
Editor's Preface

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This book focuses on the relationship between mobility and migration and human–environment relations in indigenous and folk Amazonia. Most of the chapters are revised versions of papers presented at the International Society of Ethnobiology's Ninth International Congress, held at the University of Canterbury, Kent, UK, in June 2004. The motivation for putting together the panel – named 'The Ethnobiology of Mobility, Displacement and Migration in Indigenous Lowland South America' – and subsequently for compiling this volume grew out of several interests and concerns. The first of these, echoing the broader theme of the Congress – Ethnobiology, Social Change and Displacement – recognises mobility and migration as highly relevant, both theoretically and in more applied contexts, for all of us interested in a better understanding of how human societies perceive, experience and structure their symbolic and material interactions with the environment in an increasingly articulated, changing and contingent world.

A second, more specific, motivation for collating these papers emerged from a personal sense that a disjuncture of sorts exists within the field of ethnobiology and ethnoecology in Amazonia – and perhaps beyond. While human ecologists, ethnobotanists and Amazonianists in related fields have become increasingly sensitive to, and interested in, the historical contingency of nature and of human–environment interactions, and while there has been a simultaneous, generalised and growing interest in the processual aspects of ethnoecology,¹ there remains a strong residual

1. This interest in processual issues is exemplified by recent interest in questions relating to the dynamism, variability and transformation of ethnoecological systems. See, for example, Nazarea (1999), Berkes et al. (2000), Ellen et al. (2000), Zent (2001), Heckler (2002), Hunn (2002), Ross (2002), Zarger (2002), Barrera-Bassols and Toledo (2005), Reyes-García et al. (2005) and Balée and Erickson (2006).

tendency, often implicit, to view these largely as the product of long-term historical emplacement and spatial stasis. Even when spatial stasis is not assumed, it is still not given the same level of attention as other historical processes.

While the consequences of demographic collapse and integration into the state and market economy have drawn considerable attention, the other major impact of European colonisation – the spatial reorganisation of indigenous societies – has not been as extensively or systematically examined (cf. Taylor and Bell 2004: 1). Moreover, while there has been a considerable amount of discussion on the relationship between indigenous migration and changes in mobility and demography and health and subsistence (McNeill 1980; Kroeger and Barbira Freedman 1988; Roberts et al. 1992; Zent 1993; Hill and Hurtado 1995; Coimbra et al. 2002), relatively little attention has been directed at exploring the links with other aspects of human–environment relations, including ethnobotanical and ethnoecological knowledge, the evolution, distribution and abundance of plant resources, or the symbolic representation of nature and landscapes (but see, for example, Cárdenas and Politis 2000; Little 2001; Posey 2002a; Rival 2002; Pieroni and Vandebroek 2007).

The time seems ripe, therefore, to pay closer attention to the links and relationships between movement, mobility, migration and displacement and indigenous and folk ethnoecology. Contributing to the growing literature on the historical and political ecology of Amazonia (Schmink and Wood 1992; Balée 1994; Fisher 2000; Little 2001; Posey 2002b; Heckenberger 2005) and drawing on a wide range of perspectives, theoretical approaches and disciplines – including social anthropology, historical ecology, geography, ethnobotany, botany and evolutionary biology – this collection of case studies from different parts of the Amazon and Orinoco river basins in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela seeks to fill some of the existing gaps in our current understanding of the relationship between social change and ethnoecology in lowland South America. Rather than attempt to offer a systematic or comprehensive overview of what is an extremely broad and complex topic, this book aims to illustrate links, identify interesting patterns and trends, demonstrate a range of approaches and flag areas for future study. A substantial introduction is also included at the outset in the hope that it will provide a suitable background and help orient readers not familiar with some of the concepts, ideas or vast literature relevant to indigenous mobility and migration, and their relation to Amazonian history and ethnoecology.

As the title suggests, the outlook of this volume is premised on the logic and coherence of certain geographical, social and epistemological boundaries and categories. Amazonia is used here in its broadest sense, and taken to include the Orinoco basin, as well as adjacent coastal areas (including the Brazilian *Mata Atlântica*), and the Andean piedmont. While

the clear-cut boundary between the Amazonian lowlands and the adjacent highlands is, as Dudley (this volume) underscores, a recent historical construct, and while the two regions have been thoroughly interconnected throughout much of their human history, the Andean highlands and Amazonia have experienced quite different historical trajectories and, though interconnected, are socially and ecologically quite distinct.

The scope of this book is not restricted to people who self-identify as indigenous, but also covers so-called 'folk' societies; social collectivities with relatively long histories of occupation in Amazonia. This includes the detribalised descendants of indigenous peoples, many of whom extensively intermarried with Europeans and Africans, forging an Amazonian peasantry widely referred to as *riberños* or *caboclos*. It also includes the descendants of runaway slaves – known as *quilombos* or *cimarrones* in Brazil and parts of Latin America, respectively – and more generally Afro-indigenous groups, who form distinct 'traditional' communities throughout much of the lowland tropics of South America. Deserving of treatment, but not included in this volume due to necessary limitations in size and scope, are the recent migrant and settler communities, who comprise an important proportion of rural and urban Amazonia, and whose background and reality pose a different, though clearly not mutually exclusive or unrelated, set of questions and problems for ethnoecologists.²

I would like to thank the participants of the panel, including Edmond Dounias, who acted as discussant, as well as those who were not able to attend in person but who subsequently prepared a chapter for the volume. Their contributions and lively discussions, during and after the conference, have been most instructive. I am especially grateful to Roy Ellen for his help and support in putting together the panel and for his subsequent editorial help, advice and patience. Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, Simone Athayde, Rodrigo Bernal, Charles Clement, Oliver Coomes, Meredith Dudley, Phillipe Erikson, Alf Hornborg, Egleé López, Manuel Macía, Helen Newing, Dario Novellino, Manuel Pardo, Elizabeth Reichel, Laura Rival, Daniel Rodriguez and Steven Rubinstein all provided very useful comments on different chapters, including the introduction. I am particularly grateful to Daniela Peluso for her help with many aspects of the book and to Jana Traboulsi for her assistance with several maps. The background research, preparation and editing of this book were made possible thanks to the support of the Nuffield Foundation (Advanced Career Fellowship 2002–2005), the Darrell Posey Foundation (Field

2. For case studies discussing environmental and political issues relating to internal migration and colonisation in Amazonia, see, for example, Schmink and Wood (1984), Schumann and Partridge (1989), Goodman and Hall (1990) and Painter and Durham (1995).

Fellowship 2005–2007), the British Academy (Small Grant 35207) and the University of Kent (2003 Faculty Grant). Miguel Pinedo-Vásquez has kindly assisted me over the past years with access to several key sources and journals during this time. Last but not least, I am indebted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent for offering their facilities, and to Michael Fisher for his advice on a wide range of issues relating to digital technology.

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