

Heather F. Roller.

Amazonian Routes. Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities in Northern Brazil.

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In the conclusion of *Amazonian Routes: Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities* in Northern Brazil, Heather F. Roller explains that her intention when writing the book was to emphasize the mobility and adaptability of native Indians in eighteenth-century Brazil. Whereas most accounts of colonial white-Indian relations focus on how natives were forced to move to settlements run by whites or mestizos, Roller claims to present another side of the story: the routes and movements chosen by the Indians themselves.

Yet, what caught my attention when reading this well informed, superbly researched book, was the degree to which the Portuguese colonial enterprise in Brazil attempted to control not only the territory but also the individual bodies of the natives whose lands they were invading. Perhaps not so differently from current governments in many parts of the world, Portugal's colonial rulers changed their policies according to shifts in ideological fashions and availability of resources, moving from an almost exclusive reliance on religious agency (the Mission system) to a state-controlled, secular approach to the exploitation of labor and resources (*Diretórios dos Índios*), to the privatization of all exploitation and native-contacting activities in the post-*Diretório* period, once the resources had run out. Each change imposed colossal difficulties to Brazil's original inhabitants, who were forced not only to move physically to a new location (often abandoning settlements to which they had been forcibly moved earlier), but also to adapt to new ways of organizing their space, their livelihood, and their personal relationships. So, although the book indeed includes many examples of how the natives were able to adapt to new situations and use the colonial system to their own advantage, what stands out to the reader (at least to this reader) are the minutiae of how the Portuguese set out to control, at every local level, the way in which Brazil's native inhabitants lived their lives.

The book's archival research is impressive, shedding new light on the everyday life of the village Indians (*índios aldeados*) in the eighteenth century: what activities

they carried out in the mandatory forest collecting expeditions; how they related to the cabos (white or mestizo leaders of the expeditions); how ethnic definitions were drawn and re-drawn according to everyday demands and negotiations; why índios aldeados often decided to move from one village to another; what penalties were imposed on Indians who did not follow the rules (for instance, for leaving the village they were assigned to, or for not complying with mandatory Royal Service or collecting activities); how those penalties were avoided; regional differences between the Amazon delta region (Belém and its surroundings) and the interior; and so on.

The book is divided into six chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1, "From Missions to Towns: Amazonian Settlements in an Era of Reform," sets out the contextual historical information related to the replacement of the Mission system by the Diretórios under the Pombaline reforms carried out by the Minister's own brother, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, governor of the Pará province between 1751 and 1759. Chapter 2, "Forest Collecting Expeditions and the Pursuit of Opportunities in the Sertão," reveals fascinating details about the regular expeditions for the collection of forest products, such as cacao, Brazil nuts, and manatee meat. Highly controlled and organized (at least on paper), these expeditions were subject to rules that determined, for example, when to start and when to end the collection of cacao, which tribes the crew Indians were forbidden to contact, what economic activities cabos could engage in during the expedition, and so on. Obviously, not everything worked according to plan, so the chapter also informs us through quotations from law cases or letters of complaint what happened when things did not work out. Chapter 3, "Searching for New People," focuses on the descimentos, the process of convincing native people to settle in colonial villages. Although numerically less representative in Mendonça Furtado's time (in comparison with the earlier Missions), they were still an important way of providing labor to settlers and the crown and of making village settlements viable. Without denying the existence of forced descimentos (which, though technically illegal, could be justified in the case of 'savage Indians'—an obviously open concept that could lead to all kinds of violence), the chapter focuses on the role played by village Indians (índios aldeados) in the recruitment of newcomers, including their role as expedition leaders; and on natives who chose to live in villages for various reasons, including the fact that they sometimes felt safer in villages than being at the mercy of attackers. It also gives examples of groups who decided to abandon their new villages en masse because they did not

like the way they were being treated. Chapter 4, "The Indians of This Town Ebb and Flow': Absentee Movements Within the Colonial Sphere," discusses legal cases against natives who were accused of absenteeism (abandoning the villages they were assigned to), as well as the legal arguments presented by the natives themselves against such accusations. This chapter shows very effectively how Portuguese and Indians differed in their views about settling and living in a particular place: while the Portuguese wanted to force índios aldeados to a fixed abode in a particular village, many Indians continued their traditional practice of moving houses in different seasons or after a certain period, and saw no problem at all in claiming more than one residence. It also very convincingly demonstrates that, though true in many cases, historiography's traditional view that the natives only abandoned the villages in order to run back to the forest does not tell us the whole story, as archival research shows that many natives abandoned particular villages in order to settle in other villages. Chapter 5, "Defining Indians and Vagrants," discusses the emergence in the second half of the eighteenth century of a white-indian mestizo population that was free and did not have to submit to the same rules and restrictions as the village Indians. As a result, ethnic definitions became more fluid and complicated, as many village Indians wanted to identify as branco or mestizo in order to become exempt from mandatory services or escape the anti-vagrant laws of the Directorate period, which forbade village Indians from moving around as they pleased and which became particularly draconian under governor Mendonça Furtado. The very brief Chapter 6, "Struggle for Autonomy in the Early Nineteenth Century," makes a short incursion into the abolition of the Directorate in 1799 and the fate of the former village Indians in the post-directorate period. While in theory all Indians were declared 'free' and, similar to white men (but in contrast to Black slaves), were supposedly able to go wherever they pleased with the end of the Diretórios, in practice anti-vagrant laws were still enforced, so that anyone not producing over a certain amount of agricultural or other products (and paying taxes for them) was subject to mandatory labor. In addition, the privatization of the descimento expeditions meant that anyone with money and contacts could be authorized to go into the forest in search of indigenous laborers. The abuse and violence that this privatization generated would account for a certain nostalgia amongst former village Indians for the Diretórios, and this constituted, according to the chapter, one of the elements that led to the revolts that broke out in the nineteenth century, the most famous of which being Cabanagem.

Filled with original archival research, *Amazonian Routes* definitely sheds new light on a much under-studied aspect of Brazilian history. Its style is a tad dry, as the author is sometimes perhaps too bound by a strict methodology that does not allow her to imagine anything beyond what the sources very literally reveal nor to make any big theoretical claims about the period, place or the processes of cultural contact being described. Whether this is an advantage or disadvantage will depend on the personal taste—or discipline affiliation—of the reader. *Amazonian Routes*, is, in any case, a fine and essential book for anyone working on colonial Amazonia, particularly the eighteenth-century period.

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