

# “Lost Altogether to the Civilised World”: Race and the *Cabanagem* in Northern Brazil, 1750 to 1850

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The colonisation of the tropical lowlands of South America was until fairly recently often portrayed by historians as a straightforward catalogue of genocide, epidemics, and forced catechisation.<sup>1</sup> In its emphasis on the undeniable fact of the violent subjection of much of Amerindia, this orthodoxy obscured the vital detail of the varieties of historical experience in the Amazon and Orinoco basins and the Guianas, projecting an illusion of uniformity and direction to historical processes which were in fact much more complicated and open-ended.<sup>2</sup> Historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists have more recently emphasised the historically contingent nature of ethnic identity and traced out its empirical consequence, the interweaving of identity construction and ethnicity with colonialism, economic expansion and state formation from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>3</sup> As a result, in certain parts of the tropical lowlands—notably the Guianas—it has been possible to produce a much

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the work of John Hemming: *Red Gold* (London: Macmillan, 1978), *Amazon Frontier* (London: Macmillan, 1983), “Indians and the Frontier” in L. Bethell, ed., *Colonial Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 145–89.

<sup>2</sup> N. Whitehead, “Ethnic Transformation and Historical Discontinuity in Native Amazonia and Guayana, 1500–1900,” *L’Homme*, 126–8, 13:4 (avril–décembre 1993), 285–305. A particularly good example of the complexity of “conquest” from the Indian perspective in the period immediately prior to the *Cabanagem* is N. Farage, *As Muralhas dos Sertões: Os Povos Indígenas no Rio Branco e a Colonização* (Rio: Paz e Terra, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> General volumes covering all or most of the tropical lowlands are A. Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to the Present* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); E.V. de Castro and M.C. da Cunha, eds., *Amazônia: Etnologia e História Indígena* (São Paulo: FAPESP, 1993); M.C. da Cunha, ed., *História dos Índios no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras 1992) and G. Urban and J. Sherzer, eds., *Nation States and Indians in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). For the Orinoco and Guianas, see chapters by Whitehead and Arvelo-Jimenez and Biord in Roosevelt, *Amazonian Indians*; Dreyfus, in Castro and da Cunha, *Amazonia*; and N. Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venezuela and Guayana, 1498–1820* (Dordrecht and Providence: Foris Publications, 1988). Price’s trilogy on the Saramaka Maroons of Surinam, *First Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), *To Slay the Hydra* (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1983), and *Alabi’s World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1990) is an example of a similar approach to an Afro-American ethnic formation.

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more sophisticated reading of regional history, a “thick description” which can relate the fluidity and specificity of local circumstances to wider historical processes and can thus serve as the basis for a properly comparative mapping of the past.

However, this theoretical advance has had one perverse consequence: In trying to understand the inter-relationship between colonialism and ethnicity, the relationships between colonialism and race and colonialism and class in the South American lowlands have been neglected to an extent unimaginable, for example, in the historiography of the Caribbean or the Andes. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the social, cultural, and political consequences of detribalisation. This essay will argue that if it is true, in Whitehead’s memorable phrase, that “tribes make states and states make tribes,”<sup>4</sup> it is also true that states make races (and, one is tempted to say when looking at nationalist myths of origin, that races make states). For all the importance of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries in lowland South American history, the social construction of race must also be central to the analysis and interpretation of the region’s past. This implies looking beyond the frontier as traditionally defined to the new societies and cultures forming behind it, in which race and class interweave to form a complex cultural matrix, in some ways *mestizo* but in others emphatically not.

Any discussion of concepts of race, especially in a country like Brazil, where race has occupied a central place in indigenous social theory for two centuries and become deeply embroiled in national myths of origin, should begin by making clear in what sense the term is being used. Race is regarded here as a socially constructed system of classification. Racial terminology is similar to kinship terminology: It has no biological referent, although it inevitably claims “natural” status, and does not reflect any objective difference between human populations. Race in Brazil, as elsewhere, has been socially constructed in different ways during different historical periods: on the basis of descent in the early colonial period, on descent in combination with phenotype from the late colonial period onwards. A feature of racial classification in Brazil when compared to that of North America, is that it is more negotiable, but that negotiation operates within limits. Just how those limits operated, still a difficult question to answer in contemporary Brazil, is an important issue in Brazilian historiography. Historians have paid a great deal of attention to the question of race in nineteenth-century Brazil but have tended to concentrate on the second half of the century and to draw their material from southern and northeastern Brazil. This is unfortunate, because the large indigenous Indian presence in the tropical lowlands of northern Brazil makes it in some

<sup>4</sup> “Tribes Make States and States Make Tribes: Warfare and the Creation of Colonial Tribes and States in Northeastern South America,” in R. Ferguson and N. Whitehead, eds. *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, (Santa Fé: School of American Research Press, 1992), 127–50.

ways a more promising basis for the comparison of the Brazilian experience with its Hispanic neighbours and Central and North America.

This study approaches these issues through an analysis of the *Cabanagem*, a civil war which devastated much of northern Brazil between 1835 and 1841. If the social construction of race and relationships between these racial groups is an important issue in Brazilian social history, it follows that the violent breakdown of those relationships can cast a uniquely revealing light. Despite the scale and importance of the *Cabanagem*, it is little known outside Brazil and even within it has long been overshadowed in the national consciousness by the military campaigns against Canudos in Bahia between 1893 and 1897 and the repression of the Contestado rebellion in southern Brazil between 1914 and 1916. These were dramatic messianic encounters which in elite eyes perfectly symbolised the tension between modernisation and tradition, a key theme in South American cultural history; the Canudos campaign even produced *Os Sertões*, Euclides da Cunha's study of the rebellion which occupies a central place in the Brazilian literary canon. No such cultural resonance attaches to the *Cabanagem*. No famous author was on hand; no scholars think of it as a defining event in Brazilian history.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the argument to see the *Cabanagem* as such an event is a compelling one. In the first place, the scale of events commands attention. It was probably the bloodiest uprising in Brazilian history. Thirty thousand dead, the figure given by the first and most thorough historian of the *Cabanagem*, Domingos Antônio Raiol, is an exaggeration yet does not seem wildly off the mark, given the reliable evidence which exists for casualties during specific episodes of the *Cabanagem*.<sup>6</sup> It was also the longest rebellion against the Imperial government and affected by far the largest area of the national territory. It was also the only one in which rebels took over the entire machinery of government for any length of time at the provincial level, the only one in which a rebel government negotiated with foreign powers, and the only one in which rebel forces twice occupied the provincial capital.

In addition, the documents produced by the *Cabanagem* make it immediately obvious that race was a crucial social category for all the participants, a central part of social identity upon which wide-ranging expectations and explanations of behaviour were founded. A great deal of the importance of the *Cabanagem* lies in the fact that it makes visible an Indian population after detribalisation, neglected by historians and historical anthropology alike, in the process of forming what can fairly be termed the early modern population of Amazonia. This requires some preliminary clarification. To participants in

<sup>5</sup> R. Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893–1897*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Raiol, *Motins Políticos, ou História dos Principais Acontecimentos Políticos da Província do Pará desde o Ano de 1821 até 1835* (Belém: Universidade Federal do Pará, 1970 [1865–90], 3 vols.) vol. 3:1000–1,n.

the Cabanagem, foreign observers, and its first serious historians, it was self-evident that although it did not begin as a race war, it rapidly became one. Although it encompassed a slave rebellion, it was much more than that, since the majority of the participants were not slaves, and at least in its early stages the rebellion was led by part of the regional elite. The evolution of racial terms, like that of place names, maps the mental geography of the past; and the tracing of how the semantic field of particular words changed in Brazilian Portuguese over time, together with the relationships between specific racial terms, is one of the ways in which it is possible to answer the question of the social role and salience of race in daily life in the past.

Its importance as a social category in the Cabanagem documents was reflected in its bureaucratic significance. The register books of the prison hulks used to intern rebels, for example, are large ledgers divided into columns from the left. They give first the prisoner's name, then the second column lists the individual as a member of a racial category, before proceeding to other information.<sup>7</sup> Raiol transcribes several statements of witnesses testifying against individuals accused of participation in the rebellion in the city of Belém; all give name, racial group (the word being used would also have indicated whether the individual was a slave), occupation and age, in that order.<sup>8</sup> The only individuals identified by nationality rather than race are Portuguese and foreigners. Direct quotation is the best way to illustrate the extent to which race saturates these primary sources, such as a Portuguese officer's description of the situation in Belém shortly before a rebel attack in August 1835:

The scum had promised to loot and murder all the whites, even including the women. The President of the province could only count on a handful of white Brazilians and naturalised Portuguese, who formed a militia of barely 400 men, but of whom you could rely on less than half in a moment of danger, and you could say the same of the battalion from Maranhão, made up of 80 to 100 men, almost all coloured and therefore not to be trusted.<sup>9</sup>

Here the commander of the Imperial forces, Marechal Andrea, makes a suggestion to the government in Rio:

As for recruitment, you should be aware that this province should not be garrisoned with soldiers born here, and the best course to follow would be to constantly replace them with soldiers from the southern provinces. All the men of colour born here are linked in a secret pact to put an end to all the whites. This is not a fiction, it is true, and experience has demonstrated it. It is therefore essential to put the arms in the hands of others, and to protect by all means possible the multiplication of the white race. If the

<sup>7</sup> C. A. Neto reproduces a photograph of a page from the prisoner manifest of the hulk *Defençora*, in *Índios da Amazônia: De Maioria a Minoria 1750–1850* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes), 281.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, 3:1007–14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1017–8.

government agrees with this measure, I will always send as many recruits as I can from this province, in return for an equal number of replacements.<sup>10</sup>

In this, as in the other Brazilian documents generated by the repression of the Cabanagem, the rebellion was perceived as a general uprising of *gente de cor*, people of colour, an all-inclusive category which for Portuguese-born veterans like Andrea included the majority of the population of northern Brazil, not excluding many members of the regional elite. As such, not only were all non-*brancos*, including many of their own soldiers, automatically suspect on racial grounds; but it was also necessary to take measures to ensure continuing *branco* dominance after the rebellion itself had been put down. While the administrative machinery of repression would make distinctions between racial categories in order to identify those who fell into its hands, repression in general was structured around the assumption that any non-*branco* was suspect, as we shall see.

It is also no exaggeration to say that of all the civil disturbances which characterised the first couple of decades of Brazilian independence, the Cabanagem was the one which in the eyes of both the Imperial government in Rio and foreign observers most directly threatened the territorial integrity of the Empire. This was reflected in the scale and ferocity of the central government's military response after it had overcome its customary lethargy and the problems of communication imposed by distance and realised what it was dealing with—a process which took more than a year after the acute phase of the Cabanagem began in January 1835. Almost all modern historians, their tasks complicated by the appropriation of the Cabanagem by civil authorities and scholars in the Brazilian Amazon as a key event in the formation of a specific regional identity, would ignore or downplay the importance of race in the interpretation of the Cabanagem, which has in any case received much less serious attention from scholars than one might expect.<sup>11</sup> It is time for a re-evaluation of what the Cabanagem was and what it meant. In order to begin that task, we need to examine the nature of Amazonian society in the period leading up to its outbreak.

#### THE FORMATION OF AMAZONIAN SOCIETY, 1750–1850

The century between the expulsion of the Jesuits from Amazonia in 1757 and the start of the rubber boom around 1850 is remarkable for the lack of attention it has received from historians, despite the fact that it was precisely during this period that a recognisably modern, secular and detribalised Ama-

<sup>10</sup> Arquivo Público do Pará, Códice 30, *Correspondência do Governo com a Corte, 1836–38*, folio 29.

<sup>11</sup> The only modern scholarly book in any language is V. Salles, *Memorial da Cabanagem* (Belém: Edições CEJUP, 1992).

zonian population was formed. Such neglect is understandable—the documentary sources decline in both quantity and quality with the winding down of colonial government and mission activity, and Amazonian archives tend to the chaotic—but it has seriously distorted our understanding of Amazonian history.

Throughout this period, effective governmental control, colonial or Imperial, was limited to a relatively small proportion of the province of Grão-Pará: the areas around Belém and the mouth of the Amazon, the ocean coast, river mouths, and some navigable stretches of the major rivers.<sup>12</sup> Much of the region's economic and social life—trading, slaving, the gathering of forest products, and migrations—took place beyond the reach of administrators and missionaries, leaving little or no trace in the documentary record. The large number of books on the decimation of the Indian population has obscured how shifting and provisional state control of even the main channel of the Amazon was at times: The Mura and Mundurucú Indians seriously threatened navigation on the parts of the main channel and such important tributaries as the Tapajós and the Madeira for years at a time until the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> It would take until around 1820 before the main channel of the Amazon was under secure control up to the Peruvian border, and more than thirty years after that before significant contingents of non-Indians would move into the middle and upper Amazon.

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1757, and the replacement of a mission system with a secular administration known as the Directorate, would accelerate the process of detribalisation at the same time that it deprived it of the highly organised catechisation which had been its *raison d'être*: By 1840 there were only three religious missions left in the entire province, from more than seventy in 1760.<sup>14</sup> The colonial government proved unable to administer the mission villages, and after the Directorate was abolished in 1798 the Indians were effectively left to their own devices for almost fifty years. This allowed them to pursue relatively independent economic lives for a generation preceding the Cabanagem; during this period they came to dominate important niches in the regional economy. At least one historian has argued that labour shortages were instrumental in forming a free Indian labour force in Belém as early as 1800.<sup>15</sup> Regional trade was almost completely dependent

<sup>12</sup> The province of Grão-Pará encompassed most of what today is defined in Brazil as Amazônia Legal. The old Captaincy of the Rio Negro was split off in 1850 to form the state of Amazonas.

<sup>13</sup> The Mura are one of the most interesting cases of the reinvention of an ethnic category as a result of contact with the Portuguese, and the wide range of strategies a single group could adopt over time to deal with them; see D. Sweet, "Native Resistance in 18th Century Amazonia: the 'Abominable Muras' in war and peace," *Radical History Review*, no. 53 (1992) 49–80, and M. A. Amoroso, "Corsários no caminho fluvial: os Muras do Rio Madeira," in M.C. da Cunha, ed., *História dos Índios no Brasil* (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992), 297–310.

<sup>14</sup> E. Hoornaert, ed., *A História da Igreja na Amazônia* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1990), 283.

<sup>15</sup> C. M. MacLachlan, "The Indian Labor Structure in the Portuguese Amazon, 1700–1800,"

upon them. Not only did they gather the *cacau*, rubber, annato dye, fish, quinine bark, sarsparilla, and other forest products which made up the bulk of the region's exports, but they were also the most skillful canoeists and boatmen. Their mobility, together with the sheer size of the region and (from the elite perspective) the chronic shortage of labour, was imposing practical limits on coercion decades before the end of colonial rule. Where Directorate officials were oppressive, the stock response was to move away; and where the Indians stayed, they did so because there was something in it for them in the form of access to trade goods, not because the colonial state was particularly efficient in coercing obedience. German scientists Johann Spix and Karl von Martius recount how the government canoe carrying no less a personage than Mendonça Furtado, brother of the Marquis de Pombal, Governor of Grão-Pará, and the most powerful man in the Portuguese Amazon, was abandoned by its Indian crew off the island of Marajó, who simply jumped into the river and swam ashore, leaving the stranded dignitaries to struggle with the oars. This is as historically accurate an image of Indian responses to labour markets not of their making as Taussig's more famous accounts of Indians as victims on the Putumayo or the Colombian Andes.<sup>16</sup>

But the most strategically significant career option open to Indians during this period was to enter the military. For many this was a logical progression from the "ethnic soldiering" which had marked the relationship between many Indian groups and Europeans throughout the Amazon basin since the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Indian scouts, guides, and pilots naturally gravitated towards the military, which was equally naturally despised as a dead end by Portuguese and other immigrants more intent on trade, farming, and administrative positions. By the 1830s Indians made up virtually all of the rank and file of the regular army in the capital and the interior, to the extent that when the Cabanagem began with a massacre of officers in the Belém garrison in January 1835, there were no non-Indian units to which loyalists could turn, and all military institutions save the Navy, once decapitated, fell immediately into rebel hands. Not a single army or militia unit in the entire province seems to have remained loyal to the Imperial government, which had to bring detachments from as far afield as Rio, Bahia, and Pernambuco who were distrusted

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in D. Alden, ed., *Colonial Roots of Modern Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 199–230.

<sup>16</sup> Johann Spix and Karl von Martius, *Viagem Pelo Brazil 1817–1820* (Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia, 1981 [1831]), vol. 3:28. Spix and Martius, in Raiol, *Italiaia Motins Políticos*, 3:28; and M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> For extended analyses of ethnic soldiering, see D. Sweet, "A Rich Realm of Nature Destroyed: The Middle Amazon Valley 1640–1750" (Madison: University of Wisconsin, Ph.D thesis, 1974), and N. Whitehead, "Carib Ethnic Soldiering in Venezuela, the Guianas and the Antilles 1492–1820," *Ethnohistory*, 37:4 (1990), 357–85.

even by their commanders for not being white and for their habit of rebelling against their officers at least once a year.<sup>18</sup>

One of the key questions the social history of the Brazilian Amazon during this period raises is what are its implications for the construction of Indian identity. At least one Brazilian researcher has complained that regional historians of the Cabanagem in modern Pará view Indians as “generic Indians” rather than as members of polities or tribes, and argues that Indian participation in this and other historical events cannot be properly understood without a sophisticated reconstruction of Indian identity through primary sources and oral ethnohistory.<sup>19</sup> While this would be extremely interesting—and also original, given that not a single Brazilian example exists in the literature—it is naïve to think there is a “true” reconstruction that such research could compile and is also mistaken in its implicit assumption that there was no such social actor as a “generic”—read, detribalised—Indian during the 1830s. Building up a convincing general picture of what was happening to Indian identities during this period is not difficult. As other historians have described for elsewhere in lowland South America—notably Whitehead’s analysis of Carib history—certain dimensions in the relationship with non-Indians, especially catechisation, trade, and disease, radically altered the dynamics of identity construction in the Brazilian Amazon, with some ethnic formations fading away and others—notably the Mura and Mundurucú—expanding. By the 1830s, many Indians, especially in Belém and the lower Amazon, were the grandchildren of those who had left the Directorate villages. They spoke Portuguese and *lingua geral*, the Jesuit-inspired Indian Esperanto; fewer spoke an indigenous language. They led relatively independent economic lives, as many of their parents had before them. Analysing racial terminology during the period, as we shall see, suggests that by the time the Cabanagem began, physical appearance rather than descent had become the main criterion of racial classification. This process was most marked in the lower Amazon, especially Belém, where a detribalised but nonetheless “Indian” population, certainly categorised as such by outsiders and to an extent self-defined as well, was the largest single component of the population by 1830.<sup>20</sup>

Plantation development along the classical lines of Northeastern Brazil was very limited in the north, restricted to parts of the coast of the province of Maranhão and the Itapicurú and Mearim river valleys, just to the east of Grão-Pará itself. Here, the slave population was as high as 80 percent, when nowhere in Amazonia proper approached those levels. The history of the slave population of northern Brazil—an important topic which remains under-

<sup>18</sup> General Andrea, the commander of the Imperial forces in Pará between 1836 and 1839 and the person most responsible for the final suppression of the Cabanagem, was quite open about this; see his report to the provincial government in 1838, quoted in Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, 3:981–2.

<sup>19</sup> M. R. Amoroso, “Corsários no caminho fluvial,” 309.

<sup>20</sup> The nature of Indian-ness in Belém before and during the Cabanagem is the subject of work in progress in the city archives.

studied—was very different from that of the slave population in other regions of the country.<sup>21</sup> The availability of Indian labour, forced and otherwise, and the lack of orthodox plantation development, had meant that the large-scale importation of African slaves into northern Brazil began relatively late, taking off only after the formation of the monopoly Companhia Geral do Grão-Pará e Maranhão in 1755 and effectively ceasing in 1831 after the British cut the African shipping routes and forced slave smugglers south towards Salvador and Rio.<sup>22</sup> Between 1756 and 1785, 24,886 African slaves were officially recorded as arriving in Belém and Maranhão; an additional 40,000 landed in Maranhão between 1801 and 1839 (the vast majority between 1812 and 1820), some of whom were sold on into Grão-Pará.<sup>23</sup> Although in absolute terms these numbers were dwarfed by the number of slaves shipped into Rio and Salvador during the same period—by about a factor of ten and five, respectively—the relatively small number of brancos in northern Brazil meant that Afro-Brazilians had become a significant component of the regional population by 1830, with a higher proportion than elsewhere in the country being first- or second-generation arrivals.

It is not possible to establish accurately what proportion of the total population of Grão-Pará were slaves at the time of the Cabanagem, if only because the total population of the province was so uncertain. Partly this was due to the continued slave raiding of the Indian population, a practice that was still being recorded by natural scientists decades after the Cabanagem.<sup>24</sup> It is also due to the structure of the slave trade in the region: The major slave port in northern Brazil was São Luis in neighbouring Maranhão, not Belém; and many of the slaves who entered Grão-Pará did so as a result of being sold from Maranhão, transactions which were often not recorded. As late as 1840 slaves were being transferred between the two provinces with the open connivance of their governments, despite the fact that the slave trade was by then illegal<sup>25</sup>; and most of these movements also went unrecorded.

Two things can be said with certainty. First, the slave population of Grão-Pará was heavily concentrated in two areas: the urban area of Belém, where

<sup>21</sup> Remarkably, only two books deal in any depth with slavery in northern Brazil: see V. Salles, *O Negro no Pará sob o Regime de Escravidão*, (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1971) and A. Vergolino-Henry and N. Figueiredo, *A Presença Africana na Amazônia Colonial: Uma Notícia Histórica*, (Belém: Arquivo Público, 1990), Série de Documentos Históricos, vol. 1.

<sup>22</sup> For the Companhia Geral, which revolutionised the trading relationship between northern Brazil and the outside world in the second half of the eighteenth century, see A. Carreira, *A Companhia Geral do Grão-Pará e Maranhão*, vol. 1: *O Comércio Monopolista Portugal-África-Brasil na Segunda Metade do Século XVIII* and Vol. 2: *Documentos* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:130.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g. A. Wallace, *Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro* (London: Ward, Lock and Company, 1890), 252.

<sup>25</sup> Augustus Cowper, British consul in Belém, reported one such incident in his despatch of February 19, 1840; PRO, Foreign Office (FO) 128, Box 33 *Consular Correspondence Brazil, 1840*, folios 24–25.

governor Sousa Franco estimated between a quarter and a third of the population was made up of slaves in 1840,<sup>26</sup> and the island of Marajó, where large ranches once owned by the Jesuits and worked by an Indian labour force were divided up among the provincial elite in the 1760s and the Indians replaced by Africans. It is no coincidence that these two locations saw some of the most vicious fighting of the Cabanagem. The second is that flight by slaves, and the setting up of refugee slave communities (*quilombos*), was much more common in northern Brazil than the rest of the country.<sup>27</sup> Slaves arriving in other regions of Brazil were entering a mature plantation economy, with occupied hinterlands. This was not true of the north, with its vast interior and much more thinly spread population. Most important of all, the largest population group apart from slaves were not whites but Indians who had no reason to fear the formation of quilombos in the interior. On the contrary, Indians had every incentive to trade with quilombos, since—as was often the case—they had specialised knowledge or produced goods, especially metals, which the Indians lacked. Naturally, the economic relationships between Indians and runaway slaves, which by definition proceeded beyond the reach of government, are largely unrecorded. Such snatches of oral history which have been recovered suggest, unsurprisingly, that Indian/quilombo relationships varied a great deal, with the Ka'apor, for example, first trading peaceably with runaway slaves, then fighting them.<sup>28</sup> But that they must have been significant during this period is clear from the number and frequency of reports of quilombos forming across a very wide area from the late eighteenth century onwards. To the east of Belém, in the valley of the Turiaçú river, the “possession” of which was disputed between the provinces of Maranhão and Grão-Pará, the first reports of quilombos date from 1811.<sup>29</sup> To the west, quilombos in the highland plateaus to the south of Santarém were causing the town council to appeal to Belém for military support as early as the 1790s, and by the 1840s quilombos had been reported on the north bank of the Amazon as far apart as the headwaters of the Trombetas and Maicurú rivers.<sup>30</sup>

Belém, the capital of Grão-Pará, commanded the mouth of the Amazon, and on its control hinged the movement of river traffic upriver and possession of its vast hinterland. It would be the principal theatre of the critical first eighteen months of the rebellion, and of its eventual suppression, so any understanding of events in the Cabanagem requires some background on the city. In 1835 it

<sup>26</sup> Hoornaert, *A História da Igreja na Amazônia*, 281.

<sup>27</sup> These refugee slave communities are called *quilombos* or *mocambos* in Portuguese.

<sup>28</sup> See D. Cleary, *Anatomy of the Amazon Gold Rush* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 43–44, for quilombos and the Ka'apor (called the Urubú by Brazilians).

<sup>29</sup> C. Marquês, *Dicionário Histórico-Geográfico da Província do Maranhão* (São Luis: Governo do Estado do Maranhão, 1970 [1870]), 367.

<sup>30</sup> For quilombo formation in the middle Amazon, especially the Trombetas, see R. Castro, *Negros do Trombetas: Guardiães de Matas e Rios* (Belém: UFPA/NAEA, 1993), and Vergolino-Henry and Figueiredo, *A Presença Africana na Amazonia Colonial*, 189–98.

was a small town of around 13,000 people. It extended back on a grid pattern a mere eight or nine blocks from the banks of the river Amazon; and the forest around it, still largely intact, save for a few paths leading to outlying farms and country houses, was visible at the end of every street. One small hill overlooking the main harbour was crowned by a colonial Portuguese fort and shore batteries. The houses near the harbour were large and built of stone, many of them belonging to the city's sizeable Portuguese community, whose shops dominated the waterfront. Since the 1820s a number of foreign traders, mainly British but also American (almost all from New England) and French, had established trading houses in this part of town, which also housed the main public buildings and several churches. Foreshadowing on a smaller scale the modern pattern of the city, the majority of the population lived around the central core in much less permanent dwellings, huts (*cabanas*) of adobe or rough wooden planks, thatched with dried palm leaves, lining unpaved streets of sand, painted, for the most part, in white, yellow, or blue. Fruit trees of various kinds, especially mango and açai palm, were everywhere. Picturesque though it may have been, living conditions were difficult, even for the wealthier inhabitants. Because no efforts were made to construct a sewage system for another thirty years, the town center stank. The city was built on unhealthily marshy ground, so dysentery, smallpox, malaria and cholera were common.<sup>31</sup> Only yellow fever had not yet made its appearance, an omission that would be corrected by a series of devastating epidemics in the 1850s.

To the random and not-so-random uncertainties of disease was added political instability. Independence in Grão-Pará had been achieved with more difficulty than elsewhere in Brazil; unlike the rest of the country the province had always been ruled directly from Lisbon, making Portuguese influence, along with Brazilian resentment of it, strong throughout the 1820s and early 1830s, with regular eruptions into violence. The native-born Brazilian elite was itself riven by factional infighting, splitting along ideological, religious, and personal divides which ranged liberals against conservatives, traditional Catholics against Masons, and powerful families against rivals in competition for public office.<sup>32</sup> The elite, exclusively branco but split into Portuguese and Brazilian factions, was itself perched uneasily above a vastly more numerous proto-proletariat made up of poor whites, Indians, freedmen and women and slaves, both African and Brazilian born, which it periodically attempted to mobilise against the Portuguese (an easy enough task) or to support its own factional

<sup>31</sup> Descriptions of Belém taken from Lt. H.L. Maw, *Journal of a Passage from the Pacific to the Atlantic* (London: John Murray, 1829), 402–8; H. E. Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* (London: John Murray, 1910), 2–6; A. R. Wallace, *Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro*, (London: Ward, Lock and Company, 1890), 2–6; A. M. Filho, *Landi, Esse Desconhecido*, (Brasília: Conselho Federal de Cultura, 1976), 79–90.

<sup>32</sup> For descriptions of regional politics in the period leading up to the Cabanagem, see G. M. Coelho, *Anarquistas, Demagogos e Dissidentes: A Imprensa Liberal no Pará de 1822* (Belém: Edições CEJUP, 1993) and D. A. Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, vol. 1.

disputes (a much more problematic enterprise). It was from this section of the population that troops of the line and militias stationed in Belém were drawn, usually by forcible conscription. The rank and file of the armed forces in Belém on the eve of the Cabanagem, among whom the rebellion would begin, were largely of Indian descent. It is significant in this regard that the British military observers of the Cabanagem, who had regular official contacts with the insurgent government and its forces, almost always use the word “Indians” to describe the rebels.

Underlying the parochial squabbles of town politics in Belém in the immediate post-independence period were much larger geopolitical concerns. The distant Imperial government in Rio de Janeiro, at best a ten-week passage away by boat, was, not without reason, concerned about the possibility of secession. It had been necessary to despatch a naval squadron under a British mercenary officer, Thomas Grenfell, to Belém in 1823 to ensure its adherence to the new flag. Grenfell had rounded up a selection of prominent citizens with a foreigner’s blithe disregard for political affiliation, tied them to the mouths of cannon and obtained their signatures to the declaration of independence (and, by extension, their recognition of Rio’s right to nominate provincial presidents) by threatening to fire. Foreign consuls in Belém openly mentioned the possibility of secession to their respective governments,<sup>33</sup> although the documentary record suggests they did little to foment it. Above all, paranoia about foreign intentions being the only fixed feature of Amazonian history from the sixteenth century to the present, there was the preoccupation with the French and British presence in the Guianas. A Portuguese-led expedition from Belém had actually captured Cayenne in 1809 in return for the French invasion of Portugal and occupied it for eight years. Occasional fishing and smuggling by French settlers south of the Oiapoque river was construed as a preliminary to a French attempt to occupy the north bank of the mouth of the Amazon, as was British missionary activity in the interior of Guiana. Royal Navy ships from the West India station, the nearest, in Barbados, a mere two- to three-week voyage away, were occasional visitors to the port. Until the outbreak of the Cabanagem, however, they were more interested in keeping an eye on the French than in developments in Grao-Pará.

Thus, the picture which has come down to us of Amazonia between 1750 and the start of the rubber boom around a century later, as much by default as anything else—an Indian population which had suffered a uniformly horrendous fate, securely under the thumb of missionaries and colonialists; a small and unimportant slave population; secure Portuguese and Imperial control of the region—is misleading. For our immediate purposes, this brief sketch of the decades preceding the Cabanagem is meant to point to certain issues which will be analysed in greater depth below. The most important has to do

<sup>33</sup> *E.g.* U.S. consul Abraham Smith in a despatch dated Sept. 15, 1832, U.S. National Archives, microfilm T478, roll 1, section 165–05.

with the ethnic and racial composition of the Amazonian population on the eve of the Cabanagem. In other regions of Brazil, race was socially constructed along a black-white spectrum, with negro leading through mulatto to branco. In northern Brazil, the situation was more complicated, both on the surface and beneath it: on the surface, because the continuing Indian presence added an additional dimension to race relations which other regions of Brazil had largely left behind during the eighteenth century; beneath it, because definitions of Indian-ness in northern Brazil were always (and to a large extent still are) more complex and morally ambiguous than definitions of blackness. Unlike blacks, Indians had in theory always been technically free, save in certain highly specific circumstances, such as captives in officially declared “just wars” and ransomed prisoners. Unlike blacks, as indigenes and supposed masters of their natural New World environments, they could become the objects of a European or Brazilian romanticism which portrayed them in a positive light, victims and savages perhaps, but noble ones, and potential partners in elite-inspired attempts to carve out a degree of regional political autonomy when the time came.

#### THE *CABANAGEM*: 1835 TO 1840

The Cabanagem had neither a clear beginning nor a clean end: It grew out of a prologue of political, ideological, and racial tensions which had turned violent many times since independence and would fade gradually away rather than end in a culminating battle. If saying exactly when the Cabanagem began is impossible, there is at least consensus as to when its acute phase began. On the night of January 7, 1835, around forty men led by Antônio Vinagre landed near the harbour in Belém from the Ilha das Onças, directly in front of the city. They were met by a group of men led by another member of the Brazilian elite, João de Souza Aranha, taken to his house, and armed. All the leaders of the rebellion were Brazilian-born members of the regional elite who had since independence defended the liberal position that provincial presidents should be nominated from within Grão-Pará rather than imposed by fiat from Rio. In the early hours of the morning, soldiers led by sergeants from the garrison in the city fort sounded the alarm and shot their officers as they came out into the barracks yard. The other rebels headed for the houses of the provincial president, Bernardo Lobo de Souza; the army commander, Colonel Joaquim Santiago; and the commander of the Pará naval squadron, a British mercenary called James Inglis. Alerted too late by the shots from the fort, Inglis and Santiago were found in the streets hurrying to their posts and shot down. Lobo de Souza was killed on the staircase of the palace. All resistance ended by dawn, and Felix Clemente Malcher, a Brazilian landowner who had been imprisoned by Lobo de Souza, was released and brought to the palace, where he was acclaimed as president by the soldiery and the hastily assembled city council, which knew a *fait accompli* when it saw one. Malcher had been one

of those strapped across a cannon by Grenfell in 1823 for trying to have provincial presidents nominated locally. One of his first acts was to call together the foreign consuls and assure them that the lives and property of their nationals in Belém would be respected.<sup>34</sup>

This meeting with Malcher must have been a difficult moment for the Portuguese consul; for in a foretaste of what was to come, the rebels had that first night opened the prisons, and a body of soldiers and militia, together with released prisoners, had headed for the houses by the harbour and dragged out and killed around 20 Portuguese shopkeepers. Many Portuguese over the next few days sensibly fled to ships in the harbour. In early August news filtered through to Belém of the massacre of some 70 whites in Vigia, the next town downriver. It became clear that the violence was spreading from the capital into its hinterland, where it was assuming a more openly racial character. Slaves outside Belém began to flee, some killing their owners first; and the island of Marajó, the main supplier of cattle to the capital, was taken over by rebels who were for the most part slaves who had escaped from the ranches.<sup>35</sup> Consuls and foreign traders, increasingly frightened, saw mobs begin to appear on the streets of Belém, all “Indians” or “people of color” wearing red shirts rather than the rough white ones usually worn by the poor and calling themselves Cabanos.

In May matters came to a head. With the death of Lobo de Souza, the imperial government took the position that the constitution required the vice-president of the province, Ângelo Custódio Corrêa, to succeed as interim president until a new president nominated by the Imperial government could arrive. Corrêa, with a few hundred supporters from his native town of Cametá, arrived in Belém by boat and joined the remaining Imperial forces of the naval squadron in the harbour, led by the frigate, Imperatriz. After negotiations to persuade Vinagre to resign in his favour failed, Corrêa attempted to land troops under the guns of the squadron and take the center of town. The ensuing fiasco was vividly described by a British resident in a letter to his brother in Recife:

I cannot imagine what they are about: the commander of the Imperatriz is not worth a button, these ragamuffins on shore are offering him every insult, even firing at his boats passing up and down the harbour—he keeps daily sending proclamations that unless peaceful possession is given to the lawful authorities he will be obliged to use force.

<sup>34</sup> Accounts of the January putsch and its aftermath are taken from Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, 3:ch. 11, from U.S. consul Charles Smith, U.S. National Archives, microfilm T478, roll 1, section 165–05, despatch dated January 20, 1835, and from British consul John Hesketh, despatch dated January 24, 1835, PRO FO 128, Box 21, *Letters from Consuls, Brazil—1835*, folios 298–301.

<sup>35</sup> The main charitable institution in Belém, for example, the Santa Casa de Misericórdia, lost most of its slaves both in the city and on its ranch outside Belém during this period: See A. Vianna, *A Santa Casa da Misericórdia Paraense, Notícia Histórica 1650–1902* (Belém: Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1992 [1902]), 137.

Yet every day he defers it, the worse for him . . . Just at this very moment the frigate *Imperatriz* has commenced firing on the fort, so I will wait until tomorrow to tell you of the result. 14th May. We have had more terrible work in this unfortunate place the last two days. After firing with all his might on the town for about eight hours a landing was attempted by from three to four hundred men from the vessels—and such a landing they made of it. In the first instance they made the attempt at a place where it was almost impossible to get on shore, where not a vessel could fire to protect their landing, and where they were exposed to the fire of at least four times their number. Still however about one hundred of them, principally Germans from the frigate, succeeded in landing, carried the first positions, took three pieces of artillery, and were driving the fellows before them at the point of the bayonet, when the rest of the men, who had never landed, either through cowardice or treachery, threw down their arms, jumped onto the launches and swam on board again, leaving the rest to their fate, very few of whom escaped. . . . It will now require a great force to take the place, there are at present two thousand men under arms, all people of Colour. All the Portuguese's slaves have joined the soldiers, from which the worst consequences are to be apprehended.<sup>36</sup>

With this defeat the Imperial forces abandoned the city, moving downriver and setting up an encampment on Tatuoca island, awaiting reinforcements. These arrived in June, when a frigate and four schooners of the Brazilian navy, commanded by the British mercenary, John Taylor, brought Marshal Manuel Jorge Rodriguez, newly nominated president by the Imperial government, into Belém's harbour. Rodriguez's position was not strong, since Taylor had brought practically no army reinforcements. Nevertheless, by offering an amnesty, criticising the despotism of the dead Lobo de Souza, and reminding Vinagre of his pledge of loyalty to the Imperial government, Rodriguez was eventually allowed to disembark and sworn in as President. Vinagre remained unreconciled, however; and in late July Rodriguez had him arrested. With this the political climate worsened. The leaders of the liberal faction among the Brazilian elite, notably a young landowner called Eduardo Angelim, moved into the interior with their followers to prepare the reconquest of Belém. Vinagre, released too late in a vain attempt to placate the rebels, joined them instead.

The rebels attacked Belém in August with around 2,000 men. They faced a scratch force of no more than 700 legalists, most of them Brazilian navy crews pressed into service, or volunteer civilians. These were swiftly pinned down in their fortified strong points, the fort above the harbour, the presidential palace, and the customs house. Casualties were heavy; cannon mounted in the strong points swept the streets with grapeshot, while Cabanos firing muskets from

<sup>36</sup> PRO, FO 128, Box 21, folios 298–301. This extraordinary document, signed JCH, was almost certainly written by the British consul, John Hesketh, who had a brother in Recife. A covering note from Edward Watts, British consul in Recife, says that the recipient had allowed him to make a copy, knowing of the British government's interest in the events it described. Hesketh had a house on the waterfront near the customs house which was damaged by cannon fire during the attempted landing, so he was probably an eye witness to at least some of the events that day.

windows ambushed legalist parties foolish enough to venture outside their fortifications. After nine days, the remnants of the Imperial forces abandoned the city, fleeing at night into ships in the harbour. By this time the city had been badly damaged: Most of the houses on the waterfront had been demolished by cannon fire, and the cathedral and hospital, unlucky enough to be next door to the fort and customs house respectively, were also badly knocked about. Hundreds died, many of them non-combatants caught in the bombardment.<sup>37</sup>

With the flight of the foreigners and the Imperial forces, Angelim was sworn in as provincial president. He was only nineteen years old—"a mere boy," a Royal Navy captain who later negotiated with him would say, although he also noted the hold he had over his followers and that "his name produced a terrible effect."<sup>38</sup> He would stay President for the following nine months—a miracle of political longevity under the circumstances, given that he was the fifth president of 1835 when he took office—and he was much the most charismatic and capable of the rebel leaders. No extensive study has yet been made of life in Belém under Cabano rule, although there is relevant material in the Pará state archive.<sup>39</sup> It is clear, however, that the naval blockade imposed by the Imperial forces hurt, with meat especially hard to come by. Although starvation was not a problem—fish being easy enough to catch even under blockade conditions—the Cabanos were seriously handicapped by a shortage of gunpowder. Indeed, because of no local source of supply, the lack of gunpowder above all else caused them finally to abandon Belém in May 1836.

Angelim was struggling from the first, often rather unsuccessfully, to control mob violence in Belém. His methods were occasionally draconian: Several opponents were ostentatiously executed, including radicals like the militia officer, Joaquim Antônio, who argued for the complete abolition of slavery and had put his ideas into practice by leading an armed band into farms around Belém, killing slaveowners and freeing their slaves.<sup>40</sup> Acts like this show there was still some elite participation in the Cabanagem during the early stages of the Angelim presidency, which needed to be reassured by such measures that the Cabanagem was a liberal nativist movement loyal to the crown fighting against pro-Portuguese presidents nominated from Rio, not a

<sup>37</sup> The following sources were used for the summary of events from June to August 1835: Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, v. 2:chs. 14–17, v. 3:chs. 1–5; U.S. National Archives, Consular Correspondence Pará, microfilm T478, roll 1, section 165–05; PRO FO 128 Boxes 20, 21, 22 and 25; PRO Admiralty 53, Piece 440—*HMS Despatch, Ship's Log 1832–1835*, Piece 3391—*HMS Racehorse, Captain's Log 1834–1839*; PRO Admiralty 1, Box 294—*Jamaica Station Correspondence, 1835*.

<sup>38</sup> Capt. Strong of HMS Belvidera, PRO Admiralty 1, Box 296—*Jamaica Station Correspondence 1836*, report of negotiations with Angelim in Packet 98.

<sup>39</sup> Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, devotes chapter 10 of volume 3 to the subject.

<sup>40</sup> Raiol, *Motins Políticos*, 3:934.

social revolution.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the foreign consuls noted that a great deal of looting was going on amidst the fighting in August, together with the indiscriminate killing of the Portuguese and some members of the elite: The disturbances must have acted as a convenient shield for the settling of old scores, and the particular venom against the Portuguese is partly explained by the fact that they were the most important moneylenders. Nevertheless, even the members of the elite who supported the Cabanos must have become worried in the last few months of 1835 when it became clear that all semblance of elite control of the Cabanagem outside Belém had ended and that the eastern part of Grão-Pará, together with Belém itself, was slipping into what liberals and conservatives alike must have regarded as anarchy.

We can reconstruct this period in the towns and interior downriver from Belém—especially Vigia and Salinas—thanks to an event which left a uniquely vivid documentary record. On October 1, 1835, the British brig, *Clio*, anchored off Salinas, a town acting as the pilot station for Belém. As he went ashore the next day to look for a pilot (in short supply because the Cabanos were hunting them down, to make the arrival of Imperial reinforcements from Rio more difficult), the mate let it slip that their cargo included a couple of thousand muskets, ordered by the now-defunct government of Lobo de Souza, along with several dozen crates of gunpowder. An American living in the town, John Priest, together with José Maria Monteiro, the local judge, tricked the captain ashore the next day with two crewmen, Alexander Paton and William Lloyd. There they were held prisoner, and on October 3 a group of men from the town rowed out to the ship, forced the crew to moor it up a creek next to the village, and killed them. That night, the captain and the two remaining crewmen were taken along the beach by a group of three “Indians” armed with muskets, under the pretext they were returning to the ship:

When they had walked along the beach about half a mile from the village and were abreast of a high white cliff the Indians stopped and without speaking presented their muskets at them, which snapped and would not go off. Paton heard them and saw the sparks fly from their flints; the captain turned around quick and said, oh, do not fire, when his hat fell off which he stooped to pick up and was immediately knocked down; the two others ran, but Paton saw the captain surrounded by three of the men and heard him cry most piteously, as if they were murdering him. The two men ran as fast as they could.<sup>42</sup>

After an extraordinary journey, during which Lloyd drowned while fording a river, Paton arrived at the village of Cintra, where he ran into a detachment of

<sup>41</sup> Needless to say, the notion that Angelim was in some respects a conservative finds little favour amongst his regional hagiographers, who have encrusted him with so many layers of revolutionary myth that serious studies of the Cabanagem have first to strip them away. For a portrait of Angelim as regional revolutionary hero, see P. Di Paolo, *Cabanagem: A Revolução Popular da Amazônia* (Belém: Edições CEJUP, 1990), and J. Chiavenato, *Cabanagem: O Povo no Poder* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> Extract from statement by Paton in PRO Admiralty 1, box 295—*Jamaica station correspondence 1836*, folder P42, fourth enclosure.

rebel soldiers loyal to Angelim, who took him to Vigia. He stayed there for over a month, his presence known to Angelim but kept from the British until a local fisherman captured off Belém told the Imperial authorities about him and a British warship managed to bring him off. Quite apart from the detailed description of conditions in this part of Grão-Pará in his statement, Paton's survival ensured a rich source of additional documentary sources on the Cabanagem, since Foreign Secretary Palmerston, on hearing of the Clio's fate, ordered a squadron of Royal Navy ships to Pará from Barbados to demand satisfaction. These ships spent most of 1836 in Grão-Pará, landing at various points, negotiating with both sides, witnessing fighting, and leaving reports and descriptions of enormous value for our understanding of events during this critical period.<sup>43</sup>

These accounts make it clear that even Angelim's authority in such places as Salinas, Vigia, and Marajó was very tenuous. Paton was closely guarded by a squad of soldiers in Vigia who obviously feared an attempt on his life despite Angelim's orders to keep him alive, and Salinas was clearly under nobody's control in late 1835 and had not been for some time. Statements by the Royal Navy sources, as well as Paton, are full of encounters with armed bands or soldiers without officers and apparently under no control: The Imperial authorities, demoralised in their encampment at Tatuoca, where both civilians and soldiers were dying in large numbers from dysentery and small-pox, could at the most stop ships from reaching Belém and were incapable, at that time, of exerting much authority on land. In the interior, towns and villages fortified themselves while their inhabitants preoccupied themselves with survival, alert to possibilities of profiting from the collapse of authority. Both Cintra and Vigia, their white landowners and traders having fled or been killed, seem from Paton's descriptions to have been awaiting developments more than anything else, nominally loyal to the Angelim government but not effectively controlled by it. Violence in this early stage of the Cabanagem, on the evidence of the Clio papers, appears to have been directed mainly at the rich, especially slaveowners, with the exception of the Portuguese, all classes of whom were fair game. Nevertheless, given that all the first targets of the

<sup>43</sup> The ships involved were the HMS Snake, HMS Belvidera, and HMS Despatch, which joined the HMS Racehorse already on station off Belém. Material arising from the Clio case is held in PRO, Admiralty 1, boxes 293 to 300, which hold the Jamaica station correspondence between 1835 and 1837, and FO 128, boxes 22 to 26, which hold correspondence from the consul in Belém, the British legation in Rio, and the Foreign Office, including a lively exchange of letters between Palmerston and the Brazilian ambassador in London, who protested against the Royal Navy presence and was given very short shrift for his pains. Priest and Monteiro, taken prisoner by the squadron and handed over to the Brazilian authorities, were held in the prison hulk, "Defençora," where they both died in August 1836, with Paton identifying their bodies. Priest gave a detailed statement which named eleven people who had boarded the Clio and murdered the crew. Six of them, taken prisoner by the Brazilian authorities, also later died on the Defençora. At least one other was still awaiting trial in 1840. See J. Hurley, "Traços cabanos," *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Pará*, X (1936), 7–284: 203–5.

rebels were brancos, it was a short step from killing slaveowners and Portuguese to turn upon brancos in general.

It was not until April 1836 that an effective military response on the part of the Imperial government began to take shape. Faced with the necessity of a rapid reconquest of Grão-Pará if the territorial integrity of the nation was to be preserved, with the recently expelled foreign traders and consuls unanimous in their opinion that “the large and fertile province of Pará may be considered as lost altogether to the civilised world,”<sup>44</sup> the court turned to Marshal Francisco José de Andrea, a Portuguese-born veteran of the Peninsular War and of campaigns against insurgents in Pernambuco and Santa Catarina. Andrea, briefly the military commander of Grão-Pará in 1830, arrived off the Tatuoca encampment as the newly nominated provincial governor, with emergency powers which would effectively make him dictator of northern Brazil until he returned to Rio in 1839. He brought with him a considerable naval force—a frigate, a corvette, and eight schooners—and around 800 troops, which joined an army brigade of 500 recently arrived in Pará from Pernambuco. Together with the surviving troops and sailors at Tatuoca, the legalists could muster around 2,000 men under arms.

Andrea was a forceful and ruthless man, the first competent military professional the rebels faced. He was the only figure of the Cabanagem, apart from Angelim, to impress favourably the Royal Navy captains in the region, who were contemptuous of the military capabilities of both the rebels and the legalist forces. His performance in Grão-Pará would enable him, despite his previously rather checkered military career, to become in the 1840s the Empire’s leading military troubleshooter, snuffing out rebellions in Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina. He was named governor of five provinces and eventually was regarded as a minor hero of the Brazilian military regime more than a century later.<sup>45</sup> His actions in Grão-Pará were closely followed by the British Legation in Rio, which knew that British merchants expelled from Belém would file a large claim for damages and that British naval officers in the Brazilian service would provide detailed confidential reports.<sup>46</sup> Andrea immediately grasped the importance of extending the naval blockade already in place, so he systematically occupied the villages on the approaches to Belém, rounding up anybody found bearing arms and

<sup>44</sup> Phrase from despatch Nov. 10, 1835, Fox (British Minister in Rio) to Palmerston, PRO, FO 128 Box 20, *Correspondence of Rio de Janeiro Legation with Foreign Office 1835*, folios 551–61.

<sup>45</sup> The Brazilian army commissioned a fawning biography by a descendant, José Andrea, in 1977: *O Marechal Andrea nos Relevos da História do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Biblioteca do Exército). An interesting feature of the Cabanagem is the number of important figures in the subsequent military history of the Empire who were blooded in the campaign; one junior naval officer was the future Admiral Tamandaré, commander of the Brazilian Navy in the War of the Triple Alliance against Paraguay in the 1860s.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., an anonymous report clearly written by Commodore John Taylor to the British Minister in Rio in PRO, FO 128 Box 25, *Correspondence Rio de Janeiro Legation to Foreign Office 1837*, folios 2–6.

interning those accused of active participation in the rebellion in prison hulks, where the insanitary conditions and lack of food amounted to an informal death sentence. At the same time, he shrewdly offered an “amnesty” to those bearing arms against whom no charges had been laid, provided they agreed to join the legalist cause. The bulk of the legalist forces was soon made up by those pressed into service in this way, fighting under the guns of the regular units. Naturally enough, this made mutiny one of the characteristic forms of resistance in the Cabanagem, with irregular units killing their officers and then heading for refuge in the deep interior or in French Guiana.

It did not take long for these measures to be felt in Belém. The Cabano hierarchy already knew that the lack of gun powder made it impossible to hold the city. Thus, when Andrea appeared with his forces off Belém in early May, Angelim tried to negotiate an amnesty for himself and his followers rather than fight. When this was brusquely rejected, he fled the city on the evening of May 12, allowing the Imperial forces to reoccupy the city without bloodshed the following afternoon. The reoccupation of Belém marked the beginning of the end of the revolt, since it assured the Imperial forces control of the Amazon’s mouth and gave them a base to use their superior naval power with telling effect in sweeps of the river and its main tributaries. While Belém would never again be threatened, the reoccupation of the city inaugurated a new phase of the rebellion which would last for another four years, less dramatic and less documented, given the nature and location of the fighting but equally murderous. Small-scale guerrilla warfare, rural rather than urban, was the norm in the final years of the Cabanagem, with the burden of fighting falling mainly on bands of villagers and peasants forced to make the unenviable choice between conscription into service or indefinite internment in the prison hulks. There are few documents from trials of rebels in the Belém archives, with the exception of leaders who came from the regional elite, which may well be an indication of the ruthlessness of the fighting. The Royal Navy officers and British and American consuls all mention the summary executions practised by the legalist forces, and Andrea appears to have acted secure in the knowledge that Rio would not concern itself too closely with the fate of the rebels. Indeed, when he returned to Rio in 1839 and was accused by his successor as provincial president, Bernardo Sousa Franco, of “violent tyranny,” his answer in the Chamber of Deputies in Rio de Janeiro, where he defended himself in June 1839, was that all his actions were entirely legal, given the terms of reference and emergency powers he had been given in 1835.<sup>47</sup> The terms in which Andrea and others defined the conflict, as we shall see, were certainly sufficient to serve as an ideological charter for a war of extermination.

<sup>47</sup> I have not yet been able to locate the 1835 letters of nomination to the presidency of Grão-Pará which could shed light on this point. It is likely that the key instructions he received were verbal, in any case. See Andrea, *O Marechal Andrea*, 67–8 for a summary of the debate.

Outside the eastern Amazon the rebellion arrived later, usually dated around 1836, inspired by news of the rebel occupations of Belém, and lasted longer. The experience of Santarém was typical of the upriver towns. In March 1836 most of the town council and municipal authorities fled to Macapá on the mouth of the Amazon when news arrived that Belém had fallen to the Cabanos. The town council that took its place included some members of the local elite, such as a judge, a priest, and a major in the militia. Unsurprisingly, those who fled were Portuguese-born, while those who remained were Brazilian. The reconstituted council formally recognised Angelim as president of the Province, but the town fell after a short fight to legalist schooners in December 1836. However, most of the rebels in the region withdrew up the Tapajós river, and the rebellion became embroiled in previously existing ethnic conflicts between the Mundurucú Indians, who generally supported the legalists, and other Indian groups, who were uninterested in Cabanagem politics but extremely interested in getting access to arms and trade goods, either by plunder or temporary military alliance. The result was some low-level but extremely vicious fighting in the Tapajós valley throughout 1837 and most of 1838, where all trace of the original political grievances which had sparked the Cabanagem was rapidly lost.<sup>48</sup> The worst single incident was a massacre of some forty inhabitants of the ex-mission village of Aveiros by a group of rebels led by Jacó Patacho (a Portuguese form of Pataxó, an Indian name) in 1837. The fighting died down rather than being put down by the government, largely as a result of inter-tribal politics which only detailed ethnohistorical research could reconstruct. Many of those involved in the fighting later reintegrated themselves into regional life: The British naturalist, Henry Bates, who would write the best-known nineteenth-century memoir of the Amazon, had a boatman in 1849 nicknamed the Commandante because he was one of the rebel leaders in Santarém and was much valued by him for his reliability.<sup>49</sup>

Without much more detailed work in regional archives and ethnohistorical research comparing oral with documentary sources, the later years of the Cabanagem remain clear only in general outline.<sup>50</sup> What is certain is that a

<sup>48</sup> Summary of events in Santarém and the Tapajós valley drawn from J. Hurley, "Traços cabanos," 67–79; M. A. Menendez, "A área Madeira-Tapajós: situação de contato e relações entre colonizador e indígena," in da Cunha, ed., *História dos Índios no Brasil*, 281–96; and A. C. Ferreira Reis, *Santarém: Seu Desenvolvimento Histórico* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979), 111–8.

<sup>49</sup> "His comrades called him the Commandant, on account of his being one of the rebel leaders when the Indians and others took Santarém in 1835. They related of him that, when the legal authorities arrived with an armed flotilla to capture the town, he was one of the last to quit, remaining in the little fortress which commands the place to make a show of loading the guns, although the ammunition had given out long ago" (Bates, *The Naturalist*, 115).

<sup>50</sup> Oral accounts of the Cabanagem are a source largely untapped by historians: Only one very interesting book concentrates on them, T. Thorlby, *A Cabanagem na Fala do Povo*, (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1987), but it restricts itself to eastern Amazonia. An example of the potential

great many people lost their lives and that the years of violence left behind psychic scars on the middle and upper Amazon which lasted for many years. The books written by the mid-century natural scientists, Henry Bates, Alfred Wallace, and Richard Spruce, which introduced the Amazon to a mass audience in Britain and beyond for the first time in the late nineteenth century, are full of conversations in which traders and priests talk—ten and twenty years after the event—of sudden attacks and massacres about the months on end spent hiding in the forest. Even in Belém, over a decade after the Cabanagem ended, the Portuguese continued to be wary of spending their weekends in the country.<sup>51</sup> In late 1840 the new provincial president, Bernardo Souza Franco, declared a general amnesty in return for surrender of arms: The last surrender under the amnesty took place in the remote trading village of Luzeia on the upper Tapajós in April 1841, when the arms surrendered were bows and arrows. The exact number of people who died in the Cabanagem will never be known. An approximate figure is probably around 20,000. By any standards, what happened in northern Brazil in the 1830s was an appalling human disaster. The documents of the period, scattered in their thousands throughout Brazil, Britain, the United States and elsewhere, still make terrible reading, even at this remove. It remains to establish why the carnage happened and what it meant.

#### INTERPRETING THE CABANAGEM

While the documentary evidence makes clear the extent to which the Cabanagem was perceived as a race war both by foreign observers and those Brazilians charged with putting the rebellion down, it is of course equally important to understand the extent to which the Cabanagem was perceived in racial terms by the Cabanos themselves. It is unfortunately in the nature of archives and the documents they contain that it is relatively easy to document repression but very difficult to document rebellion, let alone the workings of the popular culture from which rebellion grew. In the case of the Cabanagem, such a reconstruction is complicated by the fact that the documents left behind by the Cabanos were produced almost exclusively by the Cabano governments in Belém and thus come from a very narrow social and racial cross-section of the rebels, who were almost all members of the regional elite—and branco to boot. These documents also cover a relatively short time-span in the chronology of the revolt, albeit a crucial one, from early 1835 to May 1836. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that they contain no indication of a race-

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oral sources in northern Brazil can have for the historian is M.R. Assunção, *A Guerra dos Bem-Te-Vis: A Balaiada na Memória Oral* (São Luís: Editora SIOGE, 1988), which demonstrates the existence of a rich popular oral memory of the Balaiada, a conflict in some ways similar to the Cabanagem which began in 1839 in the neighbouring province of Maranhão.

<sup>51</sup> H. Bates and A. Wallace, *The Naturalist*, and R. Spruce, *Notes of a Botanist on the Amazon and Andes* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), 2 vols.

based antagonism towards the legalist forces. They do, on the other hand, contain a remarkable degree of antagonism towards the Portuguese, for whom there was a rich, specifically Amazonian, vocabulary of vituperation based on skin colour and their allegedly large and pointy noses, including examples such as terms like *caiado*, (“chalk-skin”), *bicudo* and *caramurú*, (“fish-face”), the fish in question having light-coloured scales and elongated and rather ugly heads, the *bicudo* being a type of needle-fish. The Amazonian white cebus monkey (*Cebus cirrhifer*), which has a strikingly pale face and a protuberant nose, was in the early decades of the nineteenth century called the *macaco português*, although by the end of the century the British would have displaced the Portuguese as regional whipping boys and transformed the white cebus into the *macaco inglês*, by which name it is known to this day.

Outside the archives, we are left with two sources of evidence: language and ethnohistory. Using ethnohistory as a means of tapping into interpretations of the Cabanagem from below is difficult and still in its infancy, but the potential for future research is great. There is the problem universal to all ethnohistorical attempts to mine oral narrations in that they are not fixed texts: Contemporary accounts, several generations removed from events, reflect not only current concerns but also the form and content of past interpretations and reinterpretations. In the case of the Cabanagem there are two additional problems, one simple, one less so. The simple problem is that there is very little ethnohistorical research on the Cabanagem, the sum total of publications to date amounting to a single book.<sup>52</sup> This is less of a handicap than it seems, since that book demonstrates that there is a rich body of oral narratives about the Cabanagem extant in the Brazilian Amazon and that collecting it is simply a matter for further research.

The real complication is the possibility of contamination of oral narrative by official discourse. In the twentieth century the Cabanagem has become an important part of regional iconography in northern Brazil. This process was already underway in the 1930s, when the centenary of the Cabanagem was celebrated by a series of official events in Belém in 1936, culminating in the dedication of a statue to Andrea and the publication of a special issue of the *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Pará*. It reached its apotheosis in 1985, with the inauguration of a monument and museum of the Cabanagem designed by Oscar Niemeyer, Brazil’s leading modernist architect, sited appropriately enough in a run-down part of the urban periphery. The differing ways in which these anniversaries were defined, let alone celebrated, shows the complex intertwining of history with contemporary politics: A liberalising democratic government emerging from military rule chose 1985 as the 150th anniversary of the Cabano rebellion of 1835, while the centralising and authoritarian Vargas government celebrated the centenary in 1936,

<sup>52</sup> Thorlby, *A Cabanagem na Fala do Povo*.

focusing instead on the legalist reoccupation of Belém and the theme of national unity. In the modern Brazilian states of Pará and Amazonas every school-child learns about the Cabanagem, but in a highly selective way: In one of the characteristic elisions of official civic discourse in Amazonia, where nation and nationality have to be reconciled with regional distinctiveness, children learn to celebrate both the heroism of the Cabanos, struggling to break the chains of oppression, and the genius of Andrea, who preserved the territorial integrity of the nation. The racial dimension, needless to say, does not figure in the syllabus.<sup>53</sup>

The oral accounts of the Cabanagem collected by Thorlby are a fascinating sample of a rich field of potential research. Despite being overwhelmingly from the lower Amazon, they prove the existence of rich oral sources on the Cabanagem, certainly comparable with those on the Balaiada rebellion during the same period in neighbouring Maranhão.<sup>54</sup> One of the striking things about the accounts is the number of times they attach significance to features of the landscape, to a particular creek mouth or ruined building where an event in the Cabanagem is said to have taken place. In northern Brazil as elsewhere, reading the symbolic meanings of the natural landscape seems to be a common means of recalling the past and relating it to the present.<sup>55</sup> Thorlby's oral sources shed little light on the role of race in the Cabanagem: Some stress the racial nature of the conflict, others not. Thorlby himself, a priest rather than an academic, does not provide enough contextual information on his sources nor detail on his editing procedures to make a proper assessment of the status of his accounts; and they cannot be combined, as they stand, in any detailed way with the documentary record. Here again, ethnohistory is suggestive rather than informative; and many questions remain for further research.

The history of racial terminology, in particular the way in which it was used in popular culture and utilised by elites, is another angle of approach. The number of racial terms in use in northern Brazil in the 1830s and 1840s was noticeably higher than in the colonial period and certainly than in the later decades of the nineteenth century—or in contemporary usage, for that matter.<sup>56</sup> It also seems to have been higher than in either southern or northeastern

<sup>53</sup> For an entertaining and provocative essay on the meaning of the Cabanagem for contemporary Amazonia, see Márcio Souza, "Representação do regional: Cabanagem e leseira - 'Só é elite quem age contra os interesses da região'," in M d'Incão and I. da Silveira, eds., *A Amazônia e a Crise da Modernização* (Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 1994), 119–24.

<sup>54</sup> Rohrig Assunção, *A Guerra dos Bem-Te-Vís*.

<sup>55</sup> For an extended treatment of this theme, see J. Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); the afterword on pp. 225–7 beautifully summarises the issue.

<sup>56</sup> A cursory trawl through primary and secondary sources on the Cabanagem threw up as many as thirty racial terms, to wit: *bicudo, boçal, branco, caboclo, cabra, cafuzo, caiado, carafuz, caramurú, cariboca, carijó, creoulo, curiboca, fula, gentio, índio, macaco, mameluco, marinho, maroto, melado, mestiço, moleque, mulato, negro, pardo, preto, tapuio, tapuya, xibaro*. It seems likely that many other colloquial terms never made it into print.

Brazil during the same period. In part this must reflect a preoccupation with racial categorisation at all levels of society, but analysing its role in popular culture is difficult. The very profusion of racial terminology makes it hard to reconstruct the subtle shades of meaning which particular racial terms may have had in popular usage, but it also suggests that racial categorisation was an important preoccupation amongst common people as well as the elite, with the number of possible racial categories and their increasing ambiguity opening up possibilities of negotiating racial identity or of “trading up” with an increase in socio-economic status.

The basic framework of the evolution of racial terminology in northern Brazil is reasonably clear: Racial classification underwent a semantic shift from ancestry to physical appearance. One class of terms began life during the colonial period as very specific terms of descent: for example, *caboclo*, *cariboca* and *carijó* for the offspring of branco and Indian; *índio*, *cafuz* and *carafuz* for the offspring of índio and negro; *xibaro* for the offspring of caboclo and negro. But classification on the basis of descent, although still a factor in racial categorisation by the elite, seems to have become less important among the mass of the population, where racial categories were reformulated to mean mixed descent in a much vaguer sense and certain physical characteristics were associated with a particular racial category: straight hair with Indianness, for example. Bates, who spoke excellent Portuguese, concluded a guide to racial terminology in Belém in the late 1840s with the observation that “these [terms] are seldom, however, well-demarcated, and all shades of colour exist; the names are generally applied only approximately.”<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the limits to the negotiation of racial status which the Cabanagem threw into very stark relief. For significant numbers of the population—African-born slaves for example—negotiation had never been an option in any case. To the elite, fanatically preoccupied with their status as brancos, the very *mestiçagem* which underlay the shift towards appearance rather than descent as the basis of popular classification of race presented itself as a threat; and the sheer scale and savagery of repression in the interior in the late 1830s suggests Andrea’s racial paranoia had at least some local resonance. The racially specific character of some early massacres of brancos in Belém and Vigia also suggests that exclusion from the ranks of the racially privileged was what preoccupied common people, not the long-term possibilities of trading racial status upwards. At the same time, race was clearly interwoven in a complex matrix with class: The Portuguese traders and moneylenders who were the early victims of the rebellion on the first morning of the Cabanagem in Belém were not killed because they were white nor because they were traders but because they were both. Nor were the subtle gradations of racial categorisation in popular culture of any interest to Marshal Andrea

<sup>57</sup> Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, 17n.

and the repression of the Cabanagem. This was most strikingly manifested in the organisation of the *Corpo de Trabalhadores*, an institution created by Andrea in April 1836. It was a province-wide forced labour corps, grafted onto the existing municipal government, into which were to be drafted “Indians, mestiços and negros who are not slaves or property-holders, nor have occupations to which they devote themselves full-time.” It was to be employed in “farming, commerce and public works” and organised along military lines, with the commander of the corps in each district assuming the title of “Captain” and given wide discretion as to the type of work to be assigned to the local corps.<sup>58</sup>

The *Corpo* would remain in existence until 1855 and was the most disastrous legacy of the Cabanagem for the mass of the Amazonian population, especially the Indians of the interior. For fifteen years after the rebellion ended, the mobile, economically autonomous way of life that the Indians had enjoyed for two generations was liable to arouse the suspicion of the authorities, or worse, and to a highly ethnocentric definition of property and productive activity which made large sections of the Indian population vulnerable. When this was combined with an increased military presence in Grão-Pará in the aftermath of the rebellion and the sense of shock the Cabanagem engendered in the brancos, the result was a reinforcing of the racial divisions in northern Brazilian society through a ratcheting up of overt racial oppression. It would take the enormous social convulsions provoked by the rubber boom over two generations to alter this depressing picture and allow some of the non-branco inhabitants of northern Brazil to reconquer the same degree of independence that their great-grandparents had enjoyed in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The overall effect of the Cabanagem was thus to re-emphasise the primordial classificatory scheme which had dominated colonial categorisation of race: A social universe in which individuals had an ascribed racial identity which was either branco, negro, índio or mixed. What mixed meant was neither here nor there, as far as the elite was concerned, since its real meaning was miscellaneous non-white. If the profusion of racial terminology in the early decades of the nineteenth century had obscured the limits of negotiation, the Cabanagem would re-emphasise them in a particularly brutal form.

The non-tribal Indian, mobile, relatively independent economically, bilingual in *língua geral* and Portuguese, was a vitally important social actor in the lower Amazon in the first decades of the nineteenth century, an importance which the Cabanagem would dramatically demonstrate, leaving no ethnic formation in the interior of the Amazon untouched in the process. Many thousands of people died. Yet one looks in vain for anything more than a

<sup>58</sup> Arquivo Público do Pará, *Leis e Decretos da Província do Grão-Pará, 1837–8*, Lei no.12, 25 de abril 1838.

passing mention of the índio, as opposed to the gentío, in the literature. This neglect has impoverished the social history of Amazonia and, in particular, our understanding of the stages of transition from a disintegrating mission culture in the late eighteenth century to the modern population of the region, the formation of which can be specifically located in the early decades of the nineteenth century, for all its subsequent modifications and transformations. It has also left in unjustified obscurity a war which deserves to be remembered as one of the great New World rebellions.