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Book review of 'Amazonian Roots: Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities in Northern Brazil' by Roller, Heather

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Roller, Heather (2014) *Amazonian Roots: indigenous mobility and colonial communities in Northern Brazil*. Stanford University Press (Stanford, California), xx + 342 pp. £44 hbk..

It is so refreshing to read a book on the history of the indigenous peoples of the Brazilian Amazon that is devoid of academic jargon, grand theories or promotes special interests. Heather Roller has done a sterling job of engaging with original archival material written by the people of the time, and constructing an account of the period which deconstructs a series of established stereotypes. It should be noted, however, that the only slightly misleading element of the book is its title, in that the book's content exclusively focuses on the 'Indian Directorate' period of 1757 to 1798, characterised by a shift in Amazonian territorial control from religious missions to the colonial state. But this should not detract from the value of the book. Much has been written about the period preceding the Directorate, dominated by religious missions, and the period following the Directorate, associated with Brazilian independence and the lead up to one of the most extensive and bloody rebellions experienced in the history of Brazil, the Cabanagem (1835–1840). This book provides the 'missing link' between these two periods and achieves this by going beyond an engagement with recently published research and Ph.D. theses. Roller's extensive use of direct quotations from original correspondences amongst decision-makers of the time provides a unique and original insight into the period.

The book aims to contribute to addressing the key questions of how autonomous indigenous communities, settlers, African slaves, missionaries and state officials operated to create a socially integrated Amazonian population, laying the foundations for the great Cabanagem rebellion which would eventually result in the death of over 30 per cent of the population of the then state of Grão-Pará. Roller's book explains the social mechanisms through which a society dominated by highly distinct autonomous indigenous communities, indigenous mission settlements and dispersed white/African slave settlements, are transformed into a cohesive population willing to fight and die in significant numbers for independence.

The book is divided into six chapters each tackling a key theme determining the gradual emergence of an integral society within the Amazon: from the transition of missions into secular settlements (Chapter 1); the yearly collecting expeditions of settled indigenous villagers for natural resources such as sarsaparilla and cocoa beans (Chapter 2); the expeditions into the territories of autonomous indigenous communities in order to recruit settlers (Chapter 3); the inter-settlement migration of indigenous peoples (Chapter 4); the increasingly complex colonial dilemma of defining race and their respective roles in an increasingly mixed race society (Chapter 5); and, finally, the difficulties emerging from an increasingly emancipated and independently minded mixed community (Chapter 6).

Throughout the chapters, Roller provides evidence for debunking a series of dominant stereotypes attributed to the indigenous communities of the period. For example, as opposed to the portrayal of indigenous victims forcibly settled and/or desperately avoiding settlement, we are introduced to an alternative narrative where settled indigenous communities actively participate in community building within the colonial sphere of influence in order to maintain and strengthen their ethnic culture. But we also see how settled indigenous communities subverted the colonial state by, for example, circumventing official mandates for contributing community members for public works by actively promoting collecting expeditions to the rainforest interior. Although ravaged by persistent epidemics and abuse by officials and white settlers, we see that over this period these indigenous villages continue to grow in population. This, however, does not indicate a resident

population rooted into a single locality. As Rollers points out, this period is 'a history of moving in order to stay settled'. In order to maximise their chances of survival, community members engaged in regular migrations from one official settlements to another, often travelling great distances.

Thus, Rollers has crafted a book which depicts a convincing and nuanced strategy of survival for the indigenous communities enveloped within the Portuguese colonial sphere: practising traditional strategies of cultivation, fishing, hunting and collecting expeditions; engaging in exchanges with autonomous indigenous nations and the large commercial centres; flexibly choosing between different roles imposed by officials; fluidly moving from settlement to settlement; creating sophisticated societies by specialising in a number of trades and crafts; and adapting to ever-changing impositions from colonial directives by manipulating the increasing confusion with regards race identity. It is this emerging, cohesive indigenous and mixed population which establishes the foundations for mass rebellion a few decades later.

In conclusion, Rollers' book is not only an essential read for those keen to engage with the history of the Amazon region, but also for practitioners working in the Amazon, as it provides a sophisticated insight into the origins, attitudes and aspirations of the people living there today.

Andrea Berardi
The Open University