-founding myth of Brazil's exceptional nature, which served as romantic background for a movement towards resource sovereignty embedded into a global anti-imperialist context. In Brazil specifically, oil production became an opportunity for a process of ecological transformation that promised to rid the country of colonial landscapes of exploitation, and even appeared as a solution for stopping the unsustainable destruction of tropical forests. Ultimately, these petro-ideals of emancipation, by positively linking nature and the nation, also hindered fully detecting the scope of the pollution problems that oil was generating. As argued in the article's conclusion, this example should rekindle the discussion about the unintended link between freedom and geological change in the analysis of Anthropocene causalities. (Article abstract)

Read the full article for free at Oxford University Press .

Websites linked in this text:

- https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz069
- https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz069

- https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz069

Periodicals Collection, Multimedia Library, Environment & Society Portal
"A Different Story in the Anthropocene: Brazil's Post-Colonial Quest for Oil (1930–1975)"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9168
Print date: 03 November 2026 16:18:53