

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

The Unexpected Amazon: Past, Present, and Imagined

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This essay reviews the following works:

Upriver: The Turbulent Life and Times of an Amazonian People. By Michael F. Brown. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. vii + 321. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780674368071.

In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of Region. By Seth Garfield. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 343. \$26.96 paper. ISBN: 9780822355854.

Rainforest Cowboys: The Rise of Ranching and Cattle Culture in Western Amazonia. By Jeffrey Hoelle. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 196. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292761346.

Tracks in the Amazon: The Day-to-Day Life of the Workers on the Madeira-Mamoré Railroad. By Gary Neeleman and Rose Neeleman. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 195. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781607812753.

Amazonian Routes: Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities in Northern Brazil. By Heather F. Roller. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 342. \$70.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780804787086.

The Amazon has often been described with superlatives, whether for its size, biological diversity, indigenous cultures, or infrastructure projects. There is a spirited competition for the lead story to account for what has happened in the world's largest river basin, whether about development policies, deforestation, climate change, or social movements. That competition will grow due to new work on the basin which reveals some surprises. The books under review here offer a panorama of intriguing findings about what we thought we knew. Drawing on new data sources, taking new standpoints, and asking different questions, these books show that human history in the Amazon has taken twists and turns that defy ready generalizations. Whether in terms of indigenous peoples who benefitted from European colonizers, pictures of suffering railroad workers, US warships on the Amazon River, warrior cultures off to school, or rubber tappers running cattle, the new scholarship identifies ironies and offers explanations to make them the new understandings of the basin and its peoples.

Because the five books under review address distinct moments in the region's history, I will go in the chronological order of the periods treated, offering comparisons along the way. I begin with the colonial period. Previous histories have often focused on the Amazon as a "counterfeit paradise"¹ that impeded cultural development, resulting in a "land without history"² inhabited by "inconstant" and highly mobile indigenous groups.³ Europeans therefore subjugated indigenous peoples by forced resettlement in nucleated villages (*aldeias*) for purposes of exploiting their labor to collect various forest products, the *drogas do sertão*.⁴

¹ Betty Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (Chicago: Atherton, 1971).

² Euclides da Cunha, *The Amazon: Land without History*, translated by R. Sousa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in Sixteenth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011).

⁴ Robin L. Anderson, *Colonization as Exploitation in the Amazon Rain Forest, 1758–1911* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); Caio Prado Junior, *The Colonial Background of Modern Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Celso Furtado, *The Economic Growth of Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

Heather Roller, a 2010 Stanford PhD in history who has won multiple prizes for her work on colonial Brazil, revisits these and other statements in *Amazonian Routes: Indigenous Mobility and Colonial Communities in Northern Brazil*. While she does not question previous accounts, Roller does offer a revisionist view by adding neglected elements of the story, which paint a rather more complex picture of social relations in settlements and on collecting expeditions.

Like the other books under review, Roller relies on distinct data sources and methods relative to previous work. As Roller notes, it was not just the directors, governors, and other Portuguese officials who recorded details on aldeias and expeditions. The voices of indigenous representatives and expedition guides also appear in some reports, and they offer valuable insights.

Roller's main argument is that under the Directorate, aldeias were negotiated spaces. There was a third option for indigenous peoples beyond forced settlement or flight: negotiated settlement, under which settled indigenous groups had obligations to the colonizers but also advantages over isolated tribes. While settled indigenous groups were vassals of the Crown, they were highly valued by colonizers for their knowledge and skills. While Roller acknowledges that none of this excuses the violence and abuses of the colonizers, it reveals a more nuanced history in which indigenous peoples did have agency. They submitted to settlement for reasons that suited their own purposes.

Understanding those purposes and recognizing where agency occurred make the documents on which Roller relies crucial. She takes an ethnohistorical approach, focusing on the words and contexts in which indigenous individuals speak. Roller argues that depositions by indigenous voices in colonial reports reflect their strategies for negotiated autonomies. As Roller notes, such depositions reveal that while the Portuguese were motivated to map and thereby incorporate more territory, indigenous peoples voluntarily participated to visit distant kin and interact with other indigenous groups, thereby upholding social obligations and strengthening indigenous social networks.

Roller pays close attention not only to expeditions, but also to colonial settlements and mobility. She notes that many aldeias failed when they brought together opposing indigenous groups. The interesting part is that one group would often leave, and then relocate to another aldeia of their choice. Further, Roller provides documentation that indigenous laborers could petition the governor about settlements, including establishment of new aldeias. Roller therefore argues that indigenous groups not only influenced where settlements were sited but also where resistance occurred. This set a pattern that would evolve over time toward greater tensions, as directors sought increased control via new labor policies, and indigenous and African laborers engaged in new forms of resistance. The eventual result was the revolt known as the Cabanagem. Roller's account thus provides a basis for understanding not only settlement policy in the eighteenth century but also the rules of engagement by colonizers and subalterns, in which there was a measure of negotiated accommodation that eroded over time.

Collecting expeditions also come in for detailed analysis. Here Roller relies on the *devassas*, or depositions about expeditions. A review of some two hundred devassas with indigenous contributors is a major contribution of Roller's work. Of particular note are "non-formulaic" devassas in which indigenous participants report bad decisions, drunkenness, traffic in contraband, and other derelictions by their Portuguese overseers to the governor. There are other indications of indigenous autonomy: devassas also include references to stops at sites for indigenous participants to socialize with kin, while putatively collecting forest products.

Roller also offers chapters on the *descimentos*, expeditions to find indigenous peoples to relocate to aldeias. Roller points out that indigenous representatives often proposed such descimentos, for they were interested in visiting with kin, and directors endorsed and underwrote them. Roller does note that such descimentos involved indigenous peoples who were themselves just resettled and not yet subject to labor requirements. This explains the support from directors, who sent indigenous representatives out to report positively on aldeias and thereby improve the chances of securing more indigenous labor.

Not surprisingly, when labor requirements kicked in, resistance grew, including indigenous absenteeism. Roller reports on absenteeism using detailed migration documents. Such documents show that many absent indigenous people moved from one aldeia to another. Roller points to migration data that suggest poor management by some directors as the explanation for indigenous relocation to other aldeias. While there are limitations in the reports, it is hard to imagine directors falsifying data to show that indigenous laborers went to other aldeias.

By the late eighteenth century, there was a growing "non-*aldeado*" population. Emancipated indigenous peoples, escaped African slaves, and independent European settlers constituted an emergent peasant class. This led to increasingly complex racial politics, as race determined who was subject to labor requirements. "Indians" were differentiated from "vagrants," but criteria were unclear, especially for multiracial individuals.

“Vagrancy” thus became a catchall category for anybody who did not contribute productively for the Crown and were thus subject to forcible resettlement. Antivagrancy campaigns followed, replacing racial categories with production requirements. These expanded the population subject to resettlement and provide another explanation for resistance, and eventually for the Cabanagem.

The Directorate was eventually abolished, amid debate over what was to follow. Roller quotes extensively from the Governor Souza Coutinho, who advocated for new productive relations based on the taxation of commerce rather than forced labor. Previous histories have often argued that indigenous groups had by then had enough and fled into the forest. Roller observes, however, that circulation among settlements continued as a form of resistance. When taxation grew more onerous, resistance to payments led to mounting tensions and the Cabanagem. If circulation had not continued, groups of “rebels” would have remained smaller and sparser. Roller’s account thus supplements previous histories of the colonial Amazon, in which the hegemony of colonizers also involved negotiations with indigenous laborers, who retained a measure of autonomy that foreshadowed later resistance.

Another infamous moment of Amazonian history concerns the construction of the Madeira-Mamoré railroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The railroad is given a new account by Gary and Rose Neeleman, who have lived for many years in Brazil, where Gary was a foreign correspondent for the United Press International. As does Roller’s book, the Neelemans’ new book, *Tracks in the Amazon: The Day-to-Day Life of the Workers on the Madeira-Mamoré Railroad*, draws on newly available information. The contribution by the Neelemans stems from their work with sources from descendants of the Pyles family, who were led by an ex-Confederate soldier who left the United States after the Civil War, settled in Brazil, and ended up working on the Madeira-Mamoré. Many photos taken by Dana Merrill, official photographer for the Madeira-Mamoré project, ended up in the Pyles family collection. This provides a more complete photographic account than was available in previously accessible prints. The Neelemans note that publication of these photos is given additional urgency due to the planning of the Madeira complex of dams, which will submerge the remains of the Madeira-Mamoré railroad itself.

The Neelemans supplement the Merrill photos with written sources, including Frank Kravigny’s diary and the English-language newspapers *Marconigram* and *Porto Velho Times*. These and other sources tell the basic story: the rubber boom of the nineteenth century motivated improvements in transport of the product to Porto Velho. In the way were the Madeira River cataracts, a section of roughly two hundred miles where rocks made navigation very dangerous. Border disputes between Bolivia, Brazil, and Peru hindered implementation of proposals, but an initial effort went forward and resulted in three miles of track laid in five years at the expense of several thousand lives. Rubber prices rose however, and the Treaty of Petropolis resolved the border disputes. A second effort at construction went forward during 1908–1912, which completed the railway to Porto Velho.

What the standard stories miss, and the photos capture, are the faces and places where construction occurred. The Madeira-Mamoré was in many ways an American project in terms of the funding, leadership, and installations. The photos document American engineers and doctors, and the narratives referenced were largely written in English. We also get Kravigny’s records of poetry composed by laborers, which focus on the simple pleasures in life, homesickness, and especially gallows humor about malaria. The view is thus from the inside of the project, but ironically the perspectives are those of outsiders.

While the presentation is somewhat disorganized and repetitive, the photos constitute the main contribution. As the Neelemans note, the story of the Madeira-Mamoré lends itself to visual presentation to capture adequately the extent of the travails; it was also the focus of a recent Globo *telenovela*. One comes to respect the courage of the workers even more with the documentation in the photos of the challenges with which they and the engineers had to contend: dense forest, rocky soils, mudslides, and more.

But the Madeira-Mamoré is not unique as an American incursion into the Amazon. Seth Garfield, a historian at the University of Texas at Austin, focuses on another important case in his second book, *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, The United States, and the Nature of Region*. Garfield offers a history of the United States and Brazil in the “Battle for Rubber” during World War II. Central to Garfield’s account are various “mediators” that account for diverse perspectives on the Amazon. He draws on political ecology to differentiate numerous social actors operating in the Amazon and evaluates their understandings of the region based on their interests. Garfield also relies on David Harvey’s work on the discursive constructions of places, and Bruno Latour’s call to conjointly explain nature and society.⁵ The result is an account with many

⁵ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, translated by C. Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

perspectives, though the meaning of the term “mediator” is not entirely clear, as it is applied in various ways at different points in the narrative. What is compelling is that Garfield’s adoption of different actor standpoints permits him to articulate their contrasting constructions of the Amazon. Beyond the propagandized “battle against nature” to support the “battle against the Axis,” there was a discursive and symbolic battle among understandings of the Amazon itself.

World War II unfolded during the *Estado Novo*, under which President Getúlio Vargas sought to launch Brazil on the road to modernity. Vargas’s visit to Manaus in 1940 brought promises to renew Amazonian rubber extraction and thereby impel the drive for development. It would be different this time: rubber extraction would be overseen by the state to the benefit of all, and revenue would be invested rationally to build infrastructure and institutions necessary to support industry. As part of the “March to the West,” the *Estado Novo* would support “rubber soldiers” migrating from the northeast, Brazilian scientists developing improved technologies, and regional merchants who would make private investments.

This in turn serves to point out the *Estado Novo*’s underlying interest: parlay US investments and technologies to impel regional development and, in the process, secure Brazilian sovereignty over the basin in an assertive geopolitical stroke. The *Estado Novo*’s logic thus sought to expand Brazil’s sphere of influence and thereby secure the basin from outside interlopers, American and otherwise. Garfield offers a catalogue of the investments along with observations on the corresponding discourses and images deployed to envision a future, modern Amazon in a similarly future, modern Brazil.

Garfield then pivots to the US government. He highlights the US emphasis on “untrustworthy supply” as a fundamental problem with procurement of rubber. The US tried various alternatives but finally opted for support of renewed rubber extraction. Garfield offers various American images of the Amazon, all “exotic.” Such images are intermixed with numbers about rubber demand and estimates of supply. The effect is jarring, but that’s the point: within the US were sundry interests with regard to the Amazon, summing to an incoherent panoply when taken together.

The rubber accords between the United States and Brazil thus set in tension short-term US goals for rubber procurement and long-term Brazilian goals for national development. Garfield provides long sections on internal US tensions, especially among competing federal agencies with differing visions of how to procure rubber and of the role of the United States in the Amazon. Garfield parallels those debates with criticism of all US interests by Brazilians suspicious of US imperial designs on the basin. The result is a palimpsest of images of the Amazon, many drawing on old tropes, albeit repackaged for wartime.

The international tensions provide context for an evaluation of the rubber soldiers, seen by outsiders all around as being inefficient. As Garfield notes, such appraisals ignore natural variability in rubber tree density and productivity; one wonders what gringos, whether from southern Brazil or the United States, might have achieved tapping rubber themselves. Garfield provides extensive discussion of US-Brazilian efforts to improve rubber production via “regimentation” or standardization of harvesting practices. That, however, begged questions about the *aviamento* system of debt peonage, which defined labor relations during the rubber boom, as well as the knowledge of rubber tappers, adapted as they were by long experience in the Amazon. Complicating the picture were the interests of the rubber bosses before the Brazilian state. Whereas the populist Vargas regime was very invested in giving rubber tappers rights, and the United States was concerned about the constitutionality of labor relations behind rubber procurement, the bosses stonewalled against governmental “interference.”

Implementation of the Battle for Rubber thus involved grumbling all around. Rubber bosses felt undercut by the Brazilian state, Brazilians griped about dictatorial US personnel, tappers grew leery of government promises for rights and benefits, and US conservatives fumed about taxpayer money going to the Amazon. Garfield documents it all, as well as the fact that it all was papered over by official propaganda in the United States and Brazil. The supreme irony is that the propagandists for both governments “had slight knowledge of the region that they sought to represent” (122). Here Garfield makes a key contribution, revealing the thorough idealism, driven by the material necessities of the war effort, which informed the representations of the justifications for said effort. The disparities between images of the Amazon viewed from afar and the reality on the ground come in for careful interpretation: “Such discrepancies suggest less the calculated duplicity of government officials than an urge to conceal their ignorance and impotence regarding the Amazon, and their condescension toward local practices and systems of knowledge” (125).

The cross-purposes at play among the many interests involved led the United States to conclude that alternatives to Amazonian rubber would have to be found. Garfield interprets the underlying determinants of the Battle for Rubber in terms of global supply chains: if demand exceeds supply, more resources must be dedicated to increasing supply. That includes looking for alternatives from other sources, which led to

technical innovations by US companies and the fabrication of synthetic rubber. Production rose in 1944, and US investments in Brazil correspondingly fell. Triumphant wartime narratives of cooperation, development, and victory thus squared poorly with actual performance, infighting, and the neglect of rubber tappers, as well as a persistent lack of understanding of Amazonia.

Garfield balances the infighting by reminding us of US and Brazilian investments in infrastructure and public health in the Amazon. He provides a useful retrospective about the evolution of the rubber bank into the Banco da Amazônia, the growth of the Chagas Foundation, and how Brazil leveraged US investments in technology and infrastructure, among other postwar changes. Wartime Amazonia vindicated state planning of infrastructure and the application of science and technology for development. These constituted the precedents for plans to integrate the Amazon into Brazil. The symbolic game board was set: Amazonia was a theater for battle, a region desired by outsiders, in need of public investments for regional development, where popular classes such as rubber tappers deserved greater recognition, and consequently a space not easily captured in a single ideological perspective, nationalist or otherwise. For Garfield, recent debates about social rights, environmental protection, and internationalization of the Amazon can be traced to the 1940s during the Battle for Rubber.

Leaping forward again in time, Michael Brown's *Upriver: The Turbulent Life and Times of an Amazonian People* takes up the case of the Awajún of the upper Marañon watershed in Peru. Brown is an anthropologist of long experience and offers a long-term reflection of his many encounters with an iconic Amazonian indigenous people. Known for their fierce warrior culture, the Awajún provide a case study of the encounters of Western civilization and indigenous groups. Brown thus orients his book around long-standing debates about "Indians" and "civilization" that continue due to the unfolding integration of indigenous peoples into Western societies.⁶ This book is really two distinct tracts, with the first providing an ethnography of the Awajún in the 1970s, and the second offering a reflection of various changes since then up to 2012. The result is a narrative of the "ethnographer who went back" to see how a warrior culture has fared in the context of integration into a national society.

Brown offers ample commentary on the perils of studying a group with an antagonistic history to Western invaders. But he does not shy away from difficult issues like the role of violence in Awajún society. Here Brown's long-term commitment to the Awajún is key, for his thoughts on these issues change as the Awajún themselves have changed. This provides the basis for Brown's meditations on the craft of ethnography in the context of social change and integration.

The first part of the book recounts Brown's dissertation fieldwork and includes historical background on the Awajún. Evidently, their encounters with aggressive outsiders during the rubber boom, namely slave raids for indigenous labor, unsurprisingly made the Awajún rather more pugnacious. But in the 1950s, Christian missionaries were working with them, which led to the establishment of villages with schools and health posts. By the time of Brown's arrival in the late 1970s, the Awajún were reserved but tolerant of outsiders.

Brown's research comes to focus on sorcery as a means of managing conflicts and violence in Awajún society. He finds that in practice, sorcery allows the Awajún to air out community conflicts and settle scores. Here his reflections on the periodic incursions of modern technology and medicine are insightful, as he seeks alternative explanations for accidents, illnesses, and deaths. Ever the rigorous documentarian, Brown recounts one case of a death surrounded by suspicions of sorcery, but concludes that the real cause was a pharmacist who provided the wrong medicine.

The broader context surrounding the Awajún is put in stark relief at the moment of Brown's departure from the field, when other anthropologists arrive. They raise issues of the politics of working with indigenous groups, and question whether Brown is merely there to study the Awajún or to help them. That leads to a tense exchange over the motives of foreigners who study indigenous peoples. This bitter conclusion to the first part of the book sets the stage for the complex issues at play in the second.

The great asset of the second half of Brown's book is to link older history to what has happened in recent years. Brown offers a critical discussion of Steven Pinker's thesis about the decline of violence with the advance of "civilization," which serves as a useful counterpoint to his rather more interesting discussion

⁶ See, for example, Jared Diamond, *The World until Yesterday* (New York: Viking, 2012); Robin Fox, *The Tribal Imagination: Civilization and the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Shane Greene, *Customizing Indigeneity: Paths to a Visionary Politics in Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); John Hemming, *Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008); and Roger Sandall, *The Culture Cult: Designer Tribalism and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

of the Awajún's encounter with Westerners.⁷ While the Awajún have become more enmeshed in national institutions, their reputation for aggression and violence has not subsided. A prominent shaman-informant from Brown's dissertation fieldwork was killed in a kin feud in the 1990s; the Awajún were beset by colonists and responded violently in 2002; and the Awajún led nationally televised confrontations in Bagua in 2009 in response to national government decree laws that curtailed indigenous rights to control natural resources in their territories. The deaths of police in those confrontations only increased the Awajún's reputation for fierceness, even over legal questions like prior consent.

This for me was the most fascinating part of the book: a report from the ethnographer who goes back and finds indigenous peoples retaining some aspects of their cultures and yet adapting to changing circumstances. Awajún lawyers now work to reconcile cultural traditions with Peruvian law. A colonist murdered by the Awajún is exhumed by police, who get a death certificate from the local coroner. The police then close the case, recognizing Awajún justice. This prompts a lengthy discussion of Awajún political strategy: pursue nonviolent means of conflict resolution, but if that fails, use violence. The formula explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of the nation-state, but only if it actually functions and thereby acknowledges indigenous claims.

Brown also provides a vivid description of the changes in the Awajún communities where he conducted his dissertation fieldwork. Much of the territory is now occupied by colonists, but the Awajún population has also grown, and the result is extensive forest loss to agriculture. Brown expresses heartbreak at these changes, but he also notes the economic improvements, as Awajún migrate for secondary education and wage jobs. Brown highlights the strains experienced by educated Awajún youths, especially young Awajún women, who feel spiritually empty as they struggle to find jobs that use their educations. More generally, his interviews with various Awajún reveal the mixed feelings about engaging national institutions.

Nonetheless, Brown concludes with a more positive note on a collective level, commenting that Awajún leaders still invoke traditional myths and the importance of "proclaiming a vision" to unify and mobilize communities for focused action. Brown concludes by observing that the Awajún have chosen their path and navigated it confidently, combining aggression with pragmatism. Never mind what outsiders might have supposed: indigenous groups in the twenty-first century have their own expertise and exercise their own agency. With that, Brown concludes on an ironic note, observing the importance of indigenous anthropologists and old ethnographies as sources for indigenous peoples to recover their traditional practices and identities.

If Brown's reflections on the Awajún document change among indigenous peoples in the Amazon, Jeffrey Hoelle's *Rainforest Cowboys: The Rise of Ranching and Cattle Culture in Western Amazonia* reveals all manner of changes and ironies among nonindigenous groups in the region. Hoelle is another recent PhD, earning his degree in anthropology from the University of Florida in 2011, and his book derives from his dissertation, which focused on the rise of "cattle culture" in the western Amazon. His case is the Brazilian state of Acre, known for the rubber tappers. Picking up a generation or two after Garfield, Hoelle rehearses the recent history: in the 1980s, rubber tappers resisted incursions by cattle ranchers who sought to clear forest for pasture. While rubber tappers at first mobilized as a rural labor movement, their struggle over land use made them environmentalists since they sought to protect the forest. The assassination of rubber tapper leader Chico Mendes in 1988 attracted the attention of the international news media, and made the "extractive reserve" an influential sustainable use policy that has since been applied across Brazil.

But now, rubber tappers themselves are running cattle. What is more, various groups in Acre profess identities and practices associated with cattle culture. It is these apparent contradictions that Hoelle sets out to explain. Whereas Garfield argues that outsider understandings of the Amazon are based on various mediators, Hoelle focuses on Amazonians themselves, and calls attention to shifts in the Amazon with which they identify, including elements that have been imported.

A major part of the innovation in Hoelle's work is to look beyond the typical economic explanations for the expansion of cattle ranching in the Amazon to consider cultural factors. This contribution is valuable because cattle culture has flourished alongside the political apogee of the social movement launched by the rubber tappers, which got its leaders elected to key state offices, resulting in the "Forest Government" of Acre. Just as the Forest Government promoted forest-based development, cattle culture has become popular in Acre.

Hoelle argues that there is a cultural as well as economic rationale for the emergence of cattle culture alongside the Forest Government. The beginnings of an explanation reside in economic history: Amazonia for several decades has been a receiving region for migrants from other parts of Brazil. As Amazonian

⁷ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).

scholars well know, the state offered fiscal incentives for investors to establish ranches in the basin. Ranching later expanded as demand for beef in regional cities grew. Available markets expanded further after Brazil controlled hoof-and-mouth disease, which permitted beef exports.

What requires additional explanation is the adoption of cattle by social groups beyond ranchers. Hoelle turns to anthropology and reviews the long-standing literature on cattle cultures around the world, in which having cattle is considered prestigious. Brazil is no exception, including Acre: Hoelle's data on cultural perceptions of cattle show a convergence, from rubber tappers to ranchers to environmental NGOs, all equating cattle with wealth and rubber tapping with poverty. Hoelle further calls attention to the importance of cultural diffusion: colonists and rubber tappers hired as ranch hands or residing next to big ranches were exposed to various signifiers of cattle culture. This overlooked explanation helps explain the shift from intergroup conflicts before 1990 to cooperation after 2000.

Hoelle also highlights history, via the arrival of ranchers from the state of São Paulo, who brought with them cultural practices that they in turn had adopted from Americans from the King Ranch who worked in southern Brazil. The "Paulistas" brought with them the rodeo tradition and a cattle culture that was commercially viable and socially vibrant. The multistep transmission of cattle culture helps generalize Hoelle's diffusion argument and shows that Acre is not the outlier one might suppose.

Not to be overlooked in all this is Hoelle's access to prominent ranchers in Acre. Ranchers have been vilified by many environmentalists and academics who work on the Amazon. Not surprisingly, ranchers have responded with a general disinclination to give interviews. Hoelle managed to gain access and invitations to cattle auctions and other cattle culture events. Here he finds social diversity: ranchers in Acre encompass not only old ranching families from southern Brazil but also entrepreneurs who recently invested in cattle. Perceptions of ranchers by colonists and even rubber tappers are intriguing: ranchers are seen as white, from southern Brazil, and as people with smooth hands. Ranchers are perceived as elites, and smooth hands are associated with power to have others do labor. For their part, ranchers see themselves as heroes: ranching means national development. Ranchers thus express considerable frustration at environmentalists, often associated with foreigners and seen as impeding development, another reference to the debate over the internationalization of the Amazon.

Hoelle also focuses on *acrianos* who identify with cattle culture but who have no cattle, or even land. For the *contri* lifestyle has also been adopted by Amazonian residents of urban areas, including many people who left the countryside. In a fascinating analysis, Hoelle documents the dismay of many urban residents at city life, and the *saudade* (homesickness) for the *contri* lifestyle, even as they clearly assert no intention to return to the country. To navigate these feelings, many urban residents identify with cattle culture for its popular signifiers of an idealized *contri* culture. Here the urban demand for beef in the Amazon gains a cultural explanation: consuming beef is one among many practices of identifying with *contri* culture. Urban areas similarly offer *contri* spaces like shops with *cauboi* clothes, *contri* events like the *cavalgada* (horse cavalcade), and showcases of cattle culture like Expo Acre (the annual state fair). Ironically, ranchers themselves avoid *contri* clothing; the identification with cattle culture is a symbolic means of finding a compromise between urban and rural lifestyles for the popular rather than elite class. Hoelle observes that other rural identities, including the *caipira* (hillbilly) or rubber tapper, are considered backward or rustic; urban identities are seen as soft and decadent. "Although it never corresponds exactly with experience, *cauboi* culture is the only form of rural identity that is positively valued and thoroughly institutionalized throughout Brazil" (107). *Contri* alone represents hard work in the name of development, a transformative ideal associated with "Order and Progress" in the Brazilian national tradition.

Brazil has emerged as the world's leading beef exporter, and most recent growth in the herd has occurred in the Amazon, with the fastest growth of all in Acre. But even here, Hoelle finds surprises: nearly half of Acre's beef is consumed locally, as Acre now has the highest per capita beef consumption in all of Brazil. That provides another opening for cultural inquiry. Hoelle finds that for most stakeholders, beef is "stronger" than other meats, and thus supports hard work and regional development, thereby closing the logical loop for the value on productivity in cattle culture. The link between production and consumption of beef, however, raises issues of identity in the cases of colonists and rubber tappers. Are rubber tappers who run cattle and no longer tap rubber really rubber tappers? Are colonists who produce beef for markets still colonists if they are no longer food self-reliant? The picture that emerges is that cultural identities are only loosely tied to economic activities in the minds of those social actors. Hoelle here makes the sage observation, which finds parallels in many of the books under review here, that old understandings of Amazon social categories persist, but largely in the minds of outsiders, who harbor increasingly outmoded assumptions about a changing Amazon.

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How to cite this article: Perz, Stephen G. 2018. The Unexpected Amazon: Past, Present, and Imagined. *Latin American Research Review* 53(1), pp. 185–192. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.226>

Submitted: 07 March 2017

Accepted: 24 April 2017

Published: 28 March 2018

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