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978-0-521-43723-3 - Rebellion on the Amazon: The Cabanagem, Race, and Popular Culture in the North of Brazil, 1798-1840

Mark Harris

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

Divergent Amazonia

At a major traffic intersection on the outskirts of Belém, one of the largest cities in the Amazon region, a striking monument can be seen. Slabs of concrete emerge from the ground in a diagonal fashion with a single break, like a hand rising from the earth, or perhaps a hand descending into water (what comes to my mind is Stevie Smith's poem, "Not waving but drowning"). Commissioned in 1985 by the state government and designed by Brazil's leading architect, Oscar Niemeyer, it is a memorial to the Cabanagem, the rebellion 150 years earlier by people of the Brazilian Amazon.

Even a backpacker could not mistake the modern regional government's appropriation of the rebellion. Yet the monument may be read in various ways. To some local residents it is an inconsequential piece of public art, while others gather there every year to mark the anniversary of the great assault on Belém on January 7. To the historian, it may represent the power of the masses to challenge how they are ruled, yet also the success of Brazil as a nation in quashing dissent and preventing its fragmentation shortly after independence from Portugal. The Cabanagem rebellion of 1835–1840 was not only a struggle by oppressed people analogous to many other such struggles around the world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was also potentially separatist. It might have proved the turning point at which the Brazilian Amazon diverged from the rest of Portuguese-speaking America. Instead, the rebellion's ultimate failure forced the region back into convergence, subordinating its sociological and historical distinctness to a larger entity. An internal colonialism was achieved whose legacy lasts to this day. Ever since, the rulers of Pará (the name of the state in the eastern Amazon encompassing most of the rebellion) and Brazil have had to contend with the region's ambiguous identity; and the significance of the Cabanagem is as contested today as ever.

The present study goes back to the contemporary documents, though few of those that survived were written by the rebels. This book can be described as an historical ethnography written by an anthropologist. I hope that nothing intrinsically separates my methodology from that of someone trained in "history," but also that my anthropological fieldwork in Pará gives this study a distinctive strength. Since 1992 I have conducted fieldwork with

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peasant riverine dwellers in Pará (in a place upriver of Belém), and their oral histories are rich with references to the Cabanagem. They tell, for example, of the way the Portuguese hid their money and gold inside saints' icons, or buried it under the ground as they fled quickly to avoid the rebels. My experience of life in and on the Amazon gave me privileged access to the riverine world of these people and their bosses, and has allowed me to marry an ethnographically sharpened sensibility with R. G. Collingwood's method of imaginative reenactment of the 'inside' of human actions – people's thoughts and purposes.¹ I aim to paint an overall picture of the social and political conditions of life in the Amazon in the early nineteenth century: a shaped form in which to place rebel motivations. This approach is like creating a face from a mask.

The sources certainly exist for such an approach. Many have already been used by other scholars of the Cabanagem. Since the 1840s the rebellion has been the object of diverse examinations and commentaries. These examiners include visitors who came in the aftermath and heard anecdotes from those who had witnessed terrible scenes, military officials who wrote memoirs and a priest who collected stories.² Around the centenary of the Cabanagem, a series of books appeared that were based on a close reading of some of the extensive documentation in the archive in Belém.³ The men who wrote these works were the first to address systematically such core problems as the conflict

1 My understanding of Collingwood and the method of reenactment has been coached by Tristan Platt. See, for example his "Knowing Silence and Merging Horizons: The Case of the Great Potosí Cover-Up" (with Pablo Quisbert), in Mark Harris (ed.), *Ways of Knowing*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007. For Collingwood's statement on reenactment, see his Epilegomena in *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 282–302.

2 The visitors included the Protestant missionary Daniel Kidder (James Cooley Fletcher and Daniel Parish Kidder, *Brazil and the Brazilians: Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1879), the Victorian naturalist Henry Walter Bates (*The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, 2 vols. London: John Murray, 1863), and the Prussian Prince Adalbert (Prince H. W. Adalbert, *Travels in the South of Europe and in Brazil with a Voyage up the Amazon and the Xingu*. London: 1849). The military officers were Felipe Leal (F. J. P. Leal, *Correções e Ampliações ao que Sobre a Revolução que Arrebatou na Cidade do Pará em Janeiro de 1835 publicou o Conselheiro João Manoel Pereira da Silva*. Bahia, 1879) and José Bettancourt (author of unpublished documents). The priest was Francisco Bernardino de Souza (F. de Bernardino de Souza, *Lembranças e Curiosidades do Valle do Amazonas*. Pará, Typografia do Futuro, 1873).

3 These main authors here are Jorge Hurley (*A Cabanagem*, Belém: Livraria Classica, 1936; and *Traços Cabanos*, Belém: Oficina Gráfica, 1936), João de Palma Muniz (*Adesão do Grão-Pará a Independência*, Belém: Conselho Estadual da Cultura, 1973, though strictly speaking this work is not on the Cabanagem it nevertheless is a substantial study of the independence period leading up to it), and Ernesto Cruz ("A Cabanagem," in *História do Pará*, vol. 1, Belém: Universidade Federal do Pará, 1963). Connected to this group but slightly later was Arthur Cesar Ferreira Reis, whose broad body of work covers all periods of Amazonian history, though he never wrote a study specifically on the Cabanagem. See especially his *História do Amazonas*, Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia; and *A Política de Portugal no Valle Amazônico*, Belém: Secult, 1993.

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between regional and national élites.⁴ Subsequent analyses developed related themes, including the role of Afro-Brazilian slaves and Indians, the ideological bases of the rebellion and Pará's social networks with the transatlantic world.⁵ Along with contemporary historians of Pará, I begin from the view that the insurrection cannot be portrayed as a conflict between two clearly marked enemies and that its origins are to be found in the colonial period.⁶ Consistent with recent scholarship on most rebellions in post-independence Brazil, I also argue cabanos were not separatists. Rather, they were defenders of their way of life and motivated by their interpretation of liberalism. At the time, the rebels used the term *patria*, or homeland, to refer to the place they wanted to protect, which signified, according to Roderick Barman, "the visible, physical community in which an individual was born, brought up, married and pursued a living and raised a family"⁷

4 However, the first examination of the Cabanagem was *Motins Políticos, ou Historia dos Principais Acontecimentos Políticos da Província do Pará, desde o ano de 1821 até 1835* (or literally "Political Revolts" for short, 3 vols, Belém: Universidade Federal do Pará, 1970) by Domingos Raiol. Originally comprising five volumes and published between 1865 and 1890, it remains foundational to understanding the turbulent period from independence to the Cabanagem. Raiol's father was murdered by rebels in a town in the interior; this fact seems to have committed him to a life of collecting material and then completing his study (while also serving in important political offices). Raiol, like anyone, has his prejudices; for example, the lack of interest in popular politics, but he treats the primary documents with respect. Given that documentary sources on the rebellion are extensive – difficult for any one researcher to command – the work of others becomes critically important. Whatever the biases of previous studies, I have found particularly useful those that have dealt reasonably with the documentation and permit new questions to be asked of it.

5 In the following chapter I review the secondary literature more fully. Some of the most recent authors who have written on those topics are Vicente Salles, for example, *Memorial da Cabanagem*, and "A Cabanagem, os Escravos, os Engenhos," 33–49; in his *O Negro na Formação da Sociedade Paraense*, Belém: Editora Paka-Tatu, 2004; Miguel Menendez, "A Área Madeira-Tapajós: Situação de Contato e Relações entre o Colonizador e Indígena," in Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (ed.), *História dos Índios do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992; Magda Ricci, "O Fim do Grão-Pará e o Nascimento do Brasil: Movimentos Sociais, Levantes e Deserções no Alvorecer do Novo Império, 1808–1840," in Mary Del Priore and Flávio dos Santos Gomes (eds.), *Os Senhores dos Rios: Amazônia, Margens e Histórias*, Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2003; and "Cabanagem, Cidadania e Identidade Revolucionária: O Problema do Patriotismo na Amazônia entre 1835 e 1840," *Tempo (Niterói)*, 2007, 11, 22, 5–30; John Chasteen, "Cautionary Tale: A Radical Priest, Nativist Agitation, and the Origin of Brazilian Civil Wars," in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Rumours of Wars: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000.

6 See Carlos de Araújo Moreira Neto, *Índios da Amazônia, de Maioria a Minoría (1750–1850)*, Petropolis: Vozes, 1985; Vicente Salles, *Memorial da Cabanagem*, Belém: CEJUP, 1992; Pasquale di Paolo, *Cabanagem: A Revolução Popular da Amazônia*, Belém: Conselho de Cultura, 1985; Geraldo Mártires Coelho, *Anarquistas, Demagogos e Dissidentes: A Imprensa Liberal no Pará de 1822*, Belém: CEJUP, 1993; Magda Ricci, "O Fim do Grão-Pará e o Nascimento do Brasil," David Cleary, "Lost Altogether to the Civilized World': Race and the Cabanagem in Northern Brazil, 1750 to 1850," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1998, 40, 1, 109–135.

7 Roderick Barman, *Brazil: The Forging of a Nation, 1798–1852*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 26.

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The Cabanagem is a well-known rebellion in the history of Brazil. It occurred during a time of rupture and uncertainty: the monarch who had led Brazil to independence had abdicated amid a rising tide of radical liberalism and virulent attacks on the Portuguese. His son was too young to rule, so a regency administration was created. Over the following four years, newly introduced laws gave more power to the regions. In the 1830s, significant uprisings took place not only in Pará but also in the northern provinces of Pernambuco (the Cabanada), Maranhão (the Balaiada) and Bahia (the Sabinada and the Muslim slave revolt of 1835), and in the far south of Brazil (the Farroupilha). Each one threatened the future existence of Brazil and challenged, in different measures, popular exclusion from politics, elite land grabbing, slavery, and monarchy. Ever since, historians have grappled with the national nature of the political breakdown during the regency period (1831–1840).⁸ What interests kept Brazil together? Were the rebellions or, more accurately, their repression necessary for the assertion of national integrity and identity? If so, whose version?⁹ How can popular participation in politics be understood? In what way, if at all, was each rebellion in line with the others? Given the large regional differences in Brazil at the time, might their contemporaneity hide local processes and relations that cannot be forced into a national perspective? These are ongoing questions to which this book makes a contribution.

In seeking answers, it becomes apparent that the Portuguese Amazon bears significant comparisons with Spanish-speaking areas of Latin America where concentrations of indigenous people were involved in the colonial regime (such as the Andes and Mexico). The rich literature on peasants, rural revolt, political consciousness, and agrarian structures in those places has helped to sharpen the questions emerging from the Amazon.¹⁰ Across the continent in the nineteenth century there was mass engagement with

8 For example, see Henrique Handelmann, *História do Brasil*, Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro 1931 [1860]; José Pereira da Silva, *História do Brasil na Menoridade do Pedro 2*, Rio de Janeiro: Havre, 1888; Caio Prado, *Evolução Política do Brasil*, São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1976; Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Boris Fausto, *História Concisa do Brasil*, São Paulo: EDUSP, 2001.

9 It should also be mentioned that the Institute of Brazilian History and Geography was inaugurated in October 1838. Intellectually, the moment was captured in the Institute's prize-winning essay by German naturalist Karl Martius on the topic of the identity of Brazil, namely, the combination of Indian, European, and African elements in a fusion unique to Brazil (Karl Martius, "How the History of Brazil Should be Written," in Bradford E. Burns, (ed.), *Perspectives on Brazilian History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.).

10 In the following chapter, I review this literature more fully. See, for example, Steve Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, for the Andes; and Friederich Katz, *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989, for Mexico.

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liberalism and a factionalized élite mobilizing supporters in various kinds of alliances. Questions worth noting here: What were the peasants' and urban poor's motives in forming such connections? How did peasants engage with central state systems? What were the ethnic and class characteristics of the peasantry in the Amazon?

A note on the term Cabanagem: it means the activity of people who live in *cabanas*, the region's poorest housing – palm and wood huts. These inhabitants were called *cabanos*, the designation carrying associations of backwardness, poverty, and sedition. It is unlikely the rebels ever accepted the term *cabanos* for themselves; and they had no overall name for their rebellion. The leading participants described themselves as “defenders of the homeland and freedom.” The term *Cabanagem* was applied retrospectively, later in the century.

Sources

This study relies chiefly on documents now housed in the Public Archive of Pará in Belém. These are mostly letters, military and municipal reports, and judicial investigations sent to the regional governor in Belém. Overwhelmingly, they were written by those who opposed the rebels. Some of the writers were Portuguese, but many were Paraenses of a few generations' standing. The local level documents have allowed me to get closer to life as it was experienced and to events on the ground as they were developing, while recognizing the possibilities of bias and deception. Church records from the older parishes of the region are variable and incomplete; yet it is possible to reconstruct some family relations from them. These books consist of baptism and marriage registers and are kept in church offices.

Not all letters were written by clerks; other educated people included priests, children of wealthy parents and Indian headmen sent to Belém to school.¹¹ The letters by these people tend to be more personal; sometimes they write to the governor to request charity. What has not survived is local correspondence between village officials, colleagues, or friends. One of the first acts of *cabanos* on taking a town was to burn the municipal archive, perhaps to start anew. For this reason and the lack of care, there are apparently no local collections of correspondence beyond Belém before the 1840s.

The enormity of the region has meant that for some topics, such as family and kinship, a more detailed picture has been sought. For this purpose I have focused on the Lower Amazon around Santarém, up to Manaus and

¹¹ See Ângela Maria Vieira Domingues, “A Educação dos Meninos Índios do Norte do Brasil na Segunda Metade do Século XVIII,” in Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva (ed.), *A Cultura Portuguesa na Terra da Santa Cruz*, Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1995, 67–77.

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down to Gurupá, and the tributaries in the vicinity, most importantly the Tapajós River. This conforms with my prior fieldwork experience. Furthermore, the rebellion ended in the Lower Amazon in a series of dramatic events that have hardly been written about. The Lower Amazon was traditionally a place between the capital and the great backlands of the Negro River, where most Indian slaves were captured during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of the Lower Amazon's aboriginal inhabitants either died of disease, escaped up the tributaries, or were forcibly moved to Belém. Nevertheless, a number of missions had been established by the early eighteenth century. Over the rest of that century, Portuguese colonists and Brazilian migrants settled there and made it their home and brought in Africans. Santarém was the second-largest town in Pará, and after the capital, the Lower Amazon was the most important center, politically and economically. It is no coincidence that the political and social convulsions lasted longer there than in other places.

Another category of documentation that has almost completely disappeared is the newspapers and pamphlets, which were abundant at the time. The editions circulated by the liberal press in Pará in the 1820s are lost, save for a handful of numbers sent to Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, London, and Paris. Original versions of the manifestos and proclamations printed during the Cabanagem exist only outside Belém, either in Rio or London. These absences are another indication of the severity of the repression.

These Pará-derived sources are complemented with a range of other archival material to cover the region, and Brazil more generally, some of which has been published in other accounts and is housed in Lisbon, Rio, and London. Generally, documents outside Belém are higher-level bureaucratic correspondence.

Another important source for details on popular culture and daily life are the travelogs, scientific and otherwise. Between the 1750s and the late 1810s Pará was not visited by foreign scientists or travelers. There were, however, a number of Portuguese and Brazilian expeditions, the most famous of which was led by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira and published as the *Viagem Filosófica* (1783–1792). The trip produced some of the finest drawings on colonial Amazonia as well as ethnographic and historical essays on the Indian populations. With the opening of the ports in 1808 and growing scientific, economic, and strategic interest in the Amazon, many travelers came. For my purposes, Johann Spix's and Karl Martius' humanistic ethnography and history of the eastern Amazon (1819–1820), Hercule Florence's ill-fated trip down the Tapajós River (1827), and Henry Bates's intimate and intelligent portraits of river life (1849–1860) are the most useful and important. In Chapter 6, I have used an extraordinary story of a young Scotsman's escape from rebels in late 1835 in order to build a picture of life during the rebellion outside of Belém.

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Finally, a lively tradition of oral histories exists on the Cabanagem, including one book by another Scot: a priest who collected stories around the region outside of Belém in the 1970s where the rebellion was planned and where some of the protagonists lived. The various memories are seen as “dangerous” because they challenge the dominant version of those who defeated the rebels. Although we have the stories, there is no analysis of them. What comes through is the ongoing significance of locale-specific stories or memories of the events, such as one family’s escape from rebels and the tactics of both the cabanos and the imperial troops. A particular place is associated with a story or person. This is confirmed in my work in the Lower Amazon. Villagers recount where a cabano lookout was, where and how a Portuguese trader was skinned alive, the ongoing search for buried treasure, and so forth. Also intriguing are stories about trickery. Men used to dress up as women to avoid being called up for military service. A village would fly the black flag to indicate loyalty to the Empire, but when imperial troops came ashore they would be attacked.¹² However, this book does not make use of these oral traditions. They are a separate study raising their own questions about the connection between memory, trauma, and landscape, and why deceit should be such a prominent theme. Instead, the context for the analysis here is Brazilian historiography.

The Structure of the Study

This book is about the emergence of a new political actor in the far north of Brazil. The period spans the late colonial and early imperial phases. Although the Cabanagem took place in the postindependence period, its origins are anticolonial. The opening chapter surveys the historical and historiographic framework for this study. It places the analysis in relation to peasant rebellions in Latin America and sets of questions emerging from other revolts in regency Brazil. The next three chapters provide background to the rebellion and indicate some of its social, economic and political context. Chapter 2 details the importance of the riverscape and the culture that grew up around it in the colonial period and its influence on Indian, mixed-blood (*mestiço*), and white dwellers and Portuguese settlement. Chapter 3 considers the patterns of kinship and social organization in the

12 Mutiny among imperial soldiers was common, as was side-changing. Red was the color of the rebels and black for “loyalists,” as they were known. Needless to add, treachery was frequently involved. For oral histories of the Cabanagem from the Acará area see Thiago Thorlby, *A Cabanagem na Fala do Povo*, São Paulo: Paulinas, 1987. An excellent analysis of contemporary stories of the Balaiada rebellion is offered by Matthis Röhrig Assunção, *A Guerra dos Bem-Te-Vis, a Balaiada na Memória Oral*, São Luís: SIOGE, 1988.

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region, focusing on godparenthood as a way to understand class and ethnicity. The fourth chapter examines the origins of the rebellion in terms of agrarian structures, economic factors, and international developments. The following chapter provides an overview of the various forms of opposition to colonial forms of domination involving Indians, slaves, and mestiços. These struggles and protests converged with the anti-Portuguese liberal sentiments around independence. This examination provides a bridge to the second part of the book, which focuses on the Cabanagem and the period immediately leading up to it.

Chapter 6 focuses on the changing nature of ethnic relations in the years of conflict, as various groups struggled to make their presence felt in Pará's postindependence era. In particular, the distinction between elite liberalism and peasant revolt in the Amazon is developed. One of the imbalances in the Brazilian historiography of Cabanagem is its concentration on the capital city, so Chapter 7 attends to the interior and especially the rebel camp of Ecuipiranga, which tried to coordinate resistance when Belém fell. The final chapter investigates the repression after the failure of the rebellion and its effect on the people of the region, and its significance as rubber production dominated regional life. The Conclusion compares the Cabanagem to the set of political and social revolutions in the Brazilian provinces during the regency period and places the events within the context of later Amazonian developments.

Following the rebellion, rubber came to dominate the Amazon. This phase (c.1850 to c. 1920) has been relatively better studied by historians such as Warren Dean, Roberto Santos, and Barbara Weinstein.¹³ Rubber production brought great prosperity to the region. At first, the naturally occurring stands in Pará were exploited by laborers who lived near them. These were probably the same people who fought, or whose parents did, in the Cabanagem, for some of the areas of heaviest fighting and stands of rubber trees were close together. By the 1870s, thousands of people were engaged in rubber-tapping, which became well accommodated to the peasant way of life – relative freedom of the conditions of work and movement, the exploitation of a diverse set of economic activities, and family-based residential groups. The peasants of Pará may have been politically subordinated, but they were able to continue their semiautonomous livelihoods. This situation suited the expanding demand for rubber in the 1840s

¹³ See Warren Dean, *Brazil and The Struggle for Rubber Study in Environmental History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Roberto Santos, *História Econômica da Amazônia (1800–1920)*, São Paulo: Editora Quêiroz, 1982; Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850–1920*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985; and “Persistence of Caboclo Culture in the Amazon: the Impact of the Rubber Trade, 1850–1920,” in Eugene Parker (ed.), “The Amazon Caboclo: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.” *Studies in Third World Societies*, 1985, 32, 89–113.

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and 1850s (that is, the early phase), for it meant a workforce was already on hand. For most historians of the rubber boom, the preceding period is precisely that – anterior and less significant. By exploring the connections between it and the earlier phase, my aim is to show how the success of the rubber economy was made possible both by the persistence of peasant values and the submission of the region.

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Pará in the Age of Revolution: History
and Historiography

The Amazon – or Grão-Pará and Maranhão, as it was known then – was administered directly from Lisbon until 1772.¹ The rest of lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) America, called the state of Brazil, was governed as a separate entity. This situation was practical as much as historical. Belém, the capital of Grão-Pará, and São Luís, the capital of Maranhão, were nearer to Lisbon than Salvador and Rio de Janeiro were, the main Atlantic seaports of Brazil. Travel between the southern and northern ports was slow. In the Amazon, missionaries – principally the Jesuits – had commanded most trade and the administration of Indians until their expulsion in 1759.² Portuguese America became united politically in 1772 under a viceroy based in the colonial capital of Rio. Although the change of colonial government had little effect on the surface, it signaled the end of the desire to recognize the Amazon as a different place and the beginning of concerted pressure to make it conform to a master command. Still, there were strong regional and environmental particularities in late colonial Brazil that undermined political integration.

This centralizing force was the reforms of the Portuguese empire for significant change and state-led development in the mid- to late eighteenth century. Directives were issued to regulate most aspects of social life, including the naming of towns and people, orthodoxy in marriage and family housing, and a ban on racist prejudice. Indians were forced to work

1 Grão Pará encompassed most of what today we recognize as the Amazon region; the term *Amazonia* was not used until the late nineteenth century. Grão Pará included the Upper Amazon (around the Solimões River) and Negro River right up to the border with the Viceroyalty of Peru. Administratively, Grão Pará was a captaincy with a governor until 1820. Between 1820 and 1824, it was ruled by regionally elected juntas and then, with the new constitution and independence, it became the Province of Pará, with an appointed president. The Upper Amazon and Negro River region remained a politically subordinate but separate legal entity until 1855. Then, Pará split with the creation of the Province of Amazonas, with Manaus as the capital.

2 Indeed, the overwhelming control of the Jesuits in the Amazon was the “spark” that led to their persecution in the Iberian colonies. See Kenneth Maxwell, “The Spark: Pombal, the Amazon and the Jesuits,” *Portuguese Studies* 2001, 17, 1, 168–183.