Solve Brainteasers! Win Prizes!

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Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.

The twentieth century is supposed to be dead for almost a decade now. Yet it is there with us continuously— in its successes of technology and market, and even more so in its violent failures and lost dreams. In its long shadow, no one can now hope to fight even a “war to end all wars”. But, wars happen. They happen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Palestine, Rwanda. They happen as the all-engulfing War on ‘Terror’. They happen as attacks on human freedoms— of politics, of civil society, of culture, of race, of sexuality. They happen to abolish— does one really know, unless it is to abolish humanity, or at least human happiness?

But, of course, it is good business. And not just for the old villains of the armaments industry, or even “statesmen” who go to war to divert attention from domestic issues. Our biggest window to wars today is provided by those
who perhaps profit from it the most— the media. In the hyperreal collage of shifting, almost kaleidoscopic images of mangled cadavers, bombed homes, ruined communities only the names and locations of the refugee camps that house emaciated bodies change— slower only than the pace with which we forget the last traces of the fleeting memories of other suffering bodies, homes and communities.

Even as Velupillai Prabhakaran’s destroyed body merges with the bodies of those killed in Palestine, or was it Afghanistan this week, the image that stays is that of suffering and of the impotency of the ‘international community’ to do anything about it— any of it. In May 2009, the Human Rights Council failed, in the face of opposition from South Africa, Cuba, China, India and Pakistan (in what other platform or what other issue would the last named three come together, one wonders), to pass a resolution that asked for mere investigation of allegations of human rights abuses. And before we start defending this as a protection of a South country’s right to limiting access to its ‘internal problems’ and even to international aid agencies, came the statement of Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister, calling the allegations “both fictional and well-fabricated, with ulterior and sinister motives, in order to discredit the armed forces, as well as to embarrass the government of Sri Lanka.” And the hegemonising tenor of the War on Terror even made short work of the moral/ethical opprobrium that normally associates with attacks on hospitals that Colombo undertook in its war on its own ‘terrorists’— the LTTE. And of course, hardly anyone bothered to waste newsprint or airtime on the subsequent ‘suppression of Jihadis’ in July.

The US-boycott of the Human Rights Council which ended months after the aforementioned meeting has been blamed for the failure of the resolution being carried. While it may have denied Barrack Obama an opportunity to post facto justify his Nobel Peace Prize, one must wonder how many, particularly in the South, and even more so in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Cuba, Chile, Panama… would miss having the Big Brother’s extended protection of their rights?

And yet, if there is the constant presence of universal war and suffering, there are also diverse histories of coexistence and even resistance, or at least of living. Mohammed Tabishat charts one such story in the Vilayat of al-Burami in Oman, where he shows how the different medical practices— Islamic, Chinese, Ayurvedic, Homeopathic and Biochemical, each drawing from different scientific and regional locations, coexist to serve the different
needs of the denizens of this multi-ethnic town, which is itself located between United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and Yemen. The question of diversity is also a principal theme of the article of Siri and Chamira Gamage as they delve into an analysis of one of the most important debates, scholarly and otherwise, of our time— that of the impact of the hegemonising, uniculturising trend of globalisation vis-à-vis the localism of communities and regions.

Finding unity, if only in tentative, crystal ball-gazing understanding of trends, is what Suhit Sen does in his analysis of the maddeningly diverse events, processes and results that make up the fifteenth general elections in the world’s largest democracy— India. He shows the emergence of a left of centre consensus in the polity, contrary to many expectations. And if this disturbs our received common sense in the post-Washington Consensus world, then Joao Maia takes on a much older consensus— that about Euclides da Cunha and what this leading Brazilian intellectual of the nineteenth century thought of the indigenes of his country. In doing this, he destabilises many of the established notions of the intellectual history of the post-colonial Brazilian nation-state.

In the Across the South section, Wapulumuka Oliver Mulwafu reports on the recently held conference in University of Malawi to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Nyasaland State of Emergency. The issues delved into make for interesting readings of similar crises of state, democracy and governance in other regions of the South. Ritoban Das delves into the varied influences and streams that, drawing on the old traditions of African music, enrich our listening experiences.

For the Reviews section, we have for you Patrick Chabal’s Africa: The Politics of Suffering and Smiling, reviewed by Percyslage Chigora, who brings out how this book takes a new look at issues without diminishing, in any way, from either their importance or their every-dayness. Jerome Teelucksingh in his review, tries to present us with new findings and interpretations on Eric Williams, while locating him in the historical context of the Caribbean.

Half a decade ago, the Sephis e-Magazine started its career as a pioneer in the field of electronic academic publications. The success of its web-based magazine opened new possibilities of a different (and affordable) kind of academic ‘publishing’. It has been a long trek since and our abiding challenge is to keep pace with the developing technology of digital publication. We realised that our website needed upgrading even as we had
ourselves just mastered its possibilities. Even though we (along with many of our regular readers) have grown used to the format of the e-Magazine, it was in crying need of a make-over, given the possibilities offered by new software. We decided to go the whole hog and to change the .pdf layout together with the Global South webpage. We know that those who are used to the existing layout will probably have to spend a few minutes getting used to the new one; we have tried to keep it simple and easy to use; and we hope the new format too will appeal to our friends and well wishers across the global south. Given the gradual dissemination of the boon of high-speed internet connectivity we are hopeful that our readers will not face difficulties in navigating the magazine and the webpage. We will be very grateful if you let us know how the new set up is working for you and especially if there are any difficulties. We are treating the first quarter as an experimental phase and will be happy to incorporate changes in accordance with suggestions from our readers.

A new look for the new year... greetings from the team to all our readers.
Thinking from the South: Brazilian Social Thought and the Case of Euclides da Cunha

The article presents the main ideas of Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909), a famous Brazilian intellectual from the beginning of the twentieth-century. Da Cunha was one of the first writers to provide a proto-sociological account of subaltern people in Brazil. The aim of the article is to review his contributions in the light of contemporary discussions concerning postcolonialism and decolonisation.

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On 15 August 1909, Euclides da Cunha, the famous Brazilian writer, was shot dead by his wife’s lover at the age of forty-three. He was one of the main figures of Brazilian intellectual life, mostly because of his book *Os Sertões (The Backlands)*. First published in December 1902, its first edition was sold out by February 1903. This was a major success in a largely illiterate country. In the wake of such an impressive reception, Da Cunha was elected in 1903 to a chair in Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian National Academy), one of the standard-bearers of the country's literary establishment.

A hundred years after Da Cunha’s death, Brazil celebrated “Euclides da Cunha National Year”, proving that not only did his writings survive, but became the core of a national tradition. Now, one can say that he was not just a Brazilian writer, but also a peripheral intellectual coping with the problems of nation-building in a postcolonial society. As many other thinkers at the margins of the “civilised” world at the beginning of the twentieth century, Da Cunha was trying to articulate a nationalist agenda in terms of a scientific discourse produced in Europe.

After *Os Sertões*, Rio Branco Baron, the then Brazilian foreign minister, asked Da Cunha’s help in a diplomatic mission in the Amazon region concerning a frontier dispute with Peru. From December 1904 until 1905, he explored rivers and remote areas along the countries’ borders. Upon his return to Rio he prepared two more texts. *Contrastes e Confrontos (Contrasts and Confrontations)* and *Peru versus Bolivia*, which were released in 1907 and were further evidence of Da Cunha’s baroque style and his use of scientific theories about geography, weather and races. The tragedy of 1909 that followed soon after thus put an untimely stop to a remarkable career.

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Chatterjee shows in his work how concepts and practices related to the nation-building process in India were closely linked to European political theory. This resulted in a nationalist ideology that denied a proper place for subaltern forms of political expression. I believe this perspective is helpful in understanding Da Cunha’s ambivalent statements concerning the people of the Brazilian backlands. Mignolo and Coronil, in turn, discuss modernity and colonialism in order to demonstrate how European epistemology is universalised and disembodied. Moreover, both authors...
argue that spatiality is crucial to a de-colonial critique of modernity and Occidentalism because it stresses alternative cognitive performances. I draw on their work to review Da Cunha’s statements concerning the geography of the hinterland. These statements could work for a contemporary agenda in social theory based on a critique of false universalism. I elaborate this issue further in the final section of the text.

Although I draw on the works of Chatterjee, Mignolo and Coronil I do not agree with every aspect of their theories. My goal is to show how contemporary discussions could be enriched by an intellectual history from the Global South. I am thus concerned with concept formation and the need for a perspective about modernity that addresses its problems from the periphery.

The Backlands and the search for nationality

Os Sertões (The Backlands) puzzled Brazilian audiences when it was published in 1902. The book drew heavily on positivistic theories that were very popular in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, but it was written in a very baroque style. Da Cunha employed very long paragraphs and confusing sentences that altered the regular order of speech. The structure of the book translated Taine’s model of race, milieu and moment in a threefold structure: Land, Man and Struggle. But which struggle was Da Cunha was writing about?

For many people at that time, the War of Canudos seemed a battle between “civilisation” and republicanism against barbarian monarchists. Critical statements by Conselheiro about the “evilness” of the recent established Republican system reinforced the fear that the struggle was conducted by disloyal monarchists. Da Cunha was one of these republicans. He was educated as a military engineer in the Military School in Rio de Janeiro during the last days of Empire and learned much about Comtean positivism and republicanism there. His first article about Canudos was called “Our Vendée”, a strong evidence of his intellectual standpoint. However, the voyage to the backlands shocked him. The cruelty of the Republican army and the strong convictions held by the sertanejos lead him to question the opposition between civilisation and barbarism, although he did not change all his views on this subject. Os Sertões was the outcome of this confused mix of feelings.

In 1897, Da Cunha was sent by Júlio de Mesquita, editor of O Estado de São Paulo (a famous Brazilian newspaper) to an arid region in the heart of the state of Bahia. In a location known as Canudos, a group of sertanejos (people who lived in the backlands of the North-East region) was fighting against the Republican army under the leadership of a religious leader named Antônio Conselheiro. The struggle was called War of Canudos and began in 1896, drawing great attention from intellectuals, politicians and military men. Sertanejos assembled apocalyptic visions and criticism of some Republican decrees (such as civil marriage). They soon began to gather around Conselheiro in a valley where a religious community was being organised. Landlords feared this peasant mobilisation that seemed to disorganise the traditional discipline of rural workforce. Soon the police was called to put down the rebellion.

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In the first part of the book, Da Cunha depicted the nature of the backlands, putting together geographical theories with impressionistic statements about soil and plants. His aim was not just to present the setting but to explore the relations between nature’s configuration and sertanejo habits and way of life. This section is still a matter of research for contemporary interpreters who argue about the evaluation of the text. Is it a scientific work or a literary book? Recent studies have pointed out that Da Cunha used geological data freely, assembling theories and concepts that helped him to express the symbolic quality of the space. Thus his representation of the region’s geography was quite inaccurate, mostly because of the romantic tone of his writing.

The section about nature is a fine example of the curious intellectual background of Da Cunha. His positivist training is easily detected in passages of the text where he quotes geography books and geological data and writes down statements about the role of land in the explanation of human behaviour. But his search for a representation of the backlands as an expressive totality full of meaning lead him to a more literary tone, typical of romantic novels that depicted nature as a character in the plot. This combination is also seen in the section concerning the men of the backlands.

Da Cunha drew on evolutionist racial theories and portrayed the sertanejos as ambivalent characters who combined heroic qualities such as courage and bravery with rude personalities. The
famous expression used by Da Cunha to characterise people in the backlands is much known to his readers: Hercules-Quasimodo. This oxymoron is a common feature of Da Cunha’s style to praise the sertanejos as epic figures. At the same time he outlined them as backward. The backwardness of these people was supposedly produced by the isolation of the backlands, an area that looked like a desert far away from the coast. Da Cunha saw the region and its inhabitants as a civilisational unit “frozen in time”, a geographical setting that was authentic due to its distance from the “European” frontier of the Brazilian coast. This twofold perspective works in Da Cunha’s texts as a metaphor for a more “authentic Brazil” – the isolated backlands that was fighting against a “civilised” one, located in cities like Rio de Janeiro.  

But how did the author assess this struggle? Da Cunha drew on scientific theories about race and nature that looked down on sertanejos. These theories depicted this group as backward figures that were destined to disappear in the civilising process. His vision was much influenced by his readings on the Polish sociologist Glumpowicz and his thesis about “war of races”. In the preliminary note that opens the book, Da Cunha states that civilisation would develop in the backlands pushed by the defeat of weak races by the strong ones, a law of History established by Glumpowicz, whom he regarded as “greater than Hobbes”. But Da Cunha’s search for a true nationality also led him to evaluate the backlands as the geographical source of a more authentic Brazil. In a famous passage, he called the sertanejos “the rock of nationality”. These opposing ideas resulted in the third and final section of the book, where he composed a tragic narrative dedicated to analyse the battles in the War of Canudos.  

In this final section, the sertanejos were represented as brave warriors fighting an army that spoke in the name of civilisation but, in reality, were guilty of carrying out massacres. Barbarism and civilisation are constantly interplayed in the final parts of the text and Da Cunha shows more empathy for backland people in these extracts. The text reaches its climax with the final battle that
destroys the community of Canudos on 5 October 1897. In a moving, though cryptic statement, Da Cunha says “Canudos did not surrender”.\(^{15}\)

According to Bertold Zilly, this tragic epic works as an aesthetic solution for Da Cunha, who could not otherwise resolve the tension that characterised his approach to the backlands.\(^{16}\) Canudos are constructed at the same time as a great utopia, an egalitarian community of the poor, and a historical impossibility, a place that did not fit into Da Cunha’s theories. Costa Lima goes further and argues that the book suffered from a huge paradox: Da Cunha employed evolutionistic theories that stated the necessary disappearing of “backward people”.\(^{17}\) At the same time he saw the sertanejos as authentic expressions of Brazilian identity. The tension is left unresolved here, but Da Cunha’s later texts provide some clues into what that solution could have been to the author.

**Paradise Lost**
Da Cunha intended to write an entire book on the Amazon region. It was to be called “Paradise Lost”, an obvious reference to John Milton. But his death in 1909 stopped him and left us with an unfinished work. And what can one infer from the analysis of the unfinished text?

It is possible to say that Da Cunha’s perspective changed. In *Os Sertões* there was a permanent tension between the unique nature of the backlands and the scientific discourse employed to analyse it. Costa Lima states that this tension culminated in a literary style in which poetic expression conflicted with theoretical discourse. Thus the text was split into a foreground written in a scientific fashion and a poetic, metaphor-ridden background, wherein the author addresses the novelty of the backlands. But in his text on the Amazon, Da Cunha realised that the extreme nature of the gigantic forest did not fit into any textbook categories. The Amazon was a forever changing territory where rivers altered routes and the whole space seemed absolutely unpredictable. He felt as if he was gazing at a land which was not finished yet, one that was in a process of labour.
Da Cunha wrote dozens of pages trying to describe a nature that seemed too large and varied to be depicted by the positivistic discourse he employed in his previous book. The Amazon was not a land frozen in time, as were the north-eastern backlands he described earlier. It was more like a frontier zone distinguished by market forces that transformed latex into a global commodity. People who colonised the Amazon were not isolated *sertanejos*, but men and women from different parts of Brazil and the world. Da Cunha wrote about capitalist exploitation in the forest, portraying the terrible conditions that surrounded the rubber business.

How did he see subalterns in the Amazon? He described them as very religious and silent people who worked in extreme conditions and behaved like characters from Dostoyevsky novels. At the same time, he saw them as adventurers who managed to settle down and engage in a stable relation with land. Contrary to the *caucheiros* Peruvian workers who extracted the *caucho*, the Brazilians in the Amazon were like pioneers, facing the jungle and conquering the “Green Hell”. Da Cunha drew on neo-Darwinist theories about the weather and “natural selection”, arguing that only the strongest men could survive in the forest.

The Amazon was for him like a new chapter in civilisation. Da Cunha praised the subaltern efforts in the colonisation of Acre, a state in the south-western Amazon, and compared it to other colonial processes in the tropics. He believed that Europeans usually recreated their own norms and rules in the tropics. In the case of the Amazon, however, the somewhat anarchic colonisation process was distinguished by the power of invention. People were not emulating norms and cultural codes from European countries. Instead they were adapting their behaviour in order to create a new kind of social order.

As one can see, Da Cunha’s writings on the Amazon are not well read, and could be seen as providing clues to understand his intellectual development. In the next section I investigate Da Cunha’s vision in a broader theoretical perspective.

**Thinking from the periphery**

In this section, I briefly address two main issues: The relation between nationalism and the subaltern in peripheral countries and the relevance of space in decolonisation debates.

Nationalism was a major political and intellectual force in postcolonial countries during the twentieth century. Partha Chatterjee has convincingly argued that political elites in these countries drew heavily on the language of nation and civil society in order to impose a modern order. Thus subaltern forms of political expression were set aside from the legitimate definition of modernity.

Da Cunha’s ambivalent approach to the relation between *sertanejos* and the civilising process is a good example of the problem detected by Chatterjee. Da Cunha drew on racial theories that held no place for subaltern peoples in peripheral areas. He was also disturbed by the lack of cultural homogeneity in Brazil, which seemed to threaten national unity. Da Cunha depicted the backlands as a unique geography that seemed to represent a past experience. In doing so, he treated difference as
an obstacle for nationalism and this assumption resulted in a distorted view of the sertanejos. At the same time, Da Cunha believed that sertanejos represented authenticity.

This ambivalent approach was the outcome of a cognitive performance that would become common to other writers in the future. In the 1910s and 1920s, Brazilian intellectuals wrote and spoke extensively of “embracing the backlands” in the modernisation process. These intellectuals perceived the subaltern as lacking cultural skills demanded by modernity. Thus nationality was perceived as the result of a state-conducted action based on education and public policies. Da Cunha was the precursor of this nationalist generation. On the one hand, he was searching for a national essence that could not be provided by urban and Europeanised Brazil. On the other hand, his scientific discourse depicted the north-eastern hinterland as a barbarian region. He also outlined sertanejos as a degenerate race who did not fit into evolutionary process. Could Da Cunha get rid of this colonial perspective? I believe that his writings about the Amazon offer a possible answer. One must analyse the language of space employed by Da Cunha and its possible connections with contemporary de-colonial perspectives.

The colonisation of space by time is a feature of modernity. In his book on the Renaissance, Walter Mignolo states that colonialism and early modernity were closely linked. Mignolo claims that the epistemology of European modernity subsumed the co-existence of different perspectives and modes of classifying the world. This epistemology translated spatial differences into temporal differences, a theoretical move that Mignolo conceptualises as “the denial of coevalness”. The rationalisation of colonial space left no room for local histories and turned these territories into peripheries in a global order. One could say that Da Cunha framed the backlands exactly in this fashion. His writings depicted these places as remains of an ancient Brazilian time which had no place in modern times. But the language of space is dubious and it can also serve as an intellectual tool for de-colonisation.

Mignolo also states that alternative territorialities did not vanish with colonial conquest. Negotiations and conflicts between European and Amerindians resulted in the establishment of a space-in-between. This space worked as a subject position that denied the “denial of coevalness” and reaffirmed other perspectives about space.

This link between critical thought and a spatial approach can be inferred from an article Mignolo wrote with M. Tlostanova. In this piece, the authors draw on the concept of “double consciousness” in order to address an alternative epistemology that avoids the false universalism of colonial modernity. In doing so they resort to the concept of border thinking, which indicates the space-in-between produced by modernity in colonial territories. This locus of discourse is characterised by an exteriority which challenges the universalistic assumptions contained in colonial discourse. It means that knowledge in peripheries is constructed from a spatially rooted point of view.

In a similar vein, Fernando Coronil argues that it is possible to work with non-imperial geo-
historical categories. He rejects spatiality as it is conceived in classical western representations and argues that one should consider colonial territories as crucial places in the making of global capitalism. These colonial settings must be seen not as empty places but as territories which play a major role in the production of commodities. This theoretical perspective deeply based on a de-colonial spatiality would help to de-centre western conceptions of modernity.

The works of Mignolo, Tlestonova and Coronil display some features of a peripheral territoriality that can also be grasped in Da Cunha’s writings on Amazon. He portrayed the nature in the tropical forest as almost impossible to analyse through scientific discourse and thus recognised the existence of a difference rendered in spatiality. Amazon was depicted as a new geography with features unknown to European colonialism. It was part of the global logic of capitalism (latex was a relevant commodity in the beginning of the twentieth century) but at the same time its people experimented with forms of living that did not exist in central countries. Migrants in the forest had no common cultural background and did not possess the intellectual and emotional qualities associated with the modern self. However, they managed to adjust to the “Green hell”.

As a place that combined exploitation and invention, Da Cunha’s Amazon could be seen as an example of the alternative territoriality claimed by Mignolo and Coronil. In the same way, the ambivalent ideas of Da Cunha could be interpreted as a typical condition for “border thinking”.

Of course it is easy to read in Da Cunha’s texts just another example of internal colonialism, a white intellectual from the elite spreading prejudices against the subaltern. He resorted to nineteenth century theories that reaffirmed both the inferiority of non-Europeans and the identification between Europe and civilisation. Mignolo denounces this internal colonialism and criticises Latin American intellectuals that tried to articulate nationalistic projects drawing on Eurocentric epistemology. As José Maurício Domingues states, Mignolo’s intellectual project rests on a full critique of modernity. Mignolo identifies it with colonialism and seeks an exterior subject position that he considers an alternative to modernity and not just an alternative modernity. Domingues criticises this perspective and claims that modernity has another side characterised by autonomy and emancipation, a view I am in agreement with. Critical thinking in Latin America and in the Global South is not an exterior form of thinking, but a subject position that recognises its colonial origins and addresses global modernity.

If one is interested in discussing social theory from a southern perspective, it is crucial to understand our past histories. Jeffrey Alexander states that classical works occupy a central place in social sciences because they provide us with a repertoire of concepts that allow intellectual exchange today. One does not, after all, read Marx, Weber or Durkheim in an uncritical fashion. According to Alexander, these authors are part of a hermeneutical dialogue which draws on past theories in a creative way. Why not open this dialogue with the aid of other intellectual histories? It is not a matter of making uncritical and nationalistic claims about Brazilian classics but a necessary step in a process of de-centring social theory.

Mignolo’s concept of border thinking helps us to review our intellectual history looking for
concepts and metaphors that open up the discussion about modernity in the South and from the South. The search for exteriority is not a matter of setting ourselves aside from modernity but of finding a point of view that addresses global modernity from postcolonial borders. That is why peripheral intellectual histories are so relevant in the contemporary debate on social theory.

1 An English translation of the book by S. Putman titled Rebellion in the Backlands, was published by Chicago University Press in 1944.

2 Although Mignolo works and lives in the USA, he provides an interesting theory about knowledge and power from a Southern perspective.

3 The concept of Occidentalism is used by Coronil.

4 Hyptpolyte Taine (1828-1893) employed this model in order to understand the social contexts of works of art. Thus he stated that an artist’s genius could be explained by his cultural dispositions (race), the particular circumstances or in which he is located (milieu) and the historical development of his personality (moment).

5 Da Cunha also employs the word jagunços, especially when he tries to describe the sertanejos who were engaged in battles and armed struggles. Jagunços was a much known word in Brazil to describe men from the backlands who worked as gunmen to landlords.

6 A Republic was established in Brazil by a military movement in 1889. Until that year, Brazil was an Empire ruled by a constitutional monarchy.

7 Augusto Comte (1798-1857) was a French philosopher widely read in Brazil between 1870 and the beginning of the twentieth century. Comte claimed that the science of society must discover the laws of evolution and thus guide the progress of mankind.

8 The Vendee (1793-1796) was an uprising of Catholics and royalists against the recently established French Republic. The uprising drew support from local peasants.

9 E. da Cunha, Obra Completa, 2 vols, Nova Aguilar, Rio de Janeiro, 1995. I am working with the
1995 edition of Da Cunha's complete works. All references to his texts are related to this edition.


14 The sertanejos guerrillas defeated three military expeditions. Only the fourth one, commanded by general Artur Oscar Guimarães, was able to crush Canudos.


18 In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Amazon was a relevant part of the global market due to the extraction of latex for the production of rubber. This link between the region and central capitalist economies resulted in a fast modernisation process that left a fancy opera-theater in Manaus and a very unequal pattern of social development.


20 See N. Lima, *Um sertão chamado Brasil*.


22 Ibid, p. xi.


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