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TEMPORARY STRUCTURES OF HOPE, PERMANENT SPACES OF POWER:
Concentration camps in Northeast Brazil from the early twentieth century drought and
war periods

by

Laura Belik

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Architecture

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Global Metropolitan Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Margaret Crawford, Chair

Professor Greg Castillo

Professor Teresa Caldeira

Professor Irit Katz

Spring 2024

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Laura Belik

ABSTRACT

TEMPORARY STRUCTURES OF HOPE, PERMANENT SPACES OF POWER:
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Laura Belik

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Professor Margaret Crawford, Chair

My dissertation contributes to the scholarship on camps, refugees and climate studies, spatial memory, heritage, and historical preservation, addressing episodes that have often been neglected in Latin American history: migrant labor camps in the first half of the twentieth century established for drought refugees in Northeast Brazil, the 1932 concentration camps, and 1942 labor recruitment centers (*pousos*). These camps were designed to serve the double purpose of helping migrants and organizing and controlling their labor power. During this time, under President Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship (1930-1945), camps were mobilized to support larger ideals of progress and national development. Through this process, drought migrants emerged as a major labor force, but reinforced racial prejudices. These episodes are significant because their effects persist in the socio-economic structures, urbanization processes, and people's daily lives in contemporary Brazil, long after the camps have been dismantled. "Backcountry northeasterners" (*sertanejo nordestino*) have continued to be the primary labor force nationwide throughout the twentieth century. To excavate these spaces and their hidden and untold histories is to tell a broader story of how the modern Brazilian state was built and how it continues to be shaped. By examining the architectural dimensions and racial underpinnings of early twentieth century concentration and labor camps in Brazil, in this dissertation, I present a history of spatial concentration, racial determination, and political segregations of populations that can help us better understand contemporary links between migration, climate, and labor.

To my parents, for their unwavering and unconditional support.

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GLOSSARY

Flagelado - (flagellated) poor and landless drought refugees from the Brazilian Northeast Region
Coronelismo - an expression related to the colonels who were landowners and who dominated provincial, local, and national politics
Sertão - backcountry/backland
Sertanejo - backcountry/backland people
Nordeste - Brazilian Northeast region
Nordestino - people from the Brazilian Northeast region
Retirante - dispossessed evacuees; the one who leaves and never to return
Pousos - landing/rest stops
Seringueira - (*Havea brasiliensis*) latex-producing trees
Seringal - latex extraction “farm”/grove or collection of *seringueira* trees
Seringueiro - Brazilian rubber gatherer/extractor collecting latex from *seringueira* trees
Seringalista - *seringal*'s landowners/bosses

Abbreviations

DNOCS (earlier versions: IFOCS/IOCS) - *Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra as Secas*/National Department for Works to Combat Droughts
SEMTA - *Serviço Especial de Mobilização de Trabalhadores para a Amazônia*/Special Service Mobilizing Workers to the Amazon
SAVA - *Superintendência do Abastecimento do Vale Amazônico*/Superintendency of Supply for the Amazon Valley
CAETA - *Comissão Administrativa de Encaminhamento de Trabalhadores para a Amazônia*/Administrative Commission for the Placement of Workers in the Amazon
DNI - *Departamento Nacional de Imigração*/National Department of Immigration
SESP - *Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública*/Special Service of Public Health

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Source: Ab’Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. “Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma Geografia Humana Sofrida.” *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 12.

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Source: Ab’Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. “Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma Geografia Humana Sofrida.” *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 28.

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Source: Ab’Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. “Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma Geografia Humana Sofrida.” *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 29.

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Source: Atlas do Império do Brasil (Cândido Mendes de Almeida, 1868). Available at: Andrade, Margarida Julia Farias de Salles. 2012. *Fortaleza em Perspectiva Histórica: Poder Público e Iniciativa Privada na Apropriação e Produção Material da Cidade 1810-1933*. [Tese de doutorado] São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo/Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, p. 18.

¹ Listed in order of appearance

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Source: Ferraz, Álvaro; Lima Jr., Andrade. 1939. "A Morfologia do Homem do Nordeste (Estudo Biotipológico)" *Coleção Documentos Brasileiros*, v. 15. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, n.p.

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Source: Ferraz, Álvaro; Lima Jr., Andrade. 1939. "A Morfologia do Homem do Nordeste (Estudo Biotipológico)." *Coleção Documentos Brasileiros*, v. 15. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, n.p.

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Source: “O Nordeste Trágico: A Noite no campo de concentração de flagelados, em Fortaleza.” In: “*A Noite*” (RJ), 25 Abril, 1932. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00027.0171/ Label: 348970_03.

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Source: Cruz, O. “Relatório sobre as condições médico-sanitárias do vale do Amazonas.” Rio de Janeiro, Typ. Do *Jornal “do Comércio,”* 1913. December 1912. Available at: Brasiliana Fotográfica/Fundo Instituto Oswaldo Cruz. <https://brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br/brasiliana/handle/20.500.12156.1/8118>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

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Source: “*Soldados da Borracha*.” Autor: João Brígido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. n.p. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.

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Source: “*Soldados da Borracha*.” Autor: João Brígido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. n.p. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.

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Source: “*Soldados da Borracha*.” Autor: João Brígido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. n.p. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC - Aba Films.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC - Aba Films.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC; Jean-Pierre Chabloz.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. 1986. *Álvaro Vital Brazil: 50 Anos de Arquitetura*. São Paulo: Nobel, p. 49.

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Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

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Source: Conduru, Roberto. 2000. Vital Brazil. Coleção Espaços da Arte Brasileira. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, p. 78.

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Source: Conduru, Roberto. 2000. *Vital Brazil*. Coleção Espaços da Arte Brasileira. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, p. 78.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: "National Department of Migration DNI, 1943." (BR_RJANRIO S7 0

MAP 0456 d0001de0002). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

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Source: “A Batalha da Borracha”. In: *Jornal “O Acre,”* edição 726, p. 5. December 25th, 1943. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB05227.0072/Label: 764752.

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Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

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Source: Maria de Fátima Melo personal collection. Photographic reproduction by Talita Oliveira. Courtesy of Maria de Fátima Melo and IPHAN AC.

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Source: Cunha, Euclides da. 1906. “Entre os Seringais.” *Revista Kosmos*, ano 3, no. 1, Rio de Janeiro, Jan. n.p.

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Source: Maria de Fátima Melo personal collection. Photographic reproduction by Talita Oliveira. Courtesy of Maria de Fátima Melo and IPHAN AC.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Photo by José Bonifácio P. Costa (1932) Available at: Arquivo nacional; Design by Laura Belik, based on a diagram by Sandra Paula Evaristo Monteiro, 2018.

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Source: *Flagelados'* Medical Assistance Report presented by chief commissioner Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa to the General Director of the National Health Department on August 30th, 1933. Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

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Source: Photos by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Photos by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Photo by Moacir Felix, June 2015. Available at:

http://www.estacoesferroviarias.com.br/ce_crato/otavio.htm. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.

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Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

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Source: “As visitas da secca no campo de concentração do Crato.” In: “*A Noite*” (RJ), 8 Agosto, 1932. Edition 07436(1). Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00027.01711/ Label: 348970_03

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Diocese de Iguatú (CE). Available at: <https://www.diocesedeiguatu.org.br/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

Figure 6.20: The 40th Drought Walk in 2022, in Senador Pompeu.

Source: “40a Caminhada da Seca Homenageia Retirantes da Seca de 1932.” In: *Jornal “O Povo,”* November 14th, 2022. Available at: <https://www.opovo.com.br/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2020.

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2020.

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Source: “Onde estão os generais da borracha?” In: “*O Cruzeiro: Revista*” (RJ), August 9th, 1947. Edition 0042 (4). Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB01844.0171/Label: 003581.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

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Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.

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Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/ Acervo DNOCS., n.p.

PREFACE/PROLOGUE

“Lula won in 9 of 10 of the states with the highest illiteracy rate. Do you know which states these are? Our Northeast.”²

Jair Bolsonaro, October 5th, 2022

Two days after the results of the first round of the presidential elections in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro publicly expressed on his YouTube channel his thoughts about his loss in the Brazilian Northeast region: These people are illiterate³.

President Bolsonaro’s discrimination and generalization about the Northeast and the people in this region is a portrait of a longer history of built-in prejudice, abstraction, and misconceptions that were carefully and strategically built by the government for its population to justify certain official actions towards them. Bolsonaro’s bias echoes the enduring and widespread xenophobia against the migrant populations of Northeast Brazil, a sentiment initially established at the turn of the twentieth century, a period on which my dissertation focuses. The influx of impoverished migrant peasants fleeing severe droughts, seeking assistance in local and regional urban centers, swiftly became perceived as a social and sanitary threat, further exacerbating community segregation. In response, the government and local elites tied assistance to the fulfillment of a demand for inexpensive labor. Over time, Northeastern migration expanded nationwide, with Northeasterners comprising the largest workforce in the industrial southeast region between 1950 and 1970 (Vainer, 2000), prompting concerns among landowning and industrial elites, given the rise in numbers and influence of this growing working class. Once again, this reinforced prejudiced perceptions of Northeasterners as inferior and advocating for their segregation served as a defense mechanism for these elites. In 2022, former President Bolsonaro utilized the same strategy to justify his lack of support from this demographic of Northeasterners. My doctoral dissertation research is not about President Jair Bolsonaro’s mandate nor his tentative reelection, but it might as well be. My research is about memory and space. I talk about a past subject that has present consequences, and Bolsonaro’s recent statements have only reassured me of how contemporary this particular “past” continues to be.

I begin my dissertation’s introduction not by directly presenting to you my case studies and findings, but by reflecting on the atypical moment I am living in as a Brazilian researcher. My dissertation and doctoral work took place during one of the most turbulent times in the history of the Brazilian democratic period, and one of the most turbulent times in the world’s contemporary history with the COVID-19 crisis.

² Original Portuguese version: “*Lula venceu em 9 dos 10 estados com maior taxa de analfabetismo, você sabe quais são esses estados? No nosso Nordeste*”

³ Source: Daily lives from Jair Bolsonaro’s YouTube channel. “Live Pr Bolsonaro - Eleições 2022 - 05/10/2022” October 5th, 2022. Min 24:10. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhuv1yqnToE>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

First, it is impossible to ignore the effects of COVID-19 not only in my research works, but in the entire education system around the world. In my case, COVID-19 meant a time of deep changes, mental health issues, and of course, restructuring my ABD (all but dissertation) plans. After six years of living in the U.S., I moved back to my home country of Brazil to be near family and loved ones, and to finish my doctoral work remotely. The chaotic (lack of) governmental administration during the pandemic led to a death toll of over 700,000 in Brazil, the second largest death rate in the world, trailing only the U.S. During the lockdown, I re-learned how to be a professor and a student online. I had to also figure out how to proceed with fieldwork without going anywhere. How can one study and analyze space without being able to visit these places? While this was already a recurring question I faced, considering that the places I study were transitory and ephemeral constructions that are no longer physically present, visiting the “empty lots” (Belik, 2022) and talking to the people that might have experienced them directly or indirectly was a part of my work that got cut short.

COVID-19 obliged me to rely more on the analysis of available public documentation as one of my main research methods. The question of access to public documentation regarding these spaces, thus, became ever more important. The scarcity of documentation (let alone digitized sources) demonstrated the absence of public support for culture and heritage today. Furthermore, as my dissertation work will discuss, it points out to the direct choices related to what the very existence of archives can represent (Mbembe 2002; Jordanova 2006; Robinson 2010; Stoler 2009; Hartman 2008). Memory is a political statement. Public memory helps build and shape people and situations in the public eye. Reconstructing the past is also an attempt to describe forms of violence licensed in the present (Hartman 2008). Whose histories are kept and reproduced? Whose memories are hidden, erased, or simply judged as not worthy of attention? The Brazilian Northeast is a social construct that was built from public governmental discourse, mostly disregarding the multiple voices and histories of that region. Therefore, it is possible to identify how Bolsonaro’s discourse about the “*Nordestino*” populations does not come from nowhere, but reproduces a longer history of public discourse and acceptance. Considering that even the existing public archives are currently facing cutbacks,⁴ the expectation for these centers to be more inclusive of “unofficial” voices in the near future is frail. My research works to change that by bringing to light the often untold and unheard stories and spatial politics of the *nordeste*, hopefully serving as a future resource fighting generalized and prejudiced statements such as Bolsonaro’s.

Coming back to Bolsonaro’s October 2022 statement, it is worth briefly contextualizing Brazilian politics within the past decade—especially considering the time in which I was a doctoral student, from 2017 to 2024—for the reader. By the time I started the doctoral program at UC Berkeley, Brazil had just suffered an impeachment, when President Dilma Rousseff (PT Workers Party/President from 2011-2016) was forced from office

⁴ The great fire at the *Museu Nacional*, in Rio de Janeiro in 2018, is a good example of how Brazilian public educational resources are slowly being dismantled in the country. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/03/fire-engulfs-brazil-national-museum-rio>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

(2016), leaving the government in the hands of her former conservative vice president Michel Temer (PMDB Brazilian Democratic Movement Party/Interim President from 2016-2018), who was the effective leader of the impeachment drive. In 2019, far-right former military candidate Jair Bolsonaro (PSL/PL Social Liberal party/Liberal Party, President from 2019-2022) was elected president as a result from a rising polarized country. Bolsonaro's controversial and extremist speeches include multiple statements against women, gay people, Black populations, and backcountry populations, including prejudiced generalizations about the Brazilian Northeast region and its population, the *Nordestinos*. Bolsonaro also openly expressed being in favor of the return of a dictatorship. By the end of 2022, new elections took place and Bolsonaro finally ran against former President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (PT Workers Party/President from 2003-2010), whose 2018 candidacy was rejected after allegation of Lula's involvement with corruption schemes, leading to his conviction and imprisonment for 580 days. The criminal proceedings against former President Lula were later condemned as illegal and arbitrary nationally by the supreme court, and internationally by the UN Human Rights Committee, which allowed him to run as the frontrunner and winning candidate against Bolsonaro in 2022.

This leads us to the October 2022 elections, when Lula won the dispute with 50.90% of the votes. Lula's previous mandates (2003-2010) had particularly focused on social protection and basic investments for the poorest populations of the country, which, by that time, officially drove Brazil off of the United Nations' (UN) Hunger Map. During the pandemic and Bolsonaro's administration, food insecurity grew, and this also demonstrated a significant loss of other basic needs for the population, such as education, employment, secure housing, access to public health, and more. Lula's bias and advantage in the Northeast region, where he led with 69.34% of the vote versus Bolsonaro's 30.66%, indicated precisely the areas where his government's deeds had the most effect⁵. Still, as I will further explain in my dissertation, the *Nordeste* has historically suffered enormous setbacks physically, economically, politically, and, most of all, socially since the late nineteenth century. The very conceptualization and construct of this part of the country as its own individualized region is a result of political and social disputes (Albuquerque Jr., 2011). Bolsonaro is not incorrect to state that the Northeast holds the highest levels of illiteracy in the country. But that does not mean that the Northeast is illiterate. Nor that by having high rates of illiteracy, the entire region is a monolith, or that its inhabitants are unable to make informed political decisions. The strategic use of a figure of speech as a generalization builds a certain complex and opens the doors for deeper prejudices and hate, especially when that discourse is directly embraced by a public figure such as the nation's President at that time. Prejudiced discourses as such led Bolsonaro's administration to hold the highest rates of anti-Semitism and hate crimes ever registered during the Brazilian democratic

⁵ Lula, himself a Northeasterner from the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, migrated with his mother and siblings to São Paulo as a child in the early 1950s, fleeing poverty and in search of better living and working conditions. His parents were illiterate, and he was the first of his eight siblings to finish primary school and then go to a technical school, learning a profession and developing an occupation as a fitter and turner. Bolsonaro's speech and generalizations about illiteracy in the Northeast is also, in part, a direct provocation towards his opponent, Lula.

period⁶. Discourses such as Bolsonaro's are directly aligned with actions and behaviors of earlier dictatorial regimes carried out by authoritarian figures such as former President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945/ 1951-54) and the military authoritarian regime (1964-1985). Discourses such as Bolsonaro's led to the creation and imposition of Brazilian concentration camps in the 1930s and *pousos* recruitment centers in the 1940s, my objects of study. Discourses such as Bolsonaro's are also the reason why we have not [yet] heard about the spaces such as the concentration camps or the *pousos* as part of a formative moment in Brazilian history.

My dissertation is about memory and space. While I engage with historical content from over eight decades ago, my research is not, however, a historical (hence past) topic. Discussing memory, heritage, and historical preservation is not about the past, but most precisely, about the present. In bringing up the acknowledgement and "disclosure" of past events, my goal is to help empower present and future generations.

⁶ See articles from the magazine "*Piauí*" available at: <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/casos-de-antissemitismo-crescem-no-governo-bolsonaro/> and <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/bolsonaro-os-judeus-e-o-antissemitismo/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

INTRODUCTION

*This is a story of the permanently ephemeral. A story of an enduring transitionality.
This is a story of a construction, even when there is nothing physically there.*



Figure 0.1: *Os Retirantes*, Cândido Portinari, 1944. Oil on canvas, 190 x 180 cm.
Source: Acervo Museu de Arte Moderna São Paulo (MASP).

He didn't feel the shotgun, the bag, the small stones that got into his sandals, the stench of carcasses that polluted the path. Sinha Vitória's words enchanted him. They would move forward, reach an unknown land. Fabiano was happy and believed in that land because he didn't know how it was or where it was. He obediently repeated Sinha Vitória's words, the words that Sinha Vitória whispered because she had confidence in him. And they walked to the south, immersed in that dream. A big city, full of strong people. [...] What would they do? They hesitated, fearful. They would arrive in an unknown and civilized land, and become trapped in it. And the backlands (*sertão*) would continue to send people there. The backlands would send strong, brutish men like Fabiano, Sinha Vitória, and the two boys to the city⁷. (Graciliano Ramos, *Vidas Secas*, 1938: 40)

⁷ Original Portuguese version: "Não sentia a espingarda, o saco, as pedras miúdas que lhe entravam nas alpercatas, o cheiro de carniças que empestavam o caminho. As palavras de sinha Vitória encantavam-no. Iriam para diante, alcançariam uma terra desconhecida. Fabiano estava contente e acreditava nessa terra, porque não sabia como ela era nem onde era. Repetia docilmente as palavras de sinha Vitória, as palavras que sinha Vitória murmurava porque tinha confiança nele. E andavam para o sul, metidos naquele sonho. Uma cidade grande, cheia de pessoas fortes. [...] Que iriam fazer? Retardaram-se, temerosos. Chegariam a uma terra desconhecida e civilizada, ficariam presos nela. E o sertão continuaria a mandar gente para lá. O sertão mandaria para a cidade homens fortes, brutos, como Fabiano, sinha Vitória e os dois meninos."

The vast arid landscape portrays desperation. The cracked desert landscape grows nothing but bones in its earth. Vultures hover over whatever is still moving. It is possible to smell death and putrefaction. Centered in this scene, a family stands in clear despair and agony. These less-than-human, half-naked, and barefoot figures are bony but also have water bellies. Their skin matches the color of the ground. They carry the little they have in a bag made of fabric above their head or on their shoulders. They are on the move. But there is nothing around them, and nowhere to go to. “*Os Retirantes*” (The Retirees), by Candido Portinari (Figure 0.1), is one of the most famous Brazilian paintings of all time. This work was painted in 1944, and together with Brazilian modernist writer, politician, and journalist Graciliano Ramos’ novel “*Vidas Secas*” (1938) (“Barren Lives”), it portrays what later became known as the stereotypical image intellectual elites and most Brazilians have of the severe drought periods in the Northeastern region of the country in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century⁸, and of the poor displaced *retirantes* (an expression roughly translated as *those who leave*) and *flagelados* (*flagellated*, poor and landless drought refugees from the Brazilian Northeast Region)⁹.

⁸ The novelist Graciliano Ramos was born in 1892 in a city in the inland state of Alagoas, in the Brazilian Northeast region. Ramos experienced firsthand the effects of the Great Droughts at the turn of the twentieth century, and his masterpiece “*Vidas Secas*” is an ode to that. Candido Portinari, on the other hand, was originally from São Paulo, and was one of the leading artists of the artistic Brazilian Modernist movement. Portinari’s work portrayed Brazilian traditional cultures in an effort to help build a national identity, taking into consideration regional differences. The painter often used the theme of “the Brazilian man and the social and historical issues that determine him” as inspiration for his works. His series from the 1940s portraying the Northeastern droughts and the people affected by them (including two other paintings from 1944, the “*Criança Morta*” (“Dead Child”) and “*Enterro na Rede*” (“Burial in the Hammock”)) also reported on the bleak poverty many *Nordestinos* had faced for years, especially during the severe drought periods at the turn of the twentieth century, emphasizing the need for social reform in Brazil.

⁹ The use of the term *flagelado* (flagellated) to designate the drought-displaced populations from Northeast Brazil started to circulate after the expression “*flagelo da seca*” (drought scourge/drought plague) was used by the pharmacist, writer, and historian Rodolfo Teófilo in his novel “*A Fome*” (“Hunger”), published in 1890, right after the great drought of 1877. *Flagelo* (scourge), according to the Old Testament, is a physical punitive act, a kind of torture that used a whip as an instrument of discipline. At the same time, *flagelo* in the field of biology also refers to an appendage to sperm cells that provides motility through a whip movement and guarantees that cells’ survival. Teófilo became known for bringing scientific language and knowledge into his novels and other writing. His descriptions of the effects of the droughts are often similar to descriptions of clinical symptoms using technical and scientific terminology (Brito, 2013:115). When referring to the drought as a scourge, Teófilo creates a mixed terminology for something that is both a plague or a curse, and also something that is fast-spreading, as he mentions in this passage: “It was the drought that arrived. The *flagelo* was spreading across the province at the speed of light” (Teófilo, 2002: 160). The expression is later popularized into designating the people that suffered from the *flagelo da seca* (drought plague) into being themselves the flagellated. The embodiment of this action is particularly telling, as it was no longer only the drought that spread rapidly, but also the people themselves that were displaced, and needed to leave their places of origin, constantly migrating from one place to the other in order to survive. These groups of people are often referred to as *retirantes* (dispossessed evacuees), meaning those who leave never to return. *Flagelado*, therefore, can also be considered in many ways as a demeaning term dehumanizing people into the conditions or actions they were performing. Still, the word *flagelado* was also legitimized as it was incorporated by the government in official documentation, from reports and communication assets, to other types of records such as train tickets from the state-run rail system, as shown later in this essay (see Figure 3.7). While the conditions

These well-known, powerful, stirring scenes live through the Brazilian imaginary. Both in the painting and in the novel the spectator joins a family in desolation while they aimlessly walk through the *sertão* (backcountry/backland) hoping to find a way out. They left their place of origin and suffered through an arduous path of uncertainty trying to reach a place with resources, jobs, and above all: water. Both the painting and the novel portray this constant battle for survival, and both works leave us uncertain of their characters' future. Did they endure? Did they get there?

My dissertation focuses on what “there” meant, what the destiny (if any) of these *retirantes* was, and if their journey has ever ended. My dissertation focuses on how a constant state of transit and impermanence managed to impose a very permanent state of identity, a social construction and memorialization of the *sertanejo nordestino* (backcountry northeasterners) as *flagelados*, who later became a synonym for a cheap labor force. I see the built environment as a major player and fundamental agent in supporting this social construction. Furthermore, I identify one particular type of spatiality that encapsulates this essence: the camp. I particularly look at examples of camps in the Brazilian state of Ceará from the first half of the twentieth century.

My work focuses on what I consider as the first two stops in the *retirantes flagelados'* long-lasting journeys: the *campos de concentração* (concentration camps) of the 1930s in the Brazilian state of Ceará built by the local and national governments as aid spaces for drought refugees; and the *pousos* recruitment and transit centers in the 1940s, bringing *sertanejo nordestinos'* manpower from Ceará to the Amazon region to serve as latex extraction workers collecting rubber for the Allies as part of the War effort. These camps were designed to serve the double purpose of helping migrants and organizing and controlling their labor power, a process that could be more closely compared to the British colonial camps, such as the famine and plague camps in India (late nineteenth century), or refugee and labor camps in South Africa from the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). During this time in Brazil, under Getúlio Vargas's dictatorship (1930-1945), camps were mobilized to support larger ideals of progress and national development. Through this process, drought migrants—the majority of them offspring of mixed ancestry descended from Portuguese colonists, escaped Black slaves, and Native Indigenous people—emerged as a major labor force, but reinforced racial prejudices that were highlighted through methods of eugenics. On one hand, *flagelados* were seen as the quintessential Brazilians, and perfectly situated as subjects for Vargas' cultural and economic modernization efforts; on the other hand, they also suffered from being perceived by urbanites as culturally backwards, condemned to a primitive state because of their heritage and long adaptation to a harsh climate (Buckley, 2017:12). Brazilian camp spaces reiterated this dichotomy. I emphasize that camps' typologies and usage, as spaces of control, seclusion, and exception, are continuous and cyclical structures,

the *flagelados* faced would only be considered for the legal status of a refugee after the 1967 U.N Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (which was a revision form the 1951 Convention), in my research I consider the *flagelados* as refugees retroactively precisely because of their position, displaced by environmental and natural disasters.

despite being ephemeral. While used in distinct contexts and periods of time, the different iterations of camp spaces play key social and political roles in building mechanisms used for consolidating the Brazilian modern state and identity.

In this dissertation I follow the migratory paths of the *sertanejos nordestinos* in these two selected historical moments, which I argue are just a continuation of each other and symbolize the beginning of a longer trajectory with further stops. While the image and condition of the *flagelado* might have changed from Portinari's portrait or Graciliano Ramos' novel descriptions, the identity conveyed for this particular group of people is a long-lasting social and political act that started and was shaped by and within the camps they passed through.

Before further contextualizing the historical processes Brazil was going through at the turn of the twentieth century and getting to my case studies, I must first explain my positionality in choosing this topic of research, and how I see my work not in isolation, but in direct conversation with a border literature and conversations within the topics of refugee, labor history, memory, and camp studies.

Positionality

When I first told my father I was going to study the Brazilian concentration camps for internally displaced drought refugees¹⁰ as my doctoral research topic, I heard a very strong and negative reaction from him: "We are Jewish! You don't get to use this term just anywhere." Understandably, "concentration camp," while an official term used in different contexts, did become a loaded wording after the Nazi period. But that does not mean it didn't exist—in multiple forms and various uses—before, or that it will not continue to happen. The history of camp spaces follows modern life, as they have been used both by authoritarian regimes and contemporary democracies, employed as instruments of custody, containment, and abandonment (Katz, 2022). As such, camps are devices of power in the form of social technologies that discipline space and the movement of people, and, most precisely, the movement of labor-power (Malkki, 2002: 353).

Not all camps are death chambers or spaces of extermination. Yet, all camps represent spaces of exception, refugee, exclusion, or control. Still, camps can also be sites for active political negotiations, where confinement can also represent resilience (Katz *et al.*, 2018). In order for them to be spaces of resistance, it is first necessary that we recognize and witness these types of places, and the stories of the different groups of encamped people. *Never forget*, they say. But these—the Brazilian camps—have already been forgotten. And that's where the problem lies. By being forgotten, we continue to

¹⁰ The legal status and definition of a "refugee" was officially established at the 1967 U.N Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (which was a revision from the 1951 Convention); in my research, however, I use this same terminology retroactively to refer to the group of vulnerable migrants from the Brazilian Northeast region in the 1930s and 1940s who were forced to leave their homes for a complex combination of reasons, mainly pushed by their position: displaced from environmental and natural disasters, with social and political implications.

cyclically build similar spaces of exception, electing similar groups of the population to be confined and excluded, physically and morally. I study examples of camps that precede the Nazi concentration camps. Yet, differently from what my father believes, I do think we need to use this term, concentration camps, more often, despite the strong connotation of the wording that was later connected to Nazi Germany. In the Brazilian case, what were officially called “*campos de concentração*” in the state of Ceará were built and conceptualized before the Second World War not as extermination facilities, but as mechanisms of state control that were also sometimes referred to as “human corrals” (enclosures). It is important to notice how the term *concentration camp* first entered the modern lexicon originally with a descriptive, and not pejorative, connotation, referring to the spatial concentration of scattered populations and disciplinary institutions, emerging as practices of welfare and social control (Forth, 2017: 4). I chose to embrace this particular expression, camp, as a reminder of the more complex and nuanced understanding of “camps” and the different iterations of these kinds of facilities through the course of history. Concentration camps continue to take place every day, to this day, with all sorts of persecuted, excluded, displaced populations worldwide. Furthermore, regardless of when, where, or to what purpose a camp space is settled, its original purpose is always to be a temporary ephemeral structure, yet the consequences of the experiences for people who live through these kinds of places are very much permanent.

Very differently from the Jewish experience today, the Brazilian camps have another relationship to memory – or the lack thereof. The challenge of *not-forgetting* about the Brazilian camps is not knowing about them in the first place. Not only was the existence of the camps temporary, but the government’s goal was to keep these people in a place of transit, in a limbo of society that would justify the way they were treated. I argue that while ephemeral, the Brazilian camps were punctual yet recurring moments in Brazilian history, structuring broader aspects of the formation and institutionalization of the Brazilian modern state. The Brazilian camps summarize within one type of ephemeral space and structure (and its various iterations across time within the territory) the powerful transformations the country was going through, and what the government was trying to achieve. Yet, the camps’ stories are still neglected, hidden, or simply and strategically forgotten.

Research methods

Some of the greatest methodological challenges of studying temporary camp spaces is their ephemeral nature, and the “gray zones” to which migrants are subjected, which also directly affect and disrupt the stability of their infrastructures of liveability (Mould, 2017; Tazzioli, 2021). When dealing with historical camps, considering that neither the physical spaces nor the people who used them are present any longer, camp studies’ archival and ethnographic works can often be a labor of “chasing architectural ghosts” (Katz, 2022: 18), which directly reflects on these types of spaces’ erratic position. The available documentation and the memory of these spaces is often frail or purposely missing (Mbembe, 2002). Acknowledging these gaps and lack of material evidence, and

excavating ways around them in order to create access to this information, can represent resistance and build representation, and that is what I set out to do.

My dissertation project was primarily based on archival research. My fieldwork consisted of visiting local and national archives and doing site visits and spatial analysis, which I documented using photographs, videos, audio recordings, drawings and informal interviews. Between 2018 and 2023 I conducted fieldwork in Brazil, in the states of Ceará, Acre, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Pará, Maranhão, and the Federal District (Brasília), as well as at the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, in the United States. Additionally, I consulted further U.S and Brazilian digital archives. The majority of the documentation I used was from local archives based in Fortaleza and national records based in Rio de Janeiro. I followed the paths of the *retirantes Nordestinos* going from the state of Ceará, to Pará and finally to Acre, both as a way of trying to find physical evidence and traces of the spaces through which they passed, and to investigate each one of these states' local archives for specific documentation regarding these migrants' arrival and passage.

While working in the Brazilian state of Ceará in 2018 and 2019, I was able to visit four of the seven areas where former facilities of the 1932 concentration camps were located, including two sites in Fortaleza, the state's capital city (Pirambú, or Urubú, camp, and Octavio Bonfim) as well as Patú camp, in Senador Pompeu, and Buriti camp, in Crato. I also partnered with the Secretariat of Culture of Ceará as a visiting scholar at the Department of Heritage and Preservation in 2019. There, I helped write the state-level landmarking process for the concentration camp of Patú, the only one of the seven former camp facilities where there are still physical remnants left (2019-2022)¹¹. Partnerships with local institutions, local scholars, and independent researchers have helped guide my work and put me in contact with people and resources otherwise unavailable to me.

Considering the scarcity of images or official documentation of most of the sites I study, especially the concentration camps, I often resorted to medical reports as some of my main sources of inquiry. In addition to a few images from local newspaper articles from the early 1930s and 1940s, medical documents from the Department of Drought Works, and from SESP (*Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública*/Special Service of Public Health) were the main records where I was able to find photographs of the 1930s concentration camps and the 1940s *pousos*. The 1940s case study, however, was more broadly documented than the 1930s camps, considering that the 1942 *pousos* were recruitment centers used for a national campaign organized by the Brazilian federal government and financed by U.S. agencies. Therefore, in addition to medical reports, I was also able to find photographs, drawings, flyers, and sketches of the *pousos*' facilities as part of the state's advertisement campaigns trying to engage and enlist workers to migrate North. I

¹¹ The Patú camp became a municipal landmark in 2019 and by July 2022 the area was also recognized as a State Heritage site by the Ceará State Secretariat of Culture. Remnants of constructions still standing date from 1922 – built originally by a British company to support the construction of a local dam (Patú dam). While these buildings and constructions were also adapted and used in 1932-1933 as support facilities for the Patú concentration camp, refugees were placed in large temporary shacks made of timber and sticks that no longer exist.

find it important to acknowledge the specificities of these two types of archives (medical reports and national propaganda) and what they represent in terms of control of the population and the territory in order to build a modern national project. I also like to point out how planning principles were highly reliant on moral and hygienist approaches, a topic I will further discuss throughout the dissertation.

Aside from the discussed archives, and regarding the 1930s concentration camps, I also relied on secondary sources from literature, especially descriptions of camp spaces from the noteworthy fictional book “*O Quinze*” (“The Fifteenth”), by Rachel de Queiroz. As I’ll further discuss, Queiroz was a member of a group of writers from the modernist Northeastern School, and the first woman to belong to the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Similarly to the novelist Graciliano Ramos in Alagoas, Queiroz experienced life in Fortaleza during the drought of 1915 firsthand (Figure 0.2). “*O Quinze*” is studied by local literary scholars as a trustworthy documentation of the city and the state of Ceará during that period – even considering its fictional narrative (Câmara, 2015)¹².



Figure 0.2: House made of junco (type of wood/construction method) in the hinterland of Ceará, where Rachel de Queiroz wrote “*O Quinze*”. Fortaleza, CE. 193-?. Black and white photograph, 12 x 23 cm.
Source: Biblioteca Nacional/Iconografia.

¹² While there are few visual materials available that help portray what the concentration camps of 1932 used to be, I understand the need to interpret different cultural references that can help us reconstruct and imagine the general feeling of what these spaces once were. I would also like to acknowledge current cultural references and productions that either mention or are based on the history of Ceará’s concentration camps. These include recent the docu-fiction piece “*Currais*” (Brazil, 2019, Directors Sabina Colares and David Aguiar), which portrays the journey and search of a man going across Ceará’s *sertão* to learn about the concentration camps’ histories; and the 2019 *samba-enredo* (samba theme/plot) from Rio de Janeiro’s Samba School Paraíso da Tuiuti called “*O Salvador da Pátria/ The savior*,” in which one of the parades from their main performance at the *Sambodrome* (carnival exhibition place for the Samba school’s parades) was portraying the *flagelados da seca* (drought refugees) sent to the concentration camps.

At the same time, my visit to the state of Acre was particularly engaging considering the research on the 1940s *pousos*. Taking into account that the *pousos* were more recent than the camps, I was able to do unstructured interviews with second generation migrants (or, as I call them, the “Rubber Children,” in reference to their parents being “Rubber Soldiers”). The Rubber Children carry some of their families’ memories (and documents) with them, and are the generation fighting for indemnity regarding their parents’ deeds for the country, as I’ll discuss in **Chapters 4, 5 and 6**. Differently from the 1930s concentration camps, the 1940s experience was much more broadly documented, and the Brazilian National Archives served as one of my main sources of information on this era. Additionally, the governmental operation responsible for sending migrants from Ceará to the Amazon, called SEMTA (Special Service Mobilizing Workers to the Amazon), requested reports and service diaries from some of their head employees, such as SEMTA’s chief of operations Paulo de Assis Ribeiro; as well as Jean Pierre Chabloz, the artist leading SEMTA’s advertisement campaign; and architect Álvaro Vital Brazil, responsible for designing and implementing the *pousos* and recruitment centers. These reports helped me by describing in detail everyday accomplishments and difficulties faced when building and implementing the operations of the *pousos* and recruitment centers.

Lastly, it was also important for me to engage and research within the U.S.-based archives in order to better understand grander arrangements regarding U.S. politics within Brazil and Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century/in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as how these international affairs have influenced building the Brazilian modern state, and, thus, shaping the 1930s concentration camps and 1940s *pousos*. This research has helped me build the basis of a broader contextualization of Brazilian social, political, and economic relations at that time, and situate the two selected case studies within wider and long-lasting internal and external alliances.

Organization

My goal with this dissertation is to bring to light the little-known histories of the Brazilian concentration camps of the 1930s and the *pousos* rest stops and recruitment centers of the 1940s, arguing that these to are two connected case studies and examples of a continuous (and ongoing) history of displacement and segregation within one particular group of the population, the poor and landless *sertanejo nordestino*. By shedding light on these stories through the lenses of the built environment, organizing archival materials and different sources of documentation from spaces and constructions that are no longer standing, I aim to empower the communities that were, and in many ways continue to be, engaged and affected by the existence of these particular spaces.

While I don’t claim this to be a theoretical work, I start this dissertation (**Chapter 1**) by briefly placing my research within the larger theoretical grounds of research fields such as camp studies and refugee studies and within discussions about memory and memorialization.

Chapters 2-5 are considered the core of this dissertation, and they are organized both chronologically, as if following the steps of the displaced populations within different moments in history, and in pairs. First they discuss the *flagelados* and the 1932 concentration camps; second, the rubber soldiers and the *pousos* rest stops and recruitment centers. The first chapter in each pair presents a broader historical contextualization for and social constructs that led to the objectification of the group of people who were considered (1) *flagelados* or (2) Rubber Soldiers. The second chapter in each pair specifically discusses the spaces created to deal with these groups of people in the concentration camps and the *pousos*, respectively. Notice here that I find these pairs to be both complementary in themselves (in order to talk about the spaces, I need to understand who their users were), and complementary to each other (as I see both camps and *pousos* as different iterations of camp spaces, and chronologically, as a continuation to each other).

Chapter 6 starts building towards the conclusion. In this chapter I discuss the current contemporary situation of both camps and *pousos*, and the efforts being made to keep the memories of these places and the people who passed through them alive. In this chapter particularly, I move from a historical narrative into an empirical one, as I describe the current situation of the camps and the *pousos* based not on my extensive archival works, but focused on my fieldwork experiences conducting site visits and interviews.

Finally, in **Chapter 7**, I present my closing considerations, reflecting on how my dissertation work builds a historical narrative that (1) combines the labor history of this one specific group of Brazilian workers and their relation to the built environment history, and (2) discusses the different forms and meanings of memorialization of these temporary yet very much permanent experiences, and the difficult task of physically commemorating things that are barely there. By presenting these case studies side-by-side and as a continuation of each other, I also claim that this type of space and segregation of this particular group of people are cyclical and a socio-spatial typology, the camp, that continues to be reproduced in different ways to this day.

CHAPTER 1: CAN THE CAMPS SPEAK?

Introduction

Before diving into the selected case studies, in this opening chapter I briefly provide context for readers in regards to the broader ongoing theoretical discussions about “camps” and how the Brazilian examples testify to these narratives.

My research and dissertation aim at focusing and delivering a more historical and descriptive analysis of these two selected examples of Brazilian camps (1930s concentration camps and 1940s *pousos*), precisely for their unknown character. I see a need for disclosing the Brazilian camps’ histories and bringing to light their long lost memories as a way of disclosing a much more complex and nuanced part of Brazilian history, and, ultimately, helping empower the people and communities affected by the existence of these spaces.

Yet, I also acknowledge the strength in placing these two South American case studies within a broader modern global history as well as current theoretical frameworks to try to make better sense of them. Displacement, prejudice, and confinement of certain groups of the population was not exclusive to Brazilian Northeasterners. And precisely by learning about other past or contemporary experiences of the Brazilian cases, one can better understand what led to their existence (and continuation) in the first place.

Can the camps speak?

Camps are complex spaces that bring to light broad interdisciplinary perspectives regarding the political, social, and economic conditions in which led to their creation: the actors responsible for their conception and establishment, the people who experienced these facilities, the design and construction of these pieces of equipment, and the memories and subsequent consequences of their existence. In my research, the “camp” is put in a position of protagonism, existing at the same time as a specific case study with its own particularities, and also, because of its recurrence and similar forms of usage, a typology to be observed and to be given a voice. “Camps” are central active agents and actors mediating the historical experience of both those confined to them and those who created the confinement. I see the Brazilian camps as central players and active strategic modern architectural instruments building the changes the country was going through internally and externally, shaping and being shaped by the practices of its time (Mitchell, 2002; Spivak, 1988)¹.

“Camp studies” is a growing field of research of its own within the broader sphere of

¹ This approach to the “camp” as a protagonist is inspired by the writings of Timothy Mitchell, building from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s subaltern theory by analyzing the social, political, and economic complexity of the Malaria outbreak in Egypt in the early 1940s and its multiple players through the lenses of the “mosquito” (Mitchell, 2002).

political geography. Contemporary scholars are often highly influenced by Giorgio Agamben's conceptualization of the camp being the "nomos" of our times (Agamben, 1998) or debate whether we should move forward from this thanatopolitics reading of camps when looking at present-day refugee spatialities (Martin et al, 2020: 744). When looking at the Brazilian case studies, I see them as examples of Agamben's biopolitical view of the camps. At the same time, I argue that while the Brazilian camps were indeed spaces of exception, exclusion, and control, we can also recognize in them new forms of resistance: their agency today is the very acknowledgment of these spaces' existence in the past. The recognition and visibility of the Brazilian camps' histories and the stories of those who experienced these spaces is a tool for understanding their complexity and claiming the rights of their former residents.

Originally set as temporary moments of occupancy built to segregate and manage specific populations, the principles of camps' urbanization were incorporated as planning positions, shaping the infrastructural thinking of modern space in Brazil. The very origin of a camp as a modern institution comes from colonial spatial regimes, working as experimental "laboratories of modernity" for the new (bio)political technologies of control and exploitation while also being a product of modernization and modern architectural technologies, building a biopolitical machine of ordering (Arendt, 1968; Minca, 2015: 75; Katz, 2016: 146). The early twentieth century camps in Brazil were created in a moment of deep political and economic shifts, as the country had just established the abolition of enslavement (1888), as well as shifted from being a monarchy after the deposition of the Emperor Pedro II into the establishment of the First Brazilian Republican regime (1889), a brief transitory moment that was soon followed by President Getúlio Vargas' *coup d'état* (1930) and early modern authoritarian regime. Given this period of instability, the Brazilian camps were created in response to these new and emerging forms of governance and the need for managing both the population and the territory, both building forms of exclusion and, at the same time, fostering expansion and creating new sources of cheap labor (or as Irit Katz (2016) puts it, the "human filling") aimed at the modernization of the country envisioned by planners and political leaders (Katz, 2016: 151).

In both cases presented in this dissertation, camps are officially portrayed by the Brazilian government as temporary spaces of transit as well as spaces of aid and hospitality concerning local drought refugees. Brazilian camps were organized in a similar fashion to today's institutional refugee camps—built with temporary structures that can also be easily dismantled leaving no traces of their existence—managed by humanitarian organizations, where interned populations are both seen as victims and threats, oscillating between being objects of repression and compassion, and an example of how being "at risk" and "a risk" is a thin political line (Fassin, 2005: 376; Stoler, 2012). The Brazilian camps from the 1930s and 1940s were created as a response to the local drought periods, a "state of emergency" that justified building sites of care for the displaced through their containment. Yet, Ceará's camps were used as early instruments of modern urbanization as a tool helping the "emergence of the state," a mechanism to both isolate and control unwanted groups of refugees and at the same time create landmarks of expanded territorial control of the Brazilian inlands by certain

social and political groups.

This “humanitarian and relief” strategy in Brazil also created a facade for a much larger project for social control, taking advantage of vulnerable and desperate people, situating these camps temporally and comparatively within a broader global history of camps: from late-nineteenth century famine camps in British colonies (Chhabria, 2019; Chopra, 2011; Forth, 2017) to early-twentieth century Mexican migrant sugar beet housing in Colorado (Perez, 2017) and mid-twentieth century facilities for the United States-Mexico Bracero Program for temporary agricultural laborers (Loza, 2016). As Michel Agier emphasized, “there is no care without control” (Agier, 2011:04), and the act of isolating the “undesirables” for their assistance and relief was only masking further actions of surveillance, domination, and discipline. “Aid” would also be translated into racial differentiation, at the intersection between migration, race, labor, and the built environment, and the Brazilian camps were an example of portraying that (Nemser, 2017; Weinstein, 2015). Similarly to what Diana Martin *et al.* (2020) described for the camps in the colonies, Brazilian camps were also utilized mainly as a form of labor exploitation, dominating the subjugated populations while also protecting the political status quo and the affirmation of the new regime in practice (Martin *et al.*, 2020: 748). Camps are social technologies that discipline space and the movement of people. They are devices of power that serve as either the product or the effect of sovereign nation-states, which depend on the control of the movement of people and, most precisely, the movement of labor-power (Malkki, 2002: 353).

Nevertheless, the Brazilian camps were indeed temporary facilities that were dismantled after their specific usage by governmental authorities. But similarly to camps elsewhere, while physically ephemeral, the camps’ consequences were very much permanent, and I illustrate that precisely by acknowledging how these mechanisms were used periodically and cyclically. The ephemeral transitory characteristic of the camps is one of the strongest strategies for their continuation and perseverance of their biopolitical order. Erasing the camps’ histories is not just about the erasure of a place, but about the continuous invisibility of the people who passed through these spaces. In that sense, the bio-political control of these populations has never ended. My work is trying to change that by bringing forward the camps’ histories, putting forward the stories of this particular group of people, and, through the visibility of their past, providing them agency moving forward.

The camp and the city

My analysis of the camps is in direct relation to their association with the formation of cities, a topic that has been extensively discussed as the “urban question of camps,” and a difficult topic to be theorized, as Michel Agier acknowledges, considering the “complexity of their urbanity” (Sanyal, 2014; Katz et al, 2018, Agier, 2002). These discussions go beyond the physical form of the spaces, encompassing the social and political status of the users within the space, in a debate that has been long disputed

referring back to the formation of the Greek *polis* (Arendt, 1998: 27)². Using the “urban” has become an important analytical framework for discussing “camps.” Existing approaches look at the camps either as “potential cities,” discussing the urbanity within the camp’s premisses and the rise of new forms of citizenship within its boundaries (Agier, 2011; Martin, 2015), or as part of cities as “urban camps,” considering that today, the majority of displaced populations (the “urban refugees,” as highlighted by Romola Sanyal, 2011) lives in urban areas rather than confined within a single location (Katz et al, 2018: 61; Martin, 2015:10).

Independently of camps’ connection to or within the formation of cities, the camp itself holds a status as a space of exception, and could be understood not as a developmental “stage” for the city but rather its own technology of power, and a “standard resource” of the modern socio-political landscape. Its suspension from the normal juridical order, which it applies to the population it encamps, brings to light the role of the camp less by its processes of urbanity, but mainly through questions of citizenship and identitarian social categories within space (Malkki, 2002: 355). Once these types of settlements are no longer needed or are no longer in use, spaces can vanish without any notice, hence their temporary condition, and their prevailing logic of exclusion considering the lack of physical traces of what was once their existence. The provisional aspect of camps’ physicality, however, is not as transitory when it comes to people’s social and political status: this is the “permanent” state of exception of camps that Giorgio Agamben refers to (1998).

While acknowledging camps’ independent status within the modern socio-political landscape, when looking at the Brazilian case studies and considering camps’ ephemerality, I see them as also a tool, a piece of infrastructure used towards the construction of the city and a strategic modern architectural mechanism that is dismissed or dispersed once it achieves its colonizing goal. It is because of camps’ status as their own technology of power that these spaces reappear in another time/space for another cycle of conquest. The *modus operandi* of camps is constantly recycled, in the form of top-down spaces, similarly subjected to the brutality of the state. According to Irit Katz (2016), camps are instruments that evolve according to changing territorial and political needs. Beyond being used and understood only during a state of emergency, the consequences and long-lasting effects of the camps on national and local scales can also establish and shift certain geopolitical orders by managing and controlling the population as well as the territory (Katz, 2016). Camps conquer territories as temporary spaces that both contain mobility and also reconfigure and reallocate borders (Martin et al, 2020: 757). But even after these spaces are formally dismantled, the logic of exception prevails (Agamben, 1998: 170), and bare life (*zoe*)—a life stripped of any right, value, and political life (*bios*)—continues through different forms: from the

² *Polis* was the city-state community structure of ancient Greece. Here in particular I am referencing Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the Aristotelian *polis* from the perspective of its political realm, considering the important distinction of the body of citizens and their level of participation in governing. For Arendt, the *polis* was not about its physical location, but the organization of the people acting and speaking together: the space for debate, and consequently, the space of exclusion, where everybody outside the *polis*—slaves and barbarians—was deprived of a way of life in which speech and only speech was the central concern of their life (Arendt, 1998: 27).

lack of rights of the encamped (or formerly encamped) people, to the lack of remembrance of their past paths. According to Giorgio Agamben (1998), the *camp* and not the *polis* is the prevailing model in our late modernity in terms of our social organization (the *nomos* of our time)³. Didier Fassin does not see Agamben's dichotomy between the camp and the *polis* as idealized and marginalized spaces in the biopolitical paradigm of the West, but he argues we should look at the tensions between the two figures. Once removed and alienated from the *polis*, and confined to the camps, as Fassin explains, these groups of excluded people were both "of" and "at" biopolitical risk, confined to the outskirts of the nation, while at the same time within its very network of security and surveillance (Fassin, 2005: 381). Those once spatially confined will continually be excluded from the *polis* by their enduring position of living a non-political life, thus continuing to be subjected to various forms of violence without legal consequences. Therefore, considering that the *polis* was already in itself an arrangement of political segregation, the camp spaces are only exacerbating this pattern of exclusion (now physically). The state (and space) of exception, according to Agamben, "which was essentially a temporary suspension of the juridico-political order, now becomes a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life" (Agamben, 1998: 175). Therefore, by looking at and studying the camps—even the spaces that are no longer active—I am studying the enduring spaces of power built by the logics of exception and exclusion within the city.

Camps' memories and identities

Even after the camps were ended in policy, questions of memory, memorialization, and erasure of these spaces that were no longer physically present highlight the effects of camps as devices of power, consolidating class disputes and strategic collective abstractions. Camp's memories reveal a profound truth (Fassin, 2005: 379). Yet, accessing or finding evidence of these memories, or archives that hold some of these spaces' stories, is one of the greatest challenges of my work. Archives are produced within regimes of power (Chhabria, 2019). Archives (or lack thereof) document the particular political context in which they are conceived and maintained: who owns them, on whose authority they depend, and under what the conditions they are accessed (Mbembe, 2002: 23). The archive is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, granting of a privileged status to certain documents over others, and therefore, those documents should be considered not as data, but as status (Mbembe, 2002: 20). At the same time, the role of the historian decoding archives, creating authority and transforming original material, presenting and making public their findings,

³ Jenny Edkins (2000) explained how Agamben had chosen the "camp" as a paradigmatic form of the political space of modernity in the West considering that this type of space first meant a clear separation of the biopolitical and the political, and while built as spaces of exception, in the twentieth century their former confinement transgressed these boundaries and started to coincide with the normal order, entering the zone of indistinction. Therefore, Agamben sees camps as both the places for the organization of state power through discipline and objectification (as described by Foucault's biopolitics, in his studies of the asylums and the prisons), but also as the spaces of possible emancipation (Edkins, 2000: 7). Yet, camps' permanence relies on the persistence of the sovereign power within and beyond the spaces of exception, increasing the inscription of individuals within the state order – the very sovereign power they wanted to liberate themselves from in the first place (Edkins, 2000: 19).

is also a subjective experience (Mbembe, 2002: 25). On one hand, the historian has the power to bring to light the histories of those who were once considered “unarchivable,” as Achille Mbembe would put it. On the other hand, historians are also building a certain selected narrative as well. Thus possessing “memory” becomes a political statement. Access to memory builds (or positions) representation, and withholding the influence of how representation is established in the public eye is a powerful tool. Public memory helps build and shape people and situations in the public eye. To reclaim and unfold certain memories is to recognize the multiplicity of narratives that are often left behind, hidden and untold, and also acknowledge that there is not just one fixed “factual” past (Hall, 1990: 226).

The process of reconstructing the pasts is also an attempt to describe forms of violence licensed in the present (Hartman, 2008). Whose histories are kept and reproduced? Whose memories are hidden, erased, or simply judged as not worthy of attention? Who has the right of memory as a form of representation? (Mbembe, 2002; Jordanova, 2006; Robinson, 2010; Stoler, 2009; Trouillot, 1995). Designed as spaces of exception, the Brazilian camps, therefore, were extremely successful given their goal of being transitory, and establishing those who were encamped as less than citizens and thus with no particular importance for having their stories told or kept. Despite the camp’s once-vast network of confinement, today these spaces are largely forgotten, “hushed into subaltern silence” (Forth, 2017: 2).

Their role as a space of exception also strips camps of a connotation of “place”—according to Agamben’s definition of camp as a political concept, built from the idea of zones of indistinction, and their role in the production of sovereign power—and renders them merely spaces of transit for bare life. In this sense, camps are thus true spaces of exception, gaining full control of their inhabitants’ bodies. Yet, other interpretations of “place” emerge from lived experiences. These views also challenge Agamben’s perspective of the camps and encamped ones as “passive” in the face of sovereign power, conceiving of these spaces in terms of their capacity to exist as sites for political identity, contestation, and resistance (Carter-White and Minca, 2020: 2; Katz, 2015: 84). Disclosing the stories of the camps—and of those encamped—therefore acts as a way of bringing to light the untold and marginalized public histories through the acknowledgment of “place,” as defined by Dolores Hayden: “a complex and multiple process which involves the intricate relationships among history, place-specific memory, and the preservation of the landscape” (Hayden, 1995: 227). Nevertheless, camps are ephemeral facilities, thus *officially* made to be (officially) forgotten. Once their purpose is *officially* achieved, structures are *officially* dismantled, survivors move on, and memory and remembrance are not necessarily *officially* recollected.

Being temporary or ephemeral does not mean bearing no place-specific history, of course. It is worth emphasizing the difference between the *official* agenda for the camp spaces, and the multiple stories they portray. Looking at camps specifically, the very act of remembrance is a form of bringing agency to them. The contrast between the modernist total approach of perceiving the camps from a bird’s-eye view versus a closer perspective of these spaces reveals that there is more to them than bare life. And this is where we identify the power of the regimes of representation, where the concept of

building an *identity* is something instrumental towards this shift (Carter-White and Minca, 2020: 3; Hayden, 1995: 228). Unfolding the camps' and encamped ones' identities challenges the concept of bare life. Identity is a social construct, a discourse that is "placed" and that can serve as a way of building stereotypes and erasing individualities, but at the same time, can be used as a tool of resistance and empowerment as the politics of identity, the politics of position (Hall, 1990: 226).

Studying the Brazilian camps has proven to be particularly methodologically challenging precisely because of both the lack of physical traces of these spaces and missing official documentation. More importantly, the minimal acknowledgement of these spaces from their former inhabitants and from the second and third generations and an associated lack of pursuing and embracing a common identity, and thus the lack of control of inhabitants' and descendents' own narratives—especially when it comes to the 1930s concentration camps⁴—presents methodological challenges. It is important to acknowledge also that *identity* is not just made of one vector of similarity and continuity, but also a vector of difference and rupture (Hall, 1990: 226). There is not just one single identity built from a shared past for all former *sertanejos nordestinos* (backcountry people from Northeast), nor do the experiences in the different concentration camps of the 1930s and recruitment centers of the 1940s configure one single history.

Moreover, *sertanejos nordestinos* (poor and landless climate refugees who were constantly in transit) did not necessarily see camp spaces through a sense of "place", but as just one more stop in their arduous journey looking for a better future. Nevertheless, it is precisely these peoples' heterogeneity living through transformation and difference that made them constantly produce and reproduce themselves anew, a common characteristic of most diasporic populations sharing common experiences of migration and displacement (Hall, 1990: 235).

Sertanejos nordestinos became the main working class labor force, migrating across the country to find the next opportunity for work. Beyond the 1930s camps, or the 1940s *pousos*, it is possible to follow these landless refugees' paths further into Brazilian labor and migratory history: the construction of Brasília in the late 1950s, and the need for industrial blue-collar workers in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 1970s and 1980s and so forth. Through time, the Brazilian camps worked as confinement zones, aid spaces, labor centers, and recruitment facilities, ultimately serving as infrastructure that was instrumental for building the modern state.

If these "camps" do not recall a sense of "place" from those who experienced them, considering that there are no physical traces left of their construction and no (or very little) formal documentation about their existence: **how can one read spaces of transit for their status of permanence?** I believe the answer lies in observing the cyclical patterns of displacement these types of spaces build, and the legacy that these spaces

⁴ As I will explain further in the dissertation, differently from the 1930s concentration camps, the 1940s *pousos* for the Rubber Soldiers have been more broadly acknowledged collectively considering the fight for the possibility of indemnity by the national government to the former inhabitants and/or their direct families.

left. This legacy, nevertheless, is less direct, based not on physical remnants of the camps themselves, but on the social construction and memorialization of the *sertanejo nordestino* identity as cheap labor force, which is often remembered because of the infrastructure projects such as the roads and dams built by the hard labor of the refugees and migrants concentrated in these camps' temporary locations in different periods of time. This legacy highlights how the concept of building infrastructure is as much a social as a physical construction, as much a project of nation-building as an effort to discipline and control a rural proletariat on the move.

CHAPTER 2: DROUGHT THE CONSTRUCT OF *NORDESTE* AND THE *FLAGELADOS*

Introduction

Similarly to Chapter 1, where I place my dissertation work within broader scholarship and a theoretical background regarding “camp studies,” Chapter 2 is crucial to understand what the conditions were that helped build the grounds for the creation of spaces such as the 1932 concentration camps and 1942 *pousos* recruitment centers and rest stops in Brazil. This current chapter grounds and contextualizes the selected case studies, tying my work into broader debates of modernization globally and to the construction of the modern Brazilian state.

My research takes place at the turn of the twentieth century into the first half of the twentieth century, an extremely turbulent period worldwide (especially in Western nations and their colonies) known as the early industrialization period, with consequences such as the rural exodus, early globalization, and, in many places, the *Belle Époque* (Gilded Age). This was a time when there was a complete shift in the modes of production and the global economy, effecting social and political changes at a fast pace in examples and symbols of the height of capitalist modernity.

No differently from the rest of the world, Brazil was facing drastic changes, and also going through a very intense political shift. The country was only gradually leaving its colonial status behind, yet still very much reproducing similar regimes of power. The recent abolition of enslaved work (1888) was also the moment when the country declared the beginning of the first Republican Regime (1889), officially establishing itself as independent of Portuguese rulers (even though Brazil had declared independence from Portugal in 1822, which was followed by an imperial regime). At the same time, a drastic drought ravaged part of the country, contributing to a crisis in agricultural production, exports, and economic relations, as well as labor conditions.

The “Great Drought” of 1877 had a planetary magnitude (a consequence from the El Niño effect), with drought and famine reported not only in Brazil but on the entire tropical monsoon belt plus northern China and North Africa – areas that are also known as colonial or former colonial regions. This global subsistence crisis was soon followed by two others, right before the turn of the century, which also included destructive epidemics (Davis, 2001:6). Globally, this meant a crisis in production and exports of primary goods, and the beginning of a new era in imperial powers based on the capitalist market economy. This also meant the need for new forms of labor management and the rise of the **camp spaces** as both an answer to the economic crisis and as instruments of social control and sanitary surveillance, which shaped the principles of modern urban planning (Forth, 2017:22; Hailey, 2009).

Camp spaces were originally tied to colonial expansion for launching military conquests, used as tools for occupying new territories and controlling local population (be they prisoners of war or civilians and workers under surveillance). By the mid-to-late

nineteenth century, the model of the military camp was repurposed, becoming the blueprint for the planning of other types of camps, such as concentration camps and famine camps, both products of colonial warfare and entwined activities of imperial military and medical policing⁵. Camps symbolized colonial sovereignty not only by dominating, isolating, and controlling certain groups of the population, but also by strategically configuring ritual displays of cultural power and dominance.

The rural exodus at the turn of the century due to the industrial revolution or the droughts meant a rapid increase in urban population, but no real infrastructure in the cities to support this rapid growth. Hygienists' approaches began to take place – which also meant further segregation. Camps once again became both a symbol and a mechanism created to provisionally deal with the magnitude of these fast-paced changes and the need for aid, control, and organization of the arrival of these large groups of the population. Overcrowding gave way to epidemics, which affected both newcomers to the cities and those who were already living in them. Health (or disease) is one of the greatest examples of the problems of human interdependence: epidemics and their effects are a public concern that involve all members of society equally (Hochman, 1998: 29). This “socialist dimension” to viruses and microbes called the attention of the elites politically and intellectually, leading discussions about sanitary reform movements⁶. The policy of building camps was part of these sanitary efforts, working as a *cordon sanitaire* to try to isolate and quarantine those affected outside of urban boundaries⁷.

⁵ Some of the first iterations of concentration camps were a result of colonial conflicts such as the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the Cuban War of Independence (1895-98), and the Philippine War (1899-1902), and worked as a calculative technology of population control and management (Minca, 2015). Irrespective of their level of vulnerability or rebellion, encamped people represented official threats to the maintenance of imperial power, and therefore needed to be isolated and controlled (Forth, 2017). Despite sharing the same terminology, concentration camps had different iterations depending on locality. While British camps in South Africa were built as systems to control and surveil displaced populations, the Spanish colonial camps in Cuba, known as (*re*)*concentrados*, were used to evacuate the countryside, avoiding the advancement of guerrillas (Forth, 2017; Smith and Stucki, 2011). At the same time, famine camps in India worked as relief camps, taking the form of segregated enclosures at the outskirts of the urban centers built to avoid the social and sanitary hazards of drought migrants in the cities. There are several commonalities between the famine camps in India and the concentration camps in Brazil.

⁶ The cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century in Europe and the U.S. represented a turning point and start of these movements, calling for the need for a collective public response to prevent and combat the dissemination of diseases.

⁷ While camps would isolate and control unwanted populations on the outskirts of the urban perimeter, modern urban renewal projects such as the well-known renovation of Paris from 1853-1870 led by Georges-Eugène Haussmann and commissioned by Emperor Napoleon III were known for their *tabula rasa* approach to the city, demolishing older medieval neighborhoods deemed overcrowded and unhealthy and displacing and evicting the poor populations. In Brazil, a famous episode of urban renewal inspired by Haussmann's work in Europe was the demolition of the *Morro do Castelo* (Castle Hill) in 1921, located at the city center of the city of Rio de Janeiro. *Morro do Castelo* was a particularly iconic place in the history of the city, as it was home to one of the main and earliest Portuguese forts, considered one of the birthplaces of the city's creation. Through the centuries, *Morro do Castelo* became home to occupations, informal settlements, and tenements, and thus stigmatized as unhealthy and dangerous. Racist cleansing ideas were being propagated while the city had been previously damaged by a series of epidemics at the turn of the century. At the same time, sanitary hygienist perspectives were used as justification to remove the hills, which was done right before the celebration of the centenary of Brazilian

At the same time that modernization efforts in urban centers were taking place worldwide, with the construction of wide avenues, parks, and new sewage systems, fountains, and aqueducts, in Brazil there were also endeavors at a larger state-wide scale to build provisional infrastructure by the government to try contain or weaken the effects of the dry periods in the *sertão* (semi-arid hinterland) by building railroads, dams, reservoirs, irrigation systems, and such. With these series of public works, there was also a need for employers, and this meant offering the low-wage jobs precisely to those who had lost their previous means of survival. Camp spaces gained a new layer, becoming justified not just as spaces for aid, control, and isolation, but as a possible resource for cheap manpower for the city and the state.

The new forms of imperial control based on the market economy arose precisely out of this context: the search for modernization as a symbol of progress. Infrastructure and hygienics were key elements and an entrypoint for countries such as the U.S. to start building relationships within the American continent, which would later help them tighten political and economic reliance. Private international agencies such as the Rockefeller Foundation would first approach countries within Latin America using humanitarian aid and philanthropy as an entrypoint. The U.S. imperial expansion started with campaigns to control yellow fever and hookworm disease in order to foster international networks of scientific exchange (and mapping of the territories) promoting modernization across the region (Amador, 2015:2). Increased U.S. influence would also impact local concepts of eugenics, as I will further present in this chapter. Furthermore, the conceptualization and development of the first Brazilian national agency for infrastructural improvements (IFOCS/Inspectorate for Works to Combat Droughts), established in 1909, followed the models of disease eradication programs and irrigation projects organized by the Rockefeller Foundation and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in U.S. western and southern states, as well as technical development efforts from British Colonial India and elsewhere (Buckley, 2017: 11).

Considering this broader overview and international perspective of the social, political, and economic conditions at the turn of the twentieth to the twentieth century, in this introductory chapter I start by precisely looking at the conditions that made *Nordeste* its own region. I look at the early 1877 droughts in the Brazilian *sertão* and the *Nordeste Seco* and how these conditions' consequences extend much farther than a climatic phenomenon. I also further provide context for the reader about the relation of President and dictator Getúlio Vargas' modernization efforts and the role of the elites and international interventions in the process of nation-building (Secreto, 2007; Buckley, 2017), and how public health and sanitary programs were key elements in the Brazilian developmental agenda at that time (Hochman, 1998), ultimately bringing to light the history of prejudice against *nordestinos* populations (Ab'Saber, 1999; Albuquerque Júnior, 1999; Morales, 2002). Furthermore, I argue that by looking at the Northeast region in particular, it is possible to explain and understand a great part of Brazilian history in the early twentieth century.

independence, in 1922, symbolizing the transformation of Rio de Janeiro into a model of national progress.

Terrible years: droughts in the *sertão* at the turn of the twentieth century



Figure 2.1: Brazilian map highlighting the state of Ceará and its capital city, Fortaleza, as well as indicating the location of ten of the largest Brazilian cities at the turn of the twentieth century.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

Geography: *Nordeste Seco*

According to geographer Aziz Nacib Ab'Sáber (1999), there are three major semi-arid regions in South America: the Guajira region, between Venezuela and Colombia; the “Southern Cone,” in Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador; and the “*Nordeste Seco*” (dry Northeast), in Brazil. What characterizes a semi-arid region is its climate, hydrology, and phytogeography. These areas have in common low levels of humidity, scarcity of annual rainfall, irregularity in the rhythm of precipitation, prolonged periods of water shortage, physically and geologically problematic soils, and the absence of perennial rivers.

Brazil's semi-arid northeastern hinterland, the "*Nordeste Seco*," which is also known as the *sertão*⁸, comprises a total area of 969,598.4 square kilometers, encompassing 1,133 counties in the states of Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe, as well as the northern portion of the state of Minas Gerais (EMBRAPA/*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*/ Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, 2022⁹). This area is home to 23 million Brazilians – including four million landless peasants, popularly known as *flagelados*. This area in Brazil is one of the most populated semi-arid regions among all existing dry lands in the tropics or between the tropics (Ab'Saber, 1999: 7). The Brazilian *Nordeste Seco* is closer to the equator line than it is to the tropics, although the region's climate is still considered "tropical," which means having two well-defined seasons: one very dry and the other moderately rainy (but in this case, with strong ruptures of the rainy season over the years). The *sertão* is considered a paradoxical sub-desert region, as it is extensively served by hydrographic networks, but has intermittent water flows in the rivers that depend on the rhythm of the dry and rainy seasons (Ab'Saber, 1999: 13).

⁸ At first the term "*sertão*" was used by early Portuguese settlers to describe all unexplored inland territories in the colony, but by the time DNOCS was created, "*sertão*" was used to specifically designate the northeast's drought zone.

⁹ This information can be found on EMBRAPA's website, under the thematic area "Convivência com a seca." Available at: <https://www.embrapa.br/tema-convivencia-com-a-seca>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

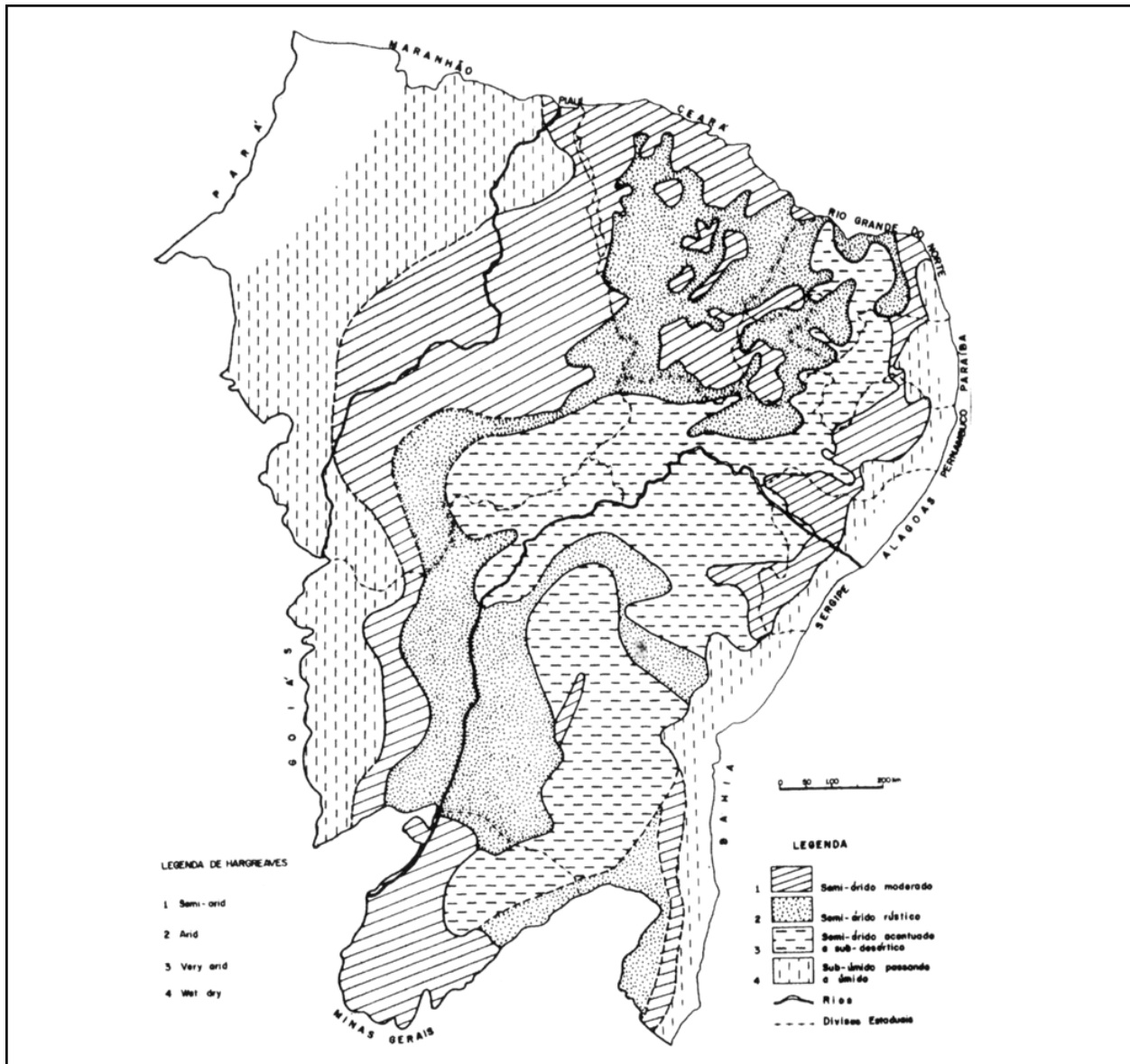


Figure 2.2: Spatial distribution of drought incidences in the Great Northeast.

Source: Ab'Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. "Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma Geografia Humana Sofrida." *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 12.

While periodic droughts in the northeast represented a persistent challenge to the region's agricultural production and livelihood of its population, the unequal social and economic conditions of the area and collapsed state programs of regional development led to a generalized underdevelopment of the *sertão* (Ab'Saber, 1999: 8). The intermittent droughts that plagued the region created forced discontinuities in rural production leading to massive unemployment among those who did not have access to land, relegating them to the potential condition of migrants. Thus, the *Nordeste Seco* region was granted the historical role of supplying a cheap labor force to almost all other regions of the country. Landless northeasterners migrated to the most varied directions

across the region and the country, looking for jobs and better living conditions (Ab'Saber, 1999: 26).

There are records regarding the droughts in the *Nordeste Seco* region dating from as early as the sixteenth century available, but these climate-related issues were recorded as a larger problem only after the white population penetrated the backlands as cattle ranchers in the eighteenth century. Cattle ranches in the hinterlands expanded from the former political and economic center of Brazil, the colonial sugar-exporting coast (Buckley, 2017:1). Ranchers would report on the drought crisis and the consequential damages suffered to the Portuguese crown, asking the King to send more slaves to replace those who died of hunger (Alves, 2003: 32). Some of the worst drought periods in the Brazilian Northeast region between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries were in 1723-27, 1744-45, 1776-78, 1790-93, 1831, 1844-46, 1877-79, and 1932-1933¹⁰. The drought of 1942, which is one of the periods I discuss in this research, was only considered a “partial drought” in comparison to the other droughts mentioned, with few real consequences to the state of Ceará (Alves, 2003: 239). EMBRAPA (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*/Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation) estimates that every 100 years there are between 18 and 20 years that have intense droughts.

¹⁰ This information can be found at EMBRAPA's website, under the thematic area “Convivencia com a seca.” Available at: <https://www.embrapa.br/tema-convivencia-com-a-seca>. Last accessed March 24th, 2024.

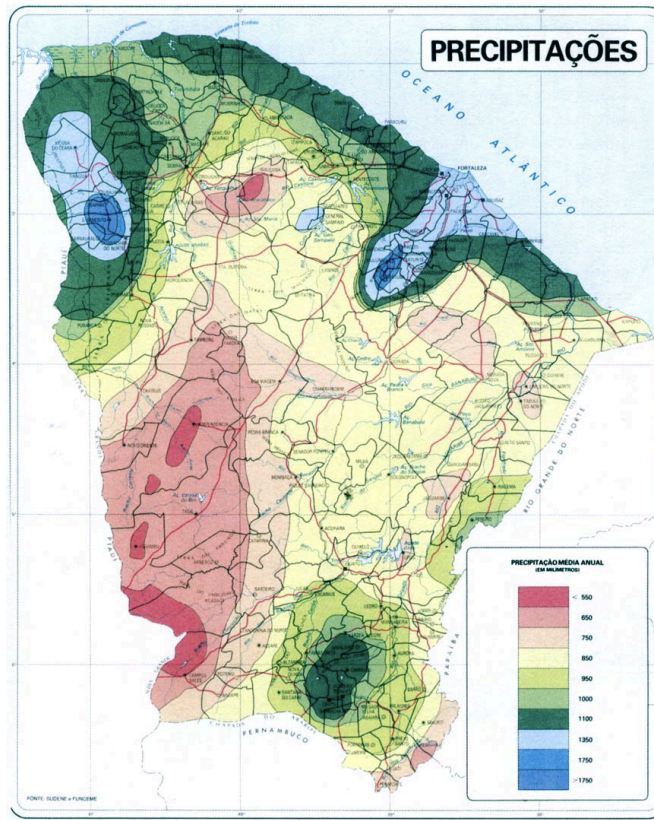


Figure 2.3: Characteristics of atmospheric circulation in the state of Ceará. This map shows the humid and dry areas of Ceará. Notice here how the hinterland has lower precipitation. Red represents the lowest precipitation rates and blue the highest.

Source: Ab'Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. "Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma geografia humana sofrida." *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 28.

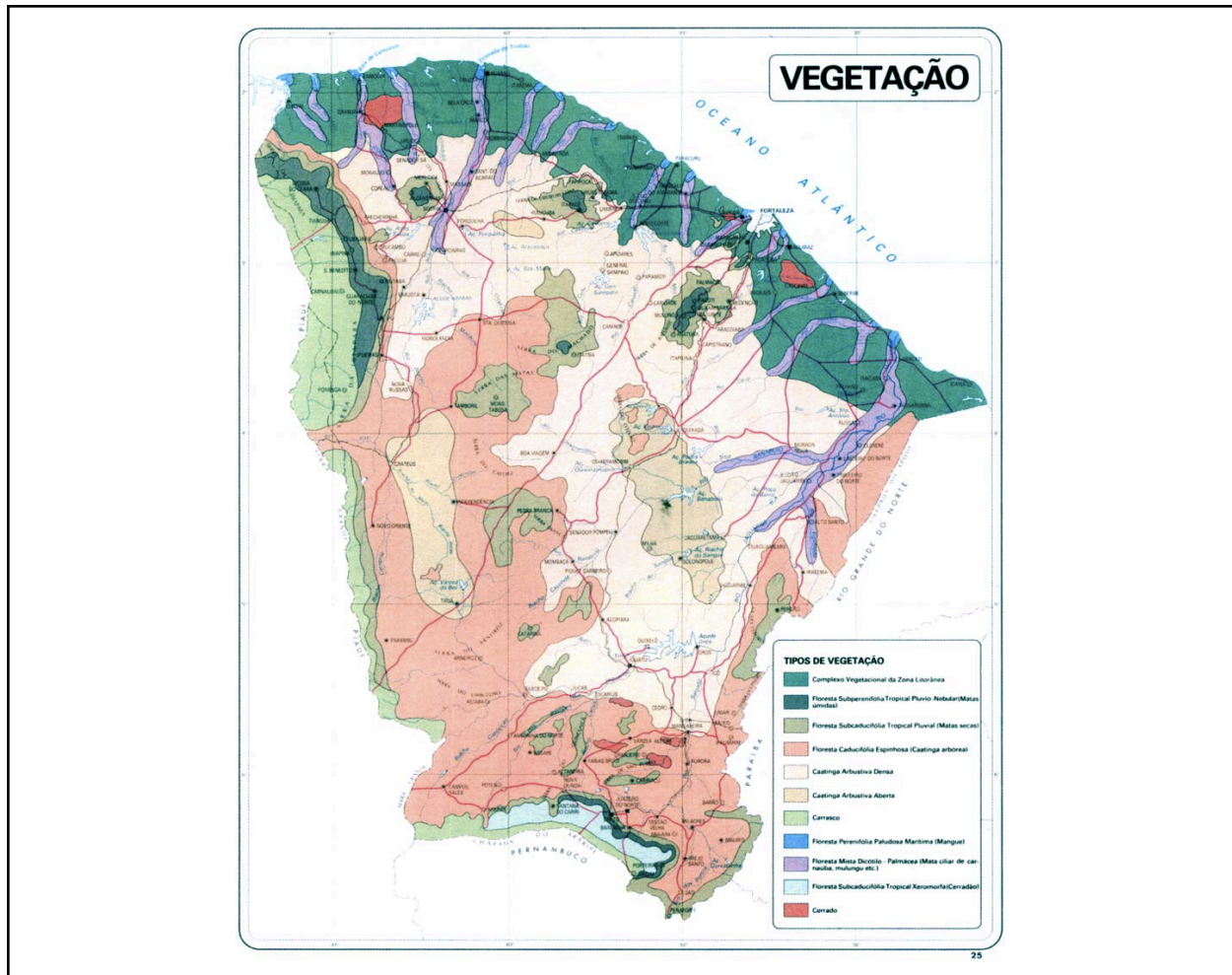


Figure 2.4: Types of vegetation in the state of Ceará. It is possible to recognize the predominance of the dry *caatinga* vegetation in the hinterlands (shades of pink/orange).
Source: Ab'Saber, Aziz. 1999. Nacib. "Dossiê Nordeste Seco: Sertão e Sertanejos uma Geografia Humana Sofrida." *Revista Estudos Avançados*, 13(36): 29.

Early droughts, early governmental responses: migration towards the cities

The 1877 drought in the *sertão Nordestino* was a particularly significant one not only for its devastating outcomes and duration, enduring for almost three consecutive years, but also for the political and economic context in which this climate disaster was unfolding locally and globally. As Mike Davis reminds us, El Niño's impact in 1877 reached multiple locations, with the drought's effects also amplified by the worst global recession of the nineteenth century (Davis, 2001: 62). Unemployment in industrial centers led to a declined demand for tropical and colonial products as well as an increase in agricultural exports with the expansion of railroads and the opening of the Suez Canal, which also led to intensified competition and falling prices of agricultural goods.

In Brazil specifically, the 1877 drought is known as the "*grande seca*" (the great drought), with extremely high death tolls of over 500,000 people, which represented

about 5% of the country's population at that time. Ceará was the most affected state of all. While the Brazilian constitution of 1824 guaranteed subsistence as a right to every Brazilian citizen, the local authorities did not manage to meet the expectations of the *sertanejos* (people from the *sertão*) as the drought gripped. *Flagelado* populations fleeing the inlands were either shipped at imperial expense to other provinces, especially Amazonas and Pará, or moved towards the coast and capital cities by foot or by train¹¹. The drought of 1877 marked an important moment in Ceará's history. This was the first time masses of displaced populations were being directed towards the cities instead of toward other rural inland areas. "Migration by 1877 was not anymore about the movement between dry lands and humid areas, but between the countryside and the cities" (Neves, 2000: 50). The decline in rural production due not only to the droughts but also to the global recession led to massive unemployment in agriculture, encouraging migrants to look for sources of work elsewhere. While not all landowners in the northeast agreed with the massive exodus of their workers to other states, the influx of refugees in Fortaleza, Ceará's capital city, was unforeseen. The "drought" was certainly an environmental issue, but it also had profound social and political implications. The state and municipal governmental authorities had few tools at their disposal to overcome the dry period, and instead turned their attention to controlling the circulation of refugees in the capital city, where overcrowding and lack of sanitation led to massive smallpox outbreaks¹².

Modern Fortaleza: Herbster's Master Plan

The conception of the concentration camps in Ceará is directly related to Fortaleza's spatial formation and expansion, and more precisely, to the city's (mainly elite populations and landowners) reaction to its sudden growth boom by the end of the nineteenth century. Even though the city's formal urbanization plan was only first implemented in the mid-nineteenth century, by observing the Fortaleza's history and occupation, it is possible to recognize in the urban form early colonial power dynamics that prevailed and were maintained throughout the years.

The first formal organization of the city plan of Fortaleza (called *Plano de Edificação*/ building plan) was established in 1812 by Lieutenant Colonel of Engineers Antônio José da Silva Paulet. Before Silva Paulet, Fortaleza was considered a village, and had streets and constructions following the meandering paths of the local Pajeú River. Silva Paulet chose to ignore the original order of the city, and implement a grid system, inspired by a traditional and dominant Portuguese urban model (Girão, 1997: 77). Following Silva Paulet, in 1859 engineer and architect João Adolfo Herbster was hired by Fortaleza's city hall to design and implement a new Expansion and Growth Plan for

¹¹ This migratory wave towards the northern parts of the country was later considered the "first rubber boom" in the Amazon region.

¹² The date December 10th, 1878 became known as the "*Dia dos Mil Mortos*" (the day of the thousand deaths) in Fortaleza, when 1,004 people were buried on the same day due to a combination of famine, overcrowding, and the smallpox epidemic. Source: Firmo, Erico. "O Dia dos Mil Mortos." *Jornal O Povo Online*, Fortaleza: 2019. Available at: <https://especiais.opovo.com.br/odiadosmilmortos/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

Fortaleza, continuing the previously imposed orthogonal logic of the existing urban fabric, but considering the city's expected expansion. Fortaleza's Herbster's Plan (1859) was based on the grid, following concentric (semi-circle) vectors of growth. The need for this new master plan arose because the city was growing exponentially by the mid-nineteenth century. According to historian Raimundo Girão (1997 [1959]), "Ceará's transactions with foreign ports grew satisfactorily [...] The entries and exits from 1858 to 1863 grew 65%" (Girão, 1997:104). Cotton-exporting businesses led by local colonial merchants and international companies using enslaved labor started gaining commercial attention internationally; therefore, land values were changing significantly. Not only that, but after Brazil's independence (1822), Fortaleza became one of the main political-administrative centers in the country (Andrade, 2012: 87). The need for modernization arrived with the implementation of basic infrastructure for commercial and administrative purposes. With Herbster's new plan, "the city's progress was now evident [...] with wide and clean streets with sidewalks" (Girão, 1997: 105). Nevertheless, Herbster's plan was also very invasive. The enlargement of the streets and implementation of infrastructure forced many people out of their properties, as their houses or lots did not fit into the new grid. This overpowering imposing strategy of urban control and organization was also evident with the government's response to the arrival of drought refugees by the late 1870s, and the isolated placement of the newcomers within the city's boundaries, as I will later explain.

An important fact to highlight is the hiring process of João Adolfo Herbster as the person behind Fortaleza's 1859 and 1877 master plans. Herbster was born in Recife, Pernambuco and his parents were from Switzerland and France. While there are no records of Herbster's educational path, there is evidence of him spending part of his adolescence and young adult life studying and working in Paris within the civil construction sector, which granted him a title of engineer when he returned to Brazil in the 1850s (Castro, 1994: 54). Herbster's unofficial and unproved technical education as an engineer is particularly relevant. Architectural historian José Liberal de Castro (1994) explained that once Herbster was hired by Fortaleza's city hall to work as the province's head engineer in 1857, part of the directions and decisions regarding the design of the 1859 (and later 1875 extension) master plans were already imposed on him by his predecessors and by the congressmen, such as the grid (also known as checkerboard) system (Castro, 1994: 58). Despite being attributed as the author of the master plan, according to Liberal de Castro, Herbster would have limited voice in the ultimate decisions made regarding the plan, and would work simply as a technician, an employee of the city hall (Castro, 1994:84)¹³. It is worth emphasizing also that Fortaleza's bourgeoisie played an important and influential role within the local government, influencing decisions related to how the city was being built and administered, and were oftentimes the city hall administrators themselves.¹⁴

¹³ Only later in 1888 did Herbster redesign and extend the master plan not as a commissioned work, but as a personal project, envisioning the city's growth into the suburbs. This new work emphasized radial vectors beyond the grid and included new technological changes happening in the city, such as livestock-drawn tram lines (Castro, 1994: 70). After Herbster's 1888 design, the next attempt at a master plan for Fortaleza was only discussed in 1932 (Girão, 1997: 80).

¹⁴ Fortaleza's bourgeoisie was mainly formed by former colonial elites, landowners raising cattle and/or growing cotton, and merchants involved in international trade of goods.

Herbster would ensure the previously imposed order of Silva Paulet (and the needs and desires of the elites) would prevail (Girão, 1997: 96). Raimundo Girão explained that while Herbster was conforming to some previously imposed orders for the city's plan, he was also chosen for his reputation as detail-oriented and for the love for the job and trust conferred in him by the municipality (Girão, 1997: 97). Liberal de Castro pointed out that while it is hard to define precisely what Herbster's *de facto* personal contribution to the plan was, it was very unlikely that he (and the elite congressmen and city hall administrators) would not be influenced by Baron George-Eugène Haussmann's modernist and hygienist reforms in Paris at that time (1853-1870). Independently, nationally, the influence of the Portuguese Imperial Court was undeniable. From the early colonial occupation, different provinces across the country adopted and adapted what was being implemented in the colony's capital city of Rio de Janeiro. The grid system imposed by Silva Paulet, as previously explained, was a layout long used by the Portuguese, which was translated into their colonies as well. In Fortaleza it is possible to recognize the traditional Portuguese influence in the urban plan not only in regards to the street grid, but also because of the distribution of the housing lots, which were originally narrow and deep, similarly to a traditional medieval lot distribution (Castro, 1994: 78). Later modernization efforts in Rio de Janeiro in the 1870s (when Brazil was already independent from Portugal, yet continued to reproduce remnant cultural, political, and economic interests of former colonial elites), inspired by the sanitation and hygienist principles coming from the technical education Brazilian engineers and military personnel were receiving in France, were also put into practice in different urban centers across the country, including Fortaleza (Castro, 1994: 82)¹⁵.

¹⁵ Some well-known hygienist renovation efforts in Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth century include the famous demolition of *Morro do Castelo*, as explained earlier in this chapter.

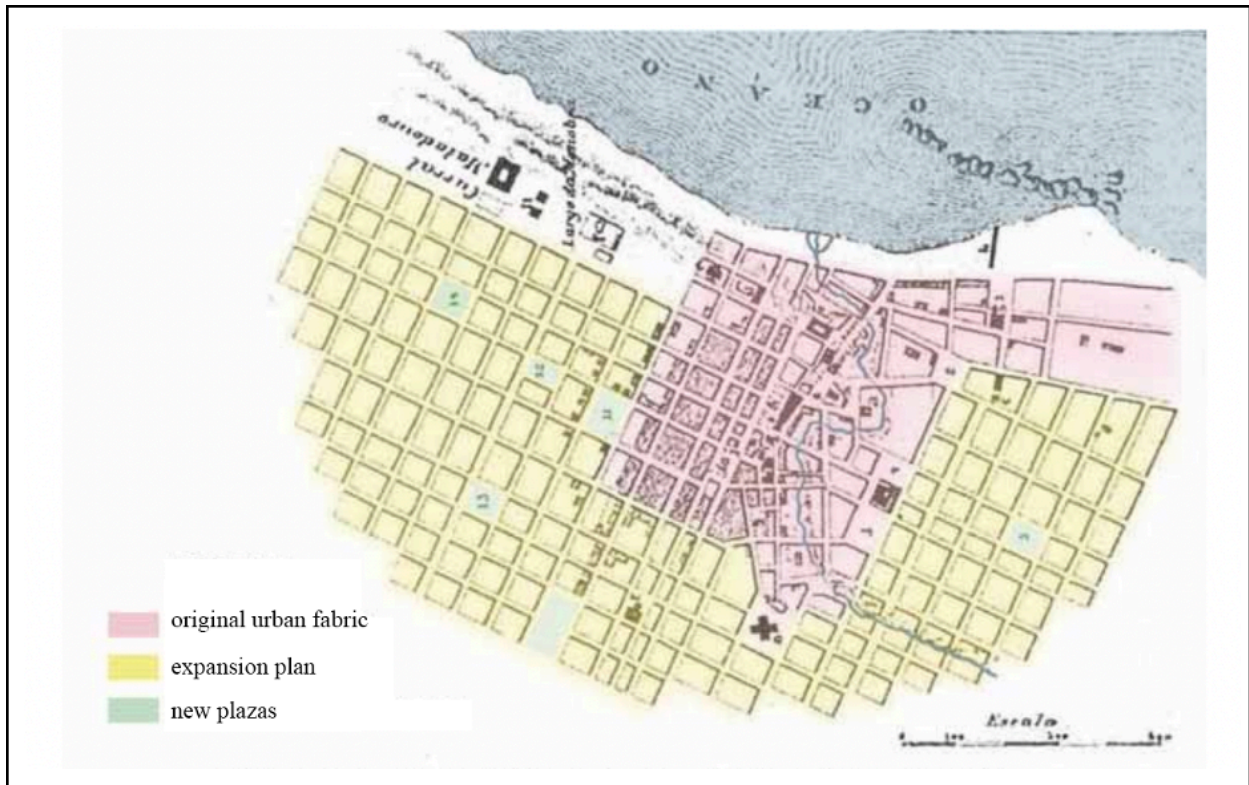
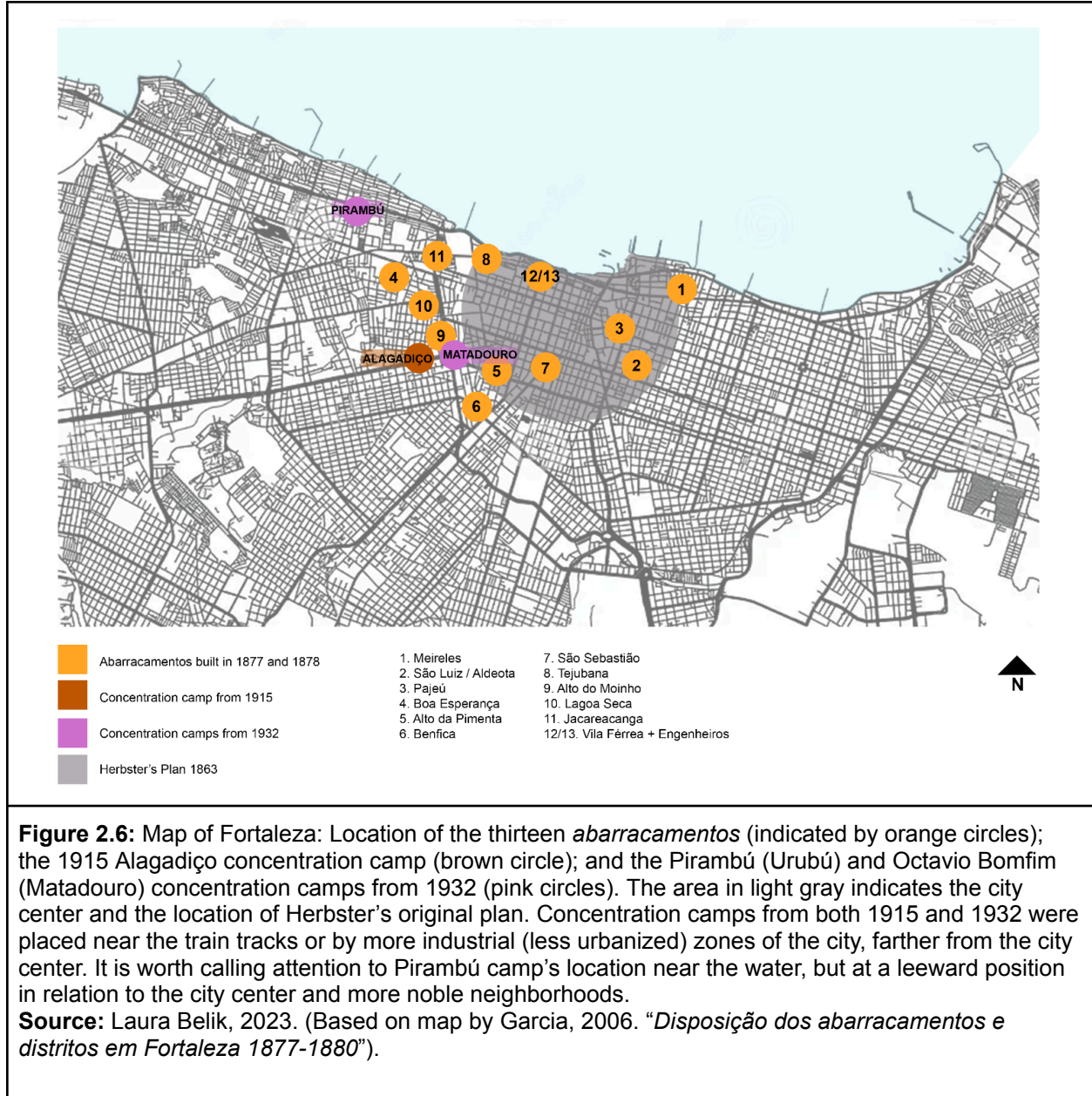


Figure 2.5: Herbst's expansion plan for the city of Fortaleza, 1863.

Source: Atlas do Império do Brasil (Cândido Mendes de Almeida, 1868). Available at: Andrade, Margarida Julia Farias de Salles. 2012. *Fortaleza em Perspectiva Histórica: Poder Público e Iniciativa Privada na Apropriação e Produção Material da Cidade 1810-1933*. [Tese de doutorado] São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo/Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, p. 18.

The arrival of the *flagelados*: *Abarracamentos* of 1877-1879



By the end of the nineteenth century, city planners and local authorities in Ceará faced a major challenge: the influx of *flagelados*. According to historian Frederico de Castro Neves, the 1877 drought was a period in which “the city was invaded and occupied by backcountry people (*sertanejos*) in a way that outnumbered the original population of Fortaleza in four times” (Neves, 1995: 94). And while the “drought” was certainly an environmental issue, its impact and effects had profound social and political implications. With the arrival of the first waves of large numbers of drought refugees, the number of residents of Fortaleza increased from a population of 27,000 to 130,000 people (Andrade, 2012:131; Neves, 1995: 94; Davis, 2001:85). Inland migrants would

not only represent an increase in the urban population of Fortaleza, but also contribute to the largest smallpox epidemics the state had experienced up to that point in time (Andrade, 2012: 131). The pharmacist, writer, and historian Rodolfo Teófilo estimated that in 1878, out of the 110,000 recently arrived migrants fleeing from the droughts, about 95% were not vaccinated against smallpox (Teófilo, 1910: 6). While the local bourgeoisie was never a fully coherent or unified group, they all agreed that the ragged and undisciplined waves of *flagelados* posed a significant risk to the established order: aside from the disease outbreaks, the elites viewed newcomers as a mass of people ripe for crime, violence, and radicalization, and pressured the local government to take action.¹⁶

As a response to the arrival of the *flagelados*, the first set of measures taken by the municipal government in 1877 was to create a series of thirteen “*abarracamentos*” (shack concentrations, also known as lodging areas) within the city’s boundaries: Meireles (population of 11,435), São Luiz e Aldeota (population of 10,102), Pajeú (population of 5,996), Boa Esperança (population of 2,476), Alto da Pimenta (population of 20,035), Benfica (population of 23,750), São Sebastião (population of 13,800), Tejubana (population of 6,237), Alto do Moinho (population of 9,213), Lagoa Seca (population of 2,236), Via Férrea and Engenheiros (population of 2,085) and Jacareacanga (population of 7,039)¹⁷. *Abarracamentos* represented an important precursor to what was later implemented as the concentration camps. At first there was no particular placement order or zoning resolution for where these accommodations would be located. *Abarracamentos* were placed in different locations within the city and started mainly in the central areas where most of the newcomers were already staying.

Despite the drought crisis, there was a rise in civil construction and the construction of public and administrative buildings across Ceará state by the late 1870s. This was all due to the labor force of the “able bodied” *flagelados*, who in turn were paid with food rations and a place to stay at the *abarracamentos* and probably some pocket money. Governor (*Presidente da Província*) Caetano Estelita Cavalcanti Pessoa (December 1876–November 1877) mentioned expenditures paying for the work of the *flagelados* in his 1877 report, and even specified the labor that was done, such as paving streets or building stone walls, but he did not further explained how the money was distributed¹⁸. The State saw this initiative of using *flagelados*’ labor as something positive for everyone, as the public works were considered “works of utility and irrefutable necessity” (Câmara, 1970: 145). Historian Frederico de Castro Neves highlighted how the establishment of these public works in the capital city for the “able-bodied” *flagelados* served two purposes: first, it justified directing public money towards aid distribution that would not just look charitable, but also contributed to local ameliorations

¹⁶ Rios identified two main diverging groups amongst the elites: the commercial bourgeoisie, and the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie (Rios, 2014a: 34).

¹⁷ The latter (Jacareacanga) served as a model for the other *abarracamentos*, and it was organized around four large urban squares/plazas (*quadriláteros*) (Andrade, 2012: 132).

¹⁸ “Relatório com que o Excelentíssimo Senhor Desembargador Caetano Estelita Cavalcanti Pessoa passou a Administração da Província do Ceará ao Excelentíssimo Senhor Conselheiro João José Ferreira Aguiar em o dia 23 de novembro de 1877”. Fortaleza: Typographia do Pedro II, 1877, p. 21.

and modernization at a bargain; and second, it provided much-needed employment to *flagelados*, however low the wages (Neves, 2000: 52). *Abarracamentos* controlled a newly proletarianized population. By keeping a close eye on refugees, authorities would also prevent revolts and rebellions and curtail crime and “immoral” activities (Azevedo, 2011: 11). Historian Kênia de Sousa Rios argued that the control of the *flagelados* and the development of the city were deeply entangled processes; urban renewal projects produced public benefits while providing an opportunity to submit drought refugees to a regime of labor discipline. During drought periods employing *flagelados* in the construction of prevention-related works such as building dams was easily justified as something that was beneficial to all parties. On the other hand, works related to the capital city’s ameliorations and “progress” during a time of crisis were less easily legitimized as something of interest to the workers or important for fighting the droughts. Yet, the elites who solicited these works and the local government that put them in practice argued that these types of production would provide jobs for those in need, and that these advancements would eventually bring more wealth to the city (Rios, 2014a: 46).

Abarracamentos were active from July 1877 until the end of the drought in 1879. Afterwards, the majority of these spaces were decommissioned, with a few exceptions. Remnant spaces grew and developed into some of the city’s current neighborhoods, such as Aldeota, Parangaba, Jacarecanga, and Mucuripe (Garcia, 2006: 17). It is worth mentioning, as Rodolfo Teófilo pointed out, that while the *abarracamentos* were implemented by the government, only “a few *retirantes* [drought migrants] were properly “*abarracados*” [sheltered in the *abarracamentos* structures] in built covered structures. The vast majority of the newcomers lived in *palhoças* (huts) or were simply unsheltered, taking refuge under the shade of a cashew tree” (Teófilo, 1910: 7).

Building the Modern Brazilian State: the “Old Republic” (1889-1930) and the early Getúlio Vargas administration (1930-1945)

The turn of the twentieth century: new social roles in a modern and segregated Fortaleza

A few years after the 1877 drought crisis in the Northeast region, Brazil went through a period of political turmoil and reform. In 1889, Brazil overthrew the constitutional monarchy, becoming an independent republic, which resulted in deep societal changes. This was the beginning of a period known as the “Old Republic” that lasted until 1930 and was marked by oligarchical powers and a political structure still very much entangled with the old colonial structures and landowners’ laws¹⁹. This also meant greater and more independent powers held by local elites who controlled local governments. In Ceará for example, the quest for progress and modernization improving local businesses led to a series of social and technological improvements being implemented in Fortaleza in the early 1900’s, such as the arrival of sewage and

¹⁹ The Brazilian Old Republic is known for *coronelismo*. This expression is related to the colonels who were landowners and who dominated provincial, local, and national politics.

sanitation (1908), automobiles (1909), electric trams (1913), and electric lighting in public and private spaces (1913) contributing to a series of transformations in urban life. Additionally, the downtown area was established as the main commercial space, and together with the recently built theater Teatro José de Alencar and a series of movie theaters, the city started to show signs of becoming a modern center for social and public life (Andrade, 2012: 167). The city's economic growth and increased flow of capital was also related to its strategic and privileged position on the northern portion of the Brazilian coastline, facilitating international commercial activities with Europe and North America, especially culminating during the First World War.

As Fortaleza's modernization efforts grew at the turn of the twentieth century, so did the social and economic gap and prejudice between the elites and the displaced newcomers. Yet, the rising power of the local elites also proved that modernization efforts were very much based on segregation patterns and the need to reinstate these new societal roles. Besides the previous experience with the *abarracamentos*, one symbolic example of the city's effort to segregate the rich and the poor was the arrangements made at the *Passeio Público* (promenade), which was "built to be a public leisure space for everyone... but separately" (Brito, 2013: 113). By the end of the nineteenth century, Fortaleza's promenade was divided into three parts: the highest areas were designated for the rich, and the two others were attended by the less privileged social classes (Rios, 2014: 55). The Parisian influence during Fortaleza's Gilded Age was such that only those who were dressed in a "French style" fashion were welcome in certain locations (such as the upper promenade) and commercial venues of the city²⁰.

²⁰ In 1910 one of the most important import-export commercial venues in Fortaleza at the time, the Casa Boris & Frères, owned by French expats, published a book of photos of Ceará (edited in Nice, France) in order to further promote Ceará's prosperity and beauty both in Brazil and abroad to enhance the city's commercial activities and success. Out of the 160 images shown in the album, 27 of them portrayed the *Passeio Público* (promenade) in Fortaleza, a symbolic gesture showing the social importance of this particular space in the city (see Figure 2.7).



The creation of DNOCS (National Department for Works to Combat Droughts)

After the intense droughts at the end of the eighteenth century, in 1909 the Brazilian federal government launched the Inspeção de Obras contra as Secas/Inspectorate for Works to Combat Droughts (IOCS), which in 1919 changed its name to Federal Inspectorate for Works to Combat Droughts (IFOCs), and in 1945 became the Departamento Nacional de Obras contra as Secas/National Department for Works to Combat Droughts (DNOCS). DNOCS played an important role in regulating the workforce and managing resources for the dry *sertão* areas. The creation of DNOCS also highlighted the beginning of a differentiation between the “North” and “Northeast”

regions in Brazil. By that time, the first Rubber Boom economic flourishing of the Amazon basin was happening (early 1900s), and this led to the adoption of a specific designation for these two northern subregions, namely the “Northeast” associated with the droughts and chronic poverty (Buckley, 2017: 15). I will discuss the effects of this regional divide culturally and politically further in this chapter.

It is worth mentioning that while this national agency was designed as an effort to better aid and support the population in need, DNOCS was also in many ways bound to the local *coronelismo* practices of the “drought industry,”²¹ serving the landowners who dominated provincial and local politics in the *Nordeste* (people known as *coroneis*) (Davis, 2001: 89). Infrastructural works built by DNOCS were instrumental in solidifying existing and long-standing social dynamics in the *sertão*, prioritizing local elite’s agendas. Roads, dams, and irrigation canals would intensify the landowners’ control over natural resources and the landless workers’ dependency on their bosses, thus reinforcing existing lines of social fracture (Buckley, 2017: 13). Despite its controversial standpoint, by the time DNOCS was established, Brazil had only recently officially abolished enslaved work (1888), and in many ways this agency served as a way to regularize employment, even if it was through a reactionary social order (Davis, 2001:90). Being a national agency also meant keeping records and reporting to the federal government regularly, consolidating information in one place. Because of this, DNOCS’s archives, and particularly the agencies’ annual medical reports, are some of the core pieces of documentation I use in this research regarding the concentration camps in Ceará from 1932 and the *pousos* from the 1940s.

The DNOCS agency was created as an effort by the Brazilian National leaders to mitigate vulnerability to the droughts and to modernize the *sertão*. The agency was modeled after technical development efforts undertaken in the U.S. by the Rockefeller Foundation’s disease eradication programs and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s irrigation projects, as well as other British colonial endeavors in India, such as early famine camps from the turn of the twentieth century, which were emerging from practices of welfare and social control²². Over the twentieth century, DNOCS conducted geographic surveys; planned irrigation systems; built dams, reservoirs, roads, and railroads; sponsored climatic, geologic, and botanical studies of the region; and funded rural health posts (Buckley, 2017: 11).

²¹ *Drought industry* is a term coined by Brazilian journalist Antônio Callado (*Correio da Manhã*, 1958).

²² This model of building segregated enclosures was used at unprecedented scales during successive famines (1876-77, 1896-97, and 1899-1901) and plague epidemics (1896) in India, accommodating over 10 million people (Forth, 2017). Relief camps responded to droughts and failed monsoons, but also served to counteract the consequences of these “natural disasters” fostered by imperial ideology and political economy by containing the movement of famine migrants and victims (Forth, 2017; Chhabria, 2019). Famine camps—fenced and policed spaces—occupied urban peripheries, avoiding the social and sanitary hazards resulting from the overcrowding of famine migrants in large urban centers, which also helped promote greater community segregation (Chhabria, 2019; Chopra, 2012). The camps were guarded makeshift villages, complete with sleeping huts, hospitals, an orphanage, and places for the disposal of the dead on their outskirts. Famine camps performed multiple functions, from detention and support centers to dormitory camps attached to large public works projects, giving less-than-subsistence wages to poor landless workers in return for their heavy labor (Forth, 2017).

The U.S. influence on the modern Brazilian state

Several of the sanitation campaigns and territorial surveys that took place throughout the Brazilian territory in the early 1900s were led or financed by U.S. agencies and partnerships. The International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, for example, had already mapped the cultural and political atmosphere of the Brazilian territory, identifying regional particularities and reporting back to the U.S. government since the early 1910s. Private foundations and institutions like the Rockefellers would strategically approach foreign peripheral countries such as Brazil using humanitarian aid as an entrypoint. This was an effort to cultivate friendly relations between the countries, later guaranteeing alliances and political and economic control of the U.S. over these territories, as shown in the 1915 report made by the National Health Board General Director Wickliffe Rose, titled “Committee to Study and Report on Medical Conditions and Progress in Brazil”:

“Our second move in this foreign work was made in Latin America – this because Latin America is a part of America, and because our geographical position and our political relations give us an interest in the countries of this hemisphere which we can feel in no others.[...].

The present time seems to be particularly opportune for us to begin operations in South America. For some years this country has been seeking to cultivate friendly relations with our South American neighbors. [...] **Business naturally enough is taking the lead in this movement to cultivate relations. But business is necessarily more interested in what it can get out of South America than in what it has to give. The International Health Commission would go to these countries in a spirit of service with nothing to ask in return. It has seemed to us, therefore, that the by-product of our work in the form of friendly international relations might be even more important than the relief and control of uncinariasis or yellow fever.**”²³

Wickliffe Rose’s discourse about the grander purpose of the International Health board in acting in pursuit of the relief and control of uncinariasis in Latin America is also made clear in this memorandum sent to the secretary of the Rockefeller Foundation, Mr. Jerome D. Greene, on September 30, 1916:

“The work for relief and control of uncinariasis which we are organizing in these Latin American countries is to be regarded merely as an entering wedge toward a larger and more permanent service in the medical field.[...] As I indicated to you in conference some weeks ago, the time is now particularly opportune for such service as the Foundation in its various branches may render

²³ Rose, Wickliffe. 1915. Report from the “Medical Education in Brazil,” Rockefeller Foundation/National Health Board Committee to study and report on medical conditions and progress in Brazil” (October Meeting, 1915), pp. 2-4.

Source: Collection Rockefeller Foundation. Rockefeller Archive Center RAC, Record Group RG 5, IHB/D series 1 correspondence/series 2 projects. Series 305 FA 115 Box 6, folder F92.

in Latin America. The war has tended greatly to stimulate effort in the direction of more intimate relations among the people of the different countries of this continent. In the effort to bring about more intimate understanding between our Latin American neighbors and ourselves business seems just now to be taking the lead. But as Mr. Haymaker points out, the South American people have come to know us mainly as people interested in our own business advancement. Such service as the Foundation has to render will tend to counteract the effect of the purely mercenary spirit and to establish a basis of real cooperation. **The very fact that we can go into these countries in the spirit of service with no favors to ask in return will go far toward creating a community of interest and toward establishing such international relations as we desire to cultivate.**²⁴

Not only did the U.S. cultivate certain relations with Brazil beginning in the early 1900s with the arrival of international organizations under the pretext of humanitarian support and national development projects, but it also has been collecting data about the population and the territory ever since. The Brazilian modernization project was built under the influence and pretense of a new civilized world, led by new forms of imperialistic control that the U.S. was building. Independently, all major medical and scientific centers in Brazil have embraced and collaborated with the International Health Board, dealing with the international organization not as an imperialistic and dominating force, but as a partnering resource for furthering national scientific knowledge and research. Regarding the latter, it is worth mentioning that many Brazilian researchers and doctors were incentivized and sponsored to study at North American universities (Faria, 1995: 121). The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, for example (where Belisário Penna and Arthur Neiva worked in the early 1910s, as I'll discuss further in this chapter), became a partnering institution helping the International Health Board (led by the Rockefeller Foundation) to settle in Brazil in 1916. Arthur Neiva openly expressed how they saw the Rockefeller Foundation's agency in Brazil as a positive endeavor helping in the exchange of scientific knowledge:

“Arthur Neiva encouraged Rockefeller's activities in health campaigns and scientific investigations. As shown in his reports and personal testimonies, Neiva did not see the Mission in Brazil as a threat to national scientific development. On the contrary, he considered it beneficial for Brazilian professionals in terms of the exchange of new scientific knowledge, campaign experiences and medical education.”²⁵ (Faria, 1995: 122)

²⁴ Rose, Wickliffe. 1916. Memorandum from Mr. Wickliffe Rose to Mr. Jerome D. Greene (September 30, 1916) pp. 1-2.

Source: Collection Rockefeller Foundation. Rockefeller Archive Center RAC, Record Group RG 5, IHB/D series 1 correspondence/series 2 projects. Series 305 FA 115 Box 6, folder F92.

²⁵ Original Portuguese version: “*Arthur Neiva incentivou a atuação da Rockefeller em campanhas sanitárias e investigações científicas. Como se depreende de seus relatórios e testemunhos pessoais, Neiva não via na atuação da Missão no Brasil uma ameaça ao desenvolvimento científico nacional. Ao contrário, considerava-a benéfica para os profissionais brasileiros, no tocante ao intercâmbio de novos conhecimentos científicos, experiências campanhistas e educação médica.*”

Public health physicians such as Arthur Neiva and Belisario Penna have supported international partnerships with the U.S. from early moments of the sanitary movement in Brazil. In their report from their 1912 excursion, Neiva and Penna openly praised foreign aid and support as an essential tool towards progress in Latin America:

“Without this element [roads of communication] and without the help of foreigners, whose initiative, quality and training, the entire American continent owes almost all its achieved progress; without this cooperation, it would be useless to wait for the miracle of the transformation of the *sertão* into the much announced land of promise.”²⁶ (Neiva and Penna, 1916: 181)

It is also important to highlight the influence foreign correspondents and U.S. agents working in partnership with national institutions had on building a particular discourse about the Brazilian population. The conceptualization of the *Nordestinos* as culturally backwards, for example, may have started with internal regional disputes regarding the country’s “progress” as a nation, but even the very concept of *progress* and modernization was shaped by international economic interests. Building economic sovereignty for the U.S. was not only related to territorial control, trade deals, or access to regional goods, but also to building a chain of cheap international labor forces. There was a need for the U.S. to incentivise certain internal social disputes, and part of their hidden agenda while working with humanitarian agencies was precisely to recognize who and where was already prone to being explored, and why.

One example of the influence U.S. agencies had on Brazilian authorities and in building internal discrimination and xenophobia is the statements made about the population of the state of Ceará in the 1920s report “**Observations on Public Health Situation and Work of the International Health Board in Brazil.**” In this document, Wickliffe Rose particularly highlighted how he considered the population from the state of Ceará to be stronger and more self-reliant than that in other northeastern states, arguing that *cearenses* were descendants of “adventurous spirits from Pernambuco” who intermarried with “a particularly virile native Indian tribe” of the area, and who have already proven to be resistant to droughts and famine in their region:

“In the development of a public health program, the character of the people upon whose cooperation it depends is fundamental. The northern boundary of the State of Sao Paulo divides Brazil into two sections presenting contrasts, with respect to populations, as sharp as those between Mexico and the United States.

Northern Brazil, beginning with Bahia, was settled by a parasitic type of Portuguese who were supplied by the home government with an army to do their fighting, and with slaves from Africa to do their work. In time, the slaves were

²⁶ Original Portuguese version: “*Sem esse elemento [vias de comunicação] e sem o auxílio do estrangeiro, cuja iniciativa, operosidade e tirocínio, todo o continente americano deve quase tudo do progresso que possui, sem este concurso, será inútil, esperar o milagre da transformação do sertão na tão anunciada terra de promessa.*”

freed. The present population is composed of shiftless blacks, parasitic whites of Portuguese origin, and a large percentage of their hybrid progeny, with traces here and there of Indian characteristics. **The one exception to this general situation is Ceará. This state was settled originally by a small band of the more adventurous spirits from Pernambuco. These intermarried with a particularly virile native Indian tribe and developed a sturdy native population. In the face of extremely hard conditions of periodic drought and famine, these people have remained in their state and are today an energetic self-reliant race.**²⁷

The recruitment of *sertanejos Nordestinos* (*Nordestinos* from the hinterlands) as the next main group to constitute the Brazilian labor force from the turn of the twentieth century, in a substitution for recently-abolished slavery (1888), is, therefore, a conscious choice. This choice combines internal regional disputes, racial prejudices, political frictions, and international interests.

Sanitation and Hygienics

Debates and disputes regarding racial determinism and racial improvements were rising topics after the First World War, and presumably common discussions in times of wars and conflicts in general, often related to nationalistic efforts such as military recruitment. The surge of nationalism and the need to consolidate Brazil as a nation-state started during the period known as the Brazilian Old (First) Republic (1889-1930). Medicine and sanitation gained a particularly important role in helping build these nationalist efforts, validating the idea of fighting diseases as a common national goal towards the country's improvements, advancements, and modernization (Lima and Hochman, 1996: 24). According to historian Gilberto Hochman, "diseases" became the binding elements building the concept of nationalism in Brazil in the early 1900s (Hochman, 1998: 48). Hochman explained how diseases were seen as a problem that could affect anyone, no matter their social status. Fighting epidemics was a common problem to which the elites did not have social immunity. Therefore, diseases and the possibility of infection symbolized a generalized threat and, at the same time, created a link of social interdependence. This was a turning point of social consciousness that was extremely significant in the creation and construction of Brazil as a nation-state.

"The most general result of the sociability generated by the microbe of the disease would be a feeling of national community, associated with demands for increased responsibilities of the Public Authorities."²⁸ (Hochman, 1998: 59)

²⁷ Rose, Wickliffe. 1920. "Memorandum No. 7502. Observations on Public Health Situation and Work of the International Health Board in Brazil." (June 16-July 5, 1920) pp. 7-8.

Source: Collection Rockefeller Foundation records, International Health Board/Division records, Record Group RG 5; Routine Reports, Series 3, Routine Reports - Brazil, Subseries 3_305 GEN.

²⁸ Original Portuguese version: "O resultado mais geral da sociabilidade gerada pelo micróbio da doença seria um sentimento de comunidade nacional, associado a demandas pelo aumento das responsabilidades do Poder Público"

Aligned to the public and collective sanitation goals to fight diseases, medical and sanitary exploratory expeditions started to take place throughout the country's territory. These incursions and expeditions were organized and financed by governmental health and sanitary institutions, and also by international U.S. agencies, as I pointed out previously. Some expeditions are particularly important to highlight, such as the 1912 excursion organized by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute and led by physicians Belisário Penna and Arthur Neiva, the *Viagem Científica pelo Norte da Bahia, Sudoeste de Pernambuco, Sul do Pará e de Norte a Sul de Goiás*/Scientific expedition through the North of Bahia, Southwest of Pernambuco, South of Pará and from North to South of Goiás (Figure 2.8)²⁹. Penna and Neiva's report regarding their seven-month journey in the Northeast region presented information on climate, fauna, and flora of the places they passed through, and it also disclosed in detail the diseases that affected men and livestock activity in the area. The researchers considered that *Nordestinos* had the potential for self-improvement, and that they could make positive contributions to national modernization efforts, but that they needed guidance and updated technology in order to advance. This report became a particularly symbolic document, as it represented a turning moment for public health in Brazil. The report's topics, which were usually considered technical and medical matters discussed at academic forums, were brought into the public debate and gained great media traction and repercussions, promoting public health to a central place in the political agenda of the country for the first time (Lima and Hochman, 1996: 26). The following excerpt from Neiva and Penna's notes from their 1912 expedition provide some of their main comments and recommendations on how to help improve the *sertão Nordestino*:

“The intelligent exploitation of land, populating it with capable and conscientious men, giving them quick and cheap means of communication connected to the consumer centers, instructing them the exact notions and practices of prophylaxis of regional diseases (diseases that can all be avoided), giving them rational and continuous assistance, and writing laws that can help safeguarding and improving different races.”³⁰ (Neiva and Penna, 1916: 221)

²⁹ Another particularly important expedition from the early twentieth century in Brazil was the *Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas Estratégicas de Mato Grosso ao Amazonas* (Strategic Telegraph Lines Commission from Mato Grosso to Amazonas), also known as the *Comissão Rondon* (Rondon Commission), that took place from 1907 and 1908.

³⁰ Original Portuguese version: “A exploração inteligente da terra, seu povoamento por homens aptos e conscientes, dando-se-lhes meios de comunicação rápida e barata com os centros consumidores, instrução e noções exatas e práticas de profilaxia das moléstias regionais, todas elas evitáveis, por meio duma assistência racional e contínua, e por leis sábias de acautelamento e aperfeiçoamento das raças.”

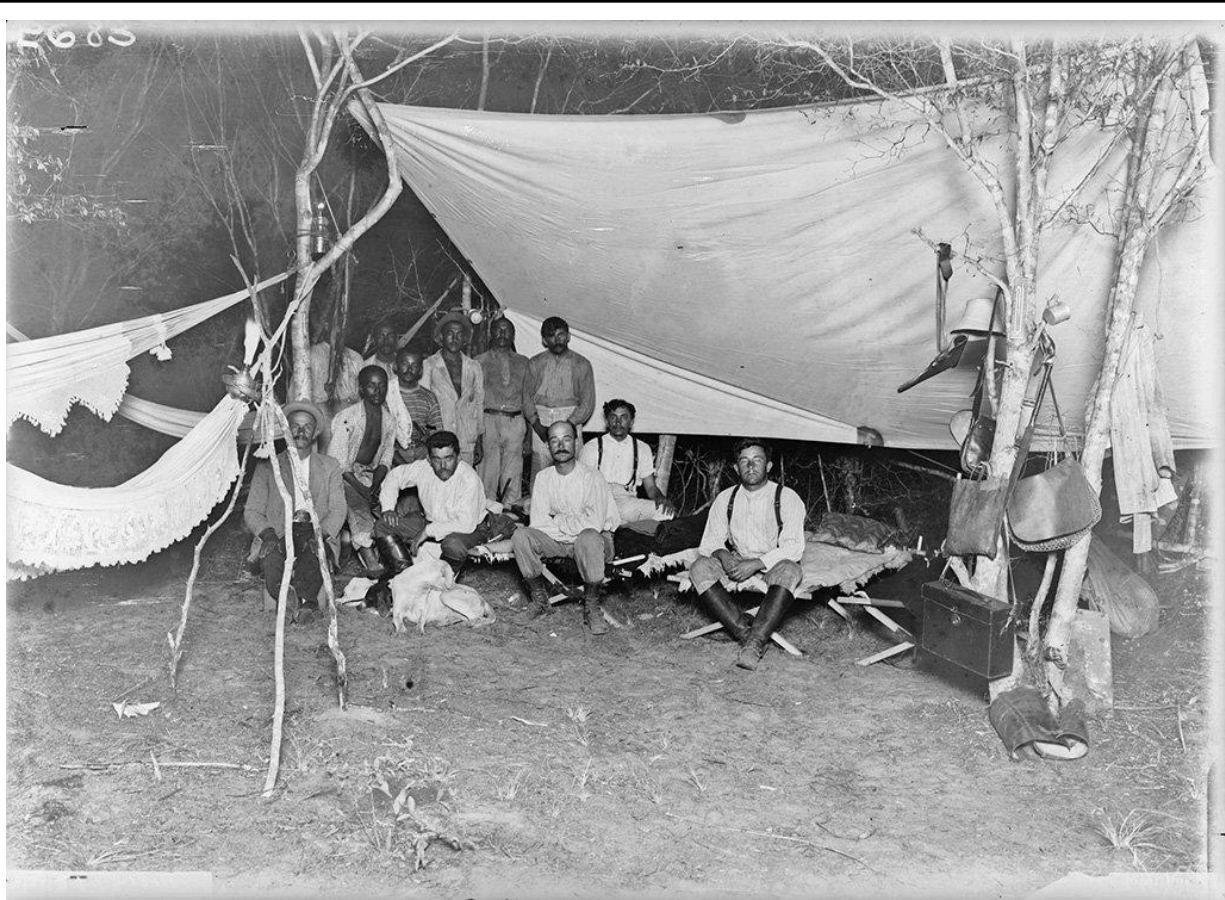


Figure 2.8: Encampment in Bebe-Mijo (PI): seated at the center, Belisário Penna and Arthur Neiva. June, 1912.

Source: Acervo Casa Oswaldo Cruz/Fiocruz.

The rise of the Brazilian sanitary movement, as seen in Neiva and Penna's report, intended to alert political and intellectual elites to the precariousness of the sanitary conditions in the *sertão*, and obtain support for effective public sanitation actions in the interior of the country. Sanitarianism was in tune with the general trends of Brazilian nationalist currents in medicine, but also culturally, such as in literary and artistic movements which I will discuss further (Hochman, 1998: 63).

Beyond their work in the early 1910s at the Oswaldo Cruz Institute, Arthur Neiva and Belisário Penna became key influential figures in public health matters in Brazil. Neiva became the director of São Paulo State Health Service (1916-1923) and was also named superintendent director of São Paulo's Biological Institute/*Instituto Butantan* (1927-1933), later also engaging in a political career representing his home state, Bahia. Neiva was one of the main advocates and enthusiastic in helping the Rockefeller Foundation and International Health Board in Brazil. Belisário Penna published in 1918 a seminal book and work of research called "*Saneamento do Brasil: Sanear o Brasil é Povoá-lo; e Enriquecê-lo; é Moraliza-lo*" ("Sanitizing Brazil: Sanitizing Brazil is to

Populate it, Enrich it, Moralize it”). Penna was one of the founders of the *Liga Pró-Saneamento do Brasil* (Pro-Sanitation League of Brazil), which later led to the creation of the National Department of Public Health (DNSP) in 1920, effectively coordinating health actions throughout the national territory (Lima and Hochman, 1996: 26). In 1932 Penna was invited by President and Dictator Getúlio Vargas to become the country’s Minister of Health and Education.

Penna’s 1918 book “*Saneamento do Brasil*” advocated for a national health policy to include rural sanitation in order to prevent and control rural endemics (Figure 2.9). Penna argued that solving the urgent sanitary problem that the Brazilian hinterlands were facing would ultimately bring the economic emancipation of the nation (Penna, 1918: 29). Penna was one of the first people to call the attention to the fact that droughts simply revealed the persistent vulnerability of the landless *sertanejo* populations, and to solve that there was a need for a stronger state intervention and investment in assisting these groups and isolated areas. Penna and Neiva had already called attention to the need for further and equal governmental support in the northern regions of the county in their report from their 1912 excursion:

“Until today those regions [*sertão Nordestino*] have been abandoned by the Nation, dividing the country in regions as if they were a metropolis and a colony; this practice has been one of the causes of *nordestes*’ backwardness, and for this reason it is convenient that further relations [between regions within Brazil] take place in more equitable conditions, where a sincere feeling of solidarity can exist. For this, it is necessary that the Government takes more interest in the afflicted dry region.”³¹ (Neiva and Penna, 1916: 182)

Penna would further this debate during his career in public health, continuing to call attention to the regional divide in public assistance on the part of the national government. Penna would also argue for the “exemplary” advancements of the more “civilized” areas of the country to work as an precedent for improving the poor abandoned Northeast and Northern areas:

“The problem of general sanitation in Brazil and its population is more than a medical or hygienics issue, a regional issue and a social and humanitarian issue: it is the great national problem.”³² (Penna, 1918: 109)

³¹ Original Portuguese version: “Até hoje aquelas regiões tem sido desamparadas pela Nação que se tem colocado em situação de metrópole para colônia; esta prática tem sido uma das causas do seu atraso e por isso convém que as relações se façam em condições de mais equidade, onde um sincero sentimento de solidariedade possa existir. Para isso, torna-se necessário que o Governo se interesse mais pela inditosa região seca.”

³² Original Portuguese version: “O problema do saneamento geral do Brasil e da sua população é mais do que higiênico e médico, mais do que regional, mais do que social e humanitário: ele é o magno problema nacional.”

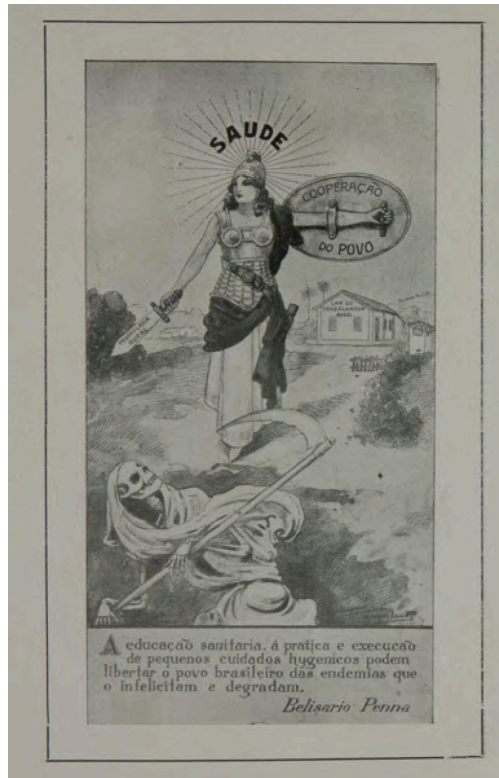


Figure 2.9: “Sanitary Education and Starting to Practice Hygienic Care can Help Free the Brazilian Populations from the Endemics That Degrade Them.” Illustration from Belisário Penna’s book “*Saneamento do Brasil*” (1919).

Source: Penna, Belisário. *Saneamento do Brasil: Sanear o Brasil é Povoá-lo; e Enriquecê-lo; é Moraliza-lo*. Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia Revista dos Tribunais, 1918, p. 156; available at: Obras Raras Fiocruz- Acervo digital de obras raras e especiais.



Figures 2.10 and 2.11 are illustrations from Penna’s 1918 book showing “the house of the Jeca,” a demeaning term coined by Brazilian novelist and media impresario Monteiro Lobato (1914) designating a person from rural areas in South/Southeast Brazil³³. The first image portrays a rural family and their house “before sanitation,” highlighting the space as poor and filthy, prone to disease. In the first image, the house is made of wattle and daub, like most traditional homes in the Brazilian hinterlands (both in the Southern and Northern parts of Brazil), and there is no access to potable water or bathroom, nor any other infrastructure. The second image shows the same location “after sanitation”: now a space that is healthy, prosperous, and comfortable. There is a

³³ The “Jeca” (or “Jeca Tatu”) character was first created and mentioned by novelist Monteiro Lobato in his 1914 article “Urupês”, published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* on December 23, 1914 (p. 6). Lobato later published other articles in the same newspaper, which were compiled as the publication “*O Problema Vital* (the vital problem)” (1918), financed by the *Sociedade de Eugenia de São Paulo* (São Paulo’s Eugenics Society) and the *Liga Pró-Saneamento do Brasil* (Pro-Sanitation League of Brazil). Lobato’s book served as a way to disseminate the sanitary campaign led by Miguel Pereira, Belisário Pena and Artur Neiva. In the publication “*O Problema Vital*,” Lobato reframes the way he initially described the *Jeca* as a lazy, unproductive, and debilitated person, not because of his genetics, but because of the conditions to which he was subjected, exposed to diseases and the like. Lobato famously wrote: “*O Jeca não é assim: está assim*” (This is not who the Jeca is: this is how the Jeca is”). (Lima and Hochman, 1996)

water well for easy access to clean water; the house is now made of brick and tile, with a built structure outside for the bathroom, following Penna's instructions and "useful advice" for basic hygienic conditions of living (Penna, 1918: 177, 273, and 279). While the Jeca's example is based on a fictitious Southeastern character, he is also used in Penna's 1918 book to illustrate a more general condition of sanitation in the inlands country-wide. Eve Elizabeth Buckley explained how Penna and Neiva suggested that the "Northeast's rural poor would progress if guided by the 'example' of more vigorous white settlers and provided with infrastructure linking them to the civilized world" (Buckley, 2010: 391). This concept of a culturally backwards *sertão Nordestino* versus a civilized urban South is what justified and propelled further regional division and political disputes.

Eugenics and the Nordestinos

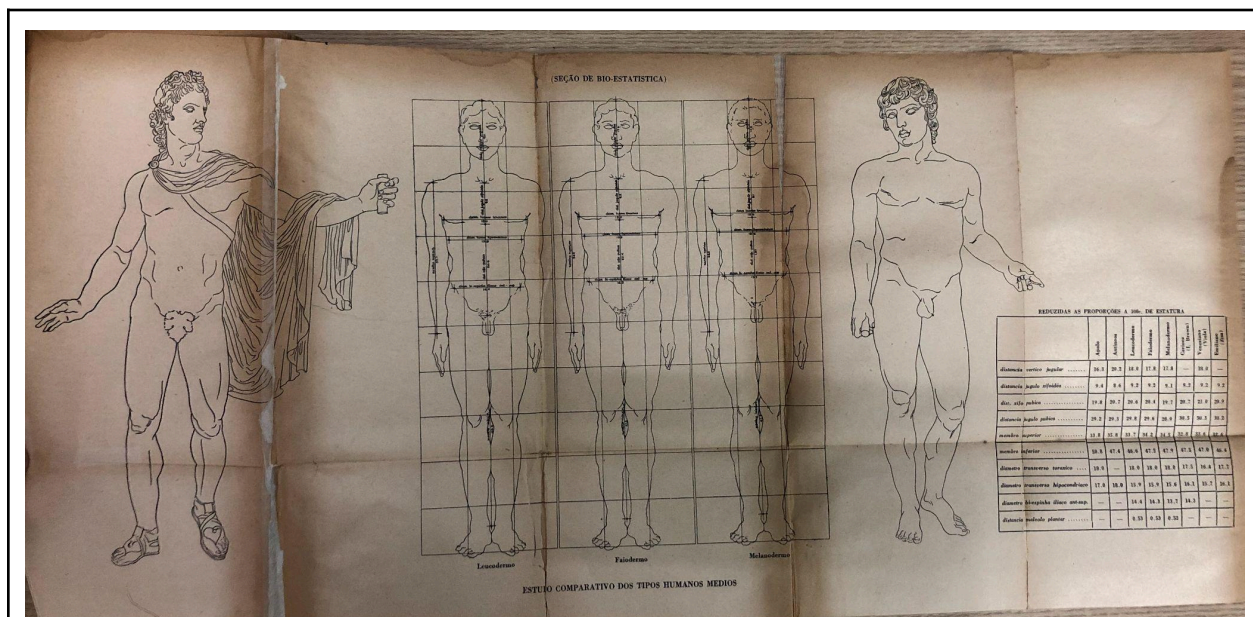


Figure 2.12: Comparative study of human typology.

Source: Ferraz, Álvaro; Lima Jr., Andrade. 1939. "A Morfologia do Homem do Nordeste (Estudo Biotipológico)." *Coleção Documentos Brasileiros*, v. 15. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, n.p.

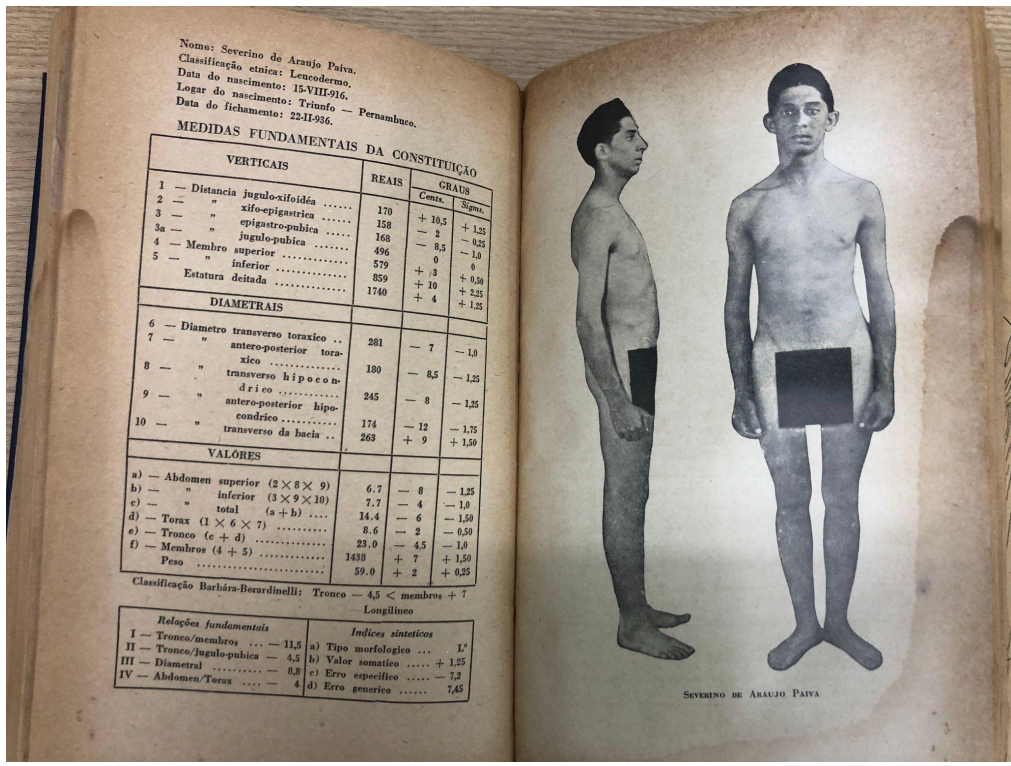


Figure 2.13: Example of a typology of men from Paraíba.
Source: Ferraz, Álvaro; Lima Jr., Andrade. 1939. "A Morfologia do Homem do Nordeste (Estudo Biotipológico)." *Coleção Documentos Brasileiros*, v. 15. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, n.p.

Public health physician Belisário Penna was a great enthusiast of the hygienics and sanitation movements, advocating for sanitation in order to prevent and control endemics. At the same time, Penna was also one of the first people to introduce the theory of eugenics in Brazil, and he was also an active member of the Brazilian Central Eugenics Commission, from which the Pro-Sanitation League originated. The eugenics movement, formed during the late nineteenth century, gained popularity worldwide during the early twentieth century. These theories were based on biotypological studies revolving around concepts such as racial determinism and miscegenation. In Brazil, eugenics was largely embraced by the country's medical and scientific communities, such as Penna, working also as an effort to justify and validate hierarchical segregation. The turn of the century also meant a moment of drastic changes in Brazil, with recent epidemic crises such as cholera, yellow fever, and smallpox; the abolition of slavery; climate crisis; unstable population growth; and the rise of urban centers. In this context, medicine gained a new "hygienist mission," which is also largely justified by ideas of discrimination (Schwarcz, 1993). The country's ideals of modernization and progress in the first half of the twentieth century were also connected to the concept of sanitation and hygienic control.

Similarly to Penna's works previously mentioned, such as "*Saneamento do Brasil*" (1918)³⁴, other studies looking for a regional biotypology in order to build a bio-determined discourse about the Brazilian identity were largely disseminated in the 1930s, aligned with President and Dictator Getulio Vargas' search for a national identity and patriotic discourse. One of the most detailed publications regarding a "regionalist biotypology" from the 1930s was the "*A Morfologia do Homem do Nordeste: Estudo Biotipológico*" ("The Morphology of the Man from the Northeast: a Biotypological Study"), a study done by authors Álvaro Ferraz and Andrade Lima Júnior (Vimeiro-Gomes, 2016) (see Figures 2.12 and 2.13). Ferraz and Junior were both part of the medical team from Pernambuco State Military Brigade. Their study was conceptualized from the data obtained from medical evaluations of the soldiers at their brigade. When published, the book was also part of a collection of Brazilian documents, edited and directed by Gilberto Freyre, who was responsible for writing the "Regionalist Manifesto" in 1926 in Recife (PE). The purpose of Ferraz and Junior's study was to determine the biotypological profile of people in the Northeast of the country (and in this case, based on people from the state of Pernambuco), defining a standard of body normality for the population of that region. Their assumption was based on the idea of regional difference, thus also aiding the construction of a regional identity (Vimeiro-Gomes, 2016: 117).

At the end of Ferraz and Junior's investigation, some of the soldiers that were evaluated and considered as representative, that is, typical of the body shapes of the various biotypes ascribed as "*nordestinos*," were also photographed. Each photographic representation characterized one of these biotypes, according to the researcher's classification. These photos also served as a parameter for future studies and for a medical practice of body assessment guided by biotypology³⁵. But aside from the "scientific" divide of Northeasterners in relation to the rest of the population, the social and political aspects of this selection and segregation becomes ever more clear when we look at the early moments of Getúlio Vargas' administration.

³⁴ Some of Penna's main publications include the previously mentioned 1918 book and work of research "*Saneamento do Brasil*"; his 1921 publication about social medicine called "*O Clamor da Verdade*" (The Cry of Truth); and the 1923 book "*Higiene Para o Povo*" (Hygienics for the Population), the latter a direct research request by the then-President Washington Luís (President from 1926-1930).

³⁵ The artist Jean-Pierre Chabloz, for example, used some of these images as a basis for his drawings and classifications for the recruitment of SEMTA's Rubber Soldiers', as I will later explain in **Chapter 4**.

Regional divide

Getúlio Vargas: *Nordestino* as quintessential Brazilian

“For the campaign managers, the ‘strong, wholesome and productive’ men they were looking for were preferably *Nordestinos* [from the Northeast]. These were *sertanejos* [backcountry people] who were used to hard labor, resistant to adversity. These were also people who faced a difficult situation that was serious enough for them to consider succumbing to the ‘nationalist plea’. It was precisely to this group of the population that the official propaganda was directed, asking them to offer their ‘share of sacrifices’ for the nation.”³⁶ (Araújo, 2015: 31)

The 1930s were a particularly turbulent time in Brazilian history. The Brazilian Revolution of 1930, also known as the *1930’s Coup d’état*, ended the period called the “Old Republic” (1889-1930) and made Getúlio Vargas the new president of an authoritarian and centralized regime that lasted until 1945. Vargas’ administration would heavily invest in Brazil’s image of “modernization,” an effort to shift the nation from an agrarian to an industrial footing. President and Dictator Getúlio Vargas came to power by displacing an elected president from São Paulo in 1930. His administration was strongly opposed by the *paulista* elites, who rebelled (and lost) against his government in 1932. While São Paulo was the main political and economic center of the country because of the coffee trade (until the 1930s) and its growing industrial zones, it was important for Vargas to downplay the importance of this particular State for national development. In order to do so, Vargas emphasized *Nordestinos* as important potential contributors to the acceleration of Brazil’s productivity, shifting the focus from Brazil’s Southern and Midwest regions to Northern territories. The emphasis on the role of *Nordestinos* was part of this effort to modernize the national economy and its production especially due to regional disputes. While the southern region was a more industrialized area, northern territories were less populated, and suffered from racial and class prejudice as they were considered as culturally backwards (Buckley, 2017: 127). Vargas stated that in order to advance as an industrial nation, the sparsely populated county needed the productive capacity of all citizens (Buckley, 2017: 131).

The regional divide was particularly compelling for the Vargas administration and its discourse, helping justify *Nordestinos* not as “culturally backwards,” but as important potential contributors to the national economy and guardians of traditional Brazilian values (Buckley, 2017: 128). Needless to say, these cultural disputes were also permeated by questions of race. Vargas considered *Nordestinos* to be quintessential Brazilians because of their mixed ancestry, being descended from Portuguese colonists, escaped Black slaves, and native Indigenous people. Vargas saw this mixed heritage as an opportunity. Vargas’ *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (Department of Press and Propaganda) portrayed *sertanejos* as “non-white, non-black, non-rebellious,

³⁶ Original Portuguese version: “*Para os gestores da Campanha, o homem ‘forte, sadio e produtivo’ que eles precisavam era, preferencialmente, o Nordeste, o sertanejo acostumado com o trabalho duro, resistente às adversidades e outra vez em difícil situação, grave o suficiente para levá-los a aceitar sem dificuldades o ‘apelo da pátria’. É a eles que a propaganda oficial fala diretamente e pede que ofereçam a sua ‘cota de sacrifícios.’*”

capable and educable” (Blake, 2011: 334), thus, perfect contributors for the country’s development projects. Furthermore, Vargas used Northeast regional droughts precisely as a way to prove how conditioned and enduring *Nordestinos* were in adapting to the adversity, and, therefore, perfect for committing labor-intensive works.

“During the *Estado Novo* [second phase of Vargas’s administration, after his *Coup D’Etat* from 1937-1945], Pernambucan government officials succeeded in creating and disseminating a new understanding of Northeastern regional identity that emphasized *Nordestinos*’ nonblack cultural and racial attributes. The *homem do Nordeste* was a strong, capable, educable, and cooperative white, worker and citizen who did not question or challenge the economic and political status quo.” (Blake, 2011: 221)

Culturally, there was a clear regional divide in Brazil that had emerged in the 1920s, culminating during the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week) of 1922. This event, held at São Paulo’s Municipal Theater, was organized by a group of writers, painters, musicians, artists, and intellectuals such as poets and writers Mario and Oswald de Andrade, composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, painter Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, and painter Anita Malfatti, amongst others. São Paulo’s Modern Art Week was an important event putting São Paulo’s cultural production on the map as modern, edgy, and, at the same time, exemplarily Brazilian by creating a rupture with Portuguese academicism and colonial cultural practices, and, consequently, a rupture with what was considered the country’s past.

This rupture also motivated greater discussions about what was truly “traditional” in Brazil. At the same time as São Paulo’s modernist movement was trying to “look forward” towards new and renewed Brazilian cultural production, there was also a particular regionalist movement rising, led by sociologist, historian, and writer Gilberto Freyre. The regionalist production highlights a naturalist-realist project in writing and describing spaces as faithfully as possible, following the path started by Euclides da Cunha’s 1906 publication “*Os Sertões*.” Cunha’s work is considered one of Brazil’s literary masterpieces, starting a movement of a national search for identity and the pursuit of what could be considered true Brazilianness by exploring the *sertanejo*’s costumes and traditions (Albuquerque Jr., 2011: 66). The folkloric traditional culture of the *sertão* was seen as the basis for the establishment of a national culture. Furthering Cunha’s debates and writings, Freyre looked at the recent Brazilian republican status as a way of overcoming former monarchical views of the country as a unity, putting forward Brazil’s different localities’ particularities (Freyre, 2003: 14). Freyre tried highlighting regional costumes and heritage, deepening Brazilian African and Indigenous roots, but at the same time, considering the Iberian and European influences on these populations as well (Freyre, 2003: 15).

As follows, here is a passage of the “*Manifesto Regionalista*” (“Regionalist Manifesto”), written by Gilberto Freyre in 1926. In this passage Freyre explained how, while the recognition of regional aspects was important (and oftentimes even exotic), there was

also a need to understand that true “Brazilianness” is also made by the fusion of different regions and cultures:

“This is Brazil: the blend, the fusion, the mixtures. And *Nordeste* is maybe the main bowl where one can see this blend happening. The fusion of blood and values that are still boiling: Portuguese, Indigenous, Spanish, French, African, Dutch, Jew, British, German, Italian. [...] It accentuates, in conclusion, that in *Nordeste* – this *Nordeste* that has been transforming itself in Brazilian values, which were values that for a long time were only considered as sub-national or even exotic – there is some sort of Franciscanism inherited by the Portuguese, that brings closer men, trees and animals. Not only species from that region, but also the foreign ones as well. Here all men become brothers, uncles, *compadres* from each other.”³⁷ (Freyre, 1996: 56)

But the regionalist movement was also built on contradictions. The very distinction of *Nordeste* from other areas in the country was created at a moment when that region was facing both an economic and political crisis. Northeastern states were extremely wealthy in the 1800s because of their production and exports of sugar and cotton using the labor of formerly enslaved people. By the end of the nineteenth century, slavery was officially abolished (1888). Furthermore, the country’s main production and exports shifted from sugar and cotton from Pernambuco and Ceará to coffee from São Paulo and Minas Gerais. By the Proclamation of the Republic and end of the Portuguese Monarchy in 1889, the South had already emerged as the country’s new center of power. As mentioned earlier, Eve Elizabeth Buckley brings to light the fact that the Brazilian designation of the *Nordeste* (Northeast) as a distinct region from the North was established precisely after the first National Department for Works to Combat Droughts (DNOCS) was founded, in 1909, to address the climate affliction of that region. The flourishing of the Amazonian rubber boom and rubber exports at the turn of the century also led to the adoption of a shared identity as well as differentiation between the two areas. Thus, from that moment on, *Nordeste* became strongly associated with drought and famine, given the area’s poor and unexplored hinterlands (Buckley, 2017: 15). Historian Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior (2011) sees the official regional divide resulting from even earlier power disputes, led by the crisis in sugar production and exports and the rise of São Paulo as the main economic and political center at the turn of the twentieth century. Independently, in both cases, both Albuquerque Jr. and Buckley point to how the creation of the category of *Nordeste* was part of a strategic move by local elites to call attention to and secure governmental aid for and further investments in this now poor and decaying area of the country, but still worthy of recognition by being “quintessential Brazilian,” as Vargas would advertise.

³⁷ Original Portuguese version: “*Pois o Brasil é isto: combinação, fusão, mistura. E o Nordeste, talvez a principal bacia em que se vêm processando essas combinações, essa fusão, essa mistura de sangue e valores que ainda fervem: portugueses, indígenas, espanhóis, franceses, africanos, holandeses, judeus, ingleses, alemães, italianos. [...] Saliente-se em conclusão, que há no Nordeste - neste Nordeste em que vêm se transformando em valores brasileiros, valores por algum tempo apenas subnacionais ou mesmo exóticos - uma espécie de franciscanismo, herdado dos portugueses, que aproxima dos homens, árvores e animais. Não só os da região como os importados. Todos se tornam aqui irmãos, tios, compadres das pessoas.*”

The cultural and regional divide of Brazil creating the concept of *Nordeste* represented a way to bring back the past and glory of that region, which also served as a way to defend certain upper-class privileges that were lost or threatened. The works of sociologists such as Gilberto Freyre (*"Nordeste,"* 1937), writers such as Rachel de Queiroz (*"O Quinze,"* 1930) and José Américo de Almeida (*"A Bagaceira,"* 1928) paint *Nordeste* as pure and victimized by the droughts, decay, and lack of governmental support. These authors were also the sons and daughters of *Nordeste's* "regional elites" whose works helped shape governmental policy and actions towards "saving" that region (Albuquerque Jr, 2011: 47). Two main examples of these authors' influence and local leverage are José Américo's invitation to become leader of President Vargas' ministry of Road and Public Works (1930-1934), and Freyre's work *"Nordeste"* (1937), later used as a basis for the creation of the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in 1941 during Vargas' administration (Freyre, 2003: 34).

CHAPTER 3: CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN CEARÁ

Introduction: Concentration Camps in Ceará

This chapter brings to light a little-known history of early twentieth century concentration camps in the Brazilian state of Ceará, and how these drought-relief governmental aid facilities had long-lasting consequences for the urban formation of the state's capital city, Fortaleza, where patterns of exclusion and displacement persist even today. This chapter draws attention to the history of the *sertanejo*'s (inland populations) drought refugees (*flagelados*) and the ways in which local and national governments have dealt with the migrant crisis, culminating in the construction of concentration camps first in 1915 and again in 1932.

Justified through humanitarian rhetoric and highly influenced by the local elites, the concentration camps in Northeast Brazil (1915 and 1932) worked as barriers to the city, functioning as ephemeral facilities built for internally displaced refugees from the droughts. Camps were placed on the outskirts of Fortaleza (CE), or strategically situated in close proximity to existing railroad stations in the inlands of the state. These were not zones of extermination, but aid, quarantine, isolation, work, and discipline. Over the course of one year (1932-33), these camps sheltered over 150,000 people.

During the droughts of 1932, there were seven concentration camp facilities built by the government within the state of Ceará. Two facilities were located within municipal boundaries, Pirambú (or Urubú) and Octavio Bonfim (or Matadouro), and the other five were spread across the state's territory along the rail lines of Sobral and Baturité: Ipú, Quixeramobim, Cariús, Patú, and Buriti. While all the 1932 camp facilities were built sharing similar organizational principles, each location had its own particularities. Spaces had different sizes, rules, and organizational principles. Nevertheless, they all shared basic concepts for their implementation, were financed by both the national and state governments, and were designed as spaces of aid and, at the same time, control of the masses of *flagelados* – poor and landless drought refugees on the move. All camps were built as temporary, ephemeral emergency facilities, located either by train stops or near a location by the rail line. Camp facilities would be implemented where there was a source of potable water, and construction used locally-sourced materials such as wood and sticks. Large common sheds or collective shacks would shelter *flagelados*, who would sleep on the floor or on hammocks. There was always a designated space for the kitchen, where food would be distributed daily, and there were also medical facilities and staff (often insufficient) to take care of those who were ill. Not all camps were walled nor policed. Most camps were connected to local public works, often using the labor force of those who were encamped.

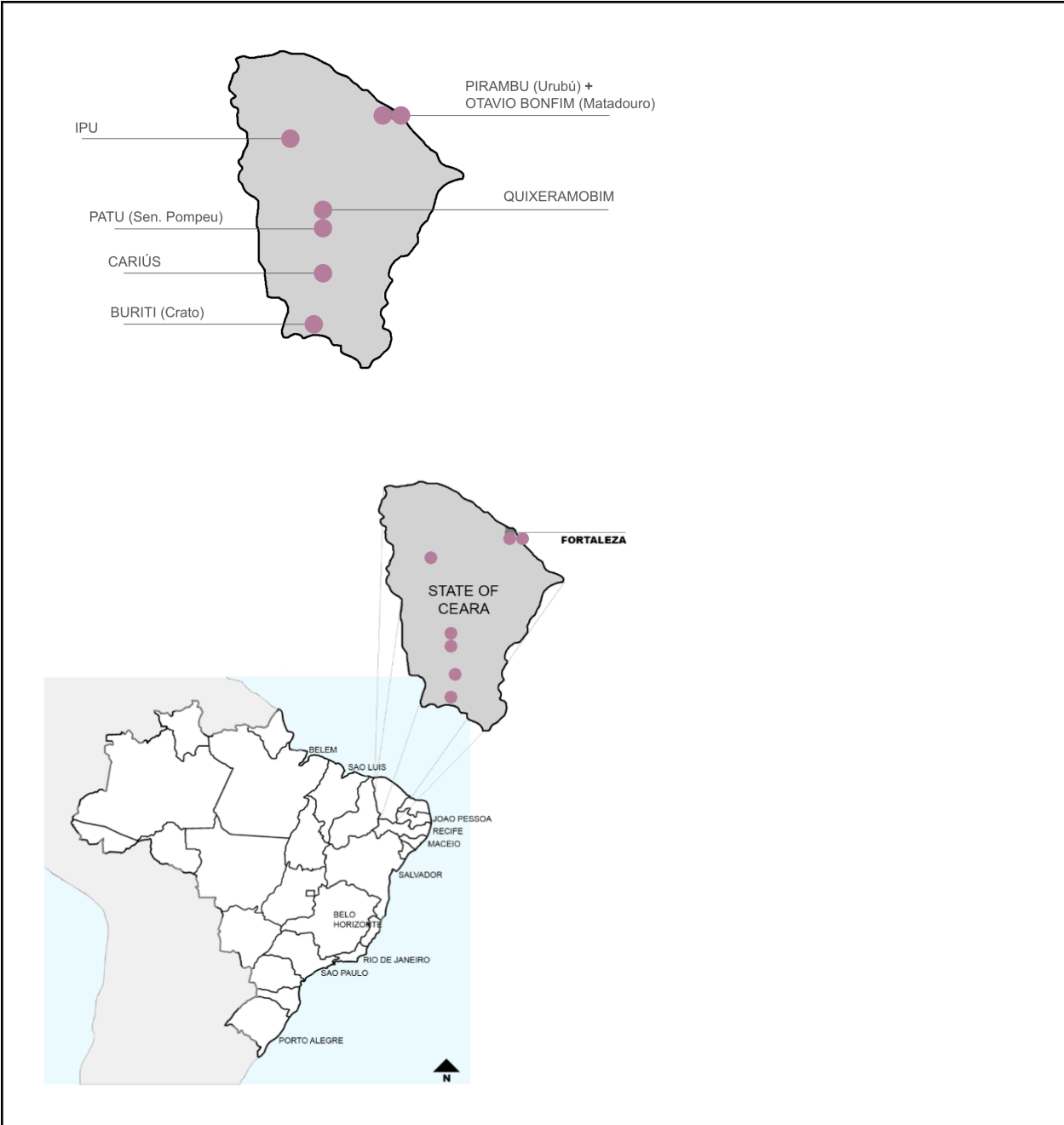


Figure 3.1: Brazilian map highlighting the state of Ceará and its capital city, Fortaleza. Magenta dots indicate the location of the seven concentration camp facilities in 1932.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

After the drought was over, the camps were quickly dismantled, and the population dispersed. The memory of these spaces that today have left little to no physical traces is quickly disappearing, but the consequences of these transitory spatial constructions and provisional urban policies are still very present in *nordestinos'* (population from the Brazilian Northeast region) lives. While built as a temporary governmental project, the

camps in many ways persist today in different forms. Fortaleza's city plan and growth vectors are a direct consequence of these long-lasting unequal and hygienist urban and social constructions from the past that are still very present and visible. I argue that the camps played an important role on a national scale building Brazilian infrastructure, and should be considered crucial sites in Brazil's history and modernization as spaces that became institutionalized as sites for the organization and control of labor power.

In the introductory chapters, I have contextualized broader discussions about camps and camps' histories worldwide, as well as how my work relates to this broader field of research. I have also examined the specific history of Brazil, analyzing the social, economic, and political moment the country was going through in the early twentieth century, building the grounds for the two case studies I am presenting in this dissertation. This chapter presents the first case study: the concentration camps. The two case studies are presented chronologically, and, as I argue, build on one another. My goal with this chapter is to put forward the little-known history of the Brazilian concentration camps, how this type of governmental aid policy came into being, what was left of these spaces, and what consequences such spaces have in *nordestinos'* lives up to the present day. I see the camps as the precursors to several cyclical and periodical country-wide nation-building programs adopting and mobilizing *nordestinos'* migrant labor as a cheap labor force for infrastructure.

This chapter is organized in three parts. (1) "Before" the concentration camps, when Fortaleza was being consolidated as a modern capital city for the state of Ceará, and the growing metropolis was dealing with severe drought periods at the turn of the twentieth century. In this section I present the new sanitary and hygienist urbanization methods that were being enforced in the city, and previous examples of the concentration camps in dealing with drought migrants coming from the inlands, such as the *abarracamentos* shack construction; (2) the 1915 drought and camp experience, with this as the first time the government of the state of Ceará officially implemented one single location within the municipal boundaries of Fortaleza to house large groups of *flagelados* arriving in the capital city; and finally (3) the 1932 camps, seven facilities built and spread across Ceará's territory implemented with the help of the federal government as a significant drought gripped the northeast region. I identify the pivotal role played by the transient and ephemeral nature of these camps, which enables such projects to follow a cyclical pattern, consistently drawing from and reinforcing the involvement of the same actors and thus further solidifying these power dynamics.

Precursor

As previously discussed, an important precursor of the concentration camps in Ceará were the *abarracamentos* from 1877-1879. This was a governmental strategy for dealing with unprecedented masses of newcomers reaching the capital city, Fortaleza. *Abarracamentos* were isolated spaces scattered around the city where *flagelados* would be placed in order to be both aided and controlled by the local authorities. Fortaleza had only recently designed and implemented a modern city plan, and this was the first time

the city had to deal with the arrival of masses of migrants in response to a climate and social crisis.

Yet, this response and these constructions were still very haphazard. The lack of organization regarding the placement choices of the *abarracamentos* by the local authorities became the source of disagreements between local authorities and doctors and technicians/sanitation teams. Many *abarracamentos* were established in windward areas, which many believed at that time was problematic because it helped spread viruses and diseases through the city (windward areas have the wind blowing from the ocean towards the inlands, while in leeward areas the wind goes from the inlands towards the ocean, affecting less of the population). Rodolfo Teófilo brought up this discussion in his report about the spread of smallpox in Fortaleza (1910), questioning if the problem of the *abarracamentos* was really and solely their position in the urban fabric. Teófilo criticized the local authorities' decision to shut down some of the *abarracamentos'* windward locations (such as São Luiz, Meirelles, and Pajeú), saying that finding a new location for these facilities was not what was going to help lessen the spread of the virus, and that by shutting down these specific *abarracamentos*, the government only caused further reason for shame for the *retirantes* (Teófilo, 1910: 19). Teófilo's argument and proposition for the handling of the newcomers in order to avoid the smallpox crisis and peak of deaths was for the government to promote a massive vaccination campaign, which never happened. Teófilo complained that the government would put all their efforts into trying to fight hunger at first, and did not pay enough attention to the deadly spread of the viruses and diseases. He backed his argument by looking more closely at one of the *abarracamentos'* (Meireles) daily medical reports from the month of November in 1878. This report shows that 875 people were admitted to the *abarracamento*, 32 of whom were vaccinated. By the end of the month, 326 of the recently arrived were dead. None of the previously vaccinated people were amongst the deceased (Teófilo, 1910: 22).

The internal organization of the *abarracamentos* was also not consistent or comprehensive across all locations. Some of the facilities were composed of huts placed along the rail station's plaza; others would make use of and adapt existing constructions to lodge the newcomers, as shown in this excerpt from local newspaper "O *Retirante*", from July 1877³⁸:

"Housing for migrants— The government has recently been constructing some shacks or more accurately, huts, to provide shelter for a portion of the destitute population that continuously migrates to this capital city. This seems advantageous to us, therefore we suggest the idea of temporarily covering a section of the building being constructed for the public market at Marquez do Herval Square with thatch [to house the migrants]. [...] Considering the fact that

³⁸ The same article from the "O *Retirante*" also provided further details about the municipal government's adaptation of the market building transforming it into an *abarracamento* and explained how these actions would also represent significant savings of public funds. One of the adaptations that the article pointed out was the subdivision of the original building into twenty smaller independent compartments that could be used as housing ("O *Retirante*," July 22, 1877, edição 5, p. 3).

the building is located within the city's perimeter, in a well-ventilated and therefore hygienic area, these unfortunate migrants in need of food and public charity could be more easily and promptly assisted.”³⁹

When first commissioned, *abarracamentos*' spaces were designed as “quadrilaterals measuring 200 to 300 meters on each side, with aligned houses, mostly covered with tiles, featuring an infirmary, food storage, a small pharmacy, a seating area with four to eight chairs, a well, and a laundry area”⁴⁰ (Andrade, 2012:132).

Abarracamentos ended up sheltering over 114,000 refugees within less than two years, housing more than 20,000 people in one single location (Andrade, 2012: 132)⁴¹. As masses of newcomers arrived, *abarracamento* spaces grew exponentially and rapidly, and were unable to keep the original orthogonal formation intact. They became a labyrinthine arrangement of dispersed huts and hammocks, as described by journalist José do Patrocínio⁴²:

“[the *abarracamento* is] A labyrinthine space with scattered huts, hammocks suspended from the branches of cashew trees, and makeshift domes created by weaving the branches of shrubs.

One then enters putrid-smelling streets or blocks formed by vast stretches of houses similarly built, forming immense halls or divided into cramped huts. And there lies the citadel of poverty.”⁴³ (Câmara, 1970: 123)⁴⁴

³⁹ Original Portuguese version: “Casas para retirantes— O governo tem ultimamente mandado erigir algumas palhoças ou propriamente ranchos para o abrigo de parte da população desvalida que emigra continuamente para esta capital. Parece-nos de vantagem e lembramos a ideia de se mandar cobrir provisoriamente de palha a parte do edifício que está fazendo para mercado público na Praça do Marquez do Herval. [...] Colocado como se acha aquele edifício dentro do perímetro da cidade, lugar muito arejado, e portanto higiênico, com mais facilidade e prontamente poderão ser socorridos esses infelizes retirantes carecedores do pão e da caridade pública.”

Source: “O Retirante,” July 22, 1877, edição 5, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Original Portuguese version: “quadriláteros de 200 a 300 metros de cada lado, com casaria alinhada e em grande parte coberta de telha, com enfermaria, deposito de viveres, pequena botica, assentamento de quatro a oito cadeiras, poço e lavanderia.”

⁴¹ *Abarracamentos* grew in size very rapidly. Spaces started by sheltering just a few families, and by November 1877, local newspaper “O Cearense” (November 18, 1877, edição 97-2, p. 3.) reported some of the largest *abarracamentos* lodging as many as 1,900 families, reaching almost 10,000 people in one location. By 1879 the largest *abarracamento* location, in Benfica, had over 23,000 people (Andrade, 2012: 132).

⁴² Black Brazilian journalist and writer José do Patrocínio was known for writing about and fighting for the abolition of enslaved work. He was also the author of “Os Retirantes” (“The Retirees”), from 1879, a novel considered to be one of the earliest literary pieces about the droughts in Northeast Brazil starting the naturalism realism literary movement in Brazil (Neves, 2007; Rocha, 2022).

⁴³ Original Portuguese version: “[o *abarracamento* é] dispersão labirintica de choupanas, redes suspensas aos galhos dos cajueiros, cúpulas improvisadas com o entrançamento das ramagens das moitas de arbustos.

Penetra-se depois em ruas fétidas ou quadras formadas por enormes lanços de casaria, edificadas pelo mesmo modelo, formando imensos salões ou divididos em apertados casebres. E aí a cidadela da miséria”

⁴⁴ José do Patrocínio was reporting for the Rio de Janeiro newspaper “Gazeta de Notícias” (RJ) at that time. Reports were later reproduced and published at: Câmara, José Aurélio Saraiva. “José do

While each family had their own space (whether it be either a designated hut or simply a shaded area with hammocks), *abarracamentos* also had common shared infrastructure such as medical facilities and a kitchen where food was prepared and distributed. The municipal government at the time created some committees of employers to help the newcomers in various aspects, as explained by the Governor Estelita (December 1876-November 1877), who first implemented the *abarracamentos* and aid support system in the city:

“Regarding the emigrants who sought refuge in the capital, I organized the necessary services for their reception – accommodations, assistance, and treatment. I appointed diligent citizens who were entrusted with the task of distributing aid, and ordered the construction of encampments near the city, where migrants are gathered by members of the local committees.”⁴⁵

The *comissão distribuidora* (distribution commission) was responsible for giving donations of clothes, food, and pocket money to those living in the *abarracamentos*⁴⁶. The *comissão domiciliaria* (housing commission) was responsible for distributing the *flagelados* amongst the different *abarracamentos* in the city. The *comissão de socorros* (medical aid commission) would give newcomers some medical assistance upon their arrival. There was also religious support offered by local priests:

“No dying person has been lacking the sweet solace of our holy religion, as a distinguished priest in every respect visits the encampment daily. I refer to the Reverend Father Ptat, a worthy Lazarist and professor at the seminary of this capital.”⁴⁷

Yet, as the *abarracamentos* grew, not only did the lodging structures become more precarious, but the shared facilities also became problematic, as pointed out in this opinion piece published in 1879 at a weekly newspaper from Ceará:

Patrocínio, Cronista da Seca.” In: *Fatos e documentos do Ceará Provincial*. Fortaleza: Imprensa Universitária da Universidade Federal do Ceará, 1970. Pp. 103-152.

⁴⁵ Original Portuguese version: “Com relação aos emigrantes que se recolham à Capital, regularizei os serviços necessários à sua recepção – alojamentos, socorros e tratamento.

Nomeei à cidadãos prestimosos a quem incumbi especialmente da distribuição dos socorros, mandando construir abarracamentos nas imediações da cidade, onde são recolhidos pelos membros das comissões domiciliares.”

Source: “Relatório com que o Excelentíssimo Senhor Desembargador Caetano Estelita Cavalcanti Pessoa passou a Administração da Província do Ceará ao Excelentíssimo Senhor Conselheiro João José Ferreira Aguiar em o dia 23 de novembro de 1877.” Fortaleza: Typographia do Pedro II, 1877, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Jornal “O Cearense”, September 16, 1877, edição 79-1, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Original Portuguese version: “A nenhum moribundo faltou ainda o doce consolo de nossa santa religião, pois um sacerdote distinto a todos os respeitos visita diariamente o abarracamento. Refiro-me ao Reverendo Sr. Padre Ptat, digno lazarista e professor no seminário desta capital.”

Source: Interview with Doctor José Lourenço for the local newspaper on January 9, 1880. *Echo do Povo*: Organ da Opinião Pública, 20-2, p. 2.

“Everyone in this capital is aware of the way the food is prepared in the encampment’s kettles. It is so filthy that the most desperately hungry individuals can only consume it only in their most dire moments, often shedding tears while eating.”⁴⁸

At the same time, newspapers reported several corruption schemes regarding the money and resources that were being directed at the *abarracamentos* from the local government. One example of this was regarding the food distribution system:

“And not even this system of prepared food prevents theft, if by chance His Excellency had the notion to prevent it; on the contrary, it facilitates it, as has already been proven in the experiments conducted since the time of the smallpox epidemic, when a mere kitchen supervisor weekly diverted the excess of over 40 sacks of provisions to his private storage, which were later sold to the government.”⁴⁹

It is worth calling attention to how the “*pronto socorro*” commission, originally appointed by Governor Estelita as “diligent citizens entrusted with the task of distributing aid,”⁵⁰ was also hiring some of the *flagelados* themselves to help with food and clothing distribution and policing at the *abarracamentos*. This would often present conflict, as described by journalist José do Patrocínio:

“The same anarchy prevails in the distribution of clothing. Family inspectors, men selected from among the very *flagelados*’ migrants themselves, but incapable of understanding their mission and grasping the responsibilities of their positions, are tasked with determining the most needy individuals. Commissioners and administrators generally do not oversee the work in a way that would prevent the most glaring injustices from occurring.”⁵¹ (Câmara, 1970: 127)

Similarly to the latter situation, journalist José do Patrocínio reported some of his findings during visits to the *abarracamentos* in Ceará between July and September

⁴⁸ Original Portuguese version: “Não há quem ignore nesta capital [...] o que seja alimentação preparada nas caldeiras dos abarracamentos, tão imunda que os mais necessitados famintos só ingerem algum bocado dela nos últimos extremos e não poucas vezes derramando lágrimas.”

Source: November 4, 1879. “*Echo do Povo: Orgam da Opinião Pública*,” 14-1, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Original Portuguese version: “E nem esse sistema de alimentação preparada impede o furto, se por acaso S. Exc. teve a lembrança de impedi-lo; pelo contrário, facilita-o, como já tem sido experimentado nos ensaios que se tem feito desde o tempo da epidemia das bexigas, quando um simples diretor de cozinha passava semanalmente a sobra de mais de 40 sacas de gêneros para o seu depósito particular, que mais tarde eram vendidas ao governo.”

Source: November 4, 1879. “*Echo do Povo: Orgam da Opinião Pública*,” 14-1, p. 2.

⁵⁰ “Relatório com que o Excelentíssimo Senhor Desembargador Caetano Estelita Cavalcanti Pessoa passou a Administração da Província do Ceará ao Excelentíssimo Senhor Conselheiro João José Ferreira Aguiar em o dia 23 de novembro de 1877.” Fortaleza: Typographia do Pedro II, 1877, p. 21.

⁵¹ Original Portuguese version: “A mesma anarquia reina na distribuição das roupas. Os inspetores de famílias, homens tirados dentre os próprios retirantes, porém incapazes de saberem compreender a sua missão e medir as responsabilidades dos seus cargos, são encarregados de dizer quais as pessoas mais necessitadas. Os comissários e administradores, geralmente não tratam de fiscalizar o trabalho de maneira que as mais clamorosas injustiças são perpetradas.”

1878 to be very different from what was originally envisioned by Governor Estelita. First, Patrocínio explicitly mentioned how there were not enough hospital beds for all those who were infirm. Second, he complained about the lack of proper sanitary conditions in the *abarracamentos*. Third, he exposed the surging cases of promiscuity and prostitution. The journalist was particularly vocal about the chaotic and ineffective food distribution system, especially during Governor José Julio de Albuquerque's mandate (1878-1880)⁵²:

“It is true they built large encampments that sheltered significant numbers of migrants. [...] However, the shadows of misfortune were not dispelled. The *Pronto Socorro* Emergency Relief Committee would arbitrarily set their own hours for providing aid to the hungry who arrived in the capital city worn out from their arduous journeys. By the entrances of the emigrants' encampments, the needy were perishing without support. [...] Hunger continued its triumphant march, pushing hundreds of women into prostitution. [...] Various illnesses encountered no resistance to their devastating course.”⁵³ (Câmara, 1970: 136)

While the everyday organization of the *abarracamentos* was far from ideal and their practice was quite distant from the envisioned system discussed by Governor Estelita in the 1888 report mentioned, the reception of newcomers was fairly arranged and systematized, given the government's need to identify a capable labor force for public works. Upon arrival, newcomers at the *abarracamentos* went through a simple registration process, where employers from the “*pronto socorro*” commission asked *flagelados* for their names; where they were coming from; where were they born; how many members their family had; and how many people were men, women, or children. At this point, employers classified *flagelados* either as “able-bodied” or “disabled/invalid” people. The “disabled” destitute group was composed of widows, orphans, and invalid/sick people, who needed to be provided with aid and support and could not work. The healthier people, or the “able” ones, were directed to work on public works, such as the construction of dams, roads, public sanitation projects, and even construction within the *abarracamentos* themselves (Andrade, 2012: 132). While they worked as centers for aid, *abarracamentos* also strategically and conveniently served as recruiting grounds for cheap labor for the government, as clearly stated in this article published in a local newspaper at the time:

“For the sake of supervision and regularity in the distribution of aid, and in order to achieve the greatest possible savings, as necessary, it is essential that Your Honor restricts the sending of provision of prepared food to widows, orphans,

⁵² The three governors of Ceará (*Presidente da Província do Ceará*) during the 1877-1879 drought were: Caetano Estelita Cavalcanti Pessoa (1876-1877), João José Ferreira Aguiar (1877-1878), and José Julio de Albuquerque Barros (1878-1880).

⁵³ Original Portuguese version: “*Construíram-se, é verdade, grandes abarracamentos que abrigaram grandes números de retirantes. [...] Mas nem por isso os negros da desgraça foram espancados. A comissão de Pronto Socorro fixou arbitrariamente horas para ir em auxílio dos famintos que chegassem à capital, fatigados pelas penosas jornadas. Junto das portas dos abarracamentos dos emigrantes, morrem sem amparo os necessitados. [...] Continuou triunfante a fome a arrastar à prostituição centenas de mulheres [...] Moléstias várias não encontraram resistência ao seu curso devastador.*”

and invalids who reside in the encampment under your direction, ceasing all supply to individuals not residing therein. In requests for provisions, Your Honor will always specify the number of destitute individuals lodged in the encampment, with reference to each of the three mentioned categories [widows, orphans, and invalids]; and in the event there are able-bodied men in the encampment, provide me with a list of their names, indicating how many are required for service so that appropriate measures can be taken for the ones who are unable to find meaningful occupation on their own.”⁵⁴

José do Patrocínio further described the importance of the early classification of newcomers to the “*socorros públicos*” committee, as food distribution was organized within three different categories: (1) rations for the “able bodies” who worked; (2) food for the widows and orphans; and (3) food and further aid treatment for the sick (disabled) people (Câmara, 1970: 129). Each of these categories of people had a specific place within the *abarracamento* where goods were disbursed. Workers were given their provisions at a place called “*pegadoria*” (roughly translated as “grab-station”) as a form of payment for their labor. At the same time, the distribution of provisions for women, according to Patrocínio, was a more chaotic and often violent process, with long lines and not enough rations for everyone (this process was different at different *abarracamento* locations):

“As soon as the door opened, the uproar and confusion began. To quell them, the administrator threatened the women with fasting. [...] Then, *quite naturally the police*, who were migrants themselves armed with clubs and whips, restored the order. [...]

The “*Pegadorias*” served to distribute rations to the men as a payment for a day’s work. These spaces were organized as large rectangles covered with thatch or even uncovered, divided into small compartments that could accommodate a hundred men each. In each compartment, there was a sort of rudimentary counter, from which the employees distributed the rations.”⁵⁵ (Câmara, 1970: 128-129)

⁵⁴ Original Portuguese version: “*A bem da fiscalização e regularidade na distribuição de socorros, e a fim de realizar a maior economia possível, como se faz necessário, cumpre que Vossa Senhoria se limite a mandar e fornecer alimentação preparada, na conformidade da tabela e ordens expedidas, às viúvas, órfãos e inválidos que residem no abarracamento sob sua direção, cessando todo e qualquer fornecimento a pessoas não residentes do mesmo.*”

Nos pedidos de gêneros Vossa Senhoria declarará sempre o número dos indigentes abarracados, com referência a cada uma das três mencionadas classes; e no caso de haver homens válidos no abarracamento, envie-me uma relação deles, informando que número é indispensável para o serviço a fim de ser dado o conveniente destino aos outros que por si não poderem procurar ocupação útil.”

Source: “*Echo do povo: Orgam da Opinião Pública.*” November 4, 1879. 14-1, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Original Portuguese version: “*Logo que a porta abre-se começa a celeuma e a confusão. Para contê-las o administrador as [as mulheres] ameaça com o jejum. [...] então muito naturalmente os policiais, retirantes armados de cacetes e chicotes re-estabelecem a ordem. [...]*”

As Pegadorias servem para distribuir aos homens as rações, que são o preço do trabalho do dia. São grandes retângulos cobertos de palha ou mesmo descobertos e divididos em pequenos compartimentos nos quais cabem cem homens. Em cada compartimentos há uma espécie de balcão tosco, de onde os empregados distribuem as rações.”

By the time the drought was over and the influx of migrants ceased, so did the *abarracamentos*. Yet, this initial modern utilitarian and sanitary experience in dealing with the population in need was only starting.

1915

The 1915 concentration camp

When the next big drought period gripped Ceará in 1915, the *abarracamento* arrangements were reconsidered by the then-Governor, Colonel Benjamin Barroso (1914-1916). Because of the series of urban improvements and the rising social segregation in Fortaleza, this time Colonel Barroso chose to concentrate the new wave of drought refugees within one single and isolated location in the capital: the *Alagadiço* concentration camp. These displaced populations, who during the 1877 drought had been allocated in multiple facilities around town, according to Colonel Barroso, “spreading their bodies contaminated with diseases of various kinds, [...] this poor population that blended with citizens from Fortaleza, invading their homes with their pleas, exposing everyone to their illnesses” (Neves, 1995: 96), were now fixed within one space. For Colonel Barroso, these measures would facilitate the distribution of aid and would allow better and more humane treatment for the refugees, who would also be accounted for working in public services, and, in exchange, would be fed and sheltered. Historian Frederico de Castro Neves highlighted the importance of the shift in the terminology being used—from *abarracamentos* to concentration camp—representing a new moment in Fortaleza’s history, bringing a more technical and scientific official solution towards aiding and organizing the drought refugees. A “concentration camp” brought up the idea of a collective and radical approach; a mechanism of control of the population (Neves, 1995: 104).

Alagadiço

The 1915 camp was located in the outskirts of the city by the Alagadiço train station. The great majority of the newcomers in 1915 arrived in Fortaleza using the Baturité rail line, which had been recently extended to the municipality of Iguatu with the work of the earlier group of migrant *flagelados* from 1877. The Iguatu train station and the Alagadiço final stop were the locations outside of Fortaleza where the majority of the conflicts and overcrowding of *flagelados* occurred. These tensions at the train stop’s departure and arrival locations were immortalized in photographs shown by Idelfono Albano, Mayor of Fortaleza from 1912 to 1914 and 1921 to 1923, and Governor of the state of Ceará from 1923 to 1924, during his famous public speech to the chamber of federal deputies in 1917 (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). During his presentation, Albano emphasized how insufficient the federal assistance was in 1915, asking for more funds and a more structured project for combating the droughts not only during a crisis moment.

“As Rodolfo Teófilo, the chronicler of droughts, very aptly put it, Ceará always lives between a past drought and another that is looming. We exist in a constant restlessness, under excessive mental strain, perpetually threatened by calamity, shackled by the age-old scourge that hinders our progress and impedes our independence.

[...]

a proposal authorizing the State to provide 100 *contos de réis* to aid the drought-stricken victims [...] It is too little to address the serious, intricate problem of rectifying the flaws of nature operating in the afflicted region.

[...]

To help the legions of famished individuals abandoning their empty homes in the parched fields; to aid the populations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, it's not enough. But the true Christian charity of receiving an official contribution from our State—to provide sustenance to those who hunger—this is what we can do at present and what we must do.”⁵⁶ (Albano, 1918:88)

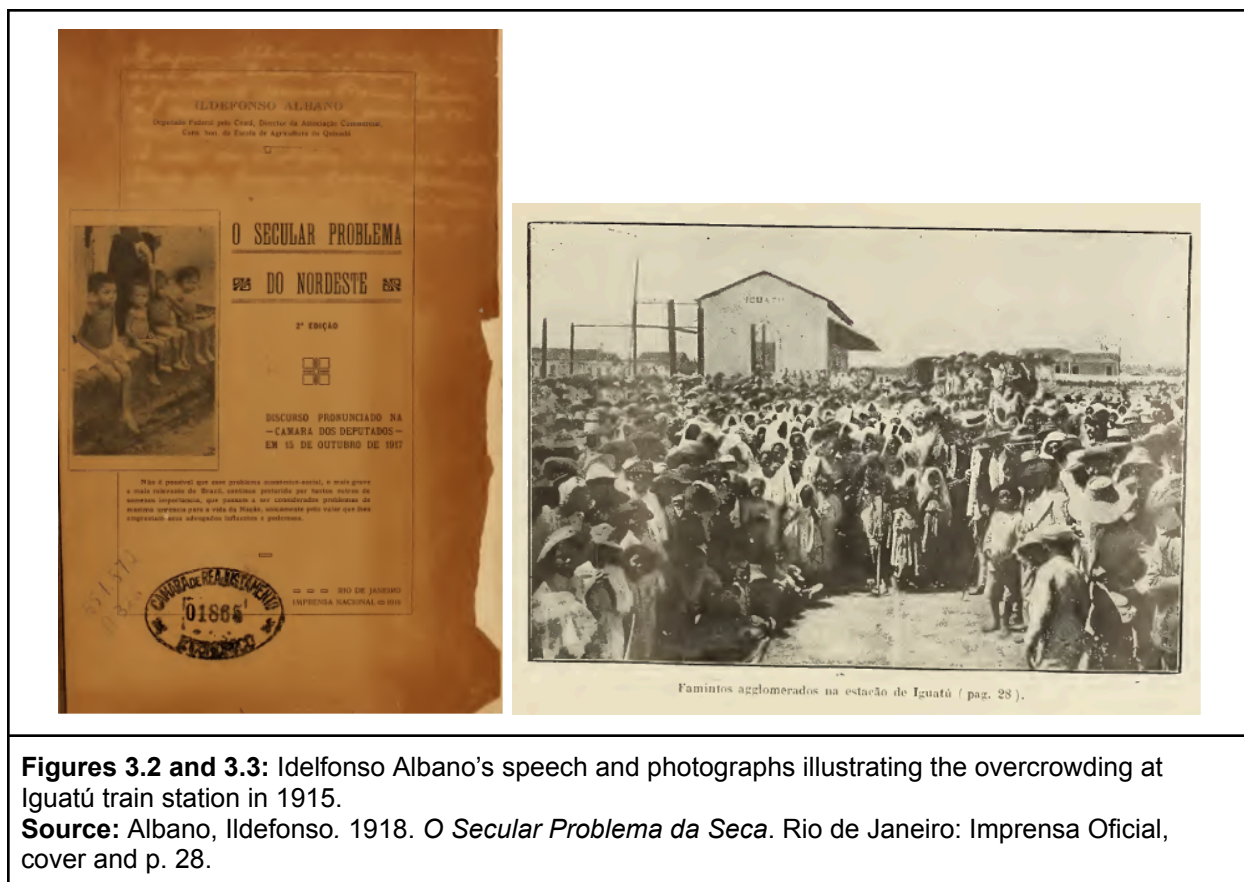
⁵⁶ Original Portuguese version: “O Ceará, como muito bem disse o cronista das secas, Rodolfo Teófilo, vive sempre entre uma seca que se foi e outra que já vem. Vivemos em uma constante inquietação, em uma excessiva tensão de espírito, sempre ameaçados da calamidade, acorrentados ao secular flagelo, que embaraça nosso progresso e impede nossa independência.

[...]

projeto autorizando o Estado a socorrer com 100 contos de réis os flagelados da seca [...] É muito pouco para resolver o problema grave, complexo, da correção de falhas da natureza operando na região flagelada

[...]

Para socorrer as legiões de famintos que abandonam os seus lares vazios, nos campos ressequidos; para socorrer as populações que se contam por centenas de milhares, é pouco, mas como uma contribuição oficial do no Estado a obra de verdadeira caridade cristã—dar alimento aos que têm fome—é o que na actualidade podemos fazer e o que devemos fazer.”



Figures 3.2 and 3.3: Idelfonso Albano’s speech and photographs illustrating the overcrowding at Iguatú train station in 1915.

Source: Albano, Idelfonso. 1918. *O Secular Problema da Seca*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Oficial, cover and p. 28.

On the other hand, the extension of the rail line also meant that not as many people were traveling to Fortaleza by foot anymore; given their less arduous journeys, they would arrive in better health. The train travels also meant that the majority of the migrants were reaching the capital city this time at a single location, having little to no contact with the rest of the population. The train stops worked almost as a vestibule for the adjacent concentration camp (Neves, 1995: 96).

The camp followed similar organization logics to its precursors, the *abarracamentos* – a vast space with provisional structures, guaranteeing shelter for a large number of *retirantes* (dispossessed evacuees), and some assistance related to distributing food and offering work to those in need. In a report written by Colonel Barroso justifying to the Federal Assembly his 1915-1916 expenditures, the Governor of Ceará digressed and described the Alagadiço camp initiative and further consequences of the 1915 drought within his mandate as the state’s administrator. Colonel Barroso explained that the area where the Alagadiço camp was installed housed at first about eight thousand people, and the space for the camp was donated by the (Brazil-based) Portuguese aristocrat João Pontes Medeiros, who made his fortune in Ceará as a fabric merchant and as the owner of the local telephony and telecommunications business⁵⁷:

⁵⁷ Idelfonso Albano, former mayor of Fortaleza, mentioned about 35,000 people passing through and being housed at the Alagadiço camp within a period of one year (Albano, 1918: 30).

“The land was owned by Mr. João de Pontes Medeiros, who kindly offered it to the Government free of charge for such a humanitarian purpose of building the Concentration Camp, which for a long time consistently accommodated over eight thousand people.”⁵⁸

In that same report, Colonel Barroso explained and justified the choice of concentrating the *flagelados* at Alagadiço, as this space was open, with many trees and access to electrical light, making it easier to police, oversee, and control the large groups of newcomers, guaranteeing there was no disrespect or indecency. Colonel Benjamin Barroso’s goal with building the camp was to avoid scenes of poverty, crime, and prostitution in the city center that were recurring during the earlier drought crisis. In this report, Colonel Barroso specifically described the space, and emphasized its new designation not as an *abarracamento*, but named as a “concentration camp”:

“In this capital, the *flagelados* were initially sheltered at the Public Promenade, as long as their number did not exceed three thousand people. However, their numbers quickly increased to such an extent that they had to be relocated to a vast area in Alagadiço, which was named the Concentration Camp. Basic facilities, including electric lighting to aid nighttime supervision, were hastily set up. This prevented incidents of indecency from being recorded.”⁵⁹

The changing terminology from *abarracamento* to concentration camp was strategic in showing a new order regulation. Yet, Rodolfo Teófilo emphasized how, in practice, the everyday organization of the 1915 concentration camp experience was not very different from the previous *abarracamentos*, despite the new lexicon:

⁵⁸ Original Portuguese version: “*De propriedade do Sr. João de Pontes Medeiros, que teve a gentileza de cedê-lo gratuitamente ao Governo para fim tão humanitário, o Campo de Concentração, por muito tempo, comportou permanentemente mais de oito mil pessoas.*”

Source: “*Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberato Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.*” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199/Label: 872830, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Original Portuguese version: “*Nesta Capital os flagelados foram agasalhados, a princípio no Passeio Público, enquanto o número não excedeu de tres mil, mas para logo subiu de uma maneira tão rápida que foi preciso retirá-los e localizá-los em um vasto terreno no Alagadiço, que tomou o nome de Campo de Concentração, em que foram feitas ligeiras instalações, inclusive de luz elétrica que facilitava a fiscalização à noite. Isso deu lugar a que não fossem registrados atos de desrespeito ao pudor.*”

Source: “*Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberato Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.*” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199/Label: 872830, p. 7.

“The migrants stayed at the Public Promenade until the future ‘abarracamento’ was prepared in Alagadiço, which took, I don’t know why, the name of ‘concentration camp,’ and the people informally called it a ‘corral.’”⁶⁰ (Teófilo, 1915: 55)

Despite similar organization between the 1915 camp and 1877 *abarracamentos*, it is worth calling attention to how the federal government had been more organized and prepared for drought periods since the previous 1877 crisis in the Northeast region. The recently established *Inspetoria de Obras contra as Secas*/Inspectorate for Works to Combat Droughts (IOCS/Later named DNOCS), from 1909, started to regulate the workforce and manage resources for the dry *sertão* areas, as I previously explained in Chapter 1. The IOCS was also a consequence of the political moment Brazil was going through, transitioning from the imperial order into a republic, where landowners gained an important political role and voice. The state, through IOCS, was an agent serving public and private interests: the government managed the labor force by sending it to public works, but also employing it in private properties (while paid by the state). The concentration camp established in 1915 was a joint effort from the state and federal governments, and it was administered by the federal superintendency IOCS. The concentration camp, differently from the previous *abarracamento* facilities, was intended more as a provisional temporary facility for those in transit who needed aid.

Upon arrival in Fortaleza’s camp, migrants usually took one of three different paths: some stayed at the camp, while the majority of the *retirantes* either migrated to other states or were redirected as labor at public works. It is worth noting that migrants arriving at the camp had some mobility, but if they chose not to stay in the camp, they would not receive any assistance from the government. Those who stayed in the camp in Fortaleza were usually the “disabled bodies,” women and children, who received medical assistance, food, clothing, and other donations made by public and private parties. A great number of people passed through the camps only on their way out of Ceará to go to other states, which was incentivized and often sponsored by the federal government. Finally, there were the healthy migrants who were given a salary and redirected to public works. Public works could be: (1) working on the dams that were under construction from the IOCS Inspectorate; (2) working on federal and state relief works (such as building and fixing existing dams and roads); or (3) working at the railway extension project by RVC (*Rede de Viação Cearense*/Ceará’s rail company) (Albano, 1918: 25).

“The groups that embarked [at the concentration camp] were promptly replaced by others of the same number who arrived from the countryside either by foot or by rail. Many *retirantes* passed through the camp before going to the capital’s port and leaving by ship to various locations in the north and south of the country. Among these individuals, the young and healthy boys and men, though weakened, contributed a few hours of manual labor each day, doing earthwork

⁶⁰ Original Portuguese version: “Os retirantes estiveram no Passeio Público até se preparar no Alagadiço o futuro “abarracamento”, o qual tomou, não sei por quê, nome de “campo de concentração” e o povo batizou de “curral.”

on the city's streets and squares while waiting for their turn to board. In return for this service, the entire group of migrants at the Concentration Camp received abundant food, along with medical and pharmaceutical assistance, as well as the distribution of clothing to those in need. This support came not only from the government but also from private individuals. Additionally, spiritual assistance was provided by the Archbishopric.”⁶¹

As the drought persisted, Colonel Barroso reported that the number of migrants coming to Fortaleza outnumbered the originally-expected 8,000 migrants that the camp hosted in earlier months. As a consequence, overcrowding led to problems with sanitation, as seen in the *abarracamentos*, where large groups of people were clustered in fragile, ephemeral constructions made of sticks and straws or under the shade of cashew and mango trees (Neves, 2000: 48; Queiroz, 1930: 87; Câmara, 2015, 178). Despite the presence of some medical aid, the lack of sanitation, insufficient food rations, and proliferation of diseases resulted in precarious conditions and increased deaths (Neves, 2000: 55; Neves 1995: 97). The death toll rose suddenly and reached 27,000 people by the end of the drought. By December 1915, Colonel Barroso dissolved the concentration camp, and people were redistributed in different work fronts across the state. Because Colonel Barroso dissolved the concentration camp after the drought was over, unlike many of the *abarracamentos* from 1877, the 1915 Alagadiço camp did not grow into becoming a neighborhood in Fortaleza:

“The dissolution of the Concentration Camp took place, and the migrants were dispersed along the roads, working if they were able, with everyone receiving a salary which varied based on the number of people in their respective families. This way, the charity that was previously only given to widows and the infirm was abolished.”⁶²

⁶¹ Original Portuguese version: “*Os grupos que embarcavam [no campo de concentração] eram logo substituídos por outros de igual número dos que chegavam do interior, a pé ou pela via férrea. Por ele passaram retirantes que pelo porto da capital embarcaram para os pontos do norte e sul do país. Desse pessoal, os rapazes e homens moços e sadios, embora enfraquecidos, enquanto esperavam que lhes tocasse a vez de embarcarem, davam poucas horas por dia de trabalho de terraplanagem nas ruas e praças da cidade. Esse serviço tinha por compensação alimento abundante para todo o pessoal do Campo de Concentração, de assistência médica e farmacêutica, além da distribuição de roupas pelos mais necessitados, não só por parte do Governo como por particulares, bem assim assistência espiritual promovida pelo Arcebispo.*”

Source: “Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberato Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199/Label: 872830, p. 7.

⁶² Original Portuguese version: “*Procedeu-se a dissolução do Campo de Concentração e o pessoal foi distribuído pelas estradas, trabalhando, os que podiam, todos recebendo salário, variável com o número de pessoas de suas respectivas famílias. Desta sorte foi abolida a esmola que cabia somente às viúvas e aos enfermos.*”

Source: “Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberato Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199/Label: 872830, p. 8.

Years later in 1917, Idelfonso Albano's speech would also provide a more realistic view of what concentrating the *flagelados* at the Alagadiço camp actually meant. Albano compared the camp space's overcrowding—with not 8,000, but over 35,000 people passing through the facility, and the lack of support to the migrants—to something similar to the tragic situation seen at Iguatu train station, at the other end of the line from the Baturité railroad: the vestibule from the camp and the camp itself became very much alike:

“Even when arriving in the capital the ordeal of these unfortunate Brazilians was still not over. During the 1915 drought, *flagelados*' groups outnumbering 35,000 people were corralled into a large enclosure at the city's gates. They lived under leafless cashew trees, exposed to the sun and rain, in complete overcrowding; they received a miserable daily ration of food and tended to their needs on-site. In this environment of filth, a terrible typhoid epidemic broke out, claiming numerous victims among both the migrants and the inhabitants of Fortaleza. In this corral of human cattle, the same piercing scenes of misery from Iguatu were repeated.”⁶³ (Albano, 1918: 30)

Everyday life at the 1915 camp

While there were significant differences in the way the 1915 drought refugees were administered by the local and national governments—considering Brazil's new political moment, the new role portrayed by IOCS, and of course the centralization of aid and resources within one location—everyday life in the camp was not much different from the 1877 *abarracamentos*, as mentioned by Teófilo (Teófilo, 1915: 55). The 1915 Alagadiço camp's overcrowded, inhumane conditions were immortalized in the writings of preeminent literary writer Rachel de Queiroz, in her novel, “*O Quinze*.” In the book situated in the year of 1915, the main character Chico Bento and his family arrived in Fortaleza as refugees from the inland droughts, and were placed in the camp, where another protagonist, Conceição, was working as a volunteer. Conceição was an upper-class young woman who was single and worked as a school teacher in Fortaleza. Every year during the long two-month holidays, she spent time at her family's estate and farm house in Quixadá, in the countryside of Ceará. At the farm, Conceição mingled with the workers, such as the *vaqueiro* (cowboy) Chico Bento and his family, as well as with her relatives who lived in the region, including Vicente, a rich cowboy and the son of a landowner, with whom she would flirt.

⁶³ Original Portuguese version: “*Na capital ainda não finda o martírio destes infelizes brasileiros. Na seca de 1915 foram eles, em número que atingiu 35.000 encurralados em um grande cercado às portas da cidade. Viviam debaixo de cajueiros sem folhas, expostos ao sol e à chuva, em completa promiscuidade; recebiam diariamente uma miserável ração de comida e satisfiziam as suas necessidades in loco. Nesse ambiente de imundice irrompeu uma terrível epidemia de paratifo, fazendo inúmeras vítimas entre os retirantes e habitantes de Fortaleza. Nesse curral de gado humano se repetiram as mesmas lancinantes cenas de misérias de Iguatu.*”

Colonel Barroso mentioned and praised the work of volunteers during the drought in his 1916 annual report to the Federal Assembly⁶⁴. He particularly described the importance of the work and aid given to *flagelados* by local religious authorities and priests, and also of other religious associations, such as the “*Senhoras de Caridade*” (Charitable ladies), a *laicato feminino vicentino* (Vincentian female laity). Queiroz’s leading female character, Conceição, was part of one of these organizations as a volunteer, as confirmed in this dialogue between Conceição’s grandmother, Dona Inácia, and Vicente, Conceição’s romantic pair:

- Why isn't Conceição here?
- She's at school, that is, by this time, she should be at the concentration camp.
- What is she doing there?
- She's part of the group of ladies that distribute food and clothes to the *flagelados*. (Queiroz, 1993: 73)

Through the impressions of the character Conceição, the writer Rachel de Queiroz described the spaces of the camp for outsiders: the heavy smells of the space, and the constant dangers of contamination and death.

Conceição would cross the concentration camp very fast. Sometimes a voice would ask:
- Can you spare some change...
She would take a coin out of her purse and move along, at a fast pace, running away from the promiscuity and bad smell of the camp.
How costly it was to cross over that space of filthy people, old cans and dirty rags. [...] (Queiroz, 1993: 55)

In the following passage, Conceição meets Chico Bento’s family in the concentration camp. This is a particularly important moment in the book: leading characters are placed in a different scenario from where they usually meet, reinforcing the discrepancy of power that has always existed between two different social classes. Chico Bento, the employee, suffered deeply from the drought, losing his job and his cattle and being forced to flee his hometown. Conceição, a privileged woman from a wealthy land-owning family, cares for the *flagelados* and even volunteers in her free time to help them, but is not as affected by the climate crisis. This is also an iconic moment, changing the perspective Conceição (and the readers) have about the camp space and the drought refugees. By bringing in a familiar face to the crowds of invisible, unknown, dehumanized *flagelados*, drought migrants finally became noted as humans – even though their inferior condition continued and prevailed, and “there was only so much” the upper classes could do for them. In this scene, Conceição helped Chico Bento’s family relocate to a less crowded space and to learn how to get their rationed food in the camp’s premises:

⁶⁴ “Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberato Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199 Label: 872830, p. 8.

Sadly, a silence weighed on them.

Suddenly Conceição spoke:

- *Compadre* [brother], I'll go check if there is a better location for your family. On the other side there is some kind of a zinc shack where this sickly old lady used to live with her granddaughter. The lady has died and another family started taking care of the child. There might be better for you...

And she left, pulling the group with her:

- Come! *Comadre* [sister], get your belongings, bring the boys. Before someone else comes and takes that space...

*

The new space was in fact much better. The floor was cleaner and harder, and they would not need to bury themselves in soft sand. There was a protected corner where they could light a fire, that was indicated by the placement of three black stones and some unlit charcoal.

Conceição showed them the advantages of the new location and concluded:

- You should settle in here, it is the best option. Now come with me, *compadre*, that is time to get the ration of food.

You don't have a plate?

And she rushed holding her blue wool skirt up, leaving in the direction of where the food distribution was being held; behind her, Chico Bento was curved and trembling, dragging his feet and holding a can in his hand, already used to the gesture of begging. (Queiroz, 1930: 90)

Dispersal of *flagelado* workers: work fronts

An estimated 80,000 migrants and their families (considering each worker had a family of about seven people) lived and worked in the three different work fronts, supported by the local and federal governments during the drought of 1915 (Albano, 1918: 27). Some of the work fronts from IOCS in different municipalities across Ceará that had been receiving migrants since 1915 became established communities, such as Acaraú-Mirim, as shown in the "Relatório do Ministério da Viação e Obras Públicas (RJ), 1915" (Report from the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works (Rio de Janeiro), 1915):

"Acaraú-Mirim, in the municipality of Sant'Anna.-- During the drought of 1915, this reservoir provided significant benefits, not only to the populations in its vicinity but also to the migrants who, in large numbers, sought refuge nearby. Land lots of 40 meters held various types of crops, and were distributed to workers. It's worth noting that by the end of the year, there were over 200 families living there, depending on the yield of their harvesting."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Original Portuguese version: "*Acaraú-Mirim, no município de Sant'Anna.-- Durante a seca de 1915 este açude prestou grandes benefícios, não somente às populações de suas circunvizinhanças, mas também aos retirantes que, em elevado número, se refugiaram nas suas imediações, e aos quais foram distribuídos em lotes de 40 metros, os seus terrenos de vazante para cultivos diversos, vindo a propósito notar que no fim do ano, existiam ali para mais de 200 famílias vivendo do produto de diferentes culturas.*"

Besides the *Acaraú-Mirim* dam, Quixadá was another public dam administered by IOCS receiving migrants and their families to work and live in its neighboring areas during the drought of 1915. Despite the water levels of the dam being lower than usual, migrants would still live off agriculture, fishing, and the maintenance works at the dam. Both Quixadá and Acaraú-Mirim together gathered about seven thousand refugees, including migrant workers and their families (Albano, 1918: 27).

Unwanted poor, needed workers

Yet, another worry of the local authorities and elites was with the great numbers of people who decided to leave the state. Colonel Barroso, in his annual report, estimated that between 1915 and 1916 over 70,000 *cearenses* (people from the Brazilian state of Ceará) emigrated to other states, which, in his view, represented a great economical loss for Ceará, as these people were active low-wage workers who could potentially contribute to his state's economic growth. This paradoxical view of the *retirantes* was also shared by the local elites, who feared the poor and diseased, but also wanted to keep the proletariat within reach: while they did not welcome *flagelados* into the capital city because they considered them a social and sanitary malaise, they also needed them as cheap labor force for their own modernization efforts within Fortaleza or in other cities in the state⁶⁶. When lamenting the 27,000 deaths in his annual report, Colonel Barroso also made a point to highlight how much of an economic loss these bodies represented to his state's finances⁶⁷:

“Around 27,000 people were dead because of starvation, according to fairly accurate estimates. Another 70,000 have emigrated. They went to work outside the state, in other parts of Brazil where they contributed to producing more than they consumed, thereby contributing to the growth and enhancement of the national capital. However, their labor ceased to be active within the state of Ceará, causing us undeniable harm. Those who died left behind significant economic loss. [...] Other portions of the sum of damages that the ongoing drought has brought to the state are related to livestock and agriculture.”⁶⁸

Source: Relatório do Ministério da Viação e Obras Públicas (RJ) - 1915, p. 210. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Available at: <https://bndigital.bn.br/acervo-digital/relatorio-ministerio-viacao-obras-publicas/459194>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

⁶⁶ Hence, the active support of multiple members of the local elites in providing aid and support to the incoming *flagelados* migrants. One example of this is the donation of the land of Alagadiço camp by João Pontes Medeiros.

⁶⁷ Barroso's comparison of the economic loss of *flagelados* as labor power to the costs of the deficit in livestock and agriculture during the drought also portrays a discourse that contributes to reducing the lives of the *flagelados* inhumanly and to a simple economic standpoint.

⁶⁸ Original Portuguese version: “*Desapareceram pela morte em consequência da inanição cerca de 27.000 pessoas, segundo cálculos bem aproximados. Outros emigraram em número de 70.000. Esses foram exercer sua atividade fora do Estado, mas em outros pontos do Brasil, onde contribuíram a produzir mais do que consomem, contribuindo assim para o aumento e aperfeiçoamento do capital nacional. Seu trabalho, porém, deixou de ser ativado no Estado, dando-lhe por isso indubitável prejuízo. Aqueles, porém, deixaram com a morte, um grande prejuízo.[...] Outras parcelas da soma de prejuízos*

This concern from the local government and Ceará's landowners with keeping the work force from migrating to other states, and therefore losing cheap labor-power, was also clearly stated in the 1915 Annual Report from IOCS (Report from the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works, 1915), as shown in this passage:

“In 1915, the Inspectorate of Works to Combat Droughts proposed to this ministry the continuation of the *Salão* dam project as one of the measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the declared drought and preventing the exodus of the *flagelados* populations, keeping them, as much as possible, within their own native state.”⁶⁹

Public money, private ventures

The 1915 report from IOCS also listed all the different açudes (dams) across the state of Ceará, both public and private ventures. From the chart below, it is possible to see how the majority of the drought-related works in the state of Ceará were executed privately, with the support of the government. Each private dam being constructed received a “prêmio” (award) from IOCS which corresponded to about 50% of its costs (Report, 1915: 211). In return for the award, the landowner constructing the private dam needed to ensure it would provide water for the populations living in the area nearby (a requirement with which they did not necessarily comply afterwards). This arrangement between the government and local landowners only helped further consolidate the elites' control over natural resources and the landless workers' dependence on their bosses. As shown in **Table 1**, there is a great disparity in the numbers of public and private dams in the state of Ceará. All facilities, independent of their status, were financed by the federal government at some capacity, which only reinforced the privileged position of the elites and landowners in the region.

que a atual seca trouxe ao Estado são relativas à pecuária e à agricultura.”

Source: “Mensagem apresentada à assembléia legislativa do Ceará em 1º de julho de 1916 pelo presidente do estado Coronel Benjamin Liberto Barroso. Fortaleza, 1916.” In: *Mensagens do Governador do Ceará para Assembléia (CE) - 1891 a 1930*. Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Code: TRB00268.0199/Label: 872830, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Original Portuguese version: “*Em 1915 a Inspeção de Obras Contra as Secas propôs a este ministério a continuação das obras do açude Salão, como uma das medidas destinadas a atenuar os efeitos da seca então declarada e impedir o êxodo das populações flageladas, conservando-as, tanto quanto possível, dentro do próprio Estado natal.*”

Source: Relatório do Ministério da Viação e Obras Públicas (RJ) - 1915, p. 209. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Available at:

<https://bndigital.bn.br/acervo-digital/relatorio-ministerio-viacao-obras-publicas/459194>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

DAMS IN THE BRAZILIAN STATE OF CEARÁ, 1915					
Type of dam	In state of conservancy	Built	Under construction	In the design phase	Being studied
PUBLIC	1	0	4	2	3
PRIVATE	–	1	11	7	2
TOTAL	1	1	15	9	5

Table 3.1: Types of dams in the Brazilian state of Ceará in 1915.
Source: Relatório do Ministério da Viação e Obras Públicas (RJ) - 1915, pp. 204-205. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Available at: <https://bndigital.bn.br/acervo-digital/relatorio-ministerio-viacao-obras-publicas/459194>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

1932

The 1932 concentration camps

The issues the government faced with the 1915 camp—such as overcrowding, problems with sanitation, corruption, and high numbers of deaths (also condemned in Albano’s 1917 speech)—did not hinder government agencies from considering a strategy of using camps as the next big drought period arrived in 1932. Seven concentration camps were built by the state, implemented across Ceará’s territory: two facilities were located in Fortaleza (Pirambú/Urubú camp and Octavio Bomfim/Matadouro camp) and five across the state (Buriti camp, Patú camp, Ipú camp, Quixeramobim camp and Cariús camp).

“In Ceará State, despite the masses of workers that have started working in dams and road works, which absorbed a considerable number of these unfortunate people, there were still many of them left, which constituted a serious aspect of the problem yet to be solved.

Facing these large numbers of people who needed help and the vast area in which they were spread - an issue that made the problem even more complex - the Federal Superintendence of Drought Works Inspectorship [IFOCS, former IOCS] had no other solution but to accumulate these *flagelados* in encampments, denominated as ‘concentration camps’.

In previously dry seasons this solution to the problem did not seem effective, since it was considered as an inertia to promiscuity and disease transmission. But this time there was no other way out.

This was a measure of great urgency. One of the camps was placed by the sea shore in Fortaleza (the Pirambú camp); another camp was located in Patú, in

Senador Pompeu city; another one was settled in Cariús, and finally there was also one in Buriti, a neighborhood of Crato.”⁷⁰

The “new camps” were interpreted by local authorities as an example of civility and modernity that would not ignore the mistakes made in the past, but would take into consideration concerns related to public health and the well-being of the *retirantes*. All speeches regarding the new implementation of concentration camps were justified by being directly connected and legitimized by hygienist and medical committees from IFOCS (Rios, 2014a: 83). This humanitarian discourse helped push *flagelados* further away from having contact with the elites, as explained by Roberto Carneiro Mendonça, Governor (*Interventor*) of Ceará from 1931-1934.⁷¹

“The Inventory [IFOCS] took urgent measures in order to efficiently provide relief services to the afflicted, and to prevent a dreaded issue for public health, the displacement of rural populations migrating to various points and mainly to the capital city. The government aimed to concentrate the afflicted individuals in various locations to effectively aid them in a timely manner. Under the supervision of the Department of Droughts, seven concentration camps were established: Buriti in the municipality of Crato, Quixeramobim in the municipality of the same name, Patú in the municipality of Senador Pompeu, Cariús in the municipality of São Matheus, Ipú in the municipality of the same name, Urubú and Otávio Bonfim in the municipality of Fortaleza.”⁷² (Mendonça, 1931-1934)

The 1932 camps were backed by federal support from the recently elected President and Dictator, Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945), who considered the camps’ mobilization a way to support larger ideals of progress and national development. There were two main criteria established for the installation of the 1932 camps. First, they were to be spread around the state’s territory in order to reduce access to the capital city of Fortaleza and other heavily populated cities, guaranteeing an even territorial occupation. Second, they needed to be connected to a source of public works, especially large infrastructure-building projects (Neves, 1995: 108). Resources coming from the federal government towards the implementation of the concentration camps in

⁷⁰ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 133.

⁷¹ Roberto Carneiro Mendonça was Ceará’s *Interventor* (intervener) from 1931-1934. His political position is similar to that of a governor, but in this case he was commissioned by the President and Dictator Getúlio Vargas to occupy this post.

⁷² Original Portuguese version: “*Para atender com eficiência os serviços de socorro aos flagelados, e evitar o deslocamento deveras temível para a saúde e tranquilidade públicas das populações sertanejas que emigravam para diversos pontos, principalmente para a capital, a inventoria [IFOCS] tomou urgentes providências. Tratou o governo de concentrar flagelados em pontos diversos a fim de socorrê-los com eficiência no tempo oportuno. Foram criadas sob a fiscalização do Departamento das Secas, sete concentrações:*

Buriti, no município de Crato, Quixeramobim, no município do mesmo nome, Patú, no município de Senador Pompeu, Cariús, no município de São Matheus, Ipú, no município de mesmo nome, Urubú e Otávio Bonfim, no município de Fortaleza.”

1932 were centralized in the figure of José Américo de Almeida, Getúlio Vargas' Minister of Road and Public Works, who directed the money and support received to IFOCS (today's DNOCS/formerly IOCS). These new enclosures from 1932 would now directly implement "regular work and rigorous routine" (Neves, 1995: 105). Historian Kênia Sousa Rios showed that while mobilizing the *flagelados*' labor for infrastructure started in 1877, these practices gained traction over the next half-century, finally to be consolidated as state and local policy during the drought of 1932 (Rios, 2014a: 48). Because federal assistance was contingent upon proof of labor recruitment, camp administrators focused on enrollments, often overlooking the quality of their services or the well-being of the people they were sheltering (Neves, 1995: 113)⁷³.

"Obeying to the plan and criteria of the Inspectorate [IFOCS], the Government has assisted those suffering populations, not only using them in the public works such as building dams, opening roads, and planting new reforestation camps, but also, with these kinds of achievements, trying to predict and avoid future malaise. There were even concentration camps designated to shelter these people, in spite of these being the least recommended measures to be taken."⁷⁴

The main difference between the 1915 and the 1932 concentration camps in Ceará was the scale of this governmental aid project, growing from a single urban and municipal intervention, into building facilities across the state's territory. The 1932 camps gathered refugees coming from the inlands towards the capital city in facilities strategically distributed along the rail lines, in different parts of the state. These scattered camps worked both as a strategy for preventing migrants from coming and staying in Fortaleza at an earlier stage, and also as a way of further controlling refugees and keeping them from moving to other states, as they would often do when they reached the capital in 1915.

While a statewide range of work fronts connected to the Alagadiço concentration camp was already happening in 1915, the spread of the concentration camps themselves in 1932 was a new phenomenon. The initial experience of the 1915 camp, as historian Frederico de Castro Neves explained, was still very incipient, with irregular work serving as a supplementary source of income for only a few, and not as an end in itself (Neves, 1995: 105). Labor units from where *flagelados* would be sent to work in 1915 were also not considered aid facilities as the seven 1932 camps or the 1915 Alagadiço camp had been.

⁷³ It is important to emphasize how medical reports from DNOCS (former IFOCS/IOCS) are today the main primary source of documentation describing the 1932 concentration camps in Ceará, and how they are also mainly composed of subjects related to health services provided by the state using resources from federal funds.

⁷⁴ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 68.

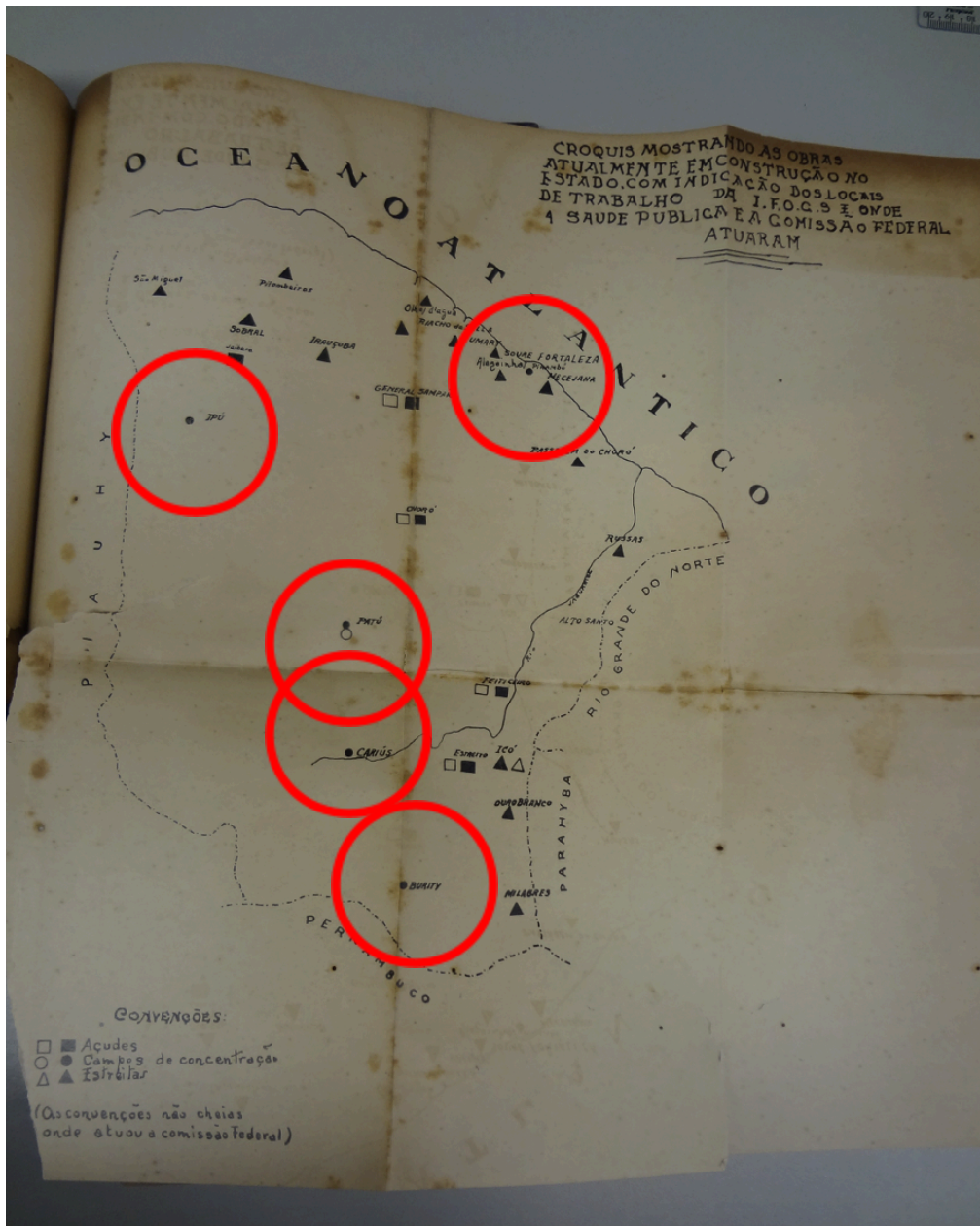


Figure 3.4: “Sketch showing construction works currently being built in the State [of Ceará], indicating the work fronts from IFOCS, and where the Public Health committee and the Federal Agency operated.” The red circles highlight the location of the 1932 concentration camps. On the original subtitles, squares represent dams, circles represent concentration camps, and triangles represent “estretas” or road works.

Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

Like in 1915, in 1932, “able bodied” *flagelados* were allocated to specific work fronts from IFOCS (formerly ICOS) in addition to in the concentration camps. On the work fronts, they mainly worked building or repairing dams, or in services related to the extension and maintenance of the roads. **Figure 3.5**, taken from a 1933 medical report archived at DNOCS (formerly known as IFOCS and IOCS), specifies how there were three different types of aid and work facilities designated to support the *flagelados* in Ceará State: “concentration camps” (lower center), *açudes* dams (top center), and *rodovias* roadworks (left and right). Each of these types of infrastructure had its own “*Posto Sanitário*” (Sanitary Station)⁷⁵. **Figure 3.4** also shows these three types of infrastructure for support and work for the *flagelados* in 1932. Circles in the map indicate the location of concentration camps; squares show the *açúdes* (dams) from IFOCS, and triangles indicate roadworks. It is worth mentioning that some of the 1932 concentration camps such as Patú, in Senador Pompeu, had their own dams or spaces for interns to work in. But at the same time, similarly to the 1915 structure for the camp, many *flagelados* could also be sent to spend their days or weeks away from the camp facility, working at designated public work stations outside the camp where their families were staying. When first implemented, the 1932 concentration camps were considered to be solely part of aid services for the *flagelados*, used to control the migrants. Yet, a few months later, as the drought gripped the state and designated work fronts (dams and roadworks) were at full capacity, there was criticism and pressure by the elites to make concentration camps lucrative and helpful for the state as well (Rios, 2014a: 86).

⁷⁵ This document is also a piece of evidence of the use of the wording “concentration camps” (*campos de concentração*) designating these specific aid facilities for drought refugees.

Camp planning and development along the rail lines

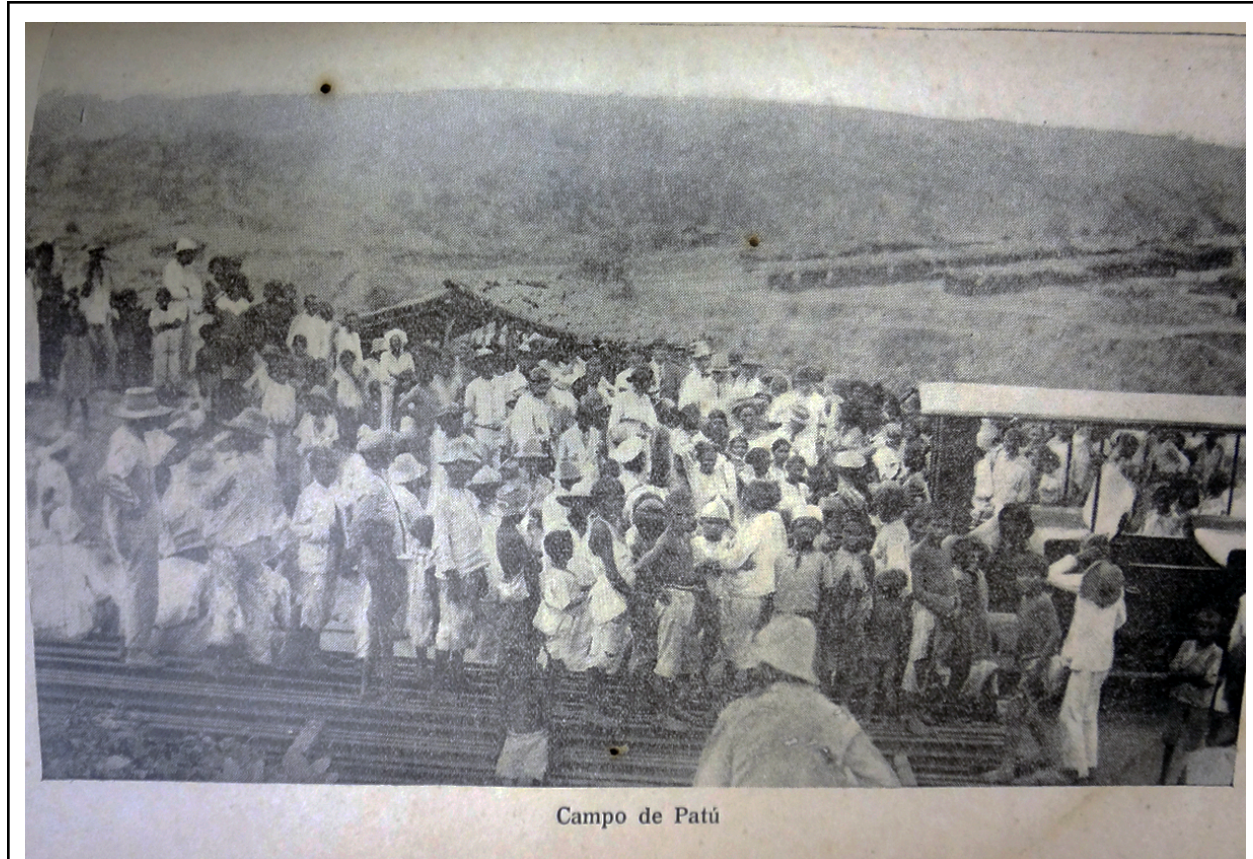


Figure 3.6: Migrants at the rail line arriving at Patú concentration camp, 1932.

Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

The “migration geography” of drought refugees largely followed the rail lines, as trains facilitated migrants’ journeys (Rios, 2014a: 20). Besides the key role of the Iguatú rail station during the drought of 1915, immortalized with the photos shown during Idelfonso Albano’s speech, another important piece of evidence about the refugees’ train journeys that is particularly telling is a train ticket I found at the Rail Museum in Fortaleza. The blue card in Figure 3.7 shows how the state-owned rail company *Rede Viação Cearense R.V.C.* issued a special ticket for *flagelados*, considered to be a class of people in itself. *Flagelados* would have separate train cars, and separate stops and destinations. Amongst other options, travelers could buy first or second class train tickets, or be placed and classified as *flagelados* and be directed or forced to a particular destination. It was not clear if *flagelados*’ tickets were sold or simply distributed or forced amongst those in need. While the term “*flagelados*” is often used in secondary sources to refer to these groups of landless drought refugees, the train tickets as a primary source of research proves the official use of this demeaning term.



Figure 3.7: Train tickets from the 1930s on display at the Rail Museum in Fortaleza, CE. June 2019. Photo by Laura Belik.
Source: Rede Viação Cearense -R.V.C., Fortaleza.

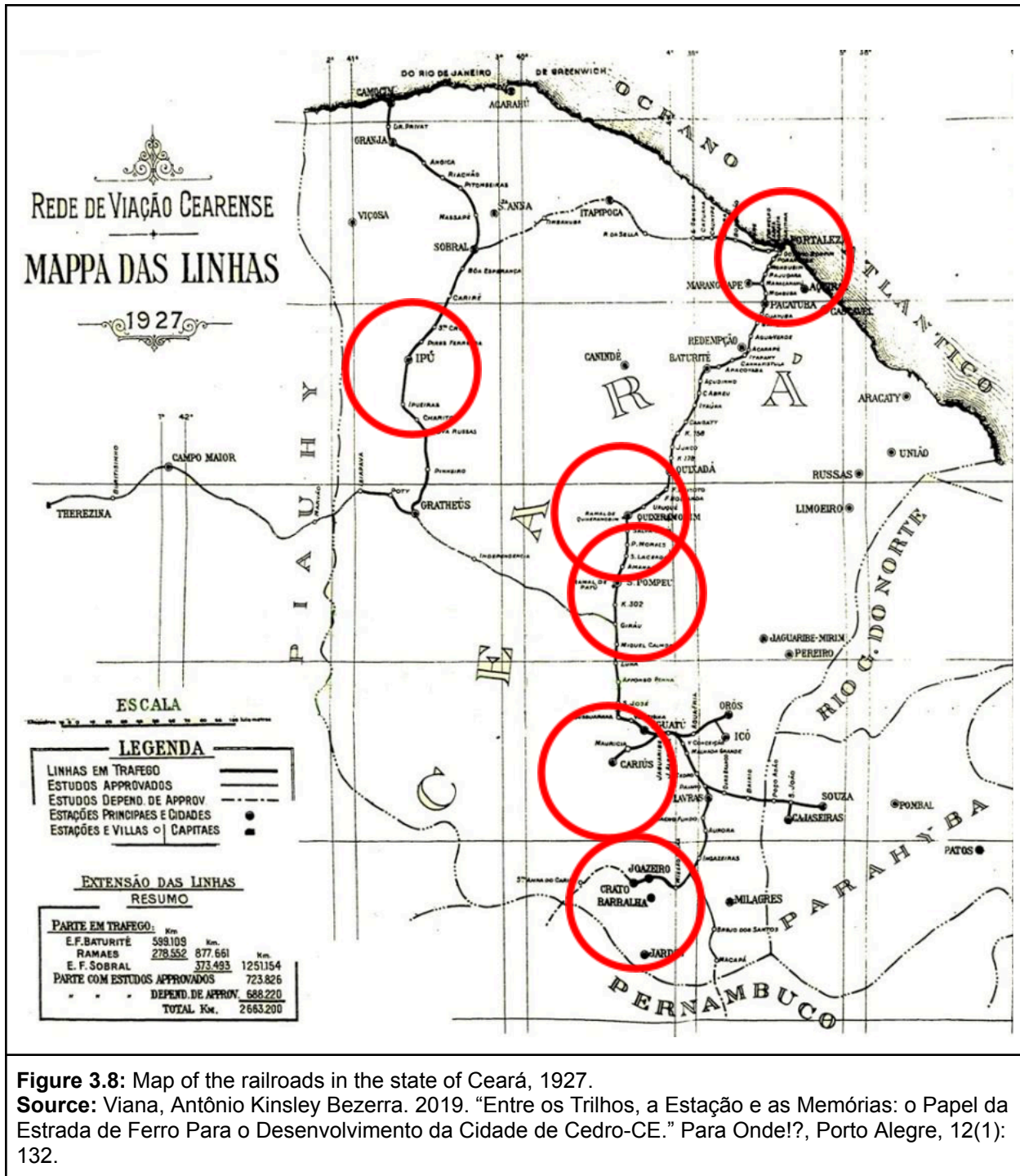
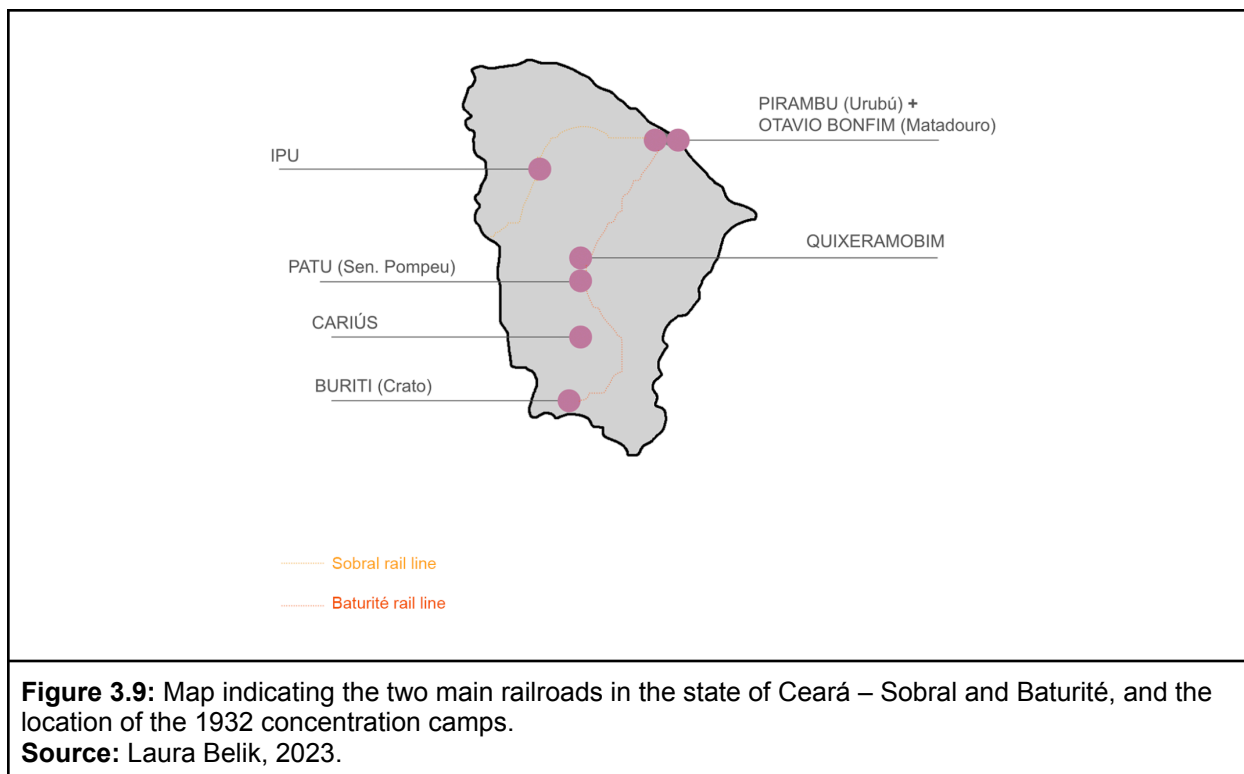


Figure 3.8: Map of the railroads in the state of Ceará, 1927.

Source: Viana, Antônio Kinsley Bezerra. 2019. "Entre os Trilhos, a Estação e as Memórias: o Papel da Estrada de Ferro Para o Desenvolvimento da Cidade de Cedro-CE." Para Ondel?, Porto Alegre, 12(1): 132.



As the drought continued, refugees kept making their way to Fortaleza via rail. Yet, train stations started becoming overcrowded and over capacity, leading to the suspension of the distribution of tickets. This resulted in tensions in the stations, spaces that soon became known as “agglomeration centers,” as Rios described (Rios, 2014a: 20). Therefore, it was precisely by the “*pontos de trem*” (train stops) that the government chose to install the concentration camps in an effort to control the flow of refugees more rigorously in April 1932. Once established in these locations, the camps received large numbers of migrants, with the smallest camp located in **Quixeramobim**. It was only active for three months (from April to June of 1932) but sheltered about 5,000 people during that short window of time (Neves, 1995: 109). Official documents from medical expeditions in 1932-1933 reported that 70,000 men, women, and children sought refuge or assistance at camps that year, though it is likely that twice that number of people passed through the camps during the 1932 drought. Buriti camp alone housed this initially-speculated number of people.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ This information can be found at: Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste (Report from the Medical Assistance and Prophylaxis commission for Northeastern Flagellated population) presented to Mr. Director General of the National Department of Public Health in August 30th, 1933. Written by Dr. J. Bonifacio P. da Costa – Commission’s Chief. Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS.

CAMP	Estimated Population	Location	Duration
Ipú	7,000	Sobral Region	April 1932-March 1933
Quixeramobim	5,000	Quixeramobim	April-June 1932
Cariús	31,900	Cariús / Cedro	May 1932-April 1933
Patú	20,000	Senador Pompeu	April 1932-April 1933
Buriti	70,000	Crato	April 1932 -Mid 1933

Table 3.2: Estimated population and estimated duration of each of the five concentration camp facilities in the state of Ceará.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

As indicated in Figures 3.8 and 3.9, **Ipú camp** was the only of the facilities that served the region of Sobral, and it interned over 7,000 people during 1932 before it was deactivated in March 1933 (Neves, 1995: 110). Rios explained that despite the fact that Sobral’s railroad covered a smaller area than Baturité’s railroad, Sobral was the region that suffered the most from the drought (Rios, 2014a: 22). All other facilities were placed either in Fortaleza (Octavio Bonfim/Matadouro camp and Urubú/Pirambú camp), or along the Baturité rail line (Quixeramobim, Patú, and Buriti camps), with the exception of **Cariús camp**. Cariús was the only camp located in a city where there was no train station, and it used the station from the municipality of Cedro (from the Baturité rail line) located only a few kilometers away. Cariús was active for almost a year (from May 1932 to April 1933), and housed 31,906 refugees (Neves, 1995: 109). Once Cariús was deactivated, the majority of the people sheltered at this facility were transferred to Buriti camp, the largest facility of all, located in the district of Crato, at the end of the rail line.

Camps’ design and administration

The design and administration of the camps in 1932 revealed the state’s concern for the moral and physical discipline of *sertanejos* as part of the larger nation-building project. The facilities and infrastructure of the 1932 camps were not much different from earlier iterations. The spaces of the camps consisted of large fenced or walled areas. While usually designed to host 2,000 to 5,000 people, Buriti camp, for example, ended up receiving 70,000 *flagelados*. Besides sharing similar principles of use and spatial organization, each camp in 1932 had different sizes, characteristics, and rules. Most of the camps consisted of large temporary sheds made out of timber or larger wood sticks, where families would take refuge from the sun and heat. Access to drinkable water was also a determining factor when the government chose the locations of the camps. This water would come from a local dam where refugees would work or a local pond, or it would be pumped or collected with a draw-well from underground (Figure 3.10). Camps would also have designated spaces for (insufficient) hospital care, a chapel, and a kitchen for distributing food.



Figure 3.10: Pirambú Concentration Camp in Fortaleza, 1932.

Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

It is worth highlighting how the two camp facilities located in Fortaleza were significantly smaller than the ones in the countryside, which each had a population of around 2,000 people. This is likely due to the efficiency of the other camps in retaining migrants before they got closer to the capital, as initially planned. Independently, Pirambú (Urubú) and Otávio Bonfim (Matadouro) were considered models for the other facilities in terms of discipline and efficiency, and were used as showcases displaying an exemplary modern and hygienist project to visitors and possible donors⁷⁷.

The 1932 camps were walled, and there was tight control of all entrances and exits for the *flagelados*. Those who arrived at the camp had no permission to leave unless they were allocated to work within the city, at a dam or on a road/railroad, for which they would leave the camp's premises by truck and be chaperoned by vigilantes at all times. Camp facilities were watched over constantly by guards, who oftentimes were former *flagelados* themselves, similarly to the situation from the 1915 Alagadiço camp. Those who attempted to escape or who violated the rules of good behavior were punished. Each camp had different methods and rules, but in the camps in Fortaleza, for example, the penalty meant being sent to the city's jail, as these acts of public disrespect were seen as an ordinary criminal procedure to be dealt with. At the same time, there were camps, such as in Buriti, where punishment was exemplary, and there was a specific jail structure to safekeep the troublemakers, built in the form of a wooden corral with a very

⁷⁷ See the example of "Mirante Jaceguay Cruise Ship" and the tourists from the "Touring Club do Brasil" explained earlier.

high wooden fence in a central location within the camp's premises (Neves, 1995: 114). Most of the time those who were condemned were caught stealing food, fighting while drunk, or acting immorally. Revolts and riots were also very commonly punished, including the insurgency of guards and vigilantes themselves. Deviations from morality and decency were some of the most feared transgressions, and the camp's civilizing project would by all means try to avoid promiscuity. Some of these strategies included not only punishments, but also disciplining the *flagelados* by separating them in different sheds for families, single men, and widows and children (Rios, 2014a: 97).

Flagelados' sleeping arrangements varied camp by camp. Usually, common provisional shacks made of sticks and straw or with zinc covers served as a shaded area for people to sleep in using hammocks or resting on the floor. According to a description from the Report from the *Commission of Medical Assistance and Prophylaxis to the Northeastern Flagelados* from 1933, Buriti camp, the largest and most populated of the camps active from April 1932 until mid 1933, housed more than 70,000 people and was "constituted of a considerable number of *palhoças* [stick shacks] organized in continuous rows, defining large and uniform streets, thus, hardly identifiable from one another" (Figures 3.11 and 3.12).⁷⁸ In contrast to the sleeping spaces, medical and administrative facilities would have walls or some kind of further separation for sanitary measures. Patú camp, in Senador Pompeu, would be the one exception in regards to the built spaces, using existing brick and stone constructions that were already on site, previously used by a British company in 1922.^{79,80}

"Patú was one of the many concentration camps instituted in Ceará. The camp utilized the area of the former Patú dam worksite from President Epitacio Pessoa's government, and was 2 kilometers distant from the city of Senador Pompeu.

The dam that was being built for that facility over Patú's river, was discontinued despite having its foundations already in place. Years later, the camp was established in that exact location, using the not-so-few already built constructions. Those existing buildings, besides serving the administration, also housed some of the *flagelados*. Nevertheless, these spaces were not enough, and multiple shacks had to be added. [...]

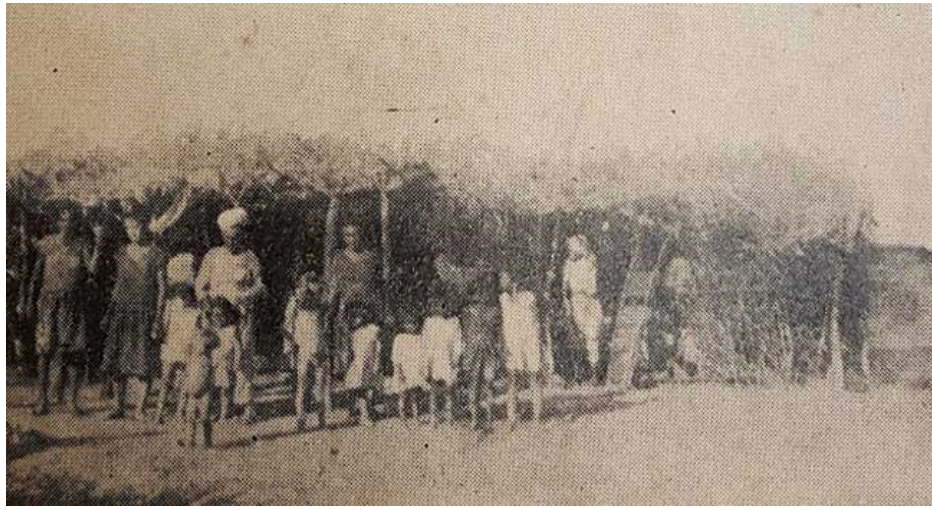
This was a concentration camp where, in general, most of the *flagelados* would spend little time at, as they would be sent as a labor force to other public works such as dams, road works, reforestation, etc."⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 136.

⁷⁹ According to a description of the camp from the IFOCS 1933 medical report, while the Patú camp used local existing constructions as part of its facilities, those spaces were not sufficient to house the *flagelados*, who also slept in temporary shacks.

⁸⁰ Patú camp was active from April 1932 to April 1933, housing almost 20,000 people (Neves, 1995: 110).

⁸¹ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 63.



Figures 3.11 and 3.12: Photos of Buriti Concentration Camp, 1932.

Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/ Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

Control of the *flagelados* also meant discipline over people's bodies. Within the camps, hygiene, sanitation, and order were top priorities. The most important constructions within the camps' premises were bathrooms and medical care facilities, which were often segregated by gender as well. Changing people's cleaning and living habits was challenging, and these activities often faced resistance and insubordination from the *flagelados*⁸². The introduction of modern sanitation facilities such as the latrine was one important civilizing attempt. Migrants were used to doing their necessities in the open, under the trees. The camp's administration was trying to change that habit through discipline. Considering the large crowds of people sharing the same space, a proper bathroom facility (latrine) also limited further exposure to disease due to lack of sanitation. Latrines were distributed separately for men and for women, and, in the case of the two camps from Fortaleza, toilets were connected to the incipient yet growing sewage system.

Bath time during the morning was also an important moment in the camp's routine, bringing up both acts of discipline and modern hygienics. The separation of men and women was important to avoid promiscuity. *Flagelados* would wake up at 5 a.m. and men would go clean themselves first at a local lake/pond or at shower facilities, depending on if the camp had them. Afterwards women and children would do the same, while guards would watch over them, as described by a journalist from "O Povo" newspaper on April 16th, 1932:

"When the car arrived at Tauape's pond, we saw about three hundred women and children bathing and washing clothes and hammocks. The civilian guards were watching over the lagoon, preventing curious onlookers from disturbing the poor women in their hygienic tasks."⁸³

Flagelados were given soap (made in the camps by women and children) for bathing and cleaning clothes⁸⁴. Kenia Rios argued that the use of the soap also had a symbolic civilizing role. Before coming to the camps, migrants were used to bathing collectively in a nearby lake or river, with their clothes on. Bathing was more of a social activity than an act of hygiene, and that mindset was what the camp's administration was trying to change (Rios, 2014a: 123).

The issue of keeping moral standards was also approached through faith. Every camp had a chapel to keep the Catholic ethic. Each camp had a vicar, and this person would celebrate baptisms, weddings, and communions weekly. The majority of the migrants would come from remote locations where there was no parish, and no official marital

⁸² One example of resistance was seen in the conflicts because of mandatory shaving of hair and facial hair for men.

⁸³Original Portuguese version: "Quando o carro chegou à lagoa de Tauape vimos cerca de trezentas mulheres e crianças banhando-se e lavando roupas e redes. Os guardas civis vigiavam a lagoa, impedindo que as pobres mulheres fossem perturbadas em seus trabalhos higiênicos por curiosos" Source: "O Povo no campo de concentração dos flagelados, em Tauápe." In: *Jornal "O Povo"* (CE), April 16th, 1932.

⁸⁴ Soap was made from animal fat, using the remains from the animals that were killed to feed the *flagelados*.

status, nor formal or orthodox religious rituals. While most *flagelados* would consider themselves Catholics, their connection to the Catholic faith was cultural, through oral histories passed from generation to generation, and using a home oratory. Therefore the camp was an opportunity for the Church to reinstate its position and importance amongst these groups of people, as well as to reinforce particular moral concerns, such as the idea of sin, with the examples of adultery and promiscuity.

At all camps, able-bodied *flagelados* would necessarily be put to work, as idleness was seen as immoral. If one was able, there were not only external works where they could be placed (such as previously-mentioned roads, dams, et cetera) but also internal jobs at the concentration camps. Some examples were the uninterrupted works in construction, building shacks and other facilities within the camp's premisses, and also works in carpentry, fabricating chairs, furniture and other objects; tailoring, making uniforms and clothing from old bags; and the barbershop and soap-making, amongst others.⁸⁵

Day-to-day life in the camps also had unconstrained moments of distraction. Former *flagelados* reported music and dance at night and even some games and sports. In Buriti camp, people reported visitors from outside joining celebratory moments, such as featured in the story presented to me by James Brito, a resident of Crato and my local guide when I visited the area of the former facilities of Buriti camp in 2019:

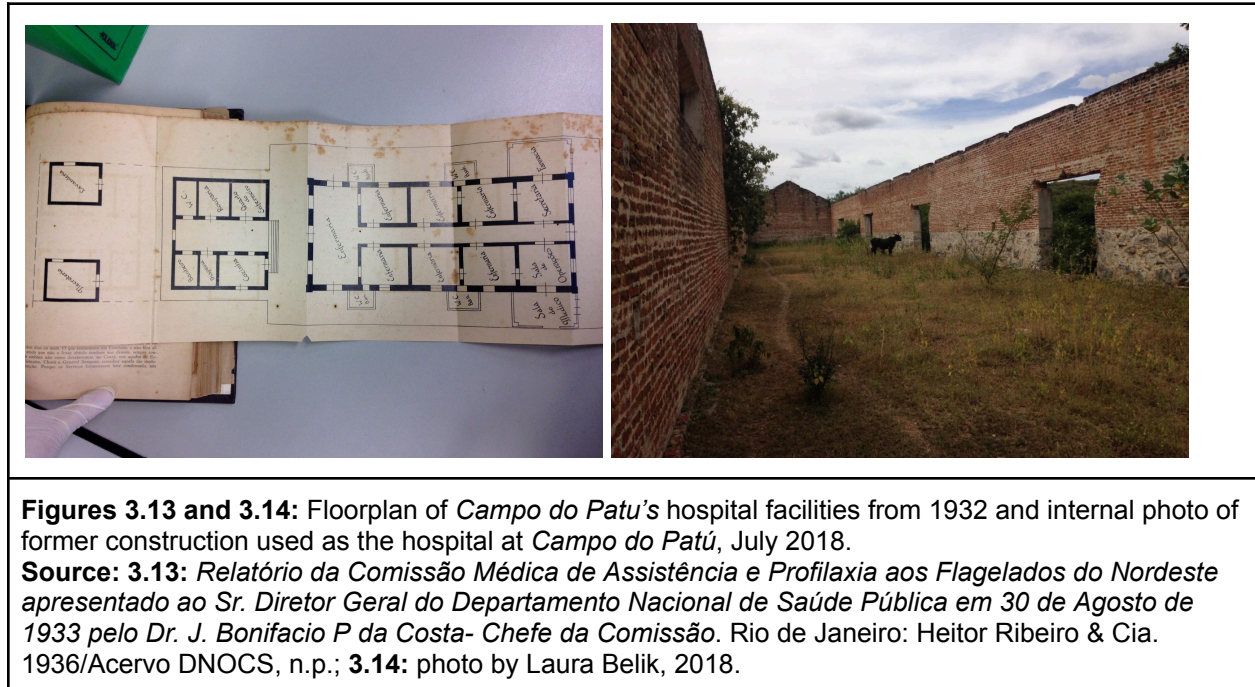
“You see that house on top of that hill? That’s the house of an older lady who is the daughter of a woman from Barbalha [a neighboring city]. By 1932 this woman used to walk to Buriti camp at night to hang out with folks. The camp was not just a sad place, there was life too. At night people would play music together, talk, mingle...Some people were not allowed to leave, but some outsiders could stop by for a visit, and that was what that lady’s mother did. She fell in love with one of the camp’s guards and ended up marrying him, and that’s that lady’s family story.”

Yet, life in the camps in 1932 was still intense. Medical facilities and medical assistance were both not enough and far from ideal. One of the few floor plans I have available from the concentration camps of 1932 is precisely the designs of the hospital from Patú camp, available at DNOCS archives⁸⁶. The drawings indicate a long and narrow construction, formerly filled with internal divisions where there could fit about 20 hospital beds, an insignificant number considering the estimated 20,000 residents of Patú camp. According to the report, after an initial visit by the medical team to Patú, they disclosed that the justification for the camp not to have proper or sufficient medical facilities was because many of the *flagelados* would be sent off to spend the day working elsewhere. Still, large numbers of refugees and a lack of sanitation led to high numbers of deaths,

⁸⁵ Jornal O Povo (CE), December 7th, 1932.

⁸⁶ As previously mentioned, one of my main sources of archival materials regarding the study of the concentration camps in Ceará is medical reports for IFOCS/DNOCS.

and the medical report's recommendation was for a larger hospital to be built in one of the previously standing constructions on the site (Figures 3.13 and 3.14).⁸⁷



The high death toll was inevitable, nevertheless. Ipu camp registered six to seven deaths daily at the height of the drought (Rios, 2014: 100). Buriti, the largest camp facility, had about 500 corpses thrown in mass graves monthly, as reported in a medical report from 1933 from DNOCS:

“There were three doctors and four guards hired to assist refugees at Buriti Camp, and one rudimentary hospital facility with more or less one hundred beds available [...] In order to judge how deficient the hospital was, it is sufficient to say that at the camp’s mortuary there were a few dozen corpses daily. The obituary had a monthly average of 500 cases.”⁸⁸

During my visit to Buriti camp, James also told me a known local anecdote regarding the camp’s mass graves where the dead bodies would be thrown:

⁸⁷ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 63.

⁸⁸ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 136.

“You see that house over there, that’s Wilton’s home. His father would always tell me a story of when he was living in the concentration camp back in 1932. He told me that one day he was walking by the trenches where the dead bodies would be thrown, and he heard something. There was a very weak man that was mistakenly placed there after passing out, but he was still alive. So, Wilton’s father decided to crawl into the trench and save the poor man. He carried the man back to the main area of the camp. By nighttime that man was dead. He was just too weak, you see?”



Hospital do Campo de Buriti.

Figure 3.15: Photo of the medical team in front of the hospital at Buriti concentration camp, 1932.
Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

While there was a clear lack of medical assistance considering the high demand for it at the camps, it is also worth noting that *flagelados* also often dismissed the help of professionals. Sanitary measures were both uncommon and feared by the remote populations coming from the inlands, who were used to self medicating and doing cultural healing rituals, considered by the elites in the capital city to be a form of

witchcraft (Rios, 2014a: 103). At the same time, doctors and the sanitary team were the employers of the camps who received the highest number of complaints from the *flagelados*, who accused them regarding the high number of deaths, not believing in their sanitary approaches to disease control (Rios, 2014a: 124). That said, Rodolfo Teófilo's prediction of the need to vaccinate the population was easier said than done. Modern hygienist approaches were not as well received by the migrants as the government expected.

A disciplined approach was also seen in the way the food rations were distributed. Each camp had a kitchen, where food was prepared and then distributed amongst the *flagelados* in a very rigid and controlled way. In Senador Pompeu, it is possible to recognize amongst today's remaining ruins of Patú camp a room with the stoves made of bricks and stone, where the kitchen facility was. Just outside, the queues of *retirantes* waiting for their rations would start at the side doors (Figures 3.16, 3.17, and 3.18). Overcrowding and corruption, as presented in the *abarracamentos* or the 1915 camps, were common, and reflected the insufficiency of provisions for the number of *retirantes*, who would be fed most often just once a day⁸⁹. The kitchen and the food distribution were two complicated and intense areas in the camps, where fights and riots were very common (Rios, 2014a: 119).



Figures 3.16 and 3.17: Current remains of the kitchen facility at the Patú camp, and the outside of the kitchen/main pavilion named as “the former Chief Engineer’s house,” where food distribution would take place.

Source: Photos by Laura Belik, 2018.

⁸⁹ There were also reports, such as the ones analyzed by historian Kenia Rios (2014a), discussing how the hygienist staff responsible for the camps in Fortaleza would describe an orderly distribution of food twice a day (breakfast after waking up at 5 a.m., lunch at 11 a.m.).



When the rain comes

The end of the drought, the end of the camps

All camps and their activities officially ended by mid-1933, when the first rains of the season brought about the end of the drought. Camp facilities were also quickly dismantled and interned people dispersed. Very similarly to what happened by the end of the 1915 drought, despite being unwanted at the city centers, *flagelados* were sought after to work at private and public works across the state.

The bourgeoisie of Fortaleza started, then, to adapt their discourse of “aid towards the refugees,” now emphasizing President Vargas’ national project towards progress. The distribution of jobs for public works and for the construction of dams and roads always had political and economic intentions masked under a humanitarian aid discourse. As

Rios explained, “the control of the *retirantes* and the development of the city were not practices that excluded one another. Quite the opposite: the progress of urban improvement projects was one of the forms of disciplining *flagelados*” (Rios, 2014a: 46). The Minister of Road and Public Works, José Américo de Almeida, described in his 1934 report “*O Ciclo Revolucionário do Ministério da Viação*” how it was precisely “in order to use *flagelados*’ working force that different kinds of services were promoted by the Superintendence of Drought Works, such as: the implementation of infrastructure for the use of the telegraph, the stabilization of sand dunes, development works for a canal [...]” (Almeida, 1934: 183). Once the drought ended, federal aid ceased⁹⁰.

Since *flagelados* could no longer stay in the camps, distribution of transportation tickets and farming seeds was a strategy to try pushing these people to return to their places of origin or to other states, attenuating the social conflicts happening in the capital. At the same time, local elites would also insist that the people who were currently allocated to work in any public works and urban improvements in Fortaleza should stay. Nevertheless, this systemic desire of control from the elites on the migratory movements of the *flagelados* was not put into practice. Some displaced populations did go back to the inlands, but others stayed in the capital without following any predetermined governmental rules (Rios, 2014a: 78). Independently, the temporary spatial construction of the concentration camps helped materialize existing dynamics of local powers in Ceará⁹¹.

⁹⁰ As briefly mentioned in **Chapter 2**, José Américo de Almeida was also known as one of the most prominent authors from the Brazilian Regionalist Movement, with “*A Bagaceira*” (1928) his best known novel.

⁹¹ I will further discuss the current situation of former camp spaces in **Chapter 6**.

CHAPTER 4: WAR THE CONSTRUCT OF RUBBER SOLDIERS

Introduction: From *flagelados* to soldiers, soldiers to *seringueiro* workers

Ceará's concentration camps from 1932 were designed and implemented as a response to the social, political, and economic context in which they were inserted. The first step in understanding the spaces of the concentration camps, as I argue, is to discern and recognize the figure and construct of the "*flagelado*" as a leading element in the creation of the northeastern camps. Ten years after the concentration camps, in 1942, the *flagelados'* path took a new turn, leading them to the "*pousos*," where poor and landless *nordestinos* from the inlands were recruited to become "Rubber Soldiers," migrating to the Amazon and becoming a cheap labor force collecting latex sap, while coerced into believing themselves to be part of a grander national gesture.

The later phase of Getúlio Vargas' administration in the late 1930s and early 1940s was very much influenced by the country's external political relations and global conditions that led Brazil into a broader sphere of international relations. By the early 1940s with the outbreak of the Second World War, Vargas' modernization investments' goals were no longer only related to the development and growth of the country's infrastructure internally, but also to advancing the country's foreign affairs. In 1942 Brazil joined the war efforts as part of the Allies and Vargas signed the Washington Agreements, promising to provide for the U.S. the latex products it could no longer get from Malaysia. Brazilian rubber became a desired (and needed) commodity, but its production and extraction in the Amazon was still very incipient. There was an urgent need to colonize the Northern Brazilian territories and boost the production of latex. In order to do so, together with the U.S. government, Vargas established the SEMTA (Special Service Mobilizing Workers to the Amazon) and organized a campaign in order to recruit workers to enlist as Rubber Soldiers to move to the Amazon and work as latex extraction workers (*seringueiros*). This campaign was mostly focused on the Brazilian Northeastern region, where the "quintessential Brazilians" had a long history as poor peasants on the move, often affected by extensive drought periods. Considering that SEMTA was a combined effort between the U.S. and the Brazilian government under Getúlio Vargas' administration, there was already a common understanding and idyllic vision of the *sertanejo Nordestino* (and most specifically, the Cearense) as the much-needed labor force to be sent to the Amazon in the 1940s.

While there was a drought in 1942 in Brazil, its effects were much milder than the previous ones, as explained earlier. Yet, this climate-related anxiety was used as one of the main narratives to attract workers to enlist to "serve their country," which was promoted by the government as a possibility of escape from their current poor quality of life.

Similarly to the 1932 concentration camps, in 1942-1943 the federal government created a series of recruitment centers placed mainly in the state of Ceará in order to

enlist volunteers. Considering that the journey North could take months, the government also established rest stops (*pousos*) for the migrants to stay at while waiting for transportation. While the *pousos* and recruitment centers were not labor camps nor refugee centers, such as the 1932 concentration camp facilities, these spaces were built to classify, discipline, and control future laborers while in transit. When established in 1943, SEMTA inherited this pre-established system and practice of public assistance that linked the *flagelado* populations to federal and state agencies already in operation, such as the Inspetoria Federal de Obras Contra as Secas (IFOCS/DNOCS) and the National Immigration Department (DNI). In addition to the ingrained system, the war effort and Vargas' authoritarian government facilitated more interventionist actions in the labor and migratory markets (Miranda and Hochman, 2021: 7). Volunteers were led to believe this was an opportunity of escape from their poor and landless conditions given by the state, but the reality of their journey, and, moreover, the reality of their new life as latex extraction workers, was not as easy as the propaganda announced.

Chapter 4 focuses on the historical contextualization that led to the social construct and creation of the Rubber Soldier, and the process of recruitment and advertisement for that position which painted an idealized life in the Amazon and suggested advantages of leaving the Northeast region for the poor and landless *sertanejos nordestinos*.

Subsequently, in **Chapter 5**, I analyze the *pousos*, transitional spaces in which Rubber Soldiers were recruited and housed while moving from Ceará to the Amazon. I talk about these spaces' design and architecture, their everyday uses and organization, and the routines of both the draftees and their families who stayed behind. While this chapter focuses on the transitory spaces in which rubber soldiers stayed as part of their migratory path, I conclude this chapter by briefly presenting the conditions these people faced upon arrival in the Amazon, and what reality they faced while living and working at the *seringais*.

I argue that the existence of the rubber soldiers, similarly to the spaces to which they were subjected, was only temporary. While the *pousos* were in use, Rubber Soldiers existed. Before being drafted, this group of the population was considered *flagelados*. Upon arrival in the Amazon, as they left SEMTA, Rubber Soldiers became *seringueiros*. In order to understand the *pousos* as camps, one needs to look at both their social dimensions (Rubber Soldiers) and their physical structures.

The Washington Agreements

It was in March 1942 that the Washington Agreement was signed between President Getúlio Vargas and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, materializing the Brazilian contributions to the US and the Allies' war efforts⁹². One key aspect of this agreement

⁹² There were several arrangements for the Washington agreements, all of them regarding efforts to increase rubber production in the Brazilian Amazon. This includes negotiations for a collaboration on a specific Health and Sanitation program, as it shows in the treaty signed on March 14th, 1942 between Benjamin Sumner Welles, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State, and Arthur de Souza Costa, the Brazilian Minister for Finance:

"The program would be initially designed for the Amazon Basin area for the special purpose of aiding in

was the creation of the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC), a U.S. agency set to guide the works and efforts towards the production and acquisition of rubber in the Amazon.

The Brazilian Amazon, and most specifically, the Brazilian state of Acre, was identified for its abundant native latex-producing *seringa* (latex) trees at the turn of the twentieth century. Acre's territorial conquest and incorporation as a territory into Brazil in 1904 led to the region's the first economic "rubber boom" to satisfy a growing European demand for industrialized rubberized goods⁹³ (Figure 4.1 shows the expansion and development of the area near the port, in the city of Rio Branco). After the 1910's, Acre and other latex producing areas in Amazonia faced abrupt decline because of economic competition with rubber production in Asia (including the British colonies in Malaysia, Borneo, Java, China, and India), which was not based on extraction, but on farming and was thus more efficient. It was precisely in 1913 that the Asian production of rubber surpassed Brazilian rubber exports, halting the Amazonian monopoly of latex exports. By 1930, Brazilian rubber production represented only 2% of the global latex production and exports (Martinello, 2018:56). The period between wars initiated some strategic international interest in the Amazonian production of rubber, but it was not until the 1940s, after Pearl Harbor's attack (December 1941), that the Allies really felt the effects of the Asian economic blockage and the rubber crisis. It was at that time that the United States started producing synthetic rubber. However, the demand for this product was very high and there was still a need to find a reliable and abundant source of this material. A report from 1941 estimated that there were about 300,000,000 *seringueira* trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*) in the Amazon region, which could potentially produce about 800,000 tons of rubber annually (Martinello, 2018: 87). If half of this production came to fruition, that would be enough for the Allies to overcome their rubber crisis (Martinello, 2018: 87).

the stimulation of rubber production, but at the desire of the Government of Brazil could be extended to other areas." (Executive Agreement Series 371/Department of State publication 2063 p. 1, March 14th, 1942. Available at: The National Library of Medicine)

⁹³ This conquest was carried out by *sertanejos*, "backcountry" migrants from northeastern Brazil, also generically known as *cearenses* (from the state of Ceará) or *nordestinos* (from Brazil's northeast) fleeing a severe drought after 1877 and looking for opportunities for work and survival.



Figure 4.1: Panoramic view of Porto Acre, 1912. Unidentified photographer.

Source: Cruz, O. "Relatório sobre as condições médico-sanitárias do vale do Amazonas." Rio de Janeiro, Typ. Do "Jornal do Comércio," 1913. December 1912. Available at: *Brasiliana Fotográfica/Fundo Instituto Oswaldo Cruz.*

<https://brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br/brasiliana/handle/20.500.12156.1/8118>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.



Figure 4.2: Brazilian map, highlighting the state of Acre, incorporated as a territory into Brazil in 1904 and officially considered a national state in 1962.

Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

Aside from the need for rubber from the Amazon, another major concern of the U.S.' was to establish military bases in South American territories⁹⁴. As another part of the Brazil-United States political-military accords, in addition to the U.S. intervention in the Amazon, Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas also agreed for U.S. armed forces to establish regional headquarters for the South Atlantic in Recife and Natal. Vargas' goals when signing agreements with the U.S. were towards the advancement, progress, and modernization of Brazil within the global economy. In exchange for agreeing on the construction of U.S. military bases in Brazilian national territories, Vargas negotiated with the foreign government to restructure the country's national army as well as to provide it with modern weapons (Herman, 2022: 53). At that time, Vargas also negotiated funding to build the facilities of what today is the country's largest steel mill/producer, the National Steel Company, *Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional* (CSN), in Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro, which became a major symbol of Brazilian economic nationalism.⁹⁵



Figure 4.3: Franklin Roosevelt and Getúlio Vargas visiting the U.S. airbase and defense installation in Natal, Brazil on January 28th, 1943.

Source: United States Library of Congress.

⁹⁴ Once Brazil officially joined the war, the government advertised the Brazilian-U.S. partnership as joint efforts working “shoulder to shoulder.” Brazil and Mexico became the only two Latin-American countries to send combat troops to Europe, in 1944, and Brazil established itself as the leading military power in South America (Herman, 2022).

⁹⁵ By the end of the war, U.S. air and naval facilities stationed over 16,000 U.S. servicemen in Brazil, and Natal became the largest airbase on foreign soil, proudly known in Brazil as the “springboard to victory” due to its strategic proximity to European and West African territories. In 1943, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt famously visited Natal’s air base, consolidating the two countries’ war-time partnership (Herman, 2022: 58). See Figure 4.3.

In the Amazon, the main goals of the U.S. in exploring that region were to both quickly extract latex and produce rubber for the war as well as to guarantee its territorial domain over Latin America. Brazilian President Vargas also saw the Washington Agreements as an opportunity to further develop the Amazonian region beyond the war endeavors. At first the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC) did try to implement and incentivize some long-duree projects and plans for the Amazon region that would allow further improvements, such as building airports, for example, but as the war further advanced, it was made clear that the U.S. was only interested in the efficiency of latex extraction, and no further commitments were made to improve the region being exploited. The Rubber Development Corporation started taking over the main role in implementing the “Rubber Battle,” growing in influence and importance, with its omnipresence above any other official Brazilian governmental agencies.

One of the main problems for the implementation of a more efficient latex extraction project in the Amazon in the 1940s was the lack of manpower in the region. Since the 1910s, latex production in Brazil had slowed down considerably. The entire production chain had decayed and was being dismantled, despite the abundance of latex trees available. In order to rapidly fulfill the new demand for latex, there was a need for massive investments nationally and internationally in the Amazonian region, especially considering the need for the recruitment of workers:

“Brazil formerly produced all but a fraction of the world’s supply of rubber, but the plantations of Malaysia have to a considerable extent superseded this. There are still enormous areas of rubber forest available [...] A drawback to the extended yield of rubber here is in the scarcity of labor.” (Enock, 1915: 424)

Because of the sudden need for *seringueiro* workers in the Amazon (Figure 4.4), the Rubber Development Corporation started working with the National Department of Immigration to promote and assist recruitment. In 1942, another drought gripped the Northeast of Brazil, and while considered not as intense as the previous climate crisis from 1877 and 1932 (Morales, 2002: 136), this occurrence helped justify a massive recruitment project in the region, incentivising poor and landless populations to move to the Amazon. Fortaleza (Ceará) was the largest recruitment pole for migrant workers to the Amazon.

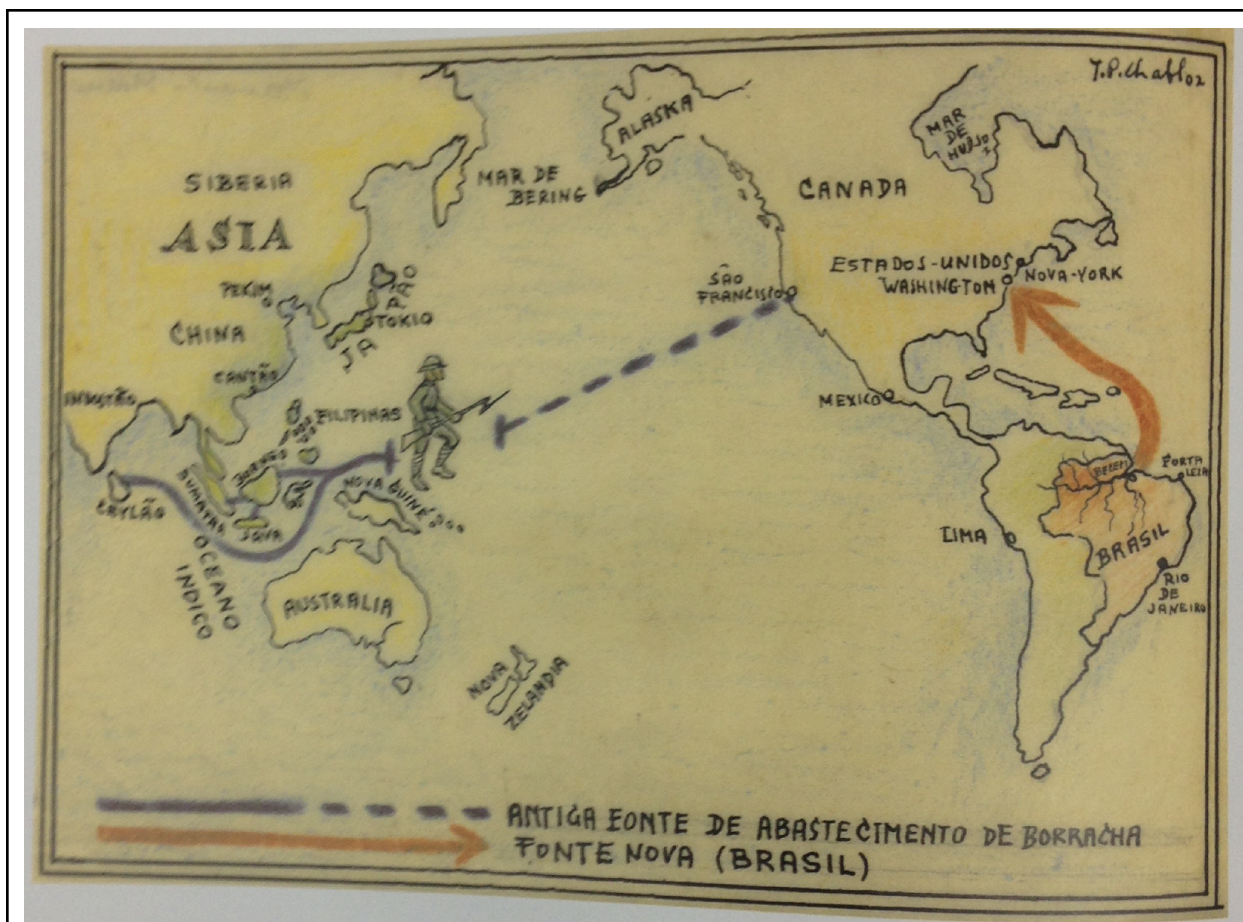


Figure 4.4: Illustration by Jean-Pierre Chabloz for SEMTA showing Brazil as the new source of rubber provision for the United States army.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

In November 1942, President Getúlio Vargas, in a joint effort with the U.S. government, created a special migratory agency called SEMTA (Special Service Mobilizing Workers to the Amazon) to recruit and transport Northeastern workers to the Amazon, with its headquarters located in Fortaleza. SEMTA's goal was to send fifty thousand workers to the Amazon within a period of five months. In order to do so, there were recruitment centers (agencies) called *pousos* where single men would voluntarily enlist to serve in the war – and in this case, be persuaded to do so by becoming a *seringueiro* latex extractor (Araújo, 2015: 44). President Getúlio Vargas had long demonstrated interest in occupying and developing the Amazonian region, and while at first the government incentivized the migration and settlement of families in the region—which would guarantee a more stable establishment and colonization of the area, considered a “demographic void”—due to the war, there was a larger campaign to only recruit men as temporary workers contributing to the urgent needs of the Allies (Secreto, 2005: 172).

The creation of SEMTA, while reflecting a particular moment in Brazilian politics, is also a consequence and continuation of ongoing governmental strategies for dealing with populations displaced by droughts in the country's Northeast region. The 1932 drought

expanded and structured federal support and assistance to the Northeastern people, housing workers and their families in concentration camps, isolating *flagelados* from the urban centers and at the same time guaranteeing a cheap labor force responsible for building roads and public dams (Neves, 2001, Rios, 2014a). When it was established in 1943, SEMTA inherited this preestablished system and practice of public assistance that linked the *flagelado* populations to federal and state agencies already in operation, such as the *Inspetoria Federal de Obras Contra as Secas* (IFOCS) and the National Immigration Department (DNI). In addition to the ingrained system, the war effort and Vargas' authoritarian government facilitated more interventionist actions in the labor and migratory markets (Miranda and Hochman, 2021: 7).

Recruitment

The enlistment efforts by SEMTA lasted from January until May of 1943. There were twenty-one locations where SEMTA focussed its campaign efforts, with most of them in the Northeast Region, and especially in the state of Ceará (Morales, 2002: 220). In the beginning, enlistment was a challenging task for SEMTA's officials. The drought was not as intense as it had been in previous years, and most young men did not want to leave their birthplace. Additionally, there were also many rumors about SEMTA's project and life in the Amazon. A report by the SEMTA's chief of operations placed in the city of Senador Pompeu (Ceará) in March 1943 described his experience traveling and recruiting workers. The recruiter stated how men would refuse to enlist for various reasons, such as not wanting to be in the war efforts, fearing of being eaten by the Indigenous populations in the Amazon, and fearing being sold as slaves:

“[...] We traveled the 30 kilometers on a road under construction, visiting each group of workers and young men along the way and listening to their reasons for being wary of our service. Some said they refused [to enlist] because what we were doing was a recruitment for the war; others knew that the first groups sent [to the Amazon] had been devoured by the Indians (!); some believed that all men would be sold for a fortune; there were even the “most loving mothers” who did not want to be separated from their children. The main reason was that winter had arrived and there was no need to leave Ceará.”⁹⁶

Volunteers' motivation was often rooted in financial incentives, the promise of employment opportunities, personal distinction, and the prospect of building a better reputation. To facilitate the relocation of individuals from their places of origin to new

⁹⁶ Original Portuguese version: “[...] *Percorremos as quatro léguas da estrada em construção visitando durante o percurso turma por turma de trabalhadores e ouvindo dos mesmos o motivo das suas reservas para com o nosso serviço. Diziam uns que se recusavam porque se tratava de um recrutamento para a guerra; outros, que já sabiam terem as primeiras turmas enviadas sido devoradas pelos índios (!); alguns, que todos os homens seriam vendidos a peso de ouro; ainda apareciam as ‘mães amantíssima’, que não desejavam separar-se dos seus filhos; destacava-se como principal motivo a alegação de que o inverno era chegado e não havia, assim, necessidade de deixar o Ceará.*”

Source: “Relatório do posto de recrutamento de Senador Pompeu enviado ao Chefe do SEMTA em Fortaleza, Hider Corrêa Lima em 18 de Março, 1943.” (BR ANRIO S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 05, p. 2.) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

destinations, the government introduced the concept of the “Rubber Soldier.” This initiative aimed to recruit workers for the Amazon region by presenting an idealized vision of their future lives, even though the feasibility of such prospects was frequently far from reality.

In the 1930s, the demand for a cheap labor force was primarily driven by local elites in Ceará to support regional infrastructure development. However, in the 1940s, this need took on a much larger scale as Brazil joined the Allies and international actors became involved. As discussed in Chapter 1, xenophobia remained a crucial tool in justifying the government’s actions towards impoverished, landless peasant populations from the sertão, who were utilized as labor for public infrastructural projects. The portrayal of the *flagelado* served a dual-purpose strategy. It not only justified the National Government and the Allies’ focus on recruiting from the Brazilian Northeast but also aimed to instill a climate crisis-driven fear in the *sertanejos*, who had fresh memories of past droughts. The objective was to make them believe they were *flagelados* and present them with options to escape this perceived fate. Unlike in previous droughts, this time, they were given choices. Staying in the *sertão* would label them as *flagelados*, while leaving offered the promise of wealth or a better reputation as a soldier.

Soldiers or workers



Figure 4.5: “Cada um no Seu Lugar. Brasil Para a Vitória.” (Everyone in Their Places. Brazil Towards Victory). Illustration by Jean-Pierre Chaboz for SEMTA’s enlistment campaign.

Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

At the same time that SEMTA was campaigning for enlisting workers to go to the Amazon to extract latex, the Brazilian government was also compulsorily recruiting men to the army during the early 1940s. The poster above from SEMTA's advertisement campaign (Figure 4.5) shows two groups of men distributed within Brazilian territory. While men using uniforms and carrying rifles are strategically placed protecting the country's coastal line, *seringueiros* are represented collecting latex sap in the northern part of the territory, near the Amazon River and its tributaries. This image designed by Jean-Pierre Chabloz was part of SEMTA's advertisements for recruiting rubber soldiers in 1943. The poster's message is clear: "Everyone in their place. Brazil towards victory," stating that independently of where each man would choose to enlist, they would all help in the war efforts by being part of the same cause.

Despite both programs being part of the war efforts officially, the act of enlisting for the Second World War was only referent to becoming a soldier in the *Força Expedicionária Brasileira* (FEB) Brazilian army, and not enlisting with SEMTA. Nevertheless, the recruitment processes presented young men with the option of going to the Amazon and engaging in the war effort by becoming a *seringueiro*. Becoming a *seringueiro* did mean that these workers were granted a justified period of leave from their military duty while they were working collecting rubber for the Allies.⁹⁷ This was also particularly confusing and caused misunderstandings, as many of these workers were considered unruly or unsubmitive by not showing up for military duty on time, even though they were isolated at the *seringais* and officially working in the war effort (Lima, 2014: 81). At the same time, the federal law decree *Decreto de Lei* 5225 from February 1st, 1942 particularly expressed the military tie of workers being sent to the Amazon to become latex extractors, although this decree did not clearly state the Amazon activities as part of the national army's endeavors at that time. Historian María Verónica Secreto (2007) clarified that when signing a volunteer contract to become a *seringueiro*, Rubber Soldiers were signing a work contract (Figure 4.6), and not an enlistment agreement; thus, they were subjected to the Department of Labor (Secreto, 2007: 11). Under clause 12 in the volunteer contract it was established that "the solution of conflicts that occur between the contracting parties will be the responsibility of the Labor Court." The war rhetoric of naming volunteers as *Rubber Soldiers*, and the work they would do on the *battlefront* in the Amazon, was just a nationalistic strategy of persuasion. The comparison between Amazon workers (Rubber Soldiers) and recruited FEB soldiers was also not very helpful in the later actions towards reparation for the *seringueiros* and their families. As Secreto explains, it is easier and more truthful to discuss the *seringueiros'* conditions of work and their need for indemnity in relation to other workers from that period or to other people doing analogous activities, than to correlate them to the *pracinhas* FEB soldiers (Secreto, 2007: 10)⁹⁸. Even so, it is worth mentioning how

⁹⁷ Following the Decreto-Lei (law decree) no. 5.225, article 1, from February 1st, 1943.

⁹⁸ Differently from the role of the Rubber Soldiers in providing feedstock for the Allies, the recruitment of the *pracinhas*, soldiers from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB), was a symbolic gesture of national military growth and recognition internationally. While there was an external demand for rubber coming from the U.S., the Brazilian government was the one pushing for sending its men overseas as a heroic and nationalistic act. Vargas' demands and ambitions did not represent a consensus internally nor externally; President Roosevelt himself was concerned about the logistics of transporting the Brazilian

Advertising the Amazonian Eldorado

Plan for General Collaboration

Despite being a newly established governmental agency, SEMTA soon became the largest national war effort in Brazil in the 1940s. This was only possible due to a series of partnerships and collaborations with different groups of society, including civic authorities, military authorities, and ecclesiastical authorities as well as the press and private entities who helped promote the agency and build an atmosphere of mutual understanding at all scales of their operations. Engineer Carlos José de Assis Ribeiro, the SEMTA chief's brother, elaborated a "Plan for General Collaboration" with SEMTA, presented to the then-director of the CME (*Coordenação da Mobilização Econômica*/Economic Mobilization Coordination) Artur Hehl Neiva on April 24th, 1943. In his report, Ribeiro described how SEMTA should get each one of the different collaborators involved in the project. Advertisement was one of the key tools in building SEMTA's morale, but the press' actions needed to be complementary to other external actions. While the military was asked to praise the Rubber Soldiers' role in the war as "production soldiers," ecclesiastical authorities were sent to the *pousos* to help break the confidence and faith of the workers. Even the elites and civic society were called out to organize events in favor of this new organization (see Figure 4.7).

The Collaboration Plan was also a strategy to build a common-ground image of what the national government wanted to portray as the expected life in the Amazon. Despite the different actions and their means, all types of advertisement painted a similar scenario for the Brazilian Northern territories, which had to be approved by the censorship of the DNI: the *Departamento Nacional de Imprensa e Propaganda*/National Department of Press and Advertisement. Volunteers needed to be convinced to move to unexplored lands, and the built environment played an important role in creating a credible atmosphere to persuade them. Constructing an image of what life in the Amazon as a Rubber Soldier would be like was a joint effort by different actors. These spaces needed to be both credible and desired. But these imagined spaces and idealized scenarios could only be recognized as plausible and real if all their different parts described and advertised these spaces in a similar way.

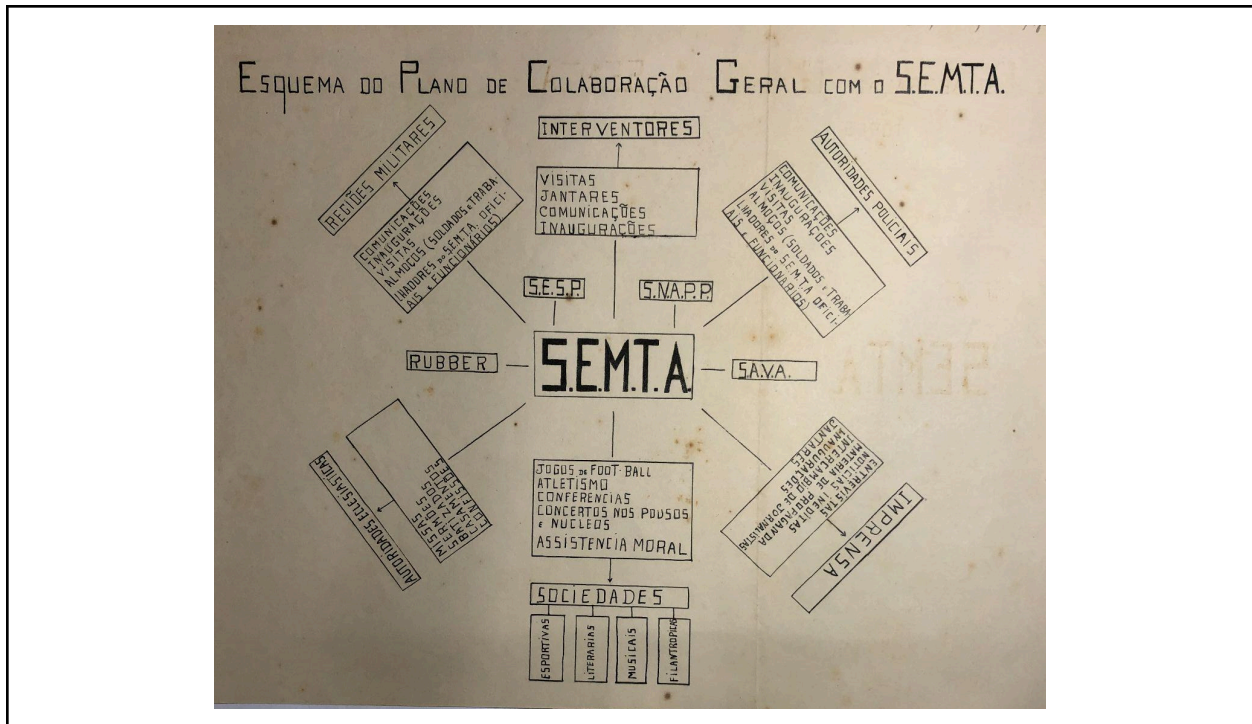


Figure 4.7: “Esquema do Plano de Colaboração Geral com o SEMTA.” (Scheme of the Plan for General Collaboration with SEMTA). Plan designed by C.J. Assis Ribeiro and presented to SEMTA’s Chief on April 24th, 1943.

Source: BR AN RIO S7 (Caixa 4, Pacote 05). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

The main advertisement strategy for SEMTA was related to the different uses of the materials created by Swiss artist Jean-Pierre Chabloz, such as his drawings for posters and flyers. Nevertheless, there were other campaigns and activities created both to convince volunteers to enlist, work in, and populate the Northern territories and to present SEMTA’s project and benefits to society. These campaigns’ goals were to help build the narratives of the Amazon as a desired destination and the *seringal* workers as war heroes. Some of these advertisements and campaigns were large-scale efforts, financed by the government and broadly spread across the territory, while others were smaller localized endeavors pushed by the population, as Ribeiro recommended and predicted in his collaboration plan.

One example of how society was actively collaborating with the SEMTA was the play and musical “*Os Soldados da Borracha*” (The Rubber Soldiers), written by João Brígido with music by Severino Correa Feio, on view at the Teatro Amazonas, in Manaus in July 1943⁹⁹ (Figures 4.8-4.11). The play’s fictional plot consisted of highlighting how the work of *seringueiros* in the Amazon was actually key in defeating Hitler in Germany. The choice of Teatro Amazonas as the place to run the show was also strategic, as the

⁹⁹ “*Soldados da Borracha*.” Autor: João Brígido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. Act 1, scene 4, p. 9. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.

theater is a symbolic structure representing the first “rubber boom” in the early 1900s, celebrating the golden era of regional growth coming from latex exports¹⁰⁰. The play romanticized the role of Rubber Soldiers, trying to demonstrate to the audience how closely related the *seringal* activities were to the actual war efforts. In the play, German soldiers came to the Amazon and actively tried to convince people not to enlist or work in the *seringais* because of the dangers of the forest. The Germans painted Brazilian folkloric figures and threatening exotic animals as villains to scare off *seringueiros*, a plan that was set out as a decisive and strategic move to cease the production and imports of latex to the Allies, and thus, win the war. The plot twist was when Rubber Soldiers got together and “defeated” the German soldiers by showing how they were not scared, and would never cease their works, which was of great importance to their nation and to the Allies.

“[Rubber Soldiers enter the stage singing:]

Let’s go! Let’s go to the forest
Without a cannon and without a rifle
Let’s seek victory
For our beloved Brazil

We are the Rubber Soldiers
Working for the greatness of Brazil
Our motto is rubber
And the victory of Brazil.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ At the turn of the twentieth century, modern planning ideals imported from Europe began to exert their influence in the Amazon region. Manaus, the capital of the state of Amazonas, exploited the profits from rubber exports (known as the “first rubber boom”) to become the wealthiest city in the region. Popularly known as the “Paris of the Tropics,” Manaus built luxurious structures such as the Teatro Amazonas using prefabricated components imported as a symbol of modernization, and staging environments that made reference to the European Belle Époque.

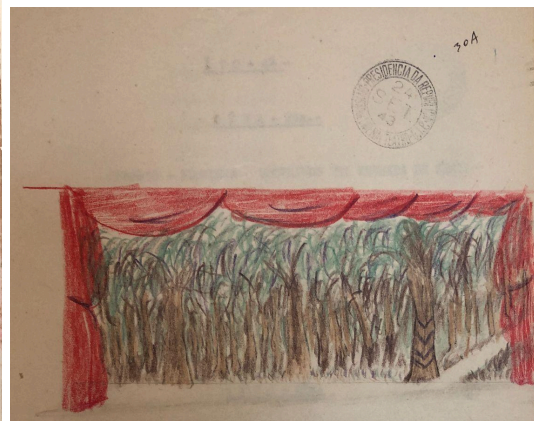
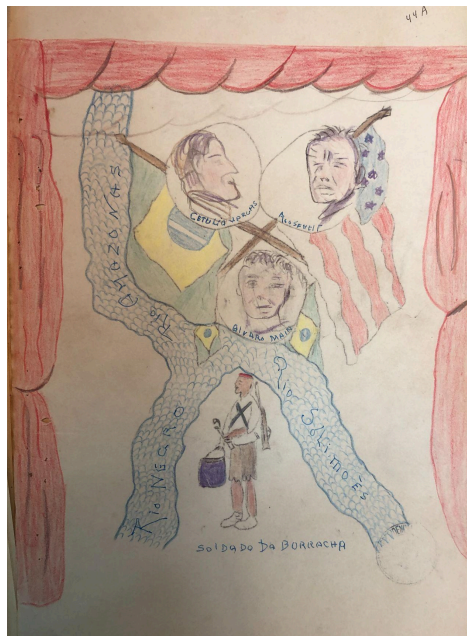
¹⁰¹ Original Portuguese version: “*Vamos! Vamos para a floresta/ Sem canhão e sem fuzil/ Vamos buscar a vitória/ Pro nosso amado Brasil/ Soldados somos da borracha/ Trabalhamos pra grandeza do Brasil/ Nosso lema é a borracha/ A vitória do Brasil*”



Figure 4.8 (left): Postcard from Teatro Amazonas, in Manaus (AM), 1910.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

Figure 4.9 (right): Stage set for the first act of "Os Soldados da Borracha," showing the Teatro Amazonas in the back.

Source: "Soldados da Borracha." Autor: João Brigido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. n.p. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.



Figures 4.10 and 4.11: Both drawings are illustrations of the stage sets used in the 1943 play "Soldados da Borracha," interpreted at the Teatro Amazonas, in Manaus.

(left) This is the final set of the play, when the Rubber Soldiers (represented by the figure at the bottom, at the intersection of the Amazon's main rivers) are seen as heroes, and represent the unifying force bounding Getúlio Vargas and Franklin Roosevelt's administration.

(right) This is the setting of the stage for Act 4, a *seringal* forest with many *seringueiras*.

Source: "Soldados da Borracha." Autor: João Brigido. Documento textual. Julho, 1943. In: Manuscritos 042.0016. n.p. Número de chamada Censura/Teatro Censura. Available at: Biblioteca Nacional Rio de Janeiro.

While initiatives such as the play about the Rubber Soldier were taking place locally in Amazonas State, the Brazilian government was also investing in larger advertising efforts to be shared nationwide. One example of this was hiring the film-director Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes to produce institutional videos for SEMTA depicting the journey of Rubber Soldiers to Pará, and their life once they reached the *seringais*¹⁰². Some of the goals with these videos were (1) to demystify the long travels that those enlisting would have to do, portraying the migration routes as seamless, fast, and enjoyable, (2) to present life in the Amazon forest as peaceful and productive, and (3) to show the process of latex extraction in the *seringueira* tree as an educational tool to future workers.

Regarding the film about the Rubber Soldiers' trajectory towards the North, Paulo Emilio's script depicted a linear narrative of the worker's journey. This puffery piece started with a scene where poor *flagelados* in the dry lands of the *sertão* were kneeling down praying for a better life. In the next scene, their prayers had been answered and they had joined SEMTA and embarked on the train, leaving Fortaleza. The journey was painted as smooth and pleasant. Workers were admiring the typical landscape of Ceará, and stopping to eat and rest along the way. Volunteers were singing and marching. There was a parade for the enlisted workers. Workers were portrayed happily jumping into trucks and continuing their journey towards the next rest stop.

“Scene 59. We witness the exclamation of a “HURRAY” to the Motherland. ‘V’ for victory. Repetition, diaphragmatic, very strong backlight.

Scene 67. Group of *flagelados* from Pernambuco, Ceará, and Paraíba, determined to enlist as workers in the rubber service.

[...]

Scene 74. Crato Railway Station; our caravan – already embarked on the freight train – awaits departure to Fortaleza.

Scene 75. What a departure! The people had really enjoyed the new pioneers of the Amazon (filmed from the platform of the last wagon).

Scene 80. Group singing, surrounded by comrades.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Paulo Emilio was hired by SEMTA to follow the first (and one of the few) groups of recruited workers coming from Rio de Janeiro to Pará, in January 1943, registering their journey and using some of this footage for later advertisement campaigns. For more information about Paulo Emilio's involvement with SEMTA and his trajectory see: Souza, José Inácio de Melo.(2002). *Paulo Emilio no Paraíso*. Rio de Janeiro, Record.

¹⁰³ Original Portuguese version:

Cena 59. Assistimos a exclamação de um “VIVA” à Pátria. “V” da vitória. Repetição, diafragmado, contra-sol fortíssimo

Cena 67. Grupo de Flagelados pernambucanos, cearenses e paraibanos, decididos a alistar-se como trabalhadores no serviço da borracha



Cena 74. Estação da Estrada de ferro de Crato; nossa caravana – já embarcada no trem de carga – aguarda a saída para Fortaleza.

Cena 75. Veja só que partida! O povo havia gostado muito dos novos pioneiros da Amazônia (filmagem da plataforma do ultimo vagão)

Cena 80. Grupo cantando, cercado pelos camaradas.

Source: Cinemateca Brasileira. Arquivo Paulo Emilio de Salles Gomes. BR CB PE/PI. 0077

Many of these scenes described in Paulo Emilio's scripts were in fact enacted, such as the public parades organized by SEMTA in 1943. These parades were also one of SEMTA's advertising strategies within the recruitment phase¹⁰⁴. Aba Films, one of the most traditional photography studios of Fortaleza and founded in 1934 by Aldemar Bezerra de Albuquerque, was the studio hired for documenting some of these parades and moments of departure of enlisted workers, as shown in Figures 4.12 and 4.13¹⁰⁵. Some recurrent elements that were present throughout SEMTA's campaign were precisely depicting these parades, and how happy and determined the volunteers were. The constant mention of the "V" arm-shape ("V" as in "victory") can be seen in ABA's pictures, Paulo Emilio's scripts, and Jean-Pierre Chablotz's drawings.

	
<p>Figure 4.12: Rubber Soldiers' departure from Fortaleza, 1943. Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC - Aba Films.</p>	<p>Figure 4.13: Rubber Soldiers' departure, marching at the plaza José de Alencar, Fortaleza, 1943. Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC - Aba Films.</p>

It is interesting to see some of the strategies Paulo Emilio used to build the specific narrative needed for SEMTA. As in any advertisement piece, the cinematographer used particular frames, close-ups, final cuts, and edits to construct a scenario and a story. In this particular job, it is worth highlighting Paulo Emilio's efforts to portray the journeys of the workers towards the Amazon Valley as very fast-paced, despite the reality being quite the opposite, as shown in the cinematographer's description of scenes 85 and 88:

¹⁰⁴ As I will later describe in this chapter, SEMTA's parades were one of the most important moments in SEMTA's advertisement campaign. They served to boost enlisted workers' morale, to attract new volunteers, and to legitimize SEMTA's campaign to the other citizens.

¹⁰⁵ Aba Films gained particular notoriety as one of the main photography and film studios in Ceará, as it held image rights for one of the only available moving images of Lampião, captured by Benjamin Abraão, who was at that time working for this production company.

“Scene 85. Landscape aspects of the Piauí hinterland. Section of the road, just before the ascent of a mountain range. [Still shot]. Another section, filmed with the camera fixed on the truck while moving at high speed; only a few meters of this scene were usable.”

“Scene 88. New trucks, racing off on the road, heading towards Teresina. There will be need for several shootings for this scene, as the vehicles only pass occasionally, and with hours of delay and great distances between each truck.”¹⁰⁶

The script describing the scenes portraying life in the Amazon is particularly interesting for its similarity to the drawings portrayed by the artist Jean-Pierre Chabloz, especially his 1943 poster “*Vida Nova na Amazônia*” (“New Life in the Amazon”), later discussed in this chapter (Figure 4.14). The clear alignment between the two pieces confirms how SEMTA’s advertisement campaigns were leveled. Even smaller non-governmental efforts such as the play “*Soldados da Borracha*” had to go through the censorship of the *Departamento Nacional de Imprensa e Propaganda*/National Department of Press and Advertisement).

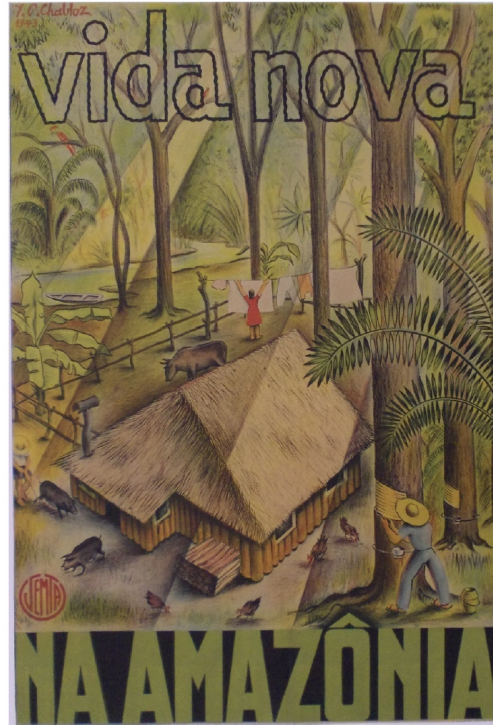
¹⁰⁶ Original Portuguese version:

Cena 85. Aspectos paisagísticos do sertão piauiense. Trecho da estrada de rodagem, logo antes da subida duma serra. [Posado]. Outro trecho, filmado com a câmera fixada no caminhão em marcha com alta velocidade; desta cena aproveitar senão poucos metros.

Cena 88. Novos caminhões, em plena corrida, rumo a Teresina. Várias cenas, pois os automóveis passaram de vez em quando com grandes distâncias e atrasos de horas.

Source: Cinemateca Brasileira. Arquivo Paulo Emilio de Salles Gomes. BR CB PE/PI. 0077.

“Scene 9. Long shot of a river with a rubber tapper’s hut in the background.
 Scene 10. Long shot of the Araguaia River or a typical river.
 Scene 11. Close-up of Francisco Dias (typical rubber tapper), his wife, and children each engaged in their tasks in front of the house.
 Scene 12. Close-up of Francisco Dias and his son preparing to enter the forest in search of latex.”¹⁰⁷



Partial script for Paulo Emilio’s footage during trips through the Northeast on behalf of SEMTA.
Source: Cinemateca Brasileira. Arquivo Paulo Emilio de Salles Gomes. BR CB PE/PI. 0079.

Figure 4.14: Poster “Vida Nova na Amazônia” (New Life in the Amazon), designed by Jean-Pierre Chabloz for SEMTA. March, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

It is important to note here how all these “collaboration efforts” helped conceive a unifying national image of the rubber soldiers, the Amazon region, and “modern Brazil.” These concepts were directly attached to an interpretation of an idealized spatial conceptualization which helped build a sentiment of belonging and a sentiment of desire for a lifestyle that neither the intended audience nor those advertising it really knew or had experienced.

Jean-Pierre Chabloz

In order for the recruitment of Rubber Soldiers in the 1940s to be compelling and efficient, the Brazilian state invested a great sum of SEMTA’s budget in propaganda, one key aspect of which was hiring the Swiss artist Jean-Pierre Chabloz to design the artistic-graphic posters and images used for SEMTA’s advertising division. Jean-Pierre Chabloz (Lausanne 1910-1984 Fortaleza) was an artist, painter, and musician. He was

¹⁰⁷ Original Portuguese version:

Cena 9. L.S. tomada do rio com choupana de seringueiro ao fundo.

Cena 10. L.S. rio Araguaia ou rio típico

Cena 11. S.C.U. de Francisco Dias (típico seringueiro), esposa e filhos empenhados cada qual em sua tarefa frente a casa.

Cena 12. Close-up de Francisco Dias e o filho preparando-se para entrar no mato em busca de látex”

born in Lausanne (Switzerland) in 1910. From 1929-1933 he attended the *École des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts) in Geneva to study Figurative Drawing, Perspective, Graphic, and Decoration. From 1933-1936 he studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* (Academy of Fine Arts) of Florence and Milan, and in 1938 graduated from the *Accademia di Brera* in Milan. Because of the rise of Nazi fascism, Chabloz moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1940 with his family, the Brazilian Regina Frota Pessoa, and their daughter Ana Maria. In 1943 Chabloz was invited by his Swiss friend Georges Rabinovitch (Rubber Reserve's agent and representative/*assistente trabalhista*) to work in Fortaleza at the propaganda division of SEMTA, together with the fellow Swiss-born Alexandre Zalszupin, who was to lead the propaganda division at the very beginning of the campaign.

In his service diary from January-June 1943, Chabloz described how SEMTA's hiring process was carried out at a very fast pace, and within a week of his job offer, he was already flying from Rio de Janeiro to Fortaleza to start working. While the recommendation of Chabloz came from Rabinovitch, he later learned that Paulo de Assis Ribeiro had previously worked with Regina's father, José Getúlio da Frota Pessoa, at the National Department of Education (1935). At Rabinovitch's suggestion (and also working as a convincing tool for getting Chabloz on board), Regina was also offered a job at SEMTA, assisting the families of the recruited workers. SEMTA would take care of the Chabloz family's moving and lodging expenses, and would pay a salary of 4,000 cruzeiros per month to Jean-Pierre (equivalent at that time to 13 monthly minimum wages), and 3,000 cruzeiros/month to Regina (equivalent at that time to 10 monthly minimum wages)¹⁰⁸.

The first weeks of January 1943 were labor-intensive. The propaganda team was gathered in São Luis (Maranhão) to establish their work guidelines, and to familiarize themselves with the campaigns' targeted audience and the kinds of work *seringueiros* would do in the Amazon as well as to look at SEMTA's contract for the recruited workers. There is a report from the Historical Book of SEMTA that explains how on January 2nd, 1943, Zalszupin and Chabloz were already building their advertising work plan, but that they were still missing some guidance and information about how to depict life in the Amazon once workers finally reached Belém and were sent to the *seringais*:

“Every day there is an increase in the activities in the Northeast. Mr. Assis Ribeiro and technicians Alexandre Zalszupin and Jean-Pierre Chabloz are building and detailing the main goals and work plan for SEMTA's advertisement, but details about the campaign are still jeopardized by the lack of data and information regarding the life workers will have after reaching Belém.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ “*Enumeração dos trabalhos executados para o S.E.M.T.A. (Desenhos etc. Em relação mais ou menos direta com este serviço - Belém - São Luiz - Teresina - Fortaleza.) - Desde 02 de Janeiro de 1943.*” Jean-Pierre Chabloz, April 5th, 1943. Artist's archives. Acervo MAUC/UFC.

¹⁰⁹ Original Portuguese version: “*As atividades no Nordeste são cada vez maiores. O Sr. Assis Ribeiro e os técnicos Alexandre Zalszupin e Jean-Pierre Chabloz traçam as linhas gerais da propaganda do SEMTA, uma vez que os detalhes são prejudicados pela falta de dados sobre a vida dos trabalhadores além de Belém.*”

“[on January 9th, 1943] SEMTA’s chief gathered with the advertisement technicians to study the possibility of establishing the basic work conditions at the *seringais* and during worker’s travels to Belém. This was an effort to help create enlightening propaganda materials for future *seringueiros*. But again, nothing was accomplished due to the lack of documentation and data about the services held in the Amazon region.”¹¹⁰

On January 12, 1943, Paulo de Assis Ribeiro (SEMTA’s chief) traveled to Belém with Jean-Pierre Chabloz¹¹¹. Upon their arrival, Chabloz went to visit the Museum and Institute Gueldi [Museu Paraense Emílio Gueldi]¹¹² in order to further collect information and documentation that would help him design the campaign advertisement:

“Mr. Jean-Pierre Chabloz, on the other hand, accompanied by José Barra and the Director of the Northern Agronomic Institute, Dr. Felizberto Camargo, visited the Museum and Institute Gueldi in order to collect the necessary documents for the advertisement he needed to design.”¹¹³

In his service diary, Chabloz’ notes from January 12th, 1943 mentioned his visit to a park where he could see *seringueira* trees, as well as pictures of the tree trunks with incisions:

“Mr. Barros led me to the Rubber Bank, where, inside the public park, there were some ‘rubber trees’ that I could draw. He gave me modern (Oriental) knives for trying to make the incisions in the Brazilian tree bark.

Source: “Histórico de implantação” (1942-1943). *Histórico de 22 de dezembro de 1942 a 01 de fevereiro de 1943* (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 4). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹¹⁰ Original Portuguese version: “[no dia 09 de Janeiro de 1943] reuniu o chefe do SEMTA, os técnicos de propaganda para ver a possibilidade de serem fixadas as bases das condições de trabalho nos seringais e do encaminhamento além de Belém, afim de que se pudesse lançar uma propaganda esclarecedora aos futuros seringueiros, mas, novamente, nada foi conseguido por falta de dados referentes aos serviços no Vale Amazônico”

Source: “Histórico de implantação” (1942-1943). *Histórico de 22 de dezembro de 1942 a 01 de fevereiro de 1943* (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 6). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹¹¹ “Livro Histórico do SEMTA”, s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 7) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹¹² The *Instituto Gueldi* is a research institute connected to Brazil’s department of science, technology, innovation, and communication. The institute was established in 1966, and its activities focus on scientific studies of natural and socio-cultural environments in the Amazon.

¹¹³ Original Portuguese version: “O Sr. Jean-Pierre Chabloz, por outro lado, em companhia de José Barra e do Diretor do Instituto Agrônomo do Norte, Dr. Felizberto Camargo, visitava o Museu Gueldi e o referido Instituto, para colher documentação necessária para a propaganda a seu cargo.”

Source: “Histórico de implantação” (1942-1943). *Histórico de 22 de dezembro de 1942 a 01 de fevereiro de 1943* (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 9). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

In the evening, at the hotel, one of the S.E.S.P (American) members showed me a picture of a tree with modern parallel incisions, so I made an elementary drawing based on that image.”¹¹⁴

Despite some materials, photos, and data collected at the museum, Chabloz was very vocal in his service diary about how he felt neglected, and thus irresponsible, for not knowing enough about the subject matter that he needed to represent in his drawings. He was particularly concerned about how life in the Amazon would be for the recruited workers. One of Chabloz’ plans (that ended up not coming to fruition during his time working at SEMTA) was to create a manual-like publication called “*Breviário do Seringueiro Modelo 1943*” (Breviary of the Exemplary *Seringueiro* 1943) to be distributed to all Rubber Soldiers upon enlistment at SEMTA. This publication would be a guide book with drawings explaining how to collect rubber from the *seringueiras* and how to work at the *seringais*, and also giving basic moral, hygienic, and medical instructions to workers.¹¹⁵

Aside from his works for SEMTA, the artist also created three layouts for SESP, the Special Service of Public Health between March and early May of 1943.^{116,117} Charles Wagley, a North American anthropologist and director of the migratory campaign from SESP, requested a special authorization from Paulo de Assis Ribeiro to temporarily use Chabloz’ services. Wagley needed to create educational posters with medical and hygienic advice for the future *seringueiros*. One of the posters was part of a campaign to help prevent malaria; the second and third posters were related to hygienic advice, such as how to clean and eat produce, how to take care of injuries, how to avoid parasitic infection, and how to properly clean and take care of their home and body (see Figures 4.15-4.17) (Moraes, 2012: 113). After working for SESP at the same time as he held his position at SEMTA, it became clear why Chabloz was an enthusiast of creating the “Breviary of the Exemplary *Seringueiro*.” Chabloz believed in the SESP strategy of focusing on sanitary education as a fundamental instrument for prevention and preparedness in helping uneducated and illiterate citizens to survive (Moraes, 2012: 172).

¹¹⁴ Original Portuguese version: “*Senhor Barros conduziu-me até o Banco da Borracha, onde, dentro do parque público, encontram-se algumas “seringueiras” que eu logo desenhei. Ele me deu facas modernas (orientais) para as incisões na casca da árvore brasileira.*

À noite, no hotel, um dos membros do S.E.S.P (americano) me mostra uma foto de uma árvore, com incisões modernas, paralelas, então eu fiz um desenho elementar.”

Source: Jean-Pierre Chabloz, service diary. January 12th, 1943. Available at: Acervo MAUC/UFC

¹¹⁵ “*Enumeração dos trabalhos executados para o S.E.M.T.A. (Desenhos etc. Em relação mais ou menos direta com este serviço - Belém - São Luiz - Teresina – Fortaleza.) - Desde 02 de Janeiro de 1943.*”

Jean-Pierre Chabloz, January 13th, 1943. Artist’s archives. MAUC-UFC.

¹¹⁶ “*Enumeração dos trabalhos executados para o S.E.M.T.A. (Desenhos etc. Em relação mais ou menos direta com este serviço - Belém - São Luís - Teresina – Fortaleza.) - Desde 02 de Janeiro de 1943.*”

Jean-Pierre Chabloz, March 17th, 1943. Artist’s archives. Acervo MAUC/UFC.

¹¹⁷ The SESP was a dual-nationality institution created in July 1942, attending both the Brazilian and U.S. governments. This service’s goal was to guarantee better sanitary conditions in the Amazon region.



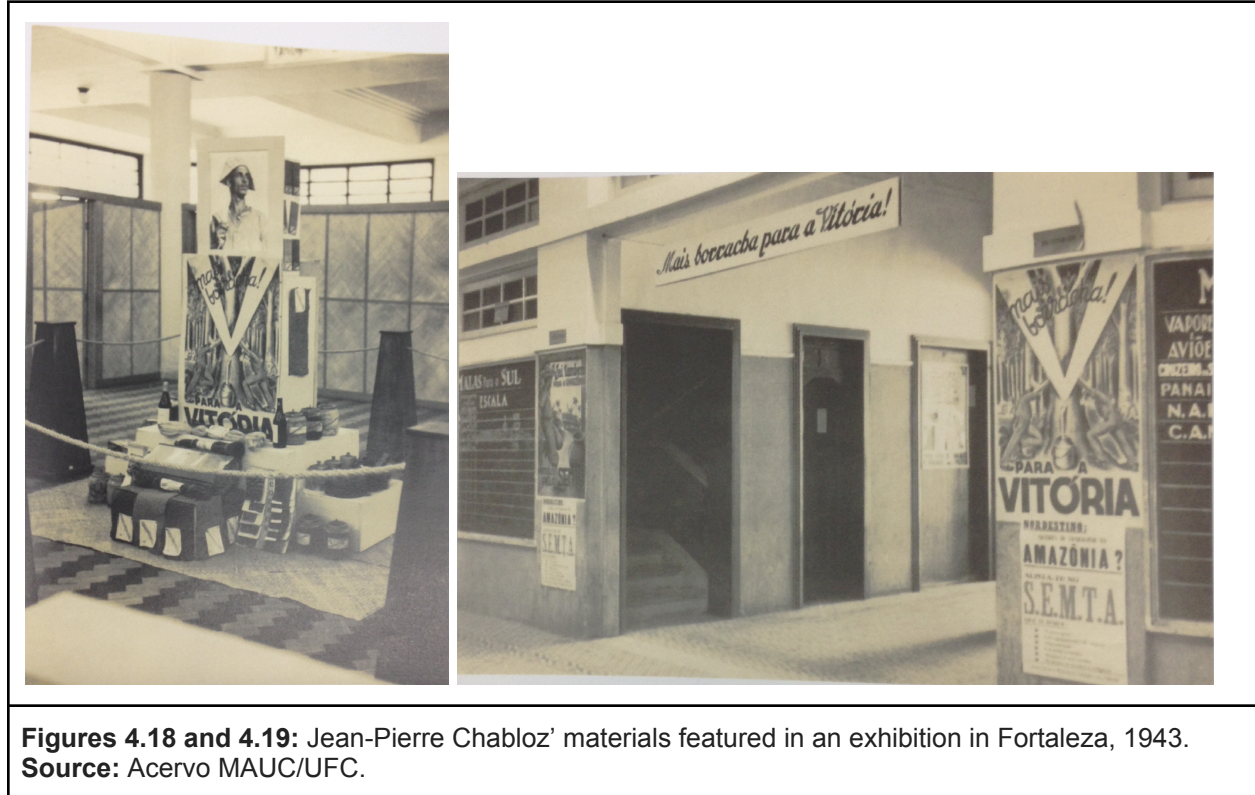
Figures 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17: Posters by Jean-Pierre Chabloz for SESP, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC; Jean-Pierre Chabloz.

Besides the jobs for SESP, and drawing the posters to advertise SEMTA's activities attracting workers to enlist as Rubber Soldiers, Chabloz also worked closely with SEMTA's medical team providing drawings for manuals, as well as organizing exhibitions of his works within different locations in Fortaleza as part of an outreach strategy (figures 4.18 and 4.19). One example was Chabloz' commissioned 2.5-meter painting reproducing one of his SEMTA posters at Fortaleza's Country Club, which also came as a last-minute request for the artist, as he stated in his diary:

“Paulo [de Assis Ribeiro] and [Georges] Rabinovitch, with Mr. Johnson, among others – ordered me to make, without delay, a large panel measuring 2.5 meters in height reproducing my poster “MORE RUBBER TOWARDS VICTORY,” destined to decorate a room at the Country Club.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Original Portuguese version: “Paulo [de Assis Ribeiro] e [Georges] Rabinovitch, com o senhor Johnson, entre outros – mandam-me fazer, sem tardar, um grande painel de 2,5 metros de altura mais ou

Chabloz's last job was organizing the advertising materials to be used in the “*Grande Parada do Mês da Borracha*” (The Great Parade of the Month of the Rubber), an event promoted by the Federal Government in which SEMTA participated.



Figures 4.18 and 4.19: Jean-Pierre Chabloz' materials featured in an exhibition in Fortaleza, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

After working for SEMTA for about six months, Chabloz decided to officially ask for his resignation on July 1st, 1943.¹¹⁹ Chabloz often complained in his service diary about how he felt there was not as much support as he hoped from SEMTA regarding his work; how there was also a very bureaucratic process in order to move along with projects, which would also delay his production and make him frustrated; and how he felt unattended and isolated. The Propaganda Department did not have a designated team of employers, nor a designated space at SEMTA's office building, which meant Chabloz was often working alone and from home, with little communication with the rest of the organization (Moraes, 2012:143; Gois, 2013: 58).

menos, reproduzindo meu cartaz “MAIS BORRACHA PARA A VITÓRIA,” destinado a decorar um espaço do Country Club”

Source: Jean-Pierre Chabloz. Service diary, March 8th, 1943. Available at: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

¹¹⁹ While working for SESP, Charles Wagley mentioned to Chabloz the possibility for him to work exclusively for SESP if/when his contract at SEMTA was terminated. On July 19th, 1943, after resigning from SEMTA, Chabloz wrote to Wagley asking if it was possible for him to move to SESP, but that was never actualized.

Source: “*Carta de Chabloz a Charles Wagley. Fortaleza, 19 jul. 1943.*” Jean-Pierre Chabloz, Artist's archives. Acervo MAUC/UFC.

Part of Chabloz' frustrations at the end of his term, however, were not properly contemplated due to a larger sense of instability not particularly regarding the propaganda department, but due to a period of uncertainty at the entire SEMTA agency. The contract between SEMTA and the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC) expired in late May 1943, and it was not clear if they would continue SEMTA's services the way the institution was initially established (Moraes, 2012:144). Regina, Chabloz's wife, also resigned from her position as director of the *Nucleo Cocorote*, sharing similar complaints as her husband: administrative disorder and lack of communication between employers, amongst others (Gois, 2013: 67).

The Posters

Chabloz' images created a certain imaginary of an idyllic life in the Amazon, which was also very appealing and convincing for those who needed to choose between the violent battlefronts in Europe as FEB's soldiers, or moving to the North of Brazil to become a *seringueiro*. Chabloz' drawings were particularly important considering the majority of the population to whom SEMTA's advertisements were directed were illiterate (Lima, 2014: 71, Garfield, 2010: 991). Posters were often opposing life in the dry and poor areas of the Northeast with the supposedly abundant and productive lands of the Amazon. Drawings were designed to build a very specific scenario for attracting and enlisting workers. Chabloz' images promised two of the most important things poor and landless *flagelados* could dream of having/becoming: (1) the possibility of enriching and having their own plot of land, and (2) the possibility of no longer being regarded as *flagelados*, of becoming highly respected *soldiers*, heroes working towards a national endeavor.

It is relevant to look at Chabloz' drawings as one of the most important tools of placemaking, and at the heart of SEMTA's institutional goal of convincing and recruiting migrants to move to the North. All of Chabloz' posters and advertisement materials were idealized representations of what truly was an uncertain future for the adventurous recruited workers. As mentioned, not even the artist himself was fully aware of what he was representing. It is interesting to note that this "place-making" idea is not solely referencing life at the *seringal*, but also the travels and spaces in between, and the personal transformations of the enlisted men during this migratory process. "Place" here is a construction that does not designate just "space," but a mindset. Thus, drawing created a specific spatial form, shaping SEMTA's campaign. These representations have deep and lasting effects on the population (both those enlisting and those supporting the campaign at various levels). Chabloz' drawings were long-lasting, more permanent than the physically-constructed (yet ephemeral) buildings, such as the *pousos* that worked as temporary recruitment facilities and shelter for SEMTA workers. In his service diary, Chabloz acknowledged his responsibility in materializing and interpreting SEMTA's conceptualization and project, and at the same time, also regretfully questioned if his work was giving a false testimony to the targeted audience. Many recruited workers particularly blamed Chabloz personally for the hard and arduous choice they made when enlisting. This happened because every poster or advertisement material was signed and dated by Chabloz, and people did not

necessarily differentiate the artist's work from those who hired and commissioned it. In response to that misunderstanding, Chabloz' wife Regina Chabloz, in an interview for the documentary "*Borracha! Para Vitória,*" responded: "this [depicting how life was in the Amazon] was not Chabloz's saying. He executed his works and drawings according to the guidance he received. He had never been to the Amazon, he did not know what to expect"¹²⁰.

Chabloz' posters were hand-drawn in ink, colored pencils, and watercolors, and then sent to Rio de Janeiro to be printed at the Gráficas Mendes Júnior on a larger scale of 20,000 copies for each poster, using the process of lithography. It took about two months for the first poster to be printed and ready for distribution and was released in May 1943 (Moraes, 2012: 238). In his service diary, Chabloz mentioned how he was very frustrated with the printing process. By the time he sent off his designs to Rio de Janeiro he believed they would be sized and reproduced using the process of photolithography. Instead, his drawings were mechanically reproduced, copied by hand on lithograph stones. This, according to Chabloz, has changed enormously the original design and authorship. Chabloz saw the printing process as a disruptive method that oversimplified his art, which was also part of a larger debate regarding the differences between an artistic piece and a commissioned job done for an advertising campaign. Before being sent to Rio de Janeiro, the original pieces drawn by Chabloz were supposed to be photographed by Aba film (a traditional photography agency from Ceará). Nevertheless, there was not enough time to register the final versions of the posters before shipping them, which was also a very frustrating moment for Chabloz, who could not keep a record of his original work¹²¹.

¹²⁰ Reference: Documentary "*Borracha! Para Vitória,*" director Wolney Oliveira, 2005. 11min 12sec.

¹²¹ "*Enumeração dos trabalhos executados para o S.E.M.T.A. (Desenhos etc. Em relação mais ou menos direta com este serviço - Belém - São Luiz - Teresina - Fortaleza.) - Desde 02 de Janeiro de 1943.*" Jean-Pierre Chabloz, May 4th, 1943. Artist's archives. Acervo MAUC/UFC.



Figure 4.20: SEMTA's poster "*Mais Borracha Para Vitória*," designed by Jean-Pierre Chabloz in January, 1943.

Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

Chabloz' very first poster for SEMTA, "*Mais Borracha para a Vitória*" ("More Rubber Towards Victory") portrays a scene at the *seringais*, and it was conceived during Chabloz' first week of work in January 1943, before the artist had any contact or further information about *seringueiros*' life when they arrived in the Amazon. In the poster, two men dressed in Rubber Soldier attire lean against a *seringueira* tree at the center of the composition. There is a bucket attached to the trunk of the tree where latex sap is being collected. A sizable letter "V" is mirroring the *seringueiro*'s arrangement, and at the same time its geometry is helping direct the sap towards the bucket while matching the top branches of the tree. On a secondary level, it is possible to recognize a dense yet backlit forest full of other *seringueira* trees, and many *seringueiro* workers collecting sap near each other. *Seringueiros* in the back work alone or in teams of two. It is possible to recognize the typical diagonal cut marks in the tree trunks to extract latex. On top of the poster placed near the treetops, there is cursive lettering announcing: "*Mais borracha!*" ("More rubber!"). On the bottom, at the ground level underneath the bucket and the *seringueiros* at the front, there is a bold, all-caps phrase: "*Para a vitória*" ("towards victory"). On the top left there is SEMTA's stamp in red, and Chabloz' signature, "J.P.Chabloz 43."

It is worth noting that Chabloz' representation of the *seringal* in "*Mais Borracha para Vitória*" did not exactly meet the reality of workers in the Amazon. This might either be a

conscious advertising strategy, or simply reflect Chabloz' ignorance of the details and nuances of life up north – a great challenge for his work, as the artist would constantly complain in his service diary. First, each *seringueiro* would be placed to work alone on a plot of land at the *seringal*, rarely seeing or gathering with other *seringueiros* in the forest. Second, the *Havea brasiliensis* seringueira trees are located within a certain distance from each other in their natural habitat. Therefore, while the forest is a dense environment, *seringueiros* needed to create a trail connecting the different *seringueira* trees scattered around, with usually two or three trees per hectare. Lastly, the influx of sap coming out of a *seringueira* trunk is not as fast or fluid as the drawing shows, nor is it collected on a full-size bucket, but in smaller cups, as I will explain in more detail later in this chapter. Therefore, the poster “*Mais Borracha para Vitória*” portrayed what seemed to be truly a battalion of workers (the Rubber Soldiers) quickly “getting the job done,” collecting latex sap collectively and quickly, in an ambience that seemed easy to navigate: quite the opposite of what recruited workers would face when arriving in the Amazon.

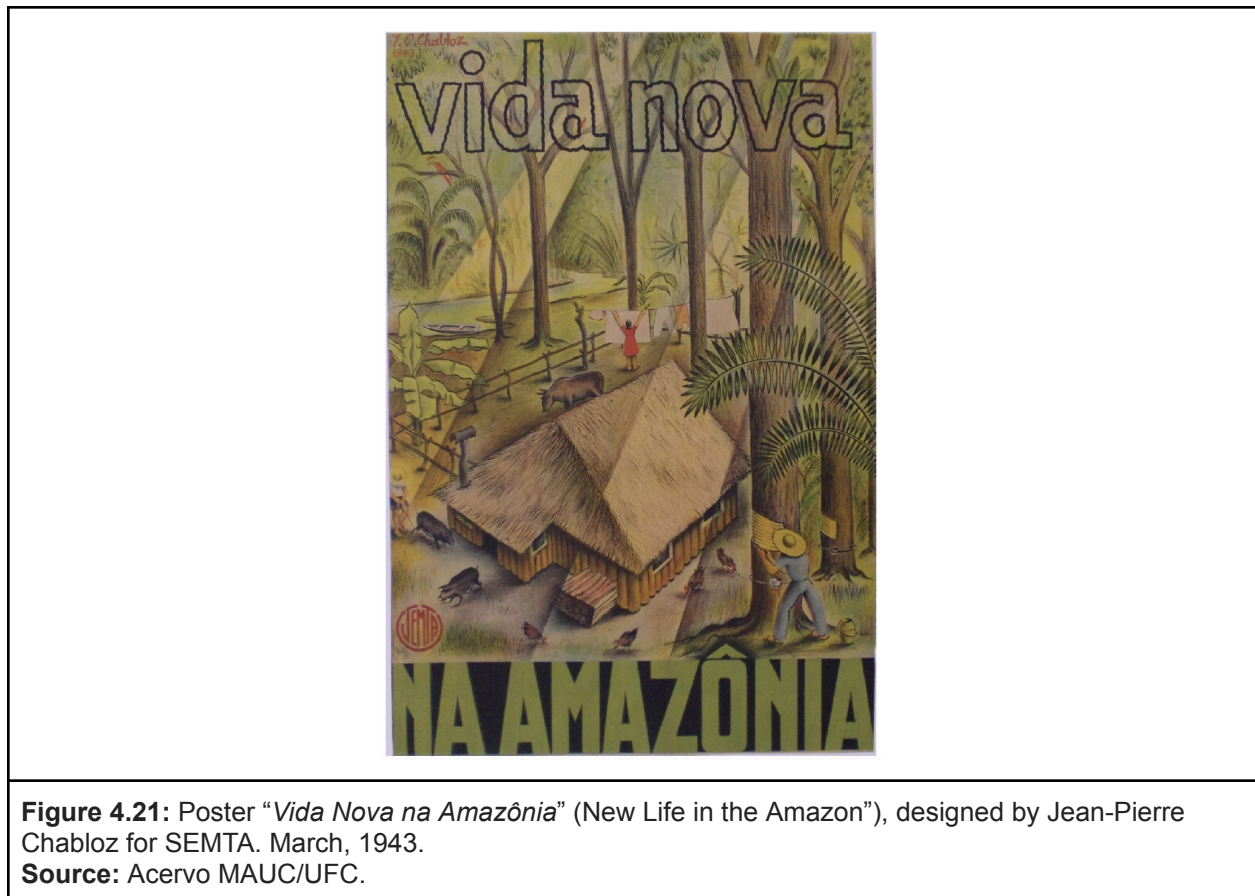


Figure 4.21: Poster “*Vida Nova na Amazônia*” (New Life in the Amazon”), designed by Jean-Pierre Chabloz for SEMTA. March, 1943.

Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

A similar idealization of the Amazon and life in the *seringais* occurred when Chabloz designed the “*Vida Nova na Amazônia*” (“New Life in the Amazon”) poster. This poster depicts a *seringueiro*'s family home in the middle of an opening in the forest. The light green and yellow colors bring up a sentiment of serenity, warmth, and happiness. The

drawing technique of using light and shadows helps us imagine the rays of sunshine coming in through the treetops, but in a very geometrical way, almost resembling a spotlight. In the center of the piece there is a cabin-like house with its structure made out of wood, covered with a straw roof. All the rooms in the house have windows. A chimney is visible in the roof, emerging from what most likely would be the kitchen or the living room. Near the door there is a pile of wood to be used in the stove. On one side of the house there is a fenced backyard where the family keeps their cow. In that same area, there is a figure of a woman wearing a red dress, hanging some clothes to dry. The woman's arms are up, in a "V"-shaped gesture, as seen in previous posters. In the background, there is a stream of calm and reflecting water, and a small canoe parked on its bank. Near the river there is a red *arara* (macaw) sitting on a tree branch. In front of the house near the entrance there are pigs and chickens being taken care of by a figure of a boy wearing shorts, a white shirt, and a hat. The house is drawn as an isometric projection from a slightly higher viewpoint. In the foreground of the poster, also at a higher level than the house, there is a fully-uniformed *seringueiro* tapping a couple of trees. From the *seringueiro*'s perspective, he can observe his house and safeguard his family while collecting rubber. There are similar trees to the one he is tapping all around his plot of land. It is possible to recognize some other tropical plants in the background, forming a denser landscape of the forest. On top of the poster there is an unfilled bold typeface spelling out "*vida nova*" ("new life"). At the bottom of the composition there is a black target and green all-caps text saying "na Amazônia" ("in the Amazon"). SEMTA's red logo is placed in the bottom left of the picture; Chabloz' date and signature are on the top left.

The "*Vida Nova na Amazônia*" poster depicts a domestic, wealthy, tranquil, and idyllic family life in the Amazon. Chabloz' composition particularly highlights the migrant's dream of having their own plot of land that is productive and abundant on fertile land with access to water where they can settle in and work. This poster became a symbol of what Rubber Soldiers expected to find when moving up North, and this was also one of the greatest frustrations these migrant workers faced. Similarly to Chabloz' first poster, "*Mais Borracha para a Vitória*" ("More Rubber Towards Victory"), this one depicts the Amazon forest in an idealized way. Again, there are two reasons why this image is portrayed the way it is: first, Chabloz did not have access to visit a *seringal*, nor he was provided enough data and documentation about that area; second, Chabloz was working on building SEMTA's propaganda materials, therefore, it was expected that his designs would serve as a tool of persuasion, depicting flourishing aspects of reality as best as possible. Thus, the promised "new life in the Amazon" was not very similar to what Chabloz showed.

Not only was Chabloz' representation of the forest and the *seringal* different from what Rubber Soldiers faced when arriving North, but so was the family life depicted in "*Vida Nova na Amazônia*." When SEMTA was established, the recruitment campaign targeted single men only, and enlisting was limited to men (Secreto, 2005: 177). Therefore, life in the *seringal* was quite lonely for most *seringueiros* at first. Only a few of them would marry local women, whom they would meet at the rare festivities at the *Seringal's* headquarters, which gathered workers from the entire *seringal*. Some northeastern

families arrived later, when SEMTA was dismantled and the National Department of Migration (DNI) changed its arrangements.

The representation of the *seringueiros*' house (*tapiri*) was also fanciful. Seringueiros did try to choose areas near rivers to build their homes. They did also domesticate a few animals that lived underneath the stilts of the house (Belik, 2021: 10). Nevertheless, *seringueiros* were highly discouraged (and, many times, forbidden) to domesticate animals, hunt, or practice subsistence farming. *Seringals*' landowners/bosses (the *seringalista*) wanted to guarantee their workers' dependence on buying goods and provisions exclusively at their warehouse, the *barracão*, in the *seringa's sede* (headquarters). The *seringals*' landlords would also claim that hunting and keeping animals, for example, were dangerous activities putting their worker's life at risk. The lack of proper storage for the meat would make the food prone to contamination, and the impossibility of proper care for the animals was also a red flag for shared diseases.



In addition to the posters depicting life in the Amazon, Chabloz was commissioned to design pieces about the recruitment process itself and what SEMTA's migratory operation was like, such as the poster "*Vai também para a Amazônia, protegido pelo*

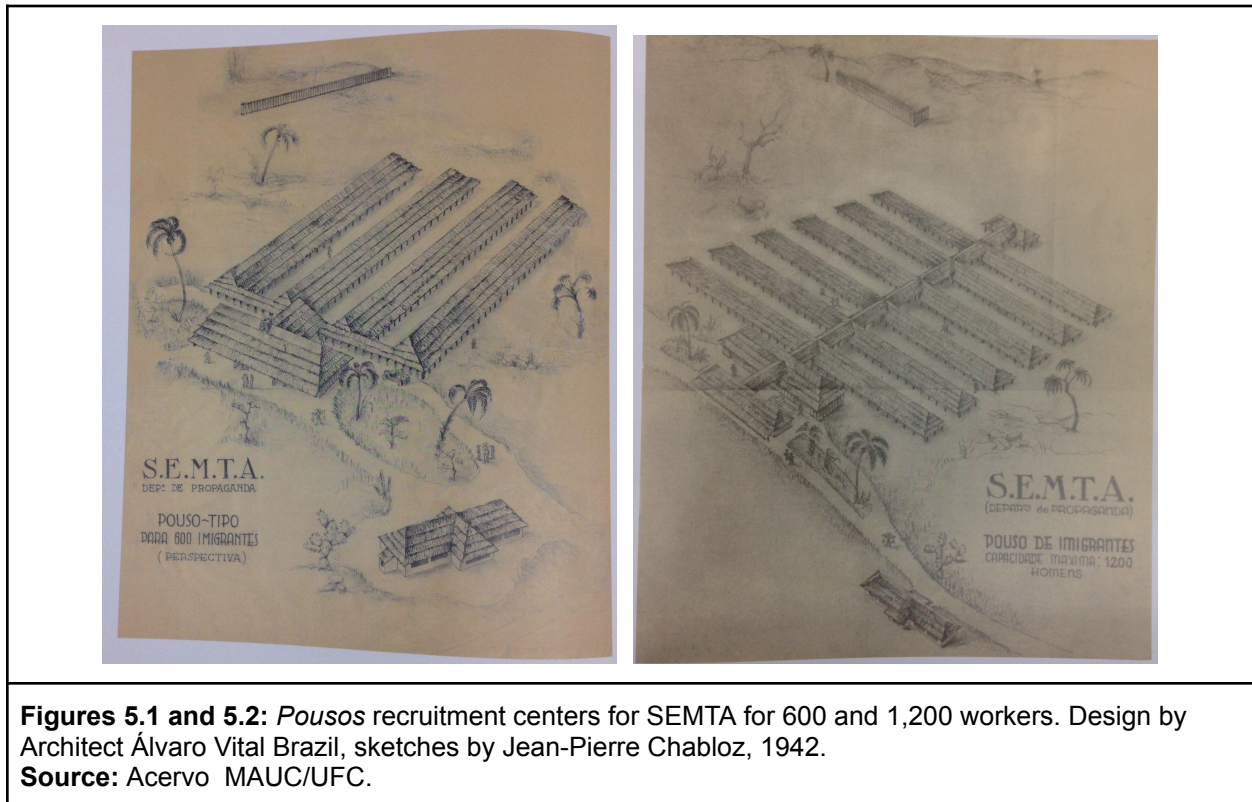
SEMTA (“Go to the Amazon as well, protected by SEMTA”). In the foreground of this poster there is a silhouette of a man leaning against a wall inside a room, looking outside. The man is wearing a white short-sleeve shirt, some loose trousers pulled up, and a hat, and he is barefoot. At his side, there is a large ceramic pot, suggesting that maybe this man is a rural worker collecting grains, cotton, or other produce, or maybe that he is using the pot to collect and store water. Outside, where the man is looking, SEMTA’s truck fleet is carrying groups of men in Rubber Soldier uniforms, excitedly waving. The soldier’s hands form a “V” shape, as in “victory,” the same thematic referenced in the previously-analyzed poster. Outside where the trucks are passing by, a house in the background and some palm trees are visible, a typical landscape from the dry Northeast region, which also indicates that trucks are heading further north. At top of the image, at the same height as the man’s head, there is lettering saying, “*Vai também para a Amazônia*” (“Go to the Amazon as well”), almost as if directly speaking to the person left behind. At the bottom of the image, bold and solid lettering reassures the man how this is a guaranteed deal, and that if he enlists, SEMTA will have his back: “*protegido pelo SEMTA*” (“protected by SEMTA”). SEMTA’s stamp in red is at the bottom left, while Chabloz’ date and signature are located at the top left of the composition.

Another composition depicting the journey of the Rubber Soldiers towards the Amazon was “*Rumo à Amazonia, Terra da Fartura*” (“Towards the Amazon, Land of Plenty”), designed in April 1943. In this composition there are three SEMTA trucks transporting enlisted workers—recognizable by their hats, which were part of SEMTA’s uniform—passing through a one-way winding road. At the bottom of the layout, the landscape is dry and arid, and as the road leads us vertically towards the north (or the top of the composition), the scenery changes first to a landscape of palm trees and *babaçu* trees, indicating how the road passed through the Brazilian states of Piauí and Maranhão, and finally arrives in a dense and tropical forest: the Amazon. In the middle of the composition in the midst of the *babaçus* there is a house recognizable as one of the *pousos* or rest stops: a simple construction made of wood and sticks with a roof made of straw. At the top of the composition, located by the Amazon forest, bold, all-caps lettering announces “*Rumo à Amazonia*” (“Towards the Amazon”). At the bottom, the message “*Terra da Fartura*” (“Land of Plenty”) contrasts with the background depicting the dry northeastern lands. While Chabloz’ road might be designed as winding, it showed a straight-forward path from the arid, sparse, and infertile desert to the “land of plenty.”

These compositions, while fictional, are genuine representations of the process volunteers were going through: many of the elements represented were based on real situations Chabloz experienced firsthand. First, Chabloz was based in Fortaleza, which served as trustworthy inspiration for him to design images representing Ceará’s landscape. While in Fortaleza, Chabloz also attended SEMTA’s parades, a common recruitment practice where exhibiting trucks carried recruited workers. As Chabloz explained in his service diary, in “*Vai também para a Amazônia, protegido pelo SEMTA*,” for example, the figure of the man he designed in the foreground was actually based on a real person he sketched during one of the parades. This figure was also representative of SEMTA’s targeted audience. The *pouso* construction Chabloz

designed in “*Rumo à Amazônia Terra da Fatura*,” an open wooden pavilion-like structure with a thatched roof, was also based on sketches he was doing with SEMTA’s architect, Álvaro Vital Brazil, who was commissioned to design and implement the *pousos*. The latter encounter is particularly interesting as, in this case, the propaganda-idealized spaces and the real modern ephemeral constructions were conceptualized at the same time. While serving a more practical purpose of housing travelers throughout their journeys, *pousos*’ spaces, similar to the designs on the posters, had a fundamental role of advertising and also building the image and concept of what and who the Rubber Soldiers were.

CHAPTER 5: THE POUSOS FROM CEARÁ TO THE AMAZON



Early stages of implementing the *pousos*

The Washington Agreements between the U.S. and Brazil were signed in March 1942. By the end of September of that same year, President and Dictator Getúlio Vargas had already created a Comissão da Mobilização Econômica (Commission on Economic Mobilization), and Paulo de Assis Ribeiro was nominated as SEMTA's chief. Paulo de Assis Ribeiro (Rio de Janeiro, 1906-1974) was a geographer and civil engineer with previous experience working during the Getúlio Vargas regime as the president of the Brazilian Association of Education (1934-1935) and as the deputy commissioner of São Paulo's Secretariat of Education. The *Livro Histórico do SEMTA* (SEMTA's Historical Book) highlighted SEMTA's earliest goals.¹²²

- a) Immediately start the necessary studies in order to transport workers from the Northeast towards the Amazon.
- b) Organize a reliable recruitment system for future workers, protecting them and conveniently assisting them in their journeys, as well as supporting their families.

¹²² "Livro Histórico do SEMTA", s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 15) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

- c) Guarantee collaboration and good relations with the National Department of Immigration Industry and Commerce.
- d) Organize, along the traveled pathway, *pousos* rest stations with adequate resources to assist the needs of workers passing through.**
- e) Organize a communication system between the different authorities responsible for transporting and assisting workers and their families.

After conceiving the studies for transportation of workers, as well as organizing the recruitment strategy, the next important item Paulo de Assis Ribeiro had to help materialize was the *pousos* (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). These were the buildings and locations where men would come to enlist as Rubber Soldiers and be housed during their journey. The *pousos* were physical spaces that legitimized the entire recruitment and mobility strategies and acted as the face of SEMTA's larger project. Creating *pousos* along the way from Ceará to Pará was necessary for conducting and hosting workers throughout their journeys. Furthermore, it was also strategic in consolidating SEMTA's credibility and in helping encourage volunteers to both want to migrate North and believe in their contribution to the greater good of the country (Morales, 2002: 277). The physical facilities helped sanction and accredit SEMTA's program and migration process for those who were voluntarily enlisting to go to the Amazon. The physical constructions ascribed credibility. The *pousos* were thus physical spaces that embodied the construct of the migrant as a soldier.

While waiting to be sent to Fortaleza to start their journey, enlisted workers would be fed and sheltered. Ana Lucia Morales highlighted how, psychologically, the moment of enlisting in the *pousos* in Fortaleza was an important step for the recruited workers' new identity: from that moment on they considered themselves to no longer be *flagelados*. They were now becoming *soldiers*, working for the nation with a new future full of possibilities ahead of them. Therefore, the moment when workers stayed and waited at the *pousos*, according to Morales, was equally important for their transitioning mindset. And the architecture of these spaces played a crucial role in creating this mentality (Morales, 2002: 277). Thus, another important characteristic of the *pousos*' design was how they needed to be isolated. From the moment they enlisted, workers were already separated from their families, given a uniform, and set into a specific routine and training, which created both an expectation towards next steps and also a feeling of community and engagement for a greater cause. At the same time, going from one *pousos* to another during their "march" towards the Amazon also helped uproot workers from the *sertão* to the forest.

Building the *pousos*' physical structures, buying supplies, and hiring staff was something that needed to be done very quickly, both to start the process of getting workers to the *seringais* as soon as possible, as well as to justify the costly investments from the Brazilian and U.S. governments. Because of the urgency in implementing SEMTA's plan of action, the very next day after SEMTA was officially created, Paulo de Assis Ribeiro was already recruiting his team of specialized technicians. They were officially hired by early December 1942. The team included public health physician

Manoel José Ferreira (Maneco), architect Álvaro Vital Brazil, attorney at law Thiers Martins Moreira, colonel Lima Câmara, and the priest Helder Camara”¹²³.

By mid-December, Paulo de Assis Ribeiro started his studies for organizing the transportation and recruitment of SEMTA’s workers. Ribeiro traveled between Fortaleza (CE) and Belém (PA) to identify, survey, and inspect possible locations to implement each *pouso*. After visiting Fortaleza, Ribeiro passed through the municipality of Tianguá (CE), on his way to Teresina (PI). Ribeiro traveled between Fortaleza and Teresina via truck in an effort to see the viability of that route and mode of transportation for the recruited workers.

“It should be noted that the trip from Fortaleza to Teresina was made by truck in order to inspect the conditions of the roads where the workers recruited to go to the Amazon would pass within a few days, also transported by trucks.”¹²⁴

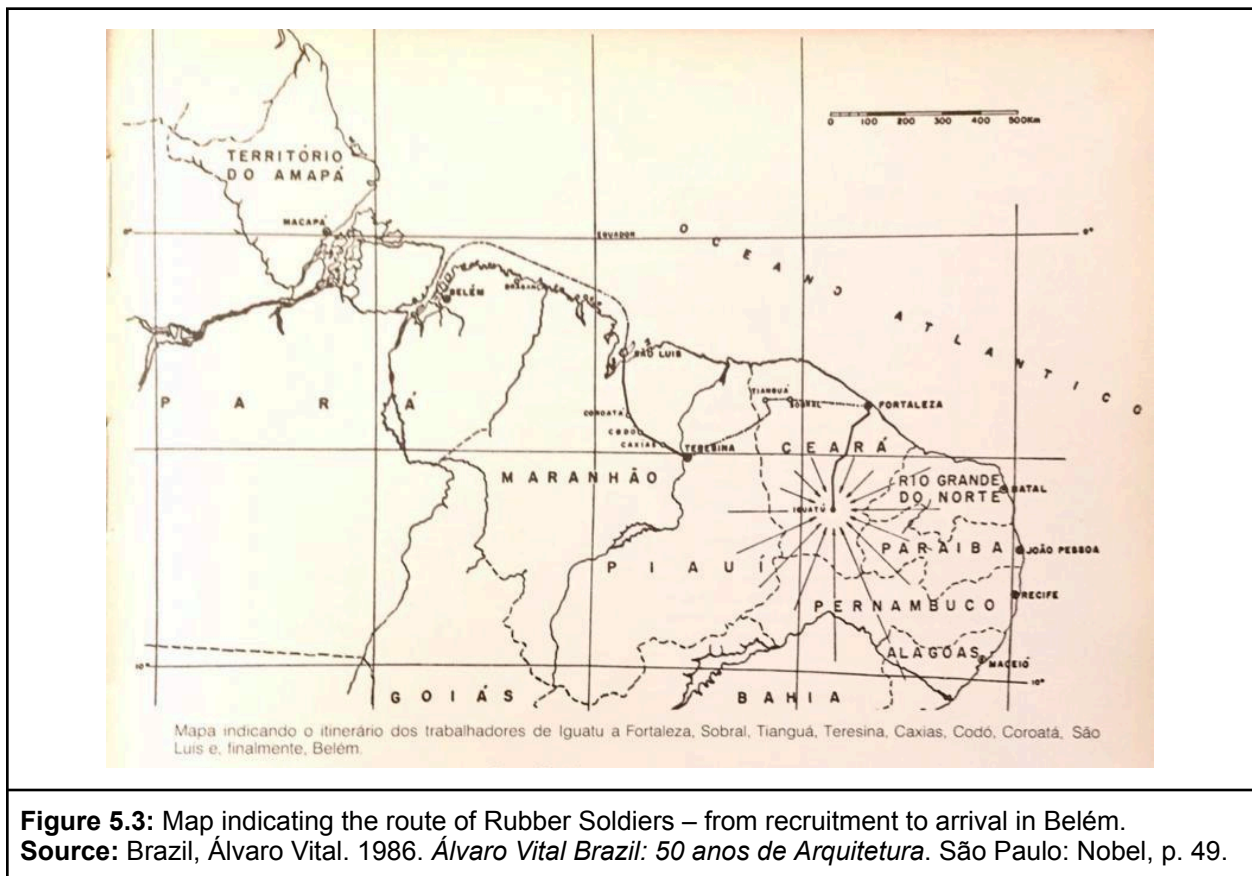


Figure 5.3: Map indicating the route of Rubber Soldiers – from recruitment to arrival in Belém.
Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. 1986. *Álvaro Vital Brazil: 50 anos de Arquitetura*. São Paulo: Nobel, p. 49.

¹²³ “Livro Histórico do SEMTA”, s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 17) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹²⁴ Original Portuguese Version: “*Cumprir observar que a viagem de Fortaleza a Teresina foi feita de caminhão, afim de que pudessem ser devidamente apreciadas as condições das estradas por onde iriam passar, dentro de poucos dias, transportados também por caminhões, os trabalhadores recrutados para a Amazônia.*”

Source: “Livro Histórico do SEMTA,” s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 21) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

Considering the rush of this first expedition and inspection trip, Ribeiro flew from Teresina (PI) to São Luis (MA) and from there to Belém (PA), even though these two stretches of land would later be completed by future *seringal* workers via train and then naval ships. By December 22nd, 1942, Paulo Assis Ribeiro had already designed SEMTA's plan of action and was back in Rio de Janeiro to formally sign the agreement between SEMTA and the Rubber Reserve Company in order to start the workers' recruitments and forwarding processes. From early on the impossibility of taking workers directly from Fortaleza to Belem via the ocean was made clear: as the war advanced, there was an increased danger of marine travel due to enemy submarines and battleships on the coastal line. An alternative path was established, taking workers by land from Ceará to São Luís, and only then taking a shorter trip through the sea to Belém. This last part of the trip was actively supported and protected by the U.S. marine crews. From Ceará to São Luís workers stopped in Sobral (CE), Tianguá (CE), Teresina (PI) and Coroatá (MA). There were also two secondary possible stops in Caxias (MA) and Codó (MA), located between Teresina and São Luis, if needed. On December 24th, Ribeiro presented the map with the route for the worker's march towards the Amazon, which also indicated the exact location of each *pouso*, the different modes of transportation, and communication methods to be used (see Figures 5.3-5.6):¹²⁵

"Iguatú, in Ceará, was the city that was initially chosen for concentrating and enlisting workers, as well as submitting workers to medical and sanitary examinations. After registering their families in the program, workers were given equipment and sent to Fortaleza to the EFCC. After resting and another round of medical examination in the capital city, workers continued their journey to Sobral, where they spent the night. The next day, workers went to Tianguá, where they were lodged in another *pouso*. After they were well rested, they continued traveling to Teresina, stopping in Caxias, Codó, and Coroatá, and then finally arriving in São Luis, where they would find a larger *pouso* facility. From this city to Belém it was impossible to travel via land, even if workers were to travel to Bragança, in Pará State, where they could take the train to Belém. Instead, since the trip via the ocean from São Luis to Belém was so short, it could be done safely with the help of the marine force. The families of the Rubber Soldiers could not travel with them, so they were supported by the State and stayed in "núcleos." In order to assist and lodge these families, the Núcleo Cocorote was built near Fortaleza."¹²⁶ (Brazil, 1986: 45)

¹²⁵ "Livro Histórico do SEMTA", s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 2) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹²⁶ Original Portuguese version: "*Iguatu, no Ceará, foi a cidade inicialmente escolhida para a concentração, inscrição e primeiros exames sanitários dos trabalhadores. Depois de terem suas famílias cadastradas, os trabalhadores, devidamente equipados, embarcavam para Fortaleza pela EFCC. Após descanso e novos exames nesta capital, continuavam a viagem agora por estrada de rodagem, até Sobral, onde pernoitavam; seguiam depois para Tianguá, onde encontravam novo pouso. Uma vez descansados, partiam para Teresina, parando em Caxias, Codó e Coroatá, para chegar finalmente a São Luís, onde encontravam outro grande 'pouso'. Desta cidade até Belém era impossível uma viagem por terra, mesmo que fosse até Bragança, no Pará, onde poderiam usar a estrada de ferro até Belém. Mas, como a viagem via marítima de São Luís a Belém fosse pequena, pôde ser protegida pela Marinha de Guerra. As famílias que não podiam seguir com os 'soldados da borracha' ficavam amparadas, ora*

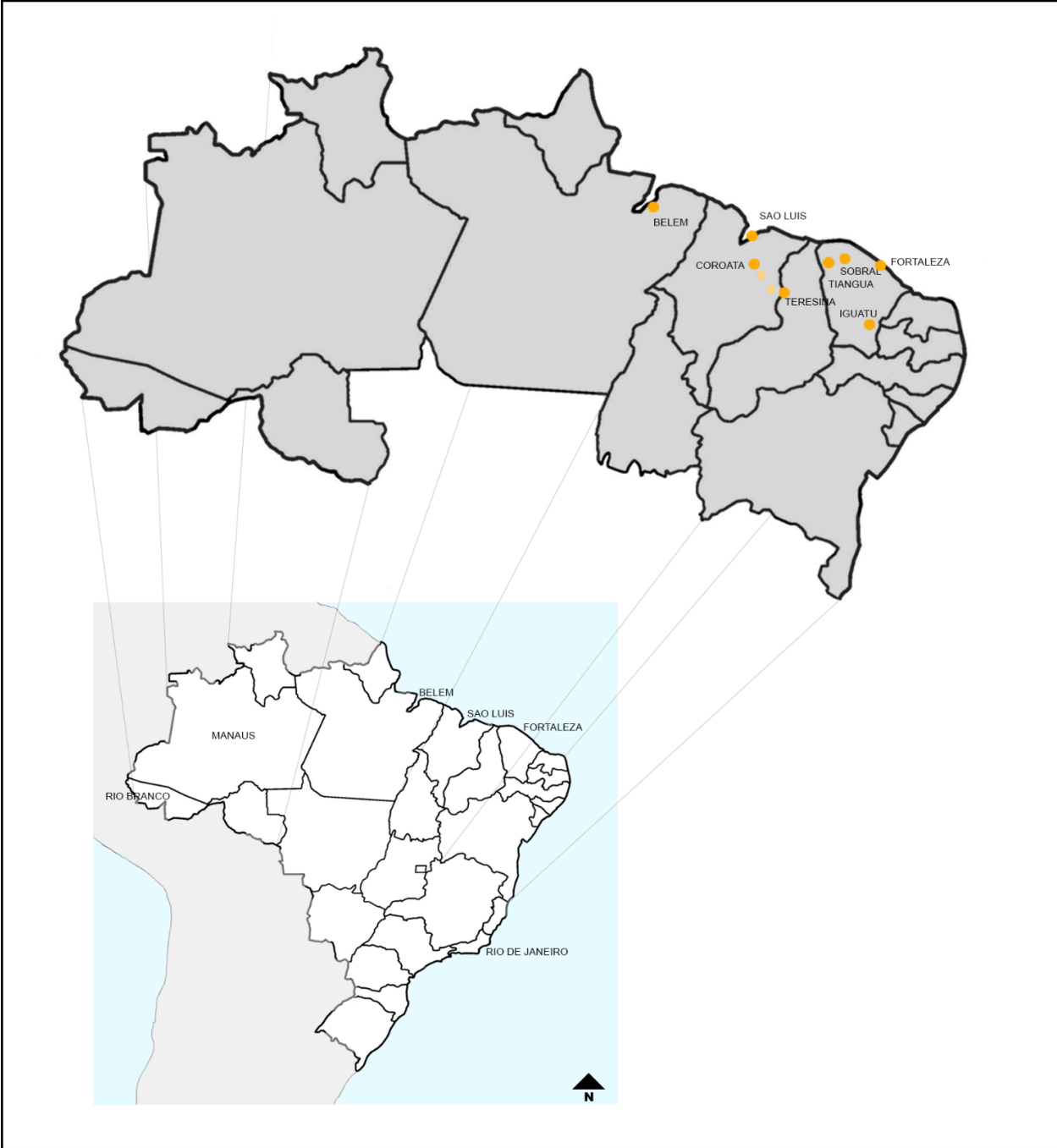


Figure 5.4: Location of the *pousos* and other secondary rest stops for the Rubber Soldiers in Northeast and North Brazil.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

nucleadas. Para isso construiu-se nas proximidades de Fortaleza o ‘Núcleo Cocorote’, onde eram convenientemente abrigadas.’

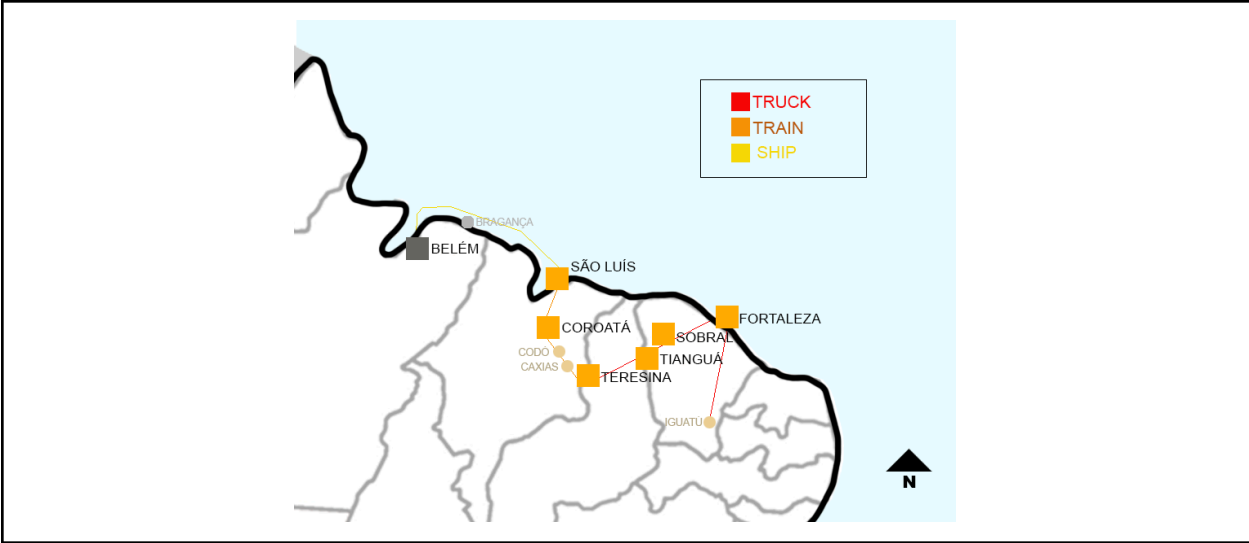


Figure 5.5: Location of the *pousos* (main locations indicated by squares, secondary locations by circles) and the route and transportation modes taken by SEMTA's recruited workers.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

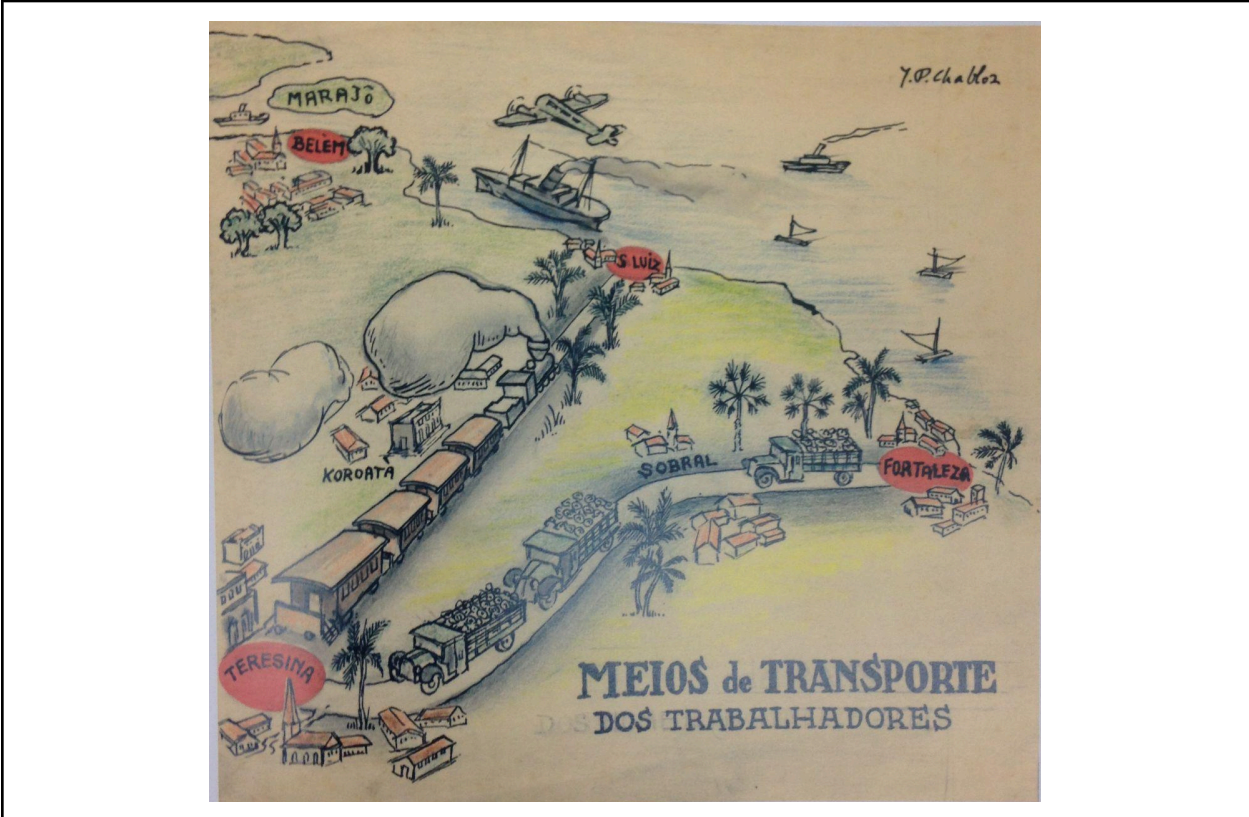


Figure 5.6: Illustration from Jean-Pierre Chablotz mapping the stops and the different modes of transportation SEMTA was using.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

Besides the six *pousos* facilities that were established in Fortaleza (CE), Sobral (CE), Tianguá (CE), Teresina (PI) and Coroatá (MA) and São Luís (MA), there was also another facility planned to be built in Bragança, in the State of Pará, which would be the last stop before the workers' arrival in Belém via airplane. Nevertheless, the Bragança *pouso* construction had to be shut down before it was completed. According to the implementation report in SEMTA's Historical Book, Bragança's *pouso* was terminated because of the lack of supply of airplanes from the Rubber Development Company.¹²⁷ Álvaro Vital Brazil further explained in an entry in his service diary dated January 21st, 1943 that it was impossible for seaplanes to land near the city center of Bragança because the river was either too narrow, or susceptible to the tide.¹²⁸ Therefore, instead of traveling via Bragança, a new route was established through the sea, and workers reached Belém via São Luis on ships traveling along the coastal line. The "Historical Implementation" Report in SEMTA's Historical Book describes the changes regarding the Bragança Pouso and the traveling route as follows:

"After twenty days have elapsed from the month of January, the construction of a new *pouso* for workers in **Bragança**, in the State of Pará was about to start. The *pouso* was designed by the engineer Vital Brazil in the centenary city of Bragança, with a capacity of 600 men. Its location was based on the anticipation of the São Luis-Bragança airway and airline, which could not be carried out due to the lack of planes that had been promised by the Rubber authorities, and thus were replaced by the São Luís-Belém sea route." ¹²⁹

Because of the changes in plans regarding the construction of the *pouso* in Bragança (PA) due to the impossibility of transporting migrant workers by air, as well as the extreme danger of ocean transport wrought by the Axis submarines which were in these same waters as SEMTA's original route, the *pousos* in São Luís, Coroatá, Teresina, and Tianguá were installed¹³⁰. Most of these *pousos* between Fortaleza and Belém worked both as spaces for the enlistment of migrants, and to break up their trip into shorter sections. This had a distinctly beneficial result, since the journey was long and arduous¹³¹.

¹²⁷ "Livro Histórico do SEMTA", s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 13) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹²⁸ Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). Diário de Serviço, Janeiro-Julho 1943, pp. 3-4. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archives.

¹²⁹ Original Portuguese version: "*Iniciando a construção de um novo pouso para trabalhadores, em Bragança, no Estado do Pará, já transcorria então o vigésimo dia do mês de Janeiro. O Pouso projetado pelo engenheiro Vital Brazil na centenária cidade de Bragança, com capacidade para 600 homens, prendeu-se à previsão da linha aérea São Luis- Bragança, que não pode ser concretizada pela falta dos aviões que haviam sido prometidos pelas autoridades da Rubber, sendo substituída pela rota marítima São Luís- Belém.*"

Source: "Livro Histórico do SEMTA", s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 13) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹³⁰ "Report by the Inter-American Affairs Institute and the Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública from September 18th, 1944." Available at: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/TM/AM/05. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

¹³¹ "Report by the Inter-American Affairs Institute and the Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública from September 18th, 1944." Available at: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/US/00/14. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

The journey: from *pouso* to *pouso*

Leaving Fortaleza: the parade

“Flyers and posters broadcasted paradisiacal images of a tropical Amazonia that was happy and prosperous [...] At the same time, the Rubber Soldier parades in Fortaleza, combined with daily radio shows, contributed to a mass enrolment for voluntary migration.”¹³² (Neves, 2001: 120)

By early 1943, Paulo de Assis Ribeiro had established all the necessary arrangements for the transportation of SEMTA's workers, including implementing the route, settling the location of the *pousos*, and organizing the volunteer recruitment system. An important part of the recruitment process was precisely the celebration of the beginning of the workers' journeys towards the North. The moment workers left Fortaleza had a psychologically empowering effect on the recruited men. **This was the moment when former *flagelados* would publicly show society how they were now Rubber Soldiers: brave men marching towards the Amazon for the greater good. They were not asking for help anymore. Because of their new job and status, they were to be the providers, making the leap from being excluded into being heroes.** Large crowds of young men wearing a specific uniform¹³³ consisting of blue trousers, white shirts, and hats (Figure 5.7)¹³⁴ were organized in groups, parading through the city center holding SEMTA's posters and signs, or waving while standing on standardized trucks which would take them to the next stop, in Sobral.¹³⁵ These public parades had two main goals: first, focusing on the people who were already enlisted, helping in their excitement towards the new adventures upon which they were about to embark; second, using the parades as the ultimate propaganda for those who had not yet

¹³² Original Portuguese version: “*Pinturas e cartazes foram veiculados as imagens paradisíacas de uma Amazônia tropical, feliz e próspera [...] Ao mesmo tempo os desfiles dos ‘Soldados da Borracha’ pelas ruas de Fortaleza, assim como os programas radiofônicos diários, contribuíam para a formação de uma adesão em massa à emigração.*”

¹³³ The uniforms played a particularly important role in SEMTA's propaganda. They created an official attire for workers that, compared to the soldiers' uniform, served as a strategy of standardization from the State. Vargas' government and the Estado Novo were building a civilizing process and SEMTA's project aided in these endeavors. *Pousos* were spaces for sanitation, preparing and domesticating workers and teaching them how to become “civilized” (Morales, 2002: 287).

¹³⁴ Jean-Pierre Chabloz' illustrations of SEMTA's uniforms included a hat, a white shirt, blue trousers, sandals, a plate, a mug, a fork and a spoon, a hammock, and a backpack. Researcher Ana Carolina Albuquerque Moraes calls attention to the fact that no photos from 1943 depict Rubber Soldiers using backpacks. Instead, workers are seen in these images loading trucks or parading, carrying their belongings in bags made out of cloth. Moraes speculates that while Chabloz was most likely well aware of the fact that there were no backpacks, given that he actively participated in the public demonstrations and parades of the soldiers, he chose to represent this particular object as a visual strategy to “upgrade” the Rubber Soldiers' uniforms. This way, Chabloz was helping create a more persuasive image of the conditions of the migrants, which would ultimately help the enlistment process (Moraes, 2012: 123).

¹³⁵ Another curiosity regarding the Rubber Soldiers' uniforms was that at first SEMTA considered giving each Rubber Soldier one pair of overalls, but in order to cut expenses, it was established that workers would use trousers and a shirt instead. Source: “Livro Histórico do SEMTA”, s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 5) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

enlisted, as well as for the Brazilian population in general, supporting a sentiment of nationalism which would help aid governmental actions.¹³⁶



Figure 5.7: Traveling equipment provided by SEMTA. Illustration by Jean-Pierre Chabloz, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

During travel

Pousos did not have walls, but the spaces were watched over by guards (who were not allowed to have guns, according to the “SEMTA’s Norms of the forwarding Division”¹³⁷), some of whom were the recruited workers themselves. Primarily, guards were instructed to break up fights and prevent escapes (Lima, 2014: 85). According to SEMTA’s Historical Book, for each group of 35 workers sent to the North, there was one soldier nominated as the leader, and who would also be identified with an armband with the symbol “F-1” (see Figure 5.8). This person was known as the *chefe da turma* (captain/boss of the group), and was responsible for maintaining order within that group of recruited workers during the entire journey from Ceará to Pará. Each *chefe da turma* would report to the guards accompanying their travels, and, at each stop, guards were under the auspices of their *pouso*’s administrator (*administrador do pouso*). *Chefes de turma* knew their group of Rubber Soldiers more personally, and would help organize

¹³⁶ Besides the regular parades of Rubber Soldiers leaving towards the Amazon, there was also a specific parade that took place in Fortaleza on July 1st, 1943 that SEMTA’s workers participated in as well. The “*Grande Parada do Mês da Borracha*” (The Great Parade of the Month of the Rubber) was promoted by the Federal Government. SEMTA’s participation in this parade consisted of: one thousand men, four decorated trucks, and twenty-four posters. (Morales, 2012: 138)

¹³⁷ “Normas da Divisão de Encaminhamento” (S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 06, p. 145). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

the *turma* in their everyday chores, such as cleaning, lining up for food, and sitting correctly in the truck or train, and as well as keeping the men engaged and excited for their arrival in the Amazon. Guards traveled escorting multiple *turmas* (groups), and were responsible for their documentation, organizing the convoy and dealing with any emergencies or accidents as well as keeping track of the workers. Each *pouso*'s administrator needed to keep track of the arrival and departure of the groups, provide shelter and food, clean the *pousos*, and keep track of the supplies they received from the government.¹³⁸



Figure 5.8: “F-1” armband identification for the *chefe da turma*.
Source: Acervo MAUC-UFC.

Despite the urgency related to the war efforts, the process of transporting recruited workers from Ceará to Belém took much longer than expected. *Seringueiros* would report having spent over six months in transit before they reached their final destination¹³⁹. According to SEMTA's records located at the Arquivo Nacional, the journeys could vary between 9 days from Fortaleza to Belém to more than 185 days, depending on the conditions of the roads, if the worker got sick, and other unexpected delays. For majority of the migrants, travel would take about 30-60 days¹⁴⁰. The interval migrants spent in lodgings (*hospedarias* and *pousos*) along the way was more than anticipated, as were SEMTA's expenditures due to the slowness of the traveling process (Morales, 2002: 236). The waiting time of these large groups of idle workers was also

¹³⁸ “Livro Histórico do SEMTA,” s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 54) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹³⁹ Notice here that the very first groups of enlisted workers were coming from Rio de Janeiro, where SEMTA's headquarters were located initially. There were in total 1,452 people who traveled from Rio de Janeiro to the Amazon between January and February 1943. After February SEMTA stopped its activities in Rio de Janeiro, and focused on the Northeast region. (Morales, 2002: 220)

¹⁴⁰(BR RJANRIO S7 Caixa 05 Pacote 01). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

problematic. *Hospedarias* and *pousos* did not have the proper conditions to house so many migrants for such a long period of time. There are several reports disclosing improper medical facilities, poor quality of food, and sweeping numbers of sick people and deaths at the lodgings as well as afterwards, along the way towards Acre's *seringais* (Martinello, 2018: 244). Young men would also often fight amongst themselves, or disturb and trouble residents from the towns where they were temporarily located (Martinello, 2018:247). Lack of food, water, and assistance were also common at the *pousos*, and led to workers' revolts, or theft from local businesses and homes (Morales, 2002: 273). Architect Vital Brazil described some of the chaos and disorder provoked by unproductive workers waiting to continue their journeys during one of his visits to the *pouso* in Coroatá on February 7th, 1943:

“As I was arriving at the hotel for lunch, I was urgently called back to the *pouso* because of a general fight between people from Ceará and Rio de Janeiro. When I arrived, there was already an ambulance transporting two or three civil police officers. I went to the *pouso*'s telephone and asked for army reinforcements to guarantee that all arrangements were being made. Moments after my arrival, the Captain commanded one hundred men to surround the *pouso* and inspect the space, disarming whomever had knives and daggers.”¹⁴¹

It was common to hear about groups of Rubber Soldiers being troublemakers in the areas they were passing through or staying in on their journeys. Besides the internal fights amongst themselves, migrant workers would also disturb local businesses and residents, which, as Lúcia Arrais Morales explains, is also a sign of SEMTA's negligence and deficient administration (Morales, 2002: 270). Furthermore, Rubber Soldiers, while waiting at the *pouso*, would also go out and explore the towns they were in, going to bars and whorehouses, and drinking and dancing... In an interview granted to Morales (2002), Sr. Raimundo (75), a former Rubber Soldier who had traveled to the Amazon through SEMTA's recruitment in 1943, reported how local populations started to hate temporarily hosting SEMTA's workers:

“In most of the places we passed by, people did not like us! If I said 'here comes the SEMTA truck!' they would run, and close their doors and windows. They were terrified of us.”¹⁴² (Morales, 2002: 271)

¹⁴¹ Original Portuguese version: “Chegando ao hotel para almoçar, fui chamado urgentemente ao campo devido a uma briga generalizada entre cearenses e cariocas. Quando cheguei já havia ambulância que estava transportando dois ou três policiais civis. Fui ao telefone do campo e pedi reforços do exército sabendo que todas as providências estavam sendo tomadas. Momentos após minha chegada o Capitão comandou cem homens que cercaram o campo e estabeleceram com o mesmo uma vistoria geral a fim de desarmar o pessoal de facas e punhais.”

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). Diário de Serviço, Janeiro-Julho 1943, p. 9. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archives.

¹⁴² Original Portuguese version: “A maioria do pessoal por onde a gente passava num gostava de nós não! Se dissesse ‘lá vem o caminhão do SEMTA!’ eles corriam, fechavam as janelas e portas. Tinham um medo danado da gente.”

Because of how common it was for these migrant workers to disrupt life in the towns where the rest stops were, Rubber Soldiers were stereotyped as agitators. Rubber Soldiers were easily recognized as they were always walking in groups and using the clothing SEMTA provided them: loose dark-blue trousers, straw hats, large cotton jackets, and sandals. These particular groups of rubber soldiers became popularly known as *Arigós*, in reference to a typical bird from *Nordeste* known for its migratory characteristics, always traveling from one place to another. Later this term was also incorporated to address all Rubber Soldiers who arrived in the Amazon during that period of time (Martinello, 2018: 228).

In a report for the Gabinete do Coordenador da Mobilização Econômica of SEMTA from July 27, 1943, Dr. Fausto Pereira Guimarães and Dr. Jayme Lins de Almeida made similar observations about the problems of workers' inaction during long waiting periods in the *pousos*. After an 18-day inspection trip to visit SEMTA's facilities, Dr. Guimarães and Dr. Almeida explained how they noticed that the long waiting time in the *pousos* along the way between Fortaleza and Belém brought up two interconnected issues: the idleness of workers combined with the absence of a paid activity for them to do, which ended up resulting in migrants selling their own personal objects and equipments provided by SEMTA, as well as stealing their colleagues' belongings, amongst other artifices to try to get money¹⁴³.

A report by Carlos José de Assis Ribeiro (Paulo de Assis Ribeiro's brother) to the then-director of the CME (*Coordenação da Mobilização Econômica*/Economic Mobilization Coordination) Artur Hehl Neiva on April 8th, 1943 talked about his observations during some of his visits to SEMTA's newly established *pousos*. In this report, Carlos José de Assis Ribeiro explained some of the various difficulties SEMTA was facing in implementing its project: the reduced speed of the recruitment process, the lack of available transportation (land, sea, and river), the poor quality of drinkable water at the *pousos*, and the lack of building materials for constructing the facilities and scarcity of certain food items. One great concern Ribeiro highlighted was how the workers' idleness and long periods of travel were also causing problems related to men's sexual tensions, and that designated spaces for sports and religious activities could represent some modest but effective solutions on the part of the program's administrators.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ "Relatório geral da viagem Fortaleza-Sobral-Tianguá-Teresina-S.Luís efetuado no periodo de 24 de junho a 11 de julho de 1943, pelos doutores Fausto Ferreira Guimarães e Jayme Lins de Almeida, do departamento de Mobilização." July 27th, 1943. (BR ANRIO S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 06, p. 12). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁴⁴ Similarly to the discussions of the role of families and women in the migratory processes of temporary workers, sexuality is a recurring topic of analysis. The large influx of male temporary migrants would often need to be officially addressed in governmental policy or programs world-wide. One example of this is brought up by Ronald Takaki (1989) when bringing up the issue of the need for "prostitutes to satisfy [workers'] sexual needs" during the gold rush in California, and the U.S. official migratory policy encouraging single women to migrate to the U.S. under the status of "prostitutes"—discouraging families and marriage—as a way to deal with the tensions and needs of laborers and at the same time maintain their temporary non-colonizing settlement status (Takaki, 1989: 41).

“I am convinced that the retention or containment of sexual instinct, in its normal manifestations, cannot produce nervous and psychological disturbances, as long as there are activities for man through work and recreation, alongside a religious fixation through preaching. [...] The Chief of the Special Service has sought to discretely prevent vices and sexual aberrations. In each *pouso*, there is a sports field and a rustic chapel, where the Priests perform religious ceremonies and preach their sermons.”¹⁴⁵

The “issue of sexuality” was openly discussed in SEMTA’s reports. This topic gained traction as the ecclesiastical members were ferociously condemning these practices as anti-Catholic and would also argue that the control of the migrants’ sexuality could avoid further economic losses related to sexually transmitted diseases and infections:

“Then, we would have the case of syphilitic and venereal contagion. A worker who was a carrier of a syphilitic or venereal disease and who infected a certain number of prostitutes could cause the same harm to several of their peers. All the contaminants would be rejected by SAVA, and the economic losses would be significant for SEMTA.”¹⁴⁶

In addition to the problems related to the long waiting time at the *pousos*, transportation itself—trucks, trains, ships—was also not necessarily adequate for receiving passengers or for handling the expected flow of people. There were several stories and reports from workers complaining about the long and arduous journeys they were subjected to on their way to Belém. The main point of complaint was regarding the travels by sea. Nevertheless, the other modes of transportation were not necessarily well suited either. Reports such as the one from Álvaro Vital Brazil’s service diary describe how it was very common for trains to derail, increasing the waiting time at each *pouso*.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Original Portuguese version: “*Estou convicto de que a retenção ou contenção do instinto sexual, em suas manifestações normais, não pode produzir perturbações nervosas e psíquicas, desde que haja no homem atividades pelo trabalho e pela recreação, ao lado de uma fixação religiosa pela pregação. [...] O Chefe do Serviço Especial tem procurado evitar vícios e as aberrações sexuais de uma maneira discreta. Em cada Pouso existe um campo de esportes e uma capela rústica, onde os Padres celebram as cerimônias religiosas e pregam os seus sermões.*”

Source: “Relato Confidencial de Observações feitas no Norte junto ao SEMTA de Carlos José de Assis Ribeiro para o chefe do SEMTA, Artur Hehl Neiva em 8 de Abril, 1943.” (BR ANRIO S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 05, p. 11). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁴⁶ Original Portuguese version: “*Depois, teríamos o caso do contágio sífilítico e venerico. Um trabalhador que fosse portador de uma moléstia sífilítica ou venérea e que contaminasse determinado número de meretrizes, poderia causar em vários de seus companheiros o mesmo mal. Todos os contaminantes seriam recusados pelo SAVA e os prejuízos econômicos seriam grandes para o SEMTA.*”

Source: “Relato Confidencial de Observações feitas no Norte junto ao SEMTA de Carlos José de Assis Ribeiro para o chefe do SEMTA, Artur Hehl Neiva em 8 de Abril, 1943.” (BRAN RIO S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 05, p. 11). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

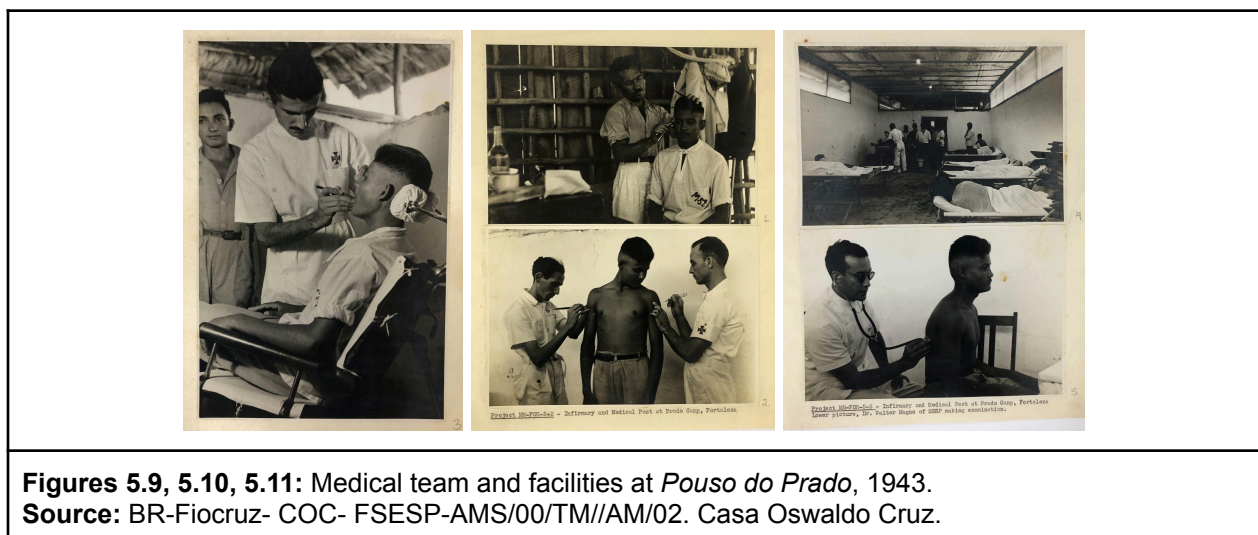
¹⁴⁷ Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*. February 6th, 1943, p. 6. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint’Anna; Brazil family archives.

“We were ready to board at 4:30 a.m., when we heard the news of the derailment between Caxias and Teresina, making it completely impossible for us to travel that day. The agent informed us that approximately 200 kilometers of the line were damaged.”¹⁴⁸

Not only that, but in regards particularly to train cars, architect Álvaro Vital Brasil, in an entry from February 6th, 1943 in his service diary, recalled an encounter he had with a doctor from Fortaleza hired to work at a Pouso in Coroatá, but who refused to continue his journey due to the poor conditions of the train ride from Ceará to Maranhão:

“I’ve heard that two doctors were coming from Fortaleza. One of them would continue his journey to Coroatá. This doctor refused, in front of the staff, to go along with the first group of people to Coroatá because he found the closed freight train cars to be inadequate for traveling, as they were not provided with sufficient ventilation and did not have seats.”¹⁴⁹

The role of the medical team within the *pousos*



Public medicine played an active role in the migratory process of workers towards the Amazon. The medical team commissioned by SEMTA were the core people responsible

¹⁴⁸ Original Portuguese version: “*Estamos prontos para embarcar às 4 horas e meia da manhã, quando soubemos da notícia do descarrilamento entre Caxias e Teresina, impossibilitando completamente a nossa ida nesse dia, pois o agente informou que aproximadamente 200 quilômetros da linha estavam avariados.*”

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*. February 6th, 1943, p. 10. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint’Anna; Brazil family archives.

¹⁴⁹ Original Portuguese version: “*Soube que tinha vindo dois médicos de Fortaleza, sendo que um, destinado à Coroatá. Este médico se recusou, em frente do pessoal, a seguir junto com a primeira leva para Coroatá, por achar os vagões inadequados (carros de carga fechados), pois não estava provido de ventilação suficiente e não tinha bancos.*”

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*. February 6th, 1943, p. 8. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint’Anna; Brazil family archives.

for the agency's selection of recruited workers. These same doctors were also the ones assisting the troops along their journey towards the Amazon, part of a joint effort between SEMTA and SESP (*Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública*/Special Service of Public Health). The doctor chosen to be the department's chief in these operations was Dr. Manoel José Ferreira (Maneco). Dr. Ferreira started working for SEMTA in December 1942, after actively and successfully participating in a previous public health campaign against malaria in Nordeste, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation between 1938-1940 (Hochman, 2019; Lopes, 2020).

The Special Service of Public Health (SESP)'s medical migration program, established on July 17th, 1942, attended and reported to both the Brazilian and U.S. governments. The program was financed by the American Government through the Division of Health and Sanitation of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, acting through the Superintendency of SESP¹⁵⁰. The North American anthropologist Charles Wagley was named chief of SESP, and the agency's goal was to guarantee the best health and sanitary conditions in the Amazon region. In order to do so, SESP heavily invested in educating the population and keeping it informed about preventive health and sanitary measures through advertisement campaigns, lectures, and distribution of pamphlets and other printed materials (Moraes, 2012, 172). Jean-Pierre Chabloz, the artist responsible for the advertising materials for SEMTA's recruitment campaign, also had an important role in creating SESP's designs. Chabloz worked for SESP at the same time that he was officially hired by SEMTA, as shown in this passage from his personal service diary from March 2nd, 1943:

"It reminds me of the data for the 'SESP' poster against malaria and for public hygiene, etc. 4-5 posters were commissioned for me to do on behalf of 'SESP' and with authorization from SEMTA."¹⁵¹

One challenge SEMTA and SESP faced in the beginning was to recruit and mobilize doctors to work at the *pousos*. The selection efforts targeted young but experienced professionals, and in order to make the positions attractive, the agencies offered above-market salary rates. SEMTA's medical team was comprised of twenty-nine "selection doctors," and above them, a few other higher-ranking experts in the field. A significant portion of these doctors had an expressive career in medicine and public health, both in government agencies and in universities, research institutions, and international organizations. When departing to the Northeast region on December 29, 1942 with Paulo de Assis Ribeiro (SEMTA's chief), SEMTA's leading physician Dr. Manoel José Ferreira conducted an interview regarding the importance of health examinations and medical assistance to the people who volunteered as Rubber Soldier candidates. Dr. Ferreira's speech was connected to President Vargas' nationalist ideals, bringing up the importance of the concept of hygiene in creating healthy workers and

¹⁵⁰ "Brazilian Field Party/ Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública. Institute of Inter-American Affairs, September 18th, 1944." Available at: BR_Fiocruz_COC-FSESP/AMS/00/TM/AM/02 Caixa 139. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

¹⁵¹ Original Portuguese version: "*Lembram-me os dados para o cartaz "SESP" contra a malária, pela higiene pública, etc. 4-5 cartazes para fazer por conta do "SESP" e com autorização do SEMTA.*" Source: Jean-Pierre Chabloz. Service diary, March 2nd, 1943. Available at: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

laborers for the country, and also incorporating the legacies of public health campaigns into ideas of national formation (Amador, 2015; Gomes, 1982; Lima and Hochman, 1996).

Not only were medicine and public health important in the everyday activities of the recruited workers, guaranteeing them a safe and healthy environment, but, more importantly, these sanitary efforts were crucial in the recruitment process itself. The recruitment of workers to be sent to the Amazon by SEMTA was led by health physicians, and the first step in the recruitment process was a physical evaluation of the volunteers. Men were examined and classified as able to do the work they were applying for. According to a report from the Office of Inter-American Affairs from September 18th, 1944 about SESP's services at the *Pouso do Prado*, located in Fortaleza, physical inspections and immunizations were held rigorously, and those who were not healthy enough to continue the journey were held back at the *pouso* for medical care (Figures 5.19-5.11):

"The service of physical inspection and immunization is carried out rigorously. Medical assistance is given in a rustic, but clean and efficient infirmary within the post, which has a capacity of 32 beds. [...] All migrants are examined shortly before embarkation, at which time all those who are not fit for travel are maintained within the post for necessary treatment."¹⁵²

The health inspection of migrants was also the very moment of the recruitment process when the department of health and the department of propaganda merged. Jean-Pierre Chabloz explained in his service diary how he considered that his work for SEMTA only effectively began when he started drawing his series on biotypologies in late January of 1943 (Figure 5.12). Chabloz' drawings were used by the "selection doctors," and the designs were based on the book "*Biotipologia do Homem do Nordeste*" of which he was lent a copy by one of Dr. Ferreira's assistants (Moraes, 2012:100).

"I effectively started my work for "SEMTA" on Thursday, January 28, 1943, when Mr. Ferreira [Dr. Manoel José Ferreira/Maneco], who was leaving for Rio, talked about the medical drawings (biotypology) for the selection of men for the Amazon. I contacted Mr. Ferreira's assistant, Mr. José Rodrigues, and studied a book called "Biotypology of the Northeast Man," borrowed from the latter. On Friday and Saturday, January 29 and 30, I devoted my time to do rough sketches in black ink (outline) and pencil (patterned) on tracing paper (for blueprinted copies). I drew five predefined types (10 face and profile drawings), based on the cited book, which summed up as 5 drawings."¹⁵³

¹⁵² "Brazilian Field Party/ Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública. Institute of Inter-American Affairs, September 18th, 1944." Available at: BR_Fiocruz_COC-FSESP/AMS/00/TM/AM/02 Caixa 139. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

¹⁵³ Original Portuguese version: "O trabalho eficaz para o "SEMTA" começa na quinta-feira, dia 28 de janeiro de 1943, onde o S. Ferreira, que parte para o Rio, fala dos desenhos médicos (biotipologia) para a seleção dos homens para a Amazônia.

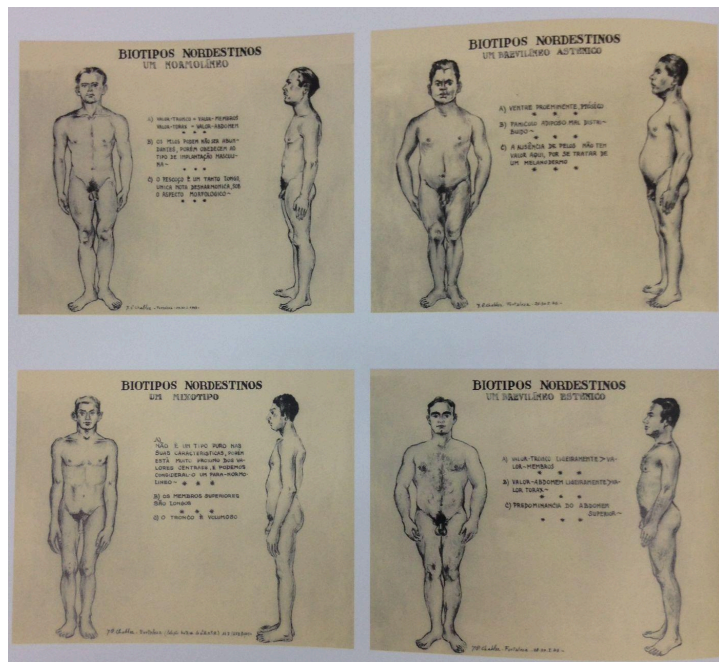


Figure 5.12: Illustrations of the “different Nordestinos’ biotypes”, from Jean-Pierre Chabloz, 1943. **Source:** Acervo MAUC-UFC.

For most volunteers at the recruitment centers, this was the first time they were ever in contact with a doctor or medical team. The press would help emphasize how this was a positive governmental action of care for the citizens, which also helped to build trust and encourage people to enlist. Many people coming from the hinterlands suffered from malnutrition and dealt with challenges related to malaria and other endemic diseases. SEMTA was to be advertised as providing a space of aid and support for those who enlisted. At the *pousos*, volunteers would get checked by doctors and be vaccinated and better fed. SEMTA offered clothing, food, cigarettes, and medical assistance throughout the worker’s journey towards the Amazon (Miranda and Hochman, 2021). It is important to also highlight the pressure of the local elites living in the Amazon region to try to guarantee that the newcomers were good healthy workers, and not just poor and desperate *flagelados* from the first migratory waves towards the North (Miranda and Hochman, 2021: 6). SEMTA’s doctors and health physicians played a crucial role actively participating in the construction of the national identity undertaken by the Vargas government and dealing with demands from the U.S., the federal government, and local governments (Miranda, 2013: 23)

Tomo contato com o assistente do S. Ferreira, o S. José Rodrigues, e estudo um livro sobre a “Biotipologia do Homem do Nordeste” emprestado deste último. Na sexta-feira e no sábado 29 e 30 de janeiro em primeiro lugar, são consagrados a esboçar grosseiramente, depois passar a limpo, à tinta preta (contorno) e lápis (modelado) sobre o papel vegetal (para cópias heliografadas), cinco tipos definidos (10 desenhos de face e de perfil) segundo a obra citada mais ou menos 5 desenhos.”
 Source: Jean-Pierre Chabloz. Service diary, January 28th, 1943. Available at: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

When evaluated by SEMTA's doctors, volunteers were classified within three categories: (1) "*Aptos*" (apt), approved as a rubber soldier, (2) "*inaptos*" (inapt), considered "incapable" for the functions of a rubber tapper; and (3) "*recuperaveis*" (recoverable), sent to receive medical assistance in hospitals and medical centers maintained by SESP¹⁵⁴. There was also the category "temporarily refused," meaning that the worker had a disease that was recoverable, and would seek medical assistance, before being officially accepted. SEMTA's doctors were to pay particular attention to identifying people who had infectious diseases, so that they would not be recruited as they could endanger others by spreading their illness. Hochman and Miranda called attention to the fact that the list of forbidden/infectious diseases grew as the recruitment process took place. This was the first time the medical team would have contact with or recognize some less-known rural diseases, so the recruitment process also served as a way to mapping and learn about these conditions (Miranda and Hochman, 2021: 12).

Considering one of the main problems faced by incoming volunteers was malnutrition, the work of nutrition professionals at the *pousos* and at the family nucleus was very important. Several reports regarding the menus and food purchases for the *pousos* can be found as part of the activities from the Economic Mobilization Coordination¹⁵⁵. Discussions regarding the population's nourishment and nutrition were in early stages in the 1940s, as the Vargas administration had just established the Social Security Food Service (SAPS) and the National Food Technical Service (STAN) in 1942, initially directed by the physician, geographer, public administrator, and expert on nutrition Josué de Castro (1908-1973). SEMTA was initially criticized for only providing volunteer workers with rice, beans, *charque* (beef jerky), and cassava flour. The nutrition team tried including fresh produce but problems with the logistics including lack of transportation or proper workspaces made these attempts fail (Miranda and Hochman, 2021: 8).

Architecture of the *pousos*

The Architect

Architect Álvaro Vital Brazil was selected by Paulo de Assis Ribeiro to be part of his team of specialized technicians at SEMTA as the leading engineer and architect designing and building the *pouso* recruitment centers and rest stops. Álvaro Vital Brazil (São Paulo, 1909-Rio de Janeiro, 1997) had graduated as an engineer from the Escola Politécnica do Rio de Janeiro and as an architect from the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (ENBA) in 1933. In 1936, Vital Brazil and his business partner, Ademar Marinho, won a competition to build a mixed-use edifice in the city center of São Paulo, called the "Edifício Esther," which worked as a residential and office tower with shops and

¹⁵⁴ "Regulamento do SEMTA"- 32. Normas da Divisão de Saúde." May 6th, 1943. (BR AN RIO, S7, Caixa 4, Pacote 6, p.137). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁵⁵ "Regulamento do SEMTA"- 32. Normas da Divisão de Saúde." May 6th, 1943. (BR AN RIO, S7, Caixa 4, Pacote 6, p.193). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

businesses on the ground floor. “Edifício Esther” became known as one of the very first modernist constructions in Brazil, launching Vital Brazil’s career as a young architect. In 1942, Álvaro Vital Brazil designed and built the Instituto Vital Brazil, a hospital, laboratory, and research center in Rio de Janeiro. The complex was named after the architect’s father, the physician, biomedical scientist, and immunologist Dr. Vital Brazil Mineiro da Campanha (1865-1950), who was known for his discovery of the polyvalent anti-ophidic serum used to treat bites of venomous snakes¹⁵⁶. With a collection of three of his works, including the Edifício Esther in São Paulo (1936), the Vital Brazil Institute in Niteroi (Rio de Janeiro, 1942), and the Raul Vidal Elementary School in Niteroi (Rio de Janeiro, 1942), the architect Vital Brazil was selected amongst twenty-three other Brazilian architects and architectural firms to be featured in the exhibition “Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old; 1652-1942,” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1943 (Figure 5.13)¹⁵⁷. The exhibition and its subsequent bilingual publication/catalog organized by the U.S. architect Phillip L. Goodwin became, to this day, known as pioneering and highly influential in the construction of a modern Brazilian architectural historiography (Scottá, 2017).

¹⁵⁶ Doctor Vital Brazil Mineiro da Campanha had some connections with the International Health Board, working on campaigns against malaria and yellow fever in Brazil in the early 1910s, and later serving as part of the Selection Committee for Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship Applicants in Brazil with Carlos Chagas and Alexandre M. Pedroso.

Available at: Hackett, Lewis W. 1919. “Hackett to Pearce, Pará, December 17, 1919.” Source: Collection Rockefeller Foundation records. Rockefeller Archive Center RAC, Rockefeller Foundation RF, Record Group RG 5, Series 1 - Correspondence, Sub-Series 2 - Project, Box 78, Folder 1110.

¹⁵⁷ It is worth calling attention to the role of the Rockefeller foundation and its power and influence in Brazil and Latin America in the early and mid-twentieth century. I would like to highlight particularly the works of Nelson Rockefeller (1908-1979), considering his appointment as the head of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs OCIAA from 1940-1943/1950-1953. At the same time, he also served as a trustee, treasurer, and president of the Museum of Modern Art, an institution developed and funded by his mother, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874-1948).



Figure 5.13: Installation view of the exhibition “Brazil Builds” at MoMA, New York. January 13, 1943-February 28, 1943. In this image, the Institute Vital Brazil building is featured as a photo on the far left, on the back wall.

Source: Photographic Archive/The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN213.7. Photograph by Soichi Sunami, 1943.

The architect Vital Brazil became a known figure in the architectural modernist movement because of his endorsement by MoMA. It was that same exhibition that also contributed to building the definition of modernism in Brazil, which was also part of a larger commitment of the U.S. in constructing the ideals of modernization in Brazil and Latin America from the early twentieth century (also led by the Rockefeller Foundation, as explained in **Chapter 2**). The format and rationale of Vital Brazil’s *pousos* strongly served President Getulio Vargas’ concept of progress and modernization, but ultimately and very openly, these particular constructions were built to support the U.S. imperialist system. Once the Washington Agreements were signed, SEMTA was officially financed by (and needed to report to) the U.S. government through the Institute of Inter-American Affairs and the Rubber Reserve Company¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁸ “Once the Agreement was signed with RUBBER, it was urgent that concrete measures be taken with the necessary urgency for the implementation of the services, in accordance with the jurisdictional functions of the S.E.M.T.A.”/Original portuguese version: *Assinado o Acordo com a RUBBER urgia que fossem tomadas com a urgência necessária, as medidas concretas para a implantação dos serviços, de acordo com as funções jurisdicionais do S.E.M.T.A.* Source: “Livro Histórico do SEMTA”, s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 1) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

Vital Brazil's previous experiences building a hospital facility and a public school (1942) might have also contributed to creating his designs for the *pousos* (1943). The *pousos* contained a very modern rationale: efficient floor plans, streamlined forms, and conscious and deliberate construction efforts and materiality. Considering the rush of the war efforts, there was a need for the *pousos* to be built very quickly and effectively, and to also take into account their ephemeral nature. When analyzing the design of the *pousos*, it is possible to recognize how they are both shaped by Vital Brazil's modernist lenses and influenced by the logic of a military base or a refugee camp site. Ultimately, the pouso was a temporary disciplinary facility designed and created to manage a specific population (*flagelados* who were then becoming workers/soldiers) in a strict and controlled manner. Its transitory nature also built a sentiment of transformation, yet impermanence, as the recruited worker was always only meant to be a passerby.

Building the *pousos*: conceptualization

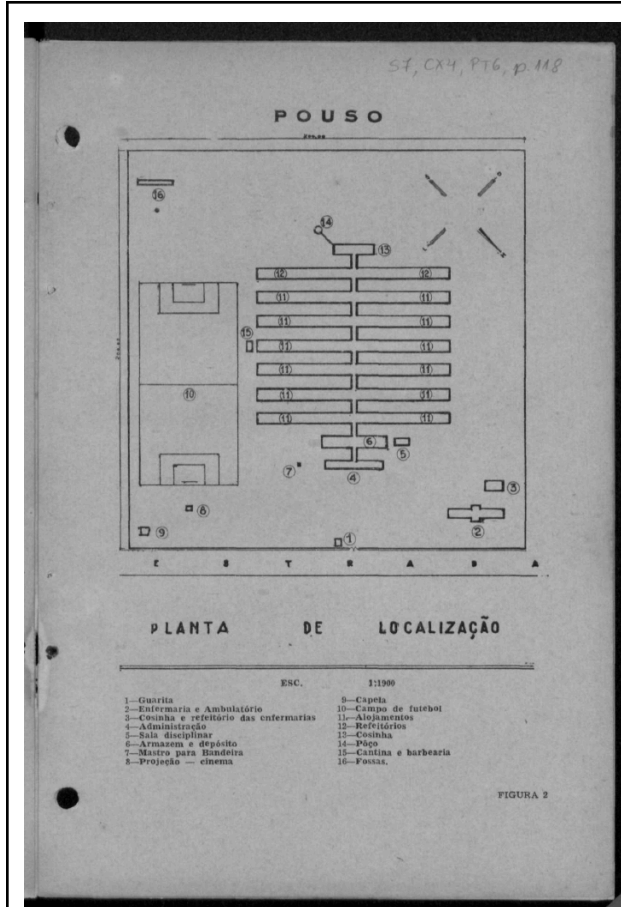


Figure 5.14: Basic floor plan and program for the *pousos*.

Translation for the subtitles:

1. Guardhouse; 2. Infirmary and Outpatient clinic; 3. Nurses' Kitchen and Dining hall; 4. Administration; 5. Disciplinary Room; 6. Warehouse and Storage room; 7. Flagpole; 8. Cinema Projection; 9. Chapel; 10. Soccer Field; 11. Lodgings; 12. Dining halls; 13. Kitchen; 14. Well; 15. Cafeteria and Barber shop; 16. Septic tanks.

Source: "Regulamento do SEMTA" (S7 Caixa 04 Pacote 06 p. 118). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

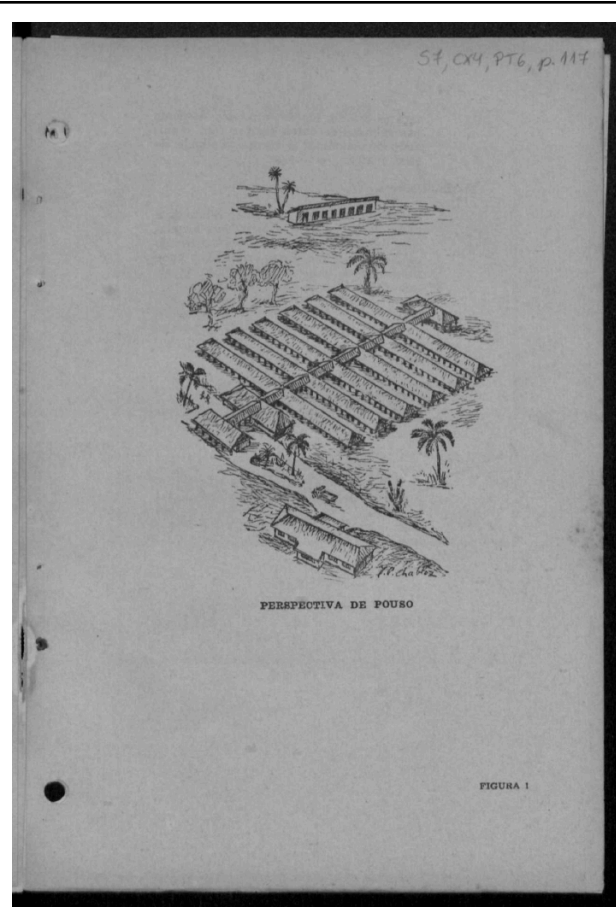


Figure 5.15: Sketch of *pousos*.

Source: "Regulamento do SEMTA" (S7 Caixa 04 Pacote 06 p. 117). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

On January 9th, construction on the very first *pouso* began. This *pouso* was located in São Luís, in Maranhão State, and its design also worked as the basic structure to be reproduced in other locations as well. The *pouso* in São Luis was implemented on a plot of land donated by the mayor of the city, and it was located 26 km from the city center, near the headwater of Aracanã river, right next to the railroad connecting Teresina to

São Luis. This facility was designed to host 1200 men¹⁵⁹. There is a detailed description of Álvaro Vital Brazil's project for the *pouso*, and the different uses for the space in the Historical Book of SEMTA. The report also highlighted how Vital Brazil managed to design the *pousos* very quickly and efficiently, taking into consideration a tight budget and short schedule. When visiting the different localities for implementing each *pouso*, Vital Brazil explained that the main features he was looking for in a lot was its proximity to the train/road/port, easy access to a source of potable water, and, ideally, land that was already leveled and empty of other construction.

Vital Brazil designed the *pousos* in a rational orderly manner: a succession of orthogonal sheds (wooden structures with covers made out of straw), connected in parallel by a centrally located covered hallway (see Figures 5.14 and 5.15). The *pousos'* main spaces were the middle rows of sheds used for the lodging/dormitories, where workers would be accommodated in individual hammocks (Figure 5.16). Near the dormitories there was a designated space for the barbershop. At one end of the structure, following the dormitories, the last sheds served as a refectory/dining area, followed by the kitchen (Figure 5.17). Opposite the kitchen, on the other end of the structure before the dormitories, there were designated sheds used as the warehouse and administration building. Beyond this main inter-connected succession of sheds (Figure 5.18), there were also smaller separate structures within the *pouso's* grounds, including the chapel (Figure 5.19), bathrooms, and hospital. Special installations for medical-related services such as the hospital and infirmary were located in isolation, as they needed to be sterilized. These spaces were roofed with tiles, and not sticks, and had walls and waterproof floors. At the hospital, all openings were screened to attempt to limit mosquitoes and flies (Figure 5.20). Similarly to the medical facilities, cesspits with individually bored hole latrines (Figure 5.21) and showering stations were also located in isolation, on the opposite end of the land. Septic tanks were treated daily with lime and cleaned with creolin, keeping spaces clean and free of contamination. External uncovered spaces were as important as the sheds, and used for large gatherings or to play sports. Sports, games, and recreational activities such as music were incentivized, understood as practices that would help workers stay more welcoming (Figure 5.22)¹⁶⁰.

“Mr. Álvaro Vital Brazil designed large wooden sheds covered with straw. He planned dormitories using hammocks, a kitchen, a dining hall, and storage warehouses to keep food. Brazil planned a hospital to be located about 30 meters from the main structures of the *pouso*, which also had better finishings and different material from the rest of the spaces in order to conform to all the demands from the Public Health Special Services. Brazil also designed a small chapel, a barbershop pavilion, a cafeteria, a designated space for sport activities, and an area for lectures and gatherings.

¹⁵⁹ “Livro Histórico do SEMTA”, s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 7) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁶⁰ “Normas da Divisão de Encaminhamento” (S7 Caixa 04, Pacote 06, p. 145). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

Everything was designed with savings in mind, and taking into consideration the ephemeral character of the constructions and the short deadlines for them to be built. Each worker was designated a personal space of two square meters. Brazil's expertise and guidance as well as his attempts to use local resources helped keep construction costs very low, within a tight budget of between CR\$12.00 to CR\$15.00 per square meter. It is worth it to also mention how the hospital facility within the *pouso* was covered not with sticks, but with tiles, and the walls were made of rammed earth, with waterproof floors using bricks and cement lined with cotton, while also keeping all gaps screened to keep mosquitos and flies outside.”¹⁶¹

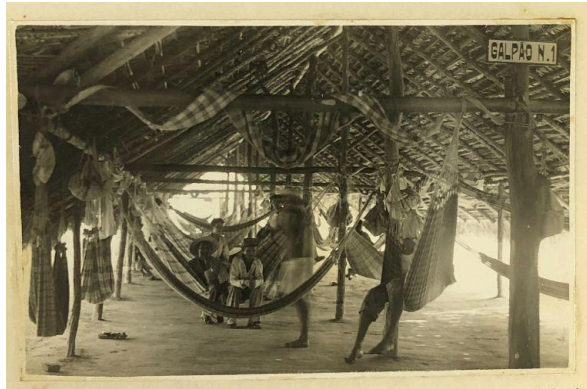


Figure 5.16: Sleeping accommodations in the *pouso* at Coroatá, Maranhão State. June, 1943.
Source: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/TMP/AM/07. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.



Figure 5.17: Refectory at the *pouso* in São Luís, Maranhão State. 1943.
Source: BR-Fiocruz -COC /FSESP/AMS/00/US/00/13. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

¹⁶¹ “Histórico de implantação.” (1942-1943). *Histórico de 22 de dezembro de 1942 a 01 de fevereiro de 1943* (Caixa 5, Documento 62, pp. 7-8). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 5.18: Covered hallway connecting the succession of shed spaces at the *pouso* in São Luís, Maranhão State. 1943.

Source: BR-Fiocruz -COC /FSESP/AMS/00/US/00/13. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.



Figure 5.19: Recruited men gathered in front of the chapel, listening to Mass at *Pouso do Prado*, Fortaleza, 1943.

Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.



Figure 5.20: Infirmary at the *pouso* in Coroatá, Maranhão State, June 1943.
Source: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/US/00/05. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.



Figure 5.21: Boarded latrines in the bathroom facilities at *Pouso do Prado*, 1943.
Source: Conduru, Roberto. 2000. *Vital Brazil. Coleção Espaços da Arte Brasileira*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, p. 78.



Figure 5.22: Recruited men playing music at the *pouso* in Teresina, Piauí State. 1943.
Source: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/US/00/14. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

Originally there were two kinds of *pousos* conceived of by SEMTA's administration. The ones with a smaller capacity (of 300-400 men) were considered "*pousos de passagem*" (transit accommodation), where migrants would stay for no longer than two days. The larger *pousos*, with the capacity for 800-1,200 men, were named "*concentrações*" (concentrations), and these were the places where recruited workers would stay at least 7 days for medical attendance and immunizations. All *pousos* were staffed with teams of physicians, dentists, typists, laboratory technicians, *guardas medicadores* (medical guards), *guardas sanitários* (sanitary guards), and cooks hired by SEMTA and SESP.

The ephemeral character of the spaces of the *pousos* and easy access to local construction materials dictated Vital Brazil's choice of materials (Figure 5.23). All of SEMTA's *pousos* were built in the "same rustic construction, consisting of palm-thatched roofs, and pounded sand floors in the barracks,"¹⁶² considering local construction materials, the temporary nature of the facilities, and the need for them to be built as quickly as possible. According to the "*Regulamento do SEMTA*" ("SEMTA's Regulation"), all *pousos* were supposed to be designed in a way that would be easy to make additions to the original plan if needed. While most *pousos*' were constructed ephemerally and built with locally sourced materials, for more permanent constructions, SEMTA advised builders to choose durable yet low-cost materials. The final recommendation regarding materials was that the budget for construction should be divided in two categories: materials that could be recovered and re-used as something else after the temporary *pousos* were dismantled, and materials that would be lost afterwards.¹⁶³

¹⁶² "Report by the Inter-American Affairs institute and the Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública from September 18th, 1944." Available at: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/TM/AM/04. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

¹⁶³ "Regulamento do SEMTA" (S7 Caixa 04 Pacote 06 p. 112). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 5.23: Details of the construction of *Pouso do Prado* using locally available materials. 1943.
Source: Conduru, Roberto. 2000. *Vital Brazil*. Coleção Espaços da Arte Brasileira. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, p. 78.

Hygiene and sanitation were major concerns of SEMTA and SESP's regarding the construction of the *pousos*. Besides the hospital facilities, the only other area covered with tiles, bricks, and cement instead of being built with "madeira e palha" (wood and straw) was the kitchen. Food for the migrants was fiscalized daily by the SESP physicians, and in order to guarantee the space's sanitation, the original material for the roofs was not deemed safe, as Vital Brazil mentioned in his service diary:

"I ordered them to build a covered kitchen with tiles in the back, as the local authorities deemed the thatched roof to be dangerous."¹⁶⁴

In the same vein, Vital Brazil mentioned how the authorities were concerned with typhus disease, and how he was persuaded to build the water storage with brick and mortar in order to avoid contamination. The *pousos*' access to clean water was a particularly important concern for SEMTA, especially because of the treatment of malaria. *Pousos* such as the one in Teresina had experts assigned as water specialists, setting up a water purification system. In São Luis (MA), a water supply was furnished by digging a deep well near a branch of the river. The water was treated by precipitation, decantation, and filtration.

¹⁶⁴ Original Portuguese version: "*Dei ordem para fazer atrás uma cozinha coberta de telhas, pois as autoridades locais acharam perigosa a cobertura de palha.*"

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*. February 7th, 1943, p. 9. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archives.

Besides serving as rest stops and recruitment centers sheltering Rubber Soldiers, *pousos* were emblematic on multiple levels, and each element within these facilities was part of a grandeur national gesture. The hospital, for example, served SEMTA's sanitary goals while also endorsing the government's ideals of eugenics. The sports fields guaranteed both discipline and the health of volunteers. Another object that was ever present since the inception of the *pousos*' architectural plans was the flagpole. Similarly to what was done in military bases and encampments, Rubber Soldiers would routinely gather by the flagpole and listen to the daily announcements (Figure 5.24). The State's presence through the flag's image was an important reminder of the scale of the project in which migrants had agreed to participate. Another key element within the *pousos*' plan that to be highlighted is the chapel, used for daily services and masses. Rather than separating religion from the State, Getulio Vargas saw the Catholic church as a strong ally to the *Estado Novo*. Priest Helder Câmara was chosen by Paulo de Assis Ribeiro (SEMTA's chief) to represent the Catholic church at SEMTA, coordinating efforts related to religious assistance within the program¹⁶⁵. The Catholic church was one of the most important institutions in Brazil in the 1940s, highly regarded within and greatly influential on the population, especially in Ceará, which had the largest religious community in the Northeast region (Miranda, 2013: 57). Yet, the Church wanted to reinstate its position and importance within isolated groups of the population, reinforcing particular moral concerns, and keeping its hegemony particularly in the Northeast and Northern regions, as the Protestant Church was already starting to arrive (Morales, 2002: 217). Getúlio Vargas used this as an opportunity and instrument of domination for the State as well. Religious participation within the *pousos* was considered crucial both within the migrants' journeys and in making sure newcomers to the Amazon would be spreading the Catholic faith. Similarly to the role of the medical team considering modern hygienics and sanitation norms, the Church played an important role and wielded major influence on the Brazilian population, helping build Vargas' national identity.

¹⁶⁵ Don Helder Câmara later became known for his fight for human rights and particularly for his positionality during the Brazilian dictatorship in the 1964-1985. He preached non-violence and focused on helping the poor. For his efforts, he received several national and international awards, including being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize four times.



Figure 5.24: Recruited men at *Pouso do Prado* listening to the daily announcements.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

At the *pousos*, the presence of the church and its religious rituals served as a mechanism of support and encouragement to the recruited workers and their families, while at the same time also establishing and instating specific moral conduct among those interned. The presence of ecclesiastical authorities was also a demand from the migrants. Considering that people were not allowed to leave the *pouso* premises, not even to go to church on Sundays, it was important for the facilities to have designated worship spaces or priests that could visit workers and their families regularly. The lack of religious attention could be the reason for internal revolts, as reported by Regina Chabloz at the *Núcleo Porangabussu*, for example:

“The formal restrictions even included forbidding people from leaving to go to church on Sundays. The religious services from SEMTA solved the situation: On Sunday they sent over a priest, who improvised an altar at the cafeteria and all women finally had their Mass.”¹⁶⁶ (Araújo et al, 2015: 79)

¹⁶⁶ Original Portuguese version: “A proibição formal incluía, inclusive, a ida à igreja no domingo. Por causa disso, houve grita geral das nucleadas. O serviço religioso do SEMTA resolveu o impasse. No domingo, apareceu lá um padre, improvisando um altar no refeitório e as mulheres tiveram a missa.”

Differences between the *pouso* facilities ¹⁶⁷



Figure 5.25: Location of the SEMTA's *pousos* (main locations indicated by squares, secondary locations by circles).

Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

There was a total of six main locations of SEMTA's *pousos* within the states of Ceará (in the cities of Fortaleza, Tianguá, and Sobral), Piauí (Teresina), Maranhão (Coroatá and São Luís). There were some secondary *hospedarias* (lodging/hospitality centers) and recruitment centers along the way (such as Iguatú in Ceará, and Codo and Caxias in Maranhão) (see Figure 5.25 for the location of primary and secondary facilities) as well as a supporting facility for families located near Fortaleza (*Núcleo Porangabussú* that was later transferred to a nearby location called Cocorote). All *pousos* started being used within the first trimester of 1943, and ended their activities between September and December 1943, when CAETA (Administrative Commission Forwarding Workers to the Amazon/*Comissão Administrativa do Encaminhamento de Trabalhadores para Amazonia*) took over their operations, substituting SEMTA and SAVA's (Superintendence of Supply of the Amazon Valley, the governmental agency responsible for the distribution of workers within the Amazonia's *seringais*) activities by combining them into one single institution.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Detailed descriptions about each *pouso* were found at the "Historical Implementation" Report at SEMTA's Historical Book, and also in Álvaro Vital Brazil's service diary, as well as in the reports provided by SESP (Special Service of Public Health).

¹⁶⁸ By the time CAETA started managing SEMTA's former affairs, this new governmental agency also started accepting transporting families (and not just men) to the Amazon Valley. CAETA also started transporting workers by sea once the imminent dangers of the War were over, later in 1944. While SEMTA was abolished as an institution, the SESP agency was still active, and it was nominated to continue giving medical support to CAETA's activities.

STATE	CITY	DURATION	CAPACITY (# of people)
Ceará	Fortaleza, CE	March-Sept., 1943	1,200
Ceará	Sobral, CE	Feb-Sept., 1943	800
Ceará	Tianguá, CE	March-Sept., 1943	400-600
Piauí	Teresina, PI	March-Sept., 1943	800
Maranhão	Coroatá, MA	March-July, 1943	1,200
Maranhão	São Luis, MA	March- Dec, 1943	1,200

Table 5.1: Location, duration, and capacity of SEMTA's *pousos*.
Source: Laura Belik, 2023.

While all *pousos* were based on the same program, following Álvaro Vital Brazil's designs, each facility also had its particularities. Most of them were built in areas donated by their municipality, and overseen by the city's mayor, but some were built on private land, or using spaces that belonged to a specific ministry. At first Vital Brazil's designs considered that most *pousos* would be built on empty lots, but some facilities had to adapt previously built constructions, such as the case of Sobral, which used a Bishop's donated house¹⁶⁹, or the early *pousos* in Fortaleza, which used the space of two former public school buildings. Paulo Assis Ribeiro (SEMTA's chief and coordinator) had previously arranged and established the location of each *pouso* in December 1942. By January 1943, architect Álvaro Vital Brazil visited each of the chosen locations for further inspection, adapting his designs to the local conditions and coordinating with local authorities details regarding availability of construction materials and labor force. By early February 1943, the first groups of migrants were already starting to arrive at the *pousos*. By then, most of the facilities were either completed or in the final stages of construction.

¹⁶⁹ Sobral's *pouso* facilities used an existing construction that was donated to SEMTA by the Bishop of Sobral. Therefore, adaptations were made to accommodate the necessary spaces needed. The infirmary, for example, was located in a different building located 1,000 meters from the *pouso*.



Figure 5.26: Sports and training of volunteers at *Pouso do Prado*, Fortaleza, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.



Figure 5.27: Sports and training of volunteers at *Pouso do Prado*, Fortaleza, 1943.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

There were different *pouso* facilities within Fortaleza. First, two public schools were adapted to house the first waves of migrant workers, while the official *Pouso do Prado* was being built in the lot where the former Jockey Club had been located. In Fortaleza there was also the *Núcleo de Famílias do Porangabussu* which was later transferred to the *Pouso do Cocorote*, where the families of the workers sent to the Amazon would be allocated. *Pouso do Prado* became an important space for SEMTA's propaganda. All the pictures and images from ABA Film used for advertising the recruitment program were set in this location. The staging of these photos, as seen in Figures 5.26 and 5.27, reinforced the notion of the *pousos* as para-military. Official photos of volunteers being trained or going through medical checkups helped build up the connection and importance of these physical spaces in the embodiment of the migrant as a soldier. *Pouso do Prado* was also considered the main entry point or starting facility for those coming from the hinterlands and going on the longer journey towards the north. Prado was a neighborhood in Fortaleza, and was part of the urban fabric, thus facilitating access to/from the city center. The architect Álvaro Vital Brazil chose the location of the city's former Jockey Club, as the space was abandoned and underutilized. Once the area for any of the *pousos* was chosen, it was expected that construction would take approximately 30 days, considering the emergency character of the program and the facilitated manufacturing of the structures that were using locally sourced materials (Conduru, 2000: 76).

"I looked for the Mayor to speak about the land, which was immediately made available to us. He asked Mr. Chaves (Director of Construction Works at the City Hall) to accompany me in choosing the said land. After examining several locations, I preferred the area of the former Jockey Club that was abandoned. I made arrangements with Mr. Nunes to hire personnel to start services the following morning."¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Original Portuguese version: "*Procurei o Sr. Prefeito para falar sobre o terreno, o qual foi posto logo à nossa disposição. Pediu ao Sr. Chaves (diretor de Obras da Prefeitura) que me acompanhasse na*

Outside of Fortaleza, other *pousos* such as the one in Sobral (CE) and in Tianguá (CE) served as overnight stops as well as recruitment centers enlisting new volunteer workers. Newly enlisted men were subjected to medical inspections and vaccinations and sent to Fortaleza where they would officially start their journey. Tianguá's *pouso*, located on top of the Serra de Ibiapaba mountain range, had some particularities in relation to the other *pousos*. Because of the different climate of the mountains, this *pouso* in particular had to adapt some of its construction for cold weather. From the photos provided by SESP's report to the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, the adaptations mainly consisted of building more enclosed spaces with wooden walls. For most of the other *pousos*, only the infirmary was enclosed as a sanitary measure.

“Another Pouso construction began on the 16th. This time it was in Tianguá, on land donated by the local judge, Dr. Vicente de Araújo, who also facilitated the construction works.[...] And since it is located at six hundred and something meters above sea level, the accommodations had to have special protection against the cold.”¹⁷¹

In Piauí, the Pouso of Teresina was praised for its outstanding medical facilities and treatments, malaria control, purification of water, and generally healthful cleanliness of the spaces. This *pouso* also had a small laboratory which was of great use for the medical team, producing groundleveling work for the purpose of mosquito control and a great deal of larvicidal treatment¹⁷². Similarly to others of SEMTA's *pousos*, Teresina's accommodations were barracks covered with straw, with a pounded sand floor. Yet, this particular location was surrounded by forest and with many natural mosquito breeding grounds, so mosquito control was one of the projects held at the *pouso*. The SESP maintained a group of guards for the destruction of the mosquito breeding grounds either using oil or by filling in the water deposits. Water specialists were also assigned to Piauí's *pouso* and were responsible for setting up a water purification system (Figure 5.28). SESP also maintained a small laboratory set up for the convenience of its physicians.

escolha do dito terreno. Após examinar vários locais, preferi o local do antigo Jockey Club que se achava abandonado. Combinei com o Sr. Nunes as providencias sobre pessoal para iniciar os serviços na manhã seguinte.”

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). Diário de Serviço. January 14th, 1943, p. 1. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archive.

¹⁷¹ Original Portuguese version: “*Outra construção de Pouso teve início no dia 16. Desta vez foi o de Tianguá, em terrenos cedidos pelo Juiz de Direito local, Dr. Vicente de Araújo, que também facilitou as obras.[...]E como fica a seiscentos e poucos metros de altitude, os alojamentos tiveram que ter uma proteção especial contra o frio.”*

Source: “Livro Histórico do SEMTA,” s/l; s/d. (Caixa 5, Documento 62, p. 11) Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁷² “Report by the Inter-American Affairs institute and the Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública from September 18th, 1944.” Available at: BR-Fiocruz- COC-FSESP-AMS/00/US/00/14. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.



Figure 5.28: Water purification system at the *pouso* in Teresina, Piauí State, 1943.
Source: BR-Fiocruz- COC- FSESP-AMS/00/US/00/14. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

In contrast to the exemplary situation of the *pouso* in Teresina, the *pouso* in Coroatá in Maranhão had a lot of trouble maintaining a healthy environment. This *pouso* was located between Teresina (PI) and São Luís (MA), at the point where the train stops overnight, and its purpose was to furnish a stop-over where migrants could sleep as well as to concentrate those who came in small groups from Teresina to meet the train from there to São Luís. This post was situated on low, sandy ground, which was very swampy most of the time due to the long season of heavy rains. Because of the extremely unfavorable geographic conditions, it was very difficult to maintain sanitary conditions at the post on a satisfactory basis. Additionally, because of the very poor railroad services, the migrants were hosted at this post by the hundreds for more than two weeks at a time. As was to be expected, many of the migrants went directly from the train to the infirmary, which was also constantly over capacity. This *pouso* was the facility that was active for the shortest duration: only four months.

The last stop of SEMTA's *pousos* was in São Luis (MA). This was also the first *pouso* facility to be built, and that which other *pousos*' design was based on, as explained earlier. There was a large influx of people in this camp and the space was often overloaded to the point of having 2,000 inhabitants (instead of the 1,200 the *pouso* was originally designed for). Similarly to other *pousos*, upon arrival all men who passed through the camp were examined and immunized against smallpox, typhoid/paratyphoid, tetanus, and yellow fever. Daily sanitary inspections were made and the preparation and distribution of all food was supervised. Despite the overcrowding, death rates were very low. Over the duration of this facility's operation, 300 men were hospitalized and there were only 2 deaths.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ This information was found in a report signed by Dr. Servulo Lima (Superintendent of SESP) and Dr. E. H. Christopherson (Chief of Field Party and Representative in Brazil of the Health and Sanitation Division of The Institute of Inter-American Affairs) from January 2nd, 1945. "Sub-Project Description and Final Summary of the Hospital and Medical Care at SEMTA Camp in São Luis, State of Maranhão." Available at: BR-Fiocruz -COC /FSESP/AMS/00/US/00/13. Casa Oswaldo Cruz.

Other related facilities: SEMTA's Family Nucleus (*Núcleos Familiares*)

Many volunteers enlisting to become Rubber Soldiers started their migratory path alongside their families. Nevertheless, SEMTA's campaign targeted single men only (Secreto, 2005: 177). **In contrast to the migratory wave of the 1900s when the main goal was to protect national borders and promote territorial occupation and colonization of the Amazon**, this time the Government and the Allies' intentions in financing this program was to develop a **land exploitation campaign, producing and exporting goods as quickly and cheaply as possible for the war** (Secreto, 2005: 177). Samuel Benchimol (1977) also explained the extraction efforts in the *seringais* as activities that usually did not comprise a long-term investment, but focused on temporary work. Benchimol argued that differently from the extractivist mindset of enriching and leaving, if migrants decided to bring their wife and the family, that would symbolize creating roots in that place in what was thus an act of colonization and not just temporary migration towards a specific cause¹⁷⁴:

In order for Rubber Soldiers to continue their journey towards the north alone, once families reached Fortaleza, they were separated. By January 21st, 1943, when most *pouso* facilities were completed and had started receiving migrant workers, it came to the attention of Mr. Douglas H. Allen, director of the Rubber Reserve Company (later RDC), that there was no plan to shelter the families of the recruited workers. Mr. Allen decided to immediately disburse an additional contingency dedicated exclusively to support Rubber Soldiers' families that were left behind in Ceará¹⁷⁵. From that moment on, at the same time that men would be directed to the *pousos* at the beginning of their recruitment process, their families were sent to specific governmental facilities to wait for their husband's/father's/son's return. These facilities were called "family nucleus." The Porangabussu Nucleus was first built in 1943 as a temporary space until the Cocorote Nucleus was finished later that same year (see Figure 5.29 for the urbanization plan).

¹⁷⁴ Discussions related to gender roles in migratory processes bring up further questions related to the nature of the colonization process in each location. Similar discussion is brought up by author Ronald Takaki regarding the influx of Chinese migrants in the U.S. by the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Takaki, 1989). Takaki compares different migratory policies in Hawaii and California in the 1850s for the influx of Chinese laborers working on agriculture and the Gold Rush. While Hawaii encouraged the immigration of Chinese women as an appeal to keep family morals preserved and at the same time use their labor as part of the workforce (combining a missionary concern and employers' self-interest), the U.S. policy viewed Chinese laborers as temporary, with single men more mobile, building a contractual relationship to workers, with no further responsibility for their families. Chinese women migrating to the U.S. before 1875 had their occupancy listed as "prostitute" in the population census manuscript, as Chinese men were not allowed to have their wives accompany them or join them as workers. (Takaki, 1989: 40-41)

¹⁷⁵ The National Archives of the United States. Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RG. 234) - Rubber Development Corporation, Entry 271. General Country File - 1942-1947. Report on the Brazilian Rubber Program. Part 1, p. 100.

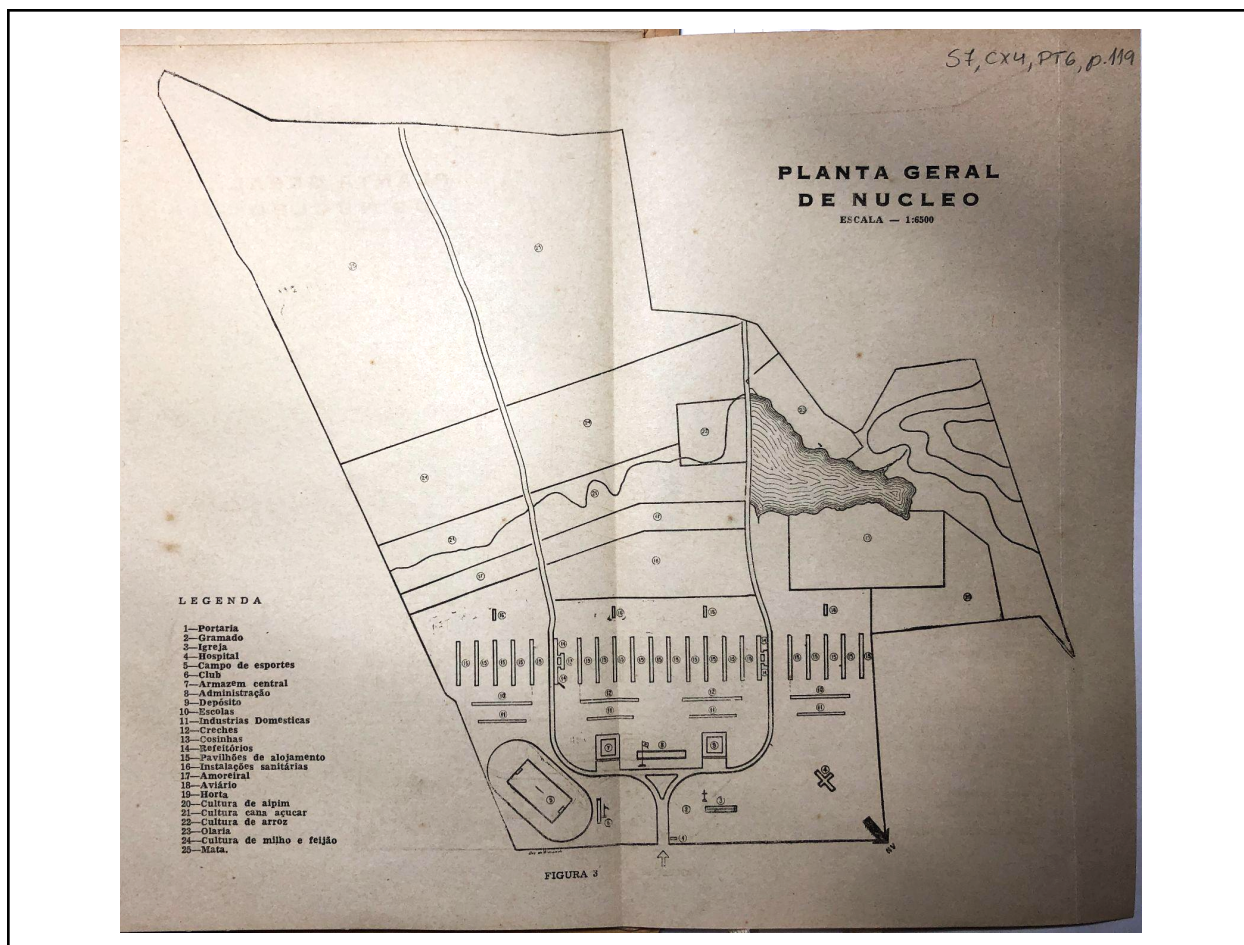


Figure 5.29: Envisioned urbanization plan for the SEMTA's Family Nucleus in Fortaleza, according to the "Regulamento do SEMTA" ("SEMTA's Regulation").

Source: "Regulamento do SEMTA" (S7 Caixa 04 Pacote 06 p. 119). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

The newspaper "A Noite" (RJ), from Friday, May 21, 1943, described SEMTA's work and the recruitment of Rubber Soldiers being sent from Ceará to the Amazon, and reporting specifically about the *pousos* facilities that were dedicated to the families:

"At the *Porangabussú* Nucleus there are 18 families of workers who have already left, totaling 296 people. The nucleus is directed by the educator from Rio de Janeiro, Ms. Regina de Paula Pessoa Chabloz, who is assisted by the collaboration of a doctor, two nutritionists from São Paulo, and six nurses. Families receive food, clothing, medical and religious assistance."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Original Portuguese version: "No Núcleo de *Porangabussú* há 18 famílias de trabalhadores que já partiram, num total de 296 pessoas. O núcleo é dirigido pela educadora carioca, Sra. Regina de Paula Pessoa Chabloz e conta com a colaboração de um médico, duas nutricionistas vindas de São Paulo, e seis enfermeiras. As famílias recebem alimentação, vestuário, assistência médica e religiosa." Source: "O exército da borracha os sertões do nordeste." In: "A Noite" (RJ), 21 May, 1943. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00101.0171/ Label: 348970_04.

The Family Nucleus of *Porangabussú*, as Mrs. Regina Chabloz explained in an interview for the documentary “*Borracha! Para Vitória*” (Wolney Oliveira, 2005), was built as a temporary space to shelter and support the women and children left behind:

“When I arrived [in Fortaleza] men were just starting to leave Ceará. So the government did not know what to do with the families that were left behind. The solution was to place the families in these existing hovels in Porangabussú. There were many hovels lined up forming streets, and that’s where the families stayed. And I was appointed to organize and take care of these families that were living there. The families usually consisted of a woman with her child or children. So these people stayed in Porangabussú for a few months until they [SEMTA/DNI] decided to send the families to the Amazon as well.”¹⁷⁷

The *Núcleo* in Porangabussú was located in the outskirts of Fortaleza, and consisted of a street with many houses made of sticks aligned (Figures 5.30 and 5.31). Each family was given one of these houses to stay in. Women did subsistence farming while children would go to the *núcleo*’s school and daycare. Besides meals, the families were entitled to medical assistance as well. No one was allowed to leave Porangabussú, a sanitary measure that caused distress and revolt amongst women who wanted to attend Sunday Mass. The government’s response was to send a priest to the nucleus, and improvise an altar in the refectory. (Araújo et al, 2015: 79)



Figures 5.30 and 5.31: Photos from the *Núcleo Familiar* in *Porangabussú*.
Source: Acervo Ana Maria Assis Ribeiro; TV Cultura.

The facilities in Porangabussu were being used temporarily while arrangements were made for the construction of the Cocorote Family Nucleus. According to SEMTA’s book of regulations, the goal of a family nucleus was to be a community that was run cooperatively. Besides the sheds for housing with separate sections for each family group, Cocorote had sheds for schools, daycare centers, dining halls, kitchens, laundries, pavilions for domestic industries/manual labor, chapel, hospital, warehouse, storage rooms, administration, residence for administrators and doctors, and sports

¹⁷⁷ Source: Documentary “*Borracha! Para Vitória*.” Director Wolney Oliveira, 2005. 14 min 46 sec.

fields (Figure 5.32)¹⁷⁸. In addition to these, there were also irrigation works, water lifting, preparation of sites for brickworks, and various services aimed at facilitating the organization of those settled in the nucleated areas (Figure 5.33). Cocorote was designed to host 2,000 people, or the dependents of at least 500 enlisted workers. The space's urbanization plan was designed in order to attend work activities in various fields chosen according to the standards set by the Department of Social Assistance¹⁷⁹.



Crianças no refeitório do Povo do Cocorote, Fortaleza, 1943

Figure 5.32: Children in the dining hall at the *Family Nucleus of Cocorote*, Fortaleza, 1943. **Source:** Acervo MAUC/UFC.



Figure 5.33: “*Hortas da Vitória*” (Victory gardens) for subsistence farming made by women at the *Porangabussu Family Nucleus*. **Source:** “O Problema da Alimentação na Batalha da Borracha” in: *Vamos Ler!* Edição 0333(2), pp. 46-47. September 23rd, 1943.

¹⁷⁸ Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*, Janeiro-Julho 1943, n.p. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archives.

¹⁷⁹ “Regulamento do SEMTA” (S7 Caixa 04 Pacote 06 pp. 110-111). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

Arrival in the Amazon: *seringueiros*

SAVA's facilities in the Amazon

Belém was the very last stop for SEMTA's migrants. When workers arrived, they were placed at a large facility run by the Superintendence of Supply of the Amazon Valley/*Superintendência de Abastecimento do Vale Amazônico* (SAVA). This governmental agency was responsible for distributing this new labor force across Amazonia's *seringais*, matching them with *seringal* owners who needed their services¹⁸⁰. "SEMTA did not enter the Amazon" (Morales, 2002: 220). SEMTA's works ended where SAVA's works started, thus, SEMTA was only responsible for taking care of the recruitment and journey of the volunteers until they arrived in the Amazon Valley (Figure 5.34)¹⁸¹.

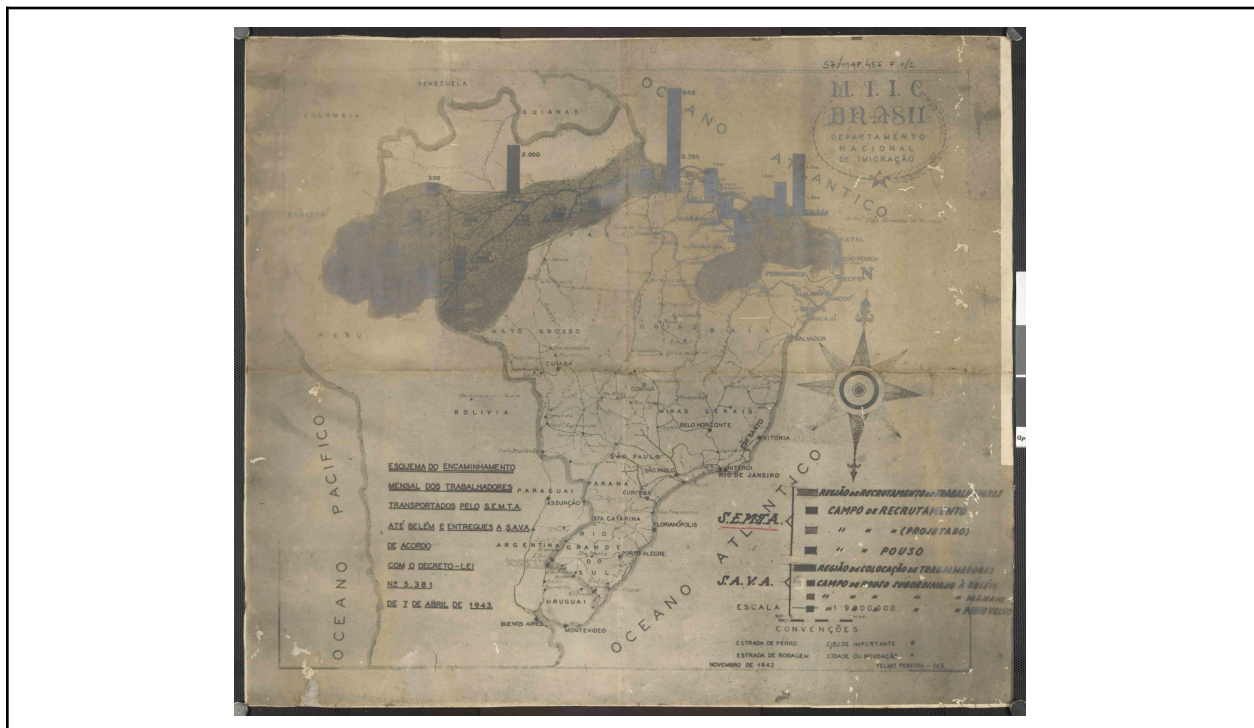


Figure 5.34: Plan of distribution of workers transported by SEMTA to Belém (PA), delivered to SAVA in accordance with the Brazilian Decree-Law No. 5.381 of April 7, 1943.

Source: "National Department of Migration DNI, 1943." (BR_RJANRIO S7 0 MAP 0456 d0001de0002). Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁸⁰ Some migrants, however, refused to continue their journey to the *seringais*, considering that the imposed conditions of work as tappers was not favorable to them. These groups of people would be considered people who quit or escaped the government's system to which they had originally committed. These were also people who did not necessarily make their way back to their place of origin, but started settling in Pará and Amazonas (Martinello, 2018: 228; Lima, 2014: 89).

¹⁸¹ This division between agencies ended up being the factor later responsible for both their extinction in 1943 and the creation of a unifying department in September 1943 called Administrative Commission Forwarding Workers to the Amazon/*Comissão Administrativa do Encaminhamento de Trabalhadores para Amazonia* (CAETA). (Morales, 2002: 223).

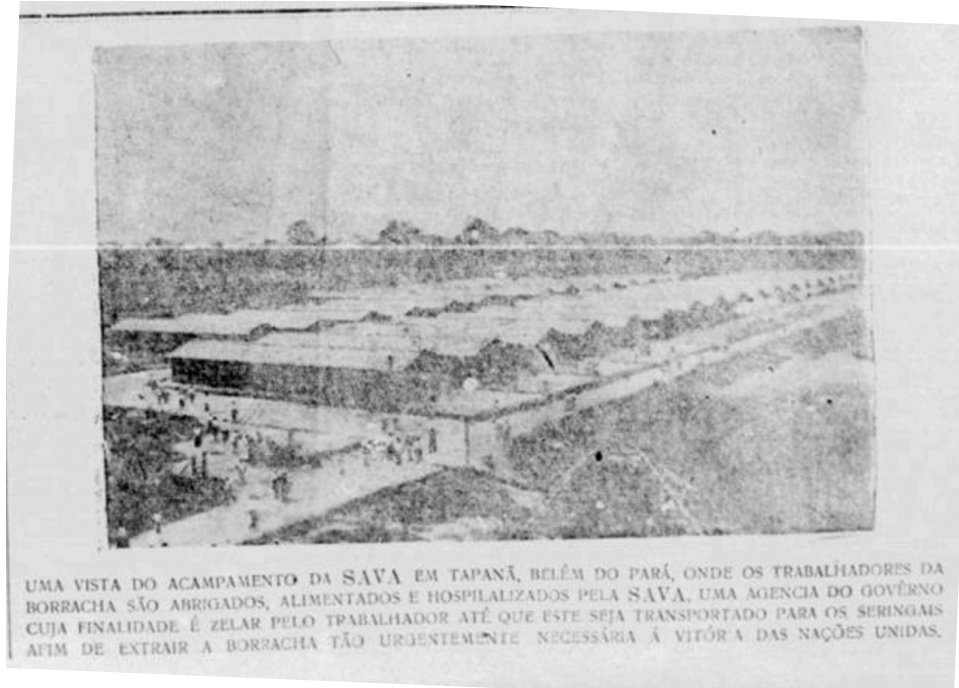


Figure 5.35: Lodging from SAVA in Tapanã, Belém. This temporary encampment was where Rubber Soldiers were housed while waiting to be transported and distributed in *seringais* in the Amazon.
Source: “A Batalha da Borracha”. In: *Jornal “O Acre,”*, edição 726, p. 5. December 25th, 1943. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB05227.0072/ Label: 764752.

SAVA’s facilities were similar to SEMTA’s *pousos*, and were also supported by SESP in matters regarding medical and sanitary measures. There were two main facilities from SAVA (and smaller secondary ones), one in Belém and the other in Manaus, the largest port cities of the Amazon Valley: Tapanã, near Belém (PA) (Figure 5.35), and the *Hospedaria do Paredão*, in Manaus (AM)¹⁸². There was also a specific facility intended for the families who arrived in the Amazon via the DNI (*Departamento Nacional de Imigração*/National Department of Immigration) located near Belém, at the Old Japanese Lodging (*Antiga Hospedaria dos Japoneses*) in Curro Velho¹⁸³.

¹⁸² The Hospedaria do Paredão in Manaus was active since April 19th, 1943, and it had the capacity of housing 1,000 men. Available at: BR_FIOCRUZ_COC_FSESP/AMS/00/TM/AM/03. Casa de Oswaldo Cruz.

¹⁸³ According to a report by SESP, the facility at Curro designated to the families of workers in the Amazon Valley (and run by SAVA and later the DNI) was designed to hold 600 people, but it was often over capacity, housing between 800 and 1,200 people. Available at: BR_FIOCRUZ_COC_FSESP/AMS/00/TM/AM/01. Casa de Oswaldo Cruz.

“In Belém, SEMTA hands over the workers to SAVA, which houses them in the large Tapanã campsite, near Pinheiros, where there are currently more than 3,000 workers. As this campsite does not have a dining hall – which is only now being built – the cleaning work is enormous. The old beef processing plant houses the infirmary with a capacity for 100 beds and with an additional 30 beds in the isolation area. Sanitation in this area, which was formerly heavily infested with malaria, required great efforts.”¹⁸⁴

The Tapanã facility, also known as a campsite, had a capacity of housing three thousand people. The first group of recruited workers arrived in Tapanã by March 1st, 1943¹⁸⁵. Workers were accommodated in large sheds where they would sleep in hammocks. There was a designated space for the infirmary with the capacity for one hundred beds, and areas for the kitchen and refectory. One of the major challenges for workers arriving in the Amazon Valley was the local climate, and tropical diseases such as malaria, typical of that region. By their arrival, all SEMTA's men were subjected to medical inspections, but many of them would get sick afterwards because of the different local conditions¹⁸⁶. While waiting to be transported to the *seringais*, men would be instructed about latex farming and rubber extraction. They would also be temporarily allocated in local jobs where labor was needed, such as in the ports in Manaus and Belém, working with agriculture, in road construction, or as crew members in steamboats, directly or indirectly contributing to the rubber export programs¹⁸⁷.

SAVA was the institution responsible not only for the placement of the workers within the *seringais*, but also for their contract with the *seringalistas* (latex farm owners), in order to guarantee just working conditions and fair employment. The monitoring of workers and their relationships with their employer, the *seringalista*, was controlled by the Rubber Credit Bank, with the assistance of SAVA. Similarly to SEMTA, SAVA was also terminated by the end of 1943, and both agencies merged as part of one single administration called CAETA, organized by the National Department of Immigration (DNI).

Architect Álvaro Vital Brazil visited SAVA's facilities in Belém as he was starting to design SEMTA's *pousos*. While SAVA's activities were separate from SEMTA, it is

¹⁸⁴ Original Portuguese version: “*Em Belém o SEMTA entrega os trabalhadores a SAVA, que os abriga no grande campo do Tapanã, próximo a Pinheiros, onde atualmente há mais de 3 mil trabalhadores. Como esse campo não dispõe de refeitório – que só agora vai ser construído – o trabalho de limpeza é enorme. No prédio de uma antiga charqueada estão a enfermaria com capacidade para 100 leitos e o isolamento, com mais 30 leitos. O saneamento desta zona antigamente muito infestada pela malária, demandou grandes esforços.*”

Source: “O Saneamento da Amazônia” in: *Jornal O Observador Econômico e Financeiro RJ*. P. 50. Edição 92(1), Setembro 1943. Code: TRB00421.0072/ Label: 123021.

¹⁸⁵ “A Superintendência de Abastecimento do Vale Amazônico”. In: *Gazeta de Notícias RJ*. Edição 94(1) p. 6. April 23rd, 1944. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00194.0072/Label: 103730_07.

¹⁸⁶ “O Saneamento da Amazônia” in: *Jornal O Observador Econômico e Financeiro RJ*. P. 50. Edição 92(1), Setembro 1943. Code: TRB00421.0072/Label: 123021.

¹⁸⁷ “A Superintendência de Abastecimento do Vale Amazônico”. In: *Gazeta de Notícias RJ*. Edição 94(1) p. 6. April 23rd, 1944. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00194.0072/Label: 103730_07.

interesting to see how the two programs were institutionally connected and that thus there was a need for the architect from SEMTA to visit SAVA's spaces. In his service diary, Vital Brazil made observations about SAVA's facilities, and the potential the Tapanã campsite currently under construction had:

“With Wagner, we visited the DNI hostel, where Dr. Pedro Rosado, the chief physician in charge of assisting immigrants, showed us the facilities. Fifteen hundred people were crowded inside this old wooden house (formerly a hostel for Japanese immigrants), where children, the elderly, and women lived in close quarters. Then we went to a place called Pinheiro, where a large meatpacking plant was built years ago and is now being adapted into an immigrant hostel. Dr. Guilherme Paiva, an engineer from SAVA, is in charge of this project. After examining the existing facilities, which are well-built for their intended purpose, we returned to the city.”¹⁸⁸

Life at the *seringal*: becoming *seringueiros*

The same way that SEMTA's *pousos* were a project and program that ended once it reached the Amazon, volunteer migrants also lost their credentials as soldiers the moment they were distributed within the *seringais*. For those who were coaxed into continuing their journey into the *seringais*, a new and arduous chapter of their lives was about to start. These migrants went from being *flagelados* in *Nordeste*, to briefly being referred to as *workers* and *soldiers* when enlisting and traveling with SEMTA, and finally to becoming *seringueiros* in the Amazon, which turned out not to be as glamorous as they hoped for their future. These migrants who became *seringueiros* are the people claiming indemnity as former Rubber Soldiers. The reality of life in the forest was very different from the one portrayed by Chablos in his posters. *Flagelados* and *seringueiros* would be equally fighting for their lives under different conditions and in different contexts. In many ways, for the *seringueiro* tappers, the exploitation system they were bound to in the 1940s was very similar to the conditions during the first Rubber Boom in the early 1900s. Once *Nordestinos* arrived in Acre, they would meet with local *seringal* landowners, who would give them a plot of forested land and provide them with basic materials for work and survival (Figure 5.36). Upon arrival, a *mateiro* specialized in recognizing profitable forest areas would escort newcomers to a *colocação* or “placement” where they were supposed to settle within the larger area of the *seringal* settlement, building their houses with locally abundant resources such as *paxiúba*

¹⁸⁸ Original Portuguese version: “Com Wagner visitamos a hospedaria do DNI, tendo nos mostrado os serviços de Dr. Pedro Rosado, médico chefe dos serviços de assistência aos emigrantes. Mil e quinhentas pessoas se acumulavam dentro desta casa velha, de madeira (antiga hospedaria de emigrantes japoneses) onde estão crianças, velhos e mulheres em promiscuidade. Em seguida fomos ao lugar denominado Pinheiro, onde há anos construíram uma grande xarqueada e atualmente estando parada, fazem adaptação para hospedaria de emigrantes. Está encarregado deste serviço o Dr. Guilherme Paiva, engenheiro do SAVA. Após exame das instalações existentes que, alias, são bem construídas para o fim a que se destinam, voltamos à cidade.”

Source: Brazil, Álvaro Vital. (1943). *Diário de Serviço*. February 12th, 1943, p. 11. Courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna; Brazil family archives.

wood¹⁸⁹ (Figure 5.37). The newcomer was left alone to build a house and open forest roads to access tapped *seringueira* trees. They also had to build a secondary structure wherein a furnace fumed collected latex sap, transforming it into rubber. In his 1906 article “*Entre os Seringais*,” Euclides da Cunha described the *seringueiros*’ life as “living in a *paxiúba* [type of local palm tree] shack in the middle of an opening in the threatening and dense forest, where *seringueiros* were surrounded by the vicious trails built for collecting latex, as if incarcerated in a prison without walls” (Cunha, 1906).



Figure 5.36: The *seringueiro*’s special outfit for collecting *seringa* (sap).
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

¹⁸⁹ Paxiúba wood was only used for housing settlements within the *Seringal*, and was not commercially exploited (Belik, 2021).



Figure 5.37: “A Casa do Seringueiro.” (*Seringueiro’s house*) Hélio Melo, 1984. Ink and leaf extracts on cardboard, 50 x 47 cm.

Source: Maria de Fátima Melo personal collection. Photographic reproduction by Talita Oliveira. Courtesy of Maria de Fátima Melo and IPHAN AC.

Seringueira (*Havea brasiliensis*) is an Amazonian species found scattered in the forest with usually only two or three trees per hectare. The tapper would first locate the trees and then clear the trails to connect them. Two or three trails with sixty to 150 trees each were the maximum that one person working alone could handle. Euclides da Cunha (1906) described the implementation of a *seringal* near the Purus river as an arduous and difficult task. Cunha considered the *seringueira* tree as the basic agrarian measurement in building the roads through which the entire extraction activities would take place:

“Starting a *seringal* in the Purus [river] is an inaccessible task even to the most experienced surveyor, given how arbitrary and varied is the diabolical geometry required for the division of the lots. Assigned to a minimum extraordinary to the value of land compared to the exclusive value of the trees, an ingenious new original agrarian measurement was created. The “road” in itself summarized the most varied aspects of this new society, settled at the margins of those large rivers. The unit of measurement there is not the meter – it is the *seringueira* tree, and a “road” consists of about 100 trees scattered in the territory in unequal intervals of space. [...]” (Cunha, 1906: n.p.)

Seringueiros' housing needed to be located close to these trails (see Figures 5.38 and 5.39). Trees along each trail were tapped on alternative days to allow them to recover. Superficial incisions were made into the bark of each tree, and small cups were placed under them to collect the latex sap that emerged. A tapper would make two morning rounds, one to make cuts and place cups and another to collect the extracted latex. In the afternoon the tapper would use the furnace, fueled by palm nuts, to heat the latex, slowly dripping it over a suspended stick that was constantly turned. Gradually, a large ball of solid rubber was formed. The latex gathering/collecting season lasted only six months of the year (Dean, 1987: 37).

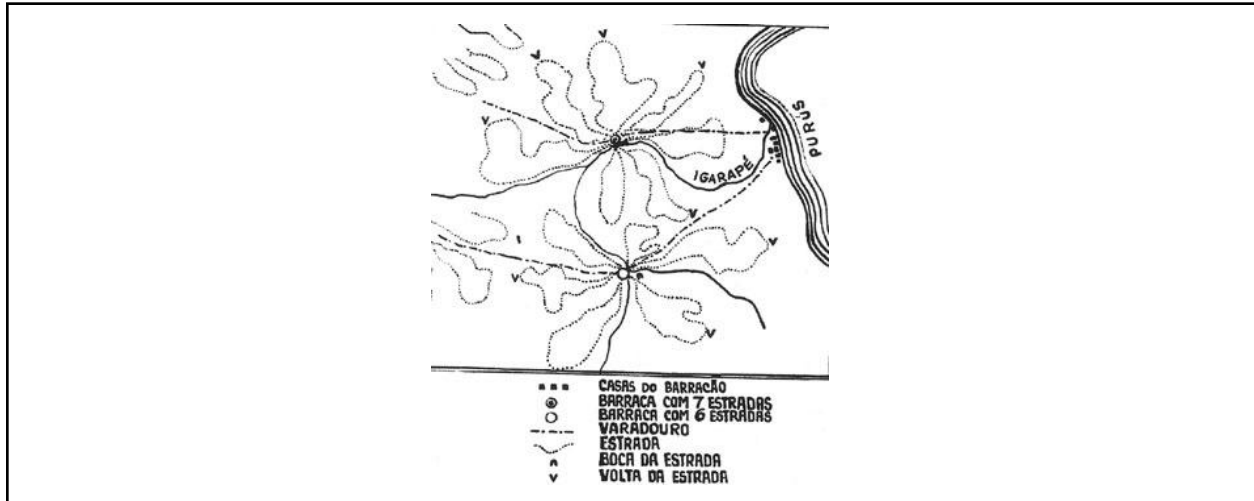


Figure 5.38: Sketch of an Acrean rubber plantation by Euclides da Cunha, drawn in 1905 based on information provided by Plácido de Castro during his exploration trip to Alto Purus. (Mapoteca do Itamaraty/Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Source: Cunha, Euclides da. 1906. "Entre os Seringais." *Revista Kosmos*, ano 3, nº 1, Rio de Janeiro, jan. n.p.



Figure 5.39: "Caminho do Seringueiro" ("Pathway of the *Seringueiro*"). Hélio Melo, 1996. Ink and leaf extracts on cardboard, 55 x 59cm.

Source: Maria de Fátima Melo personal collection. Photographic reproduction by Talita Oliveira. Courtesy of Maria de Fátima Melo and IPHAN AC.

A *colocação* was the unit of *seringueiro* land use, where they would work, live, and spend most of their time. Each *colocação* would be shared between two or three families, and each family would manage two or three latex extraction roads. *Colocações* were isolated and self-sufficient, but would be connected by forest road to the *seringal's* *sede* – the landowner's headquarters, where the *barracão* (warehouse) and administrative center of rubber production over a vast stretch of forest was located. There were no official roads between the *sede* and the *colocações*, nor there was a clear demarcation of property limits. It is hard to define a precise map of the *colocações* within a *seringal*, since they continuously changed in size and location. Still, a *colocação* is always considered a basic unit of usage (for work and living) of a *seringal*. *Colocações* showed signs of exhaustion after long periods of exploitation, leading to the abandonment of certain locations by the *seringueiros* and their families: a land use pattern similar to that of some Indigenous agrarian communities. Sometimes a *seringueiro* would move to a completely different *colocação* that was (hopefully) more productive and lucrative. At other times the new location would be right alongside the original one. For their temporary settlements, *seringueiros* looked for land that was good for subsistence agriculture and hunting and that was protected from wild animals and pests (Carneiro da Cunha and Almeida, 2002: 236-41).

Considering how arduous and demanding the latex extraction process was at the *seringais*, the “inevitable question,” as Warren Dean (1987) exposed was: “Why did the Brazilians not take up rubber cultivation themselves as a response to the Southeast Asian threat? The answer is that they did, but not successfully” (Dean, 1987: 5). Dean explained how there were several explanations for the failure in cultivating Brazilian latex instead of extracting it, from labor shortages to lack of capital or technique. The main problem, however, was essentially ecological. There was a plant fungus that attacked the *seringueira* tree within its native range. Botanist experts such as Jacques Huber realized that this particular fungus attack would increase if *Haveas brasiliensis* trees were placed more densely close to each other. Therefore, the scattered distribution of *seringueiras* under their natural conditions was already the closest each tree could get from one another. “The inherent danger of cultivation was enhanced by typical plantation practices” (Dean, 1987: 58). Another fact to be taken into consideration is that the risk of disease is also higher if the species is native to that country. Therefore, cultivating *seringueiras* outside of Brazil worked better than building plantations within the country. This is because exotic plant species, once removed from the pests and parasites that have coevolved with them, have better chances of survival, a concept later specified as *escape* (Dean, 1987: 60).

A very famous example of an attempt to cultivate *Haveas* within the Amazon region is the case of *Fordlândia*, an industrial town for growing latex trees and processing rubber, located in the state of Pará. Established in 1928 by the American industrialist Henry Ford, Fordlândia was an endeavor to try self-sufficiency of his automobile production by building his own tire plant. From the beginning, Ford faced numerous adversities in establishing his own rubber production in the Amazon, from political disputes (since he was a foreign industry operator occupying and appropriating Brazilian land and resources) and labor problems (limited labor supply, riots) to, finally, ecological

disruption (with the fungus outbreak attacking both grown trees and budwood nurseries) (Dean, 1987: 77). By 1934 Ford lost interest in his Amazon adventure, and Fordlândia has been nearly completely abandoned ever since.

Examples such as the failure of Fordlândia in the early 1930s put forward a rising preoccupation for both the Brazilian government as well U.S. industries and authorities that culminates with the Washington Agreement in the 1940s regarding the need for an increased supply of labor in the Amazon in order to further develop that region using its natural resources. It is important to notice also how the U.S. interests in incentivizing rubber production in Brazil and Latin America were not limited to the Second World War period. While foreign funding coming from the Allies peaked during the war, documentation and reports from the 1950s between the U.S and Brazilian foreign affairs office explained the projections of the increase in consumption of rubber worldwide, and the need for robust and ongoing rubber production beyond Southeast Asia. At this occasion, Mr. G.E. Rotgans, former economic consultant at the Rubber Institute in Delft, was invited in 1952 by the U.S. Embassy in Brazil to work for the Rubber Reserve Corporation to investigate further expansion of latex production in Brazilian territories.¹⁹⁰

Exploiting rubber, exploiting the *seringueiro*

Considering that Brazilian rubber production was ill-fated since the arrangement was based on extraction and not cultivation, the growth of the Amazonian region was purely based on its production numbers, and not on regional development and advancements. Nevertheless, it was not just the *seringueira* trees that were overworked: the migrant workers were equally being taken advantage of.

The system of commercializing rubber in the early/mid-twentieth century was highly exploitative, placing *seringueiros* at the very end of a production chain full of intermediaries. Tappers arrived at the *seringais* already owing the landowner for the use of their property. To pay their debt, *seringueiros* needed to deliver all the rubber they produced to the landowner, who would often manipulate prices to keep the tapper's income balance negative. The landowner needed to sell all the rubber they produced to an intermediary rubber dealer called *aviador* (forwarder). The *aviador* then shipped the material along Amazon tributaries to a port city like Manaus or Belém. Finally, a dealer would sell the commodity to an exporter for shipment to North America (Dean, 1987: 40). It is important to notice here, once again, that there were many efforts by the U.S. in the 1940s to try to change the exploitation and patron system of the rubber trade which had remained in place since the first Rubber Boom. Their main strategy to try to better organize and confront corruption within the trade chain was to create the Rubber Credit Bank, an organization that, while effective in many ways, was unable to enforce its new regulations or to properly inspect prices and conditions *seringueiros* were forced into (Dean, 1987: 95).

¹⁹⁰ Source: Arquivo Histórico Itamaraty in Brasília, folder 41.437.

The migrant dream of cashing in on latex production in Acre and leaving wealthy was another facet of the extraction and exploitation mindset in both periods of the Rubber Boom. Despite mobility within the boundaries of each *seringal*, tappers and their families were geographically bound by indebtedness to the *seringalista* (landowner). They could not leave unless they paid their debts, and this rarely occurred since landowners controlled and forged balances — practices that are today considered a form of **debt enslavement** (Dean, 1987: 41). The freedom and opportunity that *Nordestinos* sought when they decided to move to the Amazon region was rarely found. The dream of an eventual return home also proved evasive (Ranzi, 2008: 129). It was a double bind: unable to leave their allotment, they were at the same time discouraged from settling permanently. Landlords, wanting to secure long-term profits from tapper labor through indebtedness, discouraged them from farming. Obligated to buy their food and supplies from the *seringal's* landlord-controlled warehouse, tappers were tied to forest labor by their permanent condition of economic deficit.¹⁹¹ A report written to President Getúlio Vargas by Reinaldo A. Reis on April 24, 1943 explicitly complained about the working conditions of the *seringueiros*. Mr. Reis exposed how the majority of the newcomers were never informed of where exactly they were being sent, or how much money they would make:

"Working conditions for rubber tappers:

Besides the 715 [people enlisted and sent to the Amazon] by SEMTA, none of the people who were brought to the Amazon by the Ministry of Labor had a service lease contract or any other similar documentation. When personally interrogated, several of these men, in the presence of Ministry of Labor officials, said they did not know where they were going or how much they should earn. They said that their families were not being helped in their homeland. They also had no idea of the decree determining the percentage they should earn on the price of the rubber they would sell."¹⁹²

The conditions into which Northeasterner migrants in the Amazon were put from the moment of their recruitment until they reached their final destination were ones of oppression and exploitation. Poor and landless drought refugees were, once again, persuaded into isolation and forced labor under false pretenses and promises of a better life and expectations of help and support from the government.

¹⁹¹ The battle for freedom of land usage, especially for familiar agriculture and better working conditions in the *seringais*, gained traction in the 1970s when the market for Brazilian latex declined. Figures such as Chico Mendes and Wilson Pinheiro were among the union leaders and principal fighters supporting the cause.

¹⁹² Original Portuguese version: "*Condições de trabalho dos seringueiros: Fora dos 715 que foram encaminhados pelo SEMTA, nenhum dos conduzidos pelo Ministério do Trabalho teve contrato de locação de serviços ou coisa parecida. Interrogados pessoalmente, vários desses homens, na presença de funcionários do Ministério do Trabalho, informaram não saber para onde iam, nem quanto deveriam ganhar. Negaram que suas famílias estivessem sendo auxiliadas na terra natal. Nenhuma noção possuíam do decreto que fixa a porcentagem sobre o preço da borracha.*"

Source: "Relatório de Reinaldo A. Reis tratando da exploração, comercialização e contrabando da borracha e abordando a situação dos seringueiros." Rio de Janeiro (Vol. XL/57). Available at: CPDOC FGV- Classificação: GV c 1943.04.24 Série: c - Correspondência, Data de produção: 24/04/1943, p. 5.

CHAPTER 6: TEMPORARY PERMANENT

Introduction

Both the 1932 concentration camps and the 1943 *pousos* were temporary structures that stood for only a short duration. As the drought or the war ended, the constructions were dismantled, and the respective programs ceased to exist. While their existence was only temporary, these spaces left permanent marks and lasting impacts on the communities around them. This chapter presents the current contemporary situation of former camps and *pousos* spaces, as well as the different efforts and initiatives being held by the population or by the state to keep the memories of the people who passed through them.

Differently from previous historical chapters, **Chapter 6's** methodology in particular is built from empirical sources, based on my fieldwork experiences, unstructured interviews, and site visits in the states of Ceará and Acre. Following this introduction, I will present my findings regarding the current situation and uses of the spaces of four of the seven 1932 former concentration camp facilities as well as the ongoing discussions regarding the recognition and indemnity processes of Rubber Soldiers and their families.

CAMPS TODAY

Pirambú: from concentration camp to *favela*

I met geographer Sandra Paula Evaristo Monteiro and local resident Dorinha Nascimento on a Monday morning by the waterfront *Calçadão Vila do Mar*, in the area known as Grande Pirambú (Great Pirambú), in Fortaleza, the capital city of the Brazilian state of Ceará (Figure 6.1)¹⁹³.

¹⁹³ At that time, Sandra was finishing her master's degree at University of Ceará and had been living in Pirambú for the past couple of years, as she was participating in several neighborhood associations as part of her work and research. Sandra became friends with Dorinha, and both of them were kind enough to show me (and escort me) through the neighborhood.



Figure 6.1: The Pirambú community by the ocean in Fortaleza, and the waterfront *Calçadão Vila do Mar*. Photo taken during visit with Sandra Evaristo Monteiro and Dorinha Nascimento, June 2018.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

We walked to the end of a pier and appreciated the view at *Mirante Rosa dos Ventos*. Looking forward, I could see a vast ocean with light green clear water, inviting-looking beaches, and some local fishermen arriving in their colorful boats. Behind us was a recently installed urban infrastructural equipment configured for the new waterfront project with large walking pathways, bike lanes, playgrounds, and sports equipment. “[Former Brazilian President] Dilma Rousseff was here just the other day for the inauguration. She stood exactly here, where we are,” Dorinha mentioned proudly. While this space could have been a new touristic destination, the “*Calçadão Vila do Mar*” was a hygienist urbanization project from 2012 trying to deal with some of the multiple issues Grande Pirambú faced: overcrowding, lack of sanitation, lack of street lighting, a need for open spaces, lack of leisure equipment for the population, and, most of all, the state’s desire for access and control. According to the 2010 Brazilian census, Grande Pirambú has at least 42,600 thousand inhabitants and over 11,000 households. It is considered the greatest *favela* (slum) of Fortaleza and the seventh largest *favela* in the country, combining three different neighboring communities/neighborhoods: Pirambú, Cristo Redentor, and Barra do Ceará. Yet, the *Calçadão Vila do Mar* waterfront project was not the first state intervention and municipal revitalization project in the area. The

neighborhood was settled and grew precisely because of its history of social control through infrastructural construction, which was first put in motion in the early 1930s with the Pirambú (or Urubú) concentration camp for drought refugees, the *flagelados*.

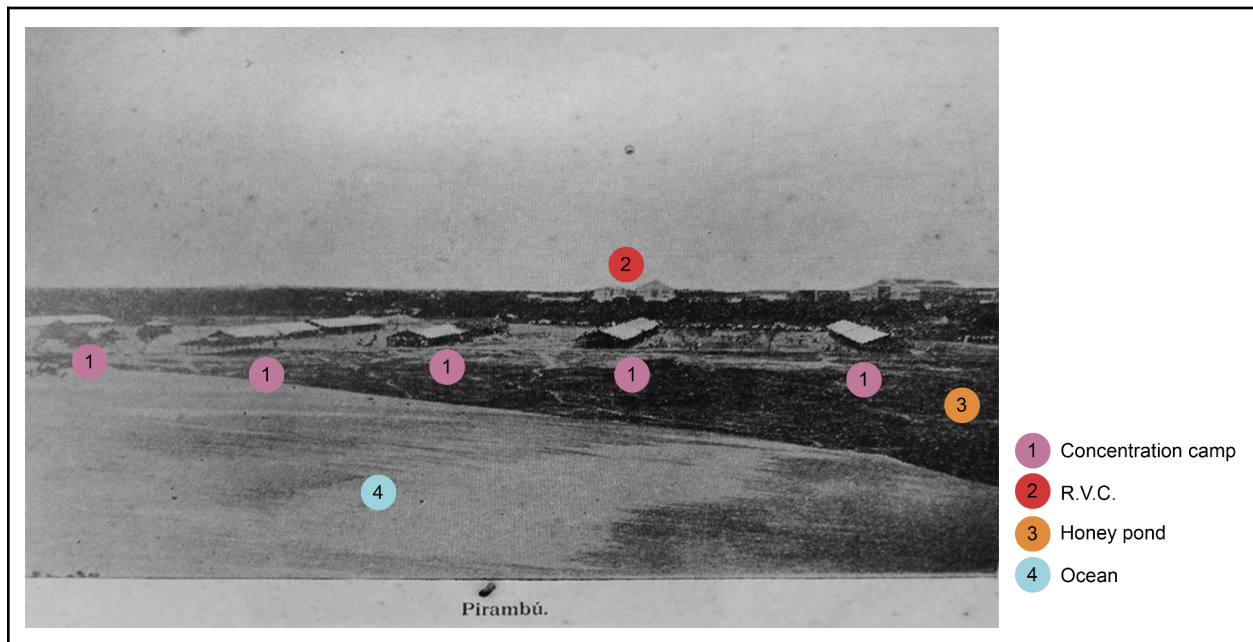


Figure 6.2: The Pirambú concentration camp is located on the left, in the center are the workshops that belong to the state rail company (*Rede de Viação Cearense - RVC*), and on the right is the Honey Pond.

Source: Photo by José Bonifácio P. Costa (1932). Available at: Arquivo nacional; design by Laura Belik, based on a diagram by Sandra Paula Evaristo Monteiro, 2018.

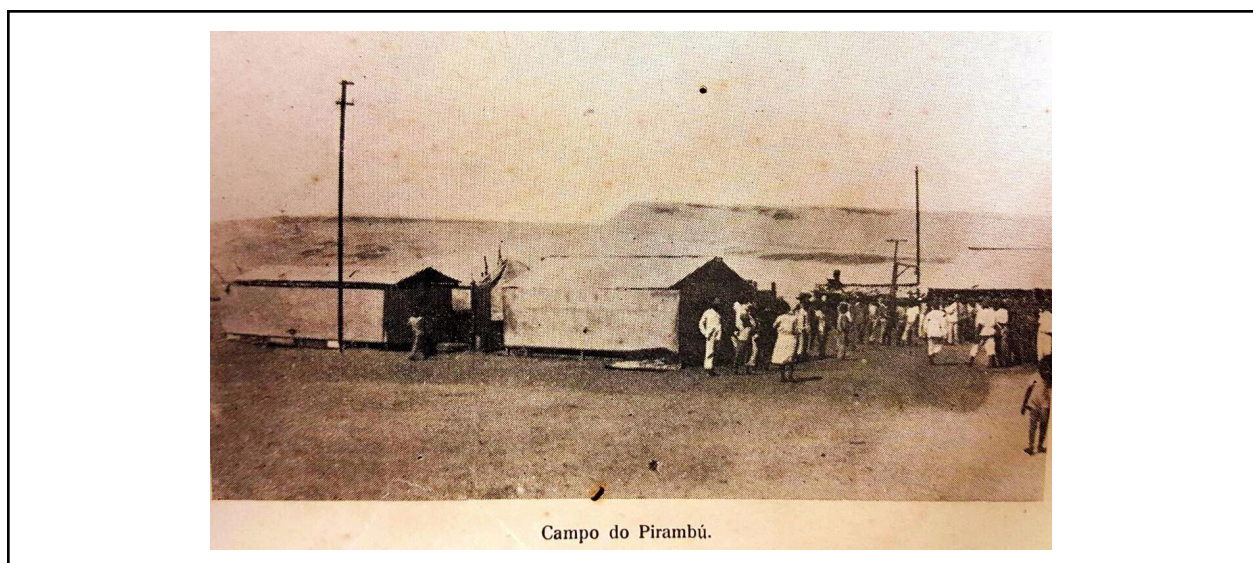


Figure 6.3: Photo of Pirambú concentration camp, 1932.

Source: *Flagelados'* Medical Assistance Report presented by chief commissioner Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa to the General Director of the National Health Department on August 30th, 1933. Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/ Acervo DNOCS, n.p.

While it is a homonym of the neighborhood's name, the history of the concentration camp is little known amongst the current residents of the area¹⁹⁴. **Pirambú (or Urubú) camp** was placed near the train tracks, between the area of the *Pirambú* neighborhood and the port (Neves, 1995:108). "The chosen location [of the camp] by the beach, not so close to the ocean, right by the workshops of R.V.C. (*Rede de Viação Cearense/* Railroad Network), in *Urubú*. The main shack/lodging had its construction initiated last Saturday, considering the proximity of a large pond of potable water, also known as the Honey Pond." ¹⁹⁵ *Pirambú* was originally a region of dunes, and difficult to access. According to a medical report from 1933, "in order to shelter the *flagelados* population in *Pirambú* large sheds were built using leaf or zinc coverings. Hammocks were tight to the wooden frame, and that was where people would sleep and live: promiscuity and no separation between private and public"¹⁹⁶ (Figures 6.2 and 6.3). Despite its location by the ocean, the difficulty of building on such unstable terrain and its windward position were two reasons why growth in Fortaleza was not likely there. Sandra called attention to how the area was neglected as it had been formerly used for different forms of quarantine facilities to isolate and treat people with leprosy since 1856. Beyond that, Fortaleza's entire sewage system had emptied into the ocean in the area since 1927 (Monteiro, 2018: 36). *Pirambú* was also known as the first industrial zone in Fortaleza. Factory activities started in 1930 with the arrival of mechanical facilities for the state's rail company (*Rede de Viação Cearense - RVC*), known as the *Urubú* workshop (Brasil/Cavalcanti, 2015: 7). This was also a major feature that attracted migrants to the area. Aside from those who were placed in the camp, many newcomers would settle nearby, slowly contributing to the urban sprawl of the *Grande Pirambú*¹⁹⁷.

After some time meandering within the sinuous and narrow streets of the *favela*, we reached a large six-lane avenue called *Avenida Presidente Castelo Branco* (also known as Avenue East-West). This road was originally built in the 1970s, connecting the industrial zone of Fortaleza at Avenue *Francisco de Sá* with the nearest port, the *Porto do Mucuripe*. The avenue cuts "Grande Pirambú" into different zones, making it easier to identify different moments of occupation of the territory by observing the difference in the layout of the streets and how consolidated the construction was. As Sandra explained, these various moments of growth and urbanization of the *Pirambú* community were based on the different waves of migration into the neighborhood.

The exact location where the concentration camp was once located still exists, despite how difficult it is to find. Yet, no remnants of the camp's facilities remain. We were at Avenue Presidente Castelo Branco when Sandra pointed out our last stop of the visit,

¹⁹⁴ The name "Pirambú" refers to a local species of fish found in the area. The neighborhood started as an isolated fisherman's villa.

¹⁹⁵ *Jornal "O Povo,"* April 11th, 1932.

¹⁹⁶ *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, p. 134.

¹⁹⁷ Once the camp's facilities were shut down after the drought ended in 1933, many of the *flagelados* also made their living as blue collar laborers in the nearby factories.

and the most important one: The Honey Pond¹⁹⁸. It took me a minute to actually acknowledge the pond, hidden behind a wall, inside of a recycling facility. I climbed a fence to try to get a better view of the space. There was a small pool of water with some grass around it. The space was not very big, and while preserved, there was not much space between the pond and the neighboring houses. Most of the documentation I found described the Honey Pond as the source of potable water for the concentration camp, and the reason for its chosen location¹⁹⁹. There I was, looking at it. Sandra assured me this was the correct location, yet, there was no plaque or official indication of the pond (nor the camp) at the site, nor was there any mention of it on the GPS map (Figures 6.4 and 6.5).

While Pirambú's Honey Pond is hidden behind a recycling facility's wall, other spaces formerly used by the different concentration camps are also apparently "empty"²⁰⁰. This lack of materiality, documentation, and representation configures a state in which the lives and histories of the camps' former inhabitants are lost or simply and strategically forgotten.



Octavio Bonfim: camps and the rail system

This strong connection to the rail line and rail stations is still particularly evident when looking at the former facility of **Octavio Bonfim camp**, one of the camps within the city limits of Fortaleza, where I had a chance to visit in 2018. Octavio Bonfim was placed at the *antiga feira do Matadouro Modelo*, a former plaza and street market in front of the city's main slaughterhouse. The camp made use of some of the remaining installations from the former market, such as one walled area, some roofing made out of tiles, and

¹⁹⁸ Today the Honey Pond is located at Avenue Presidente Castelo Branco, 3830.

¹⁹⁹ *Jornal "O Povo"*, April 11th, 1932.

²⁰⁰ I will come back to the concept of the empty lot later in the dissertation.

access to potable water (Neves, 1995:109). This facility sheltered over two thousand people.

Today this is the area where the Otavio Bonfim Bus Terminal and Plaza are located, in the Farias Brito neighborhood. The area of the train station and the *Matadouro Modelo* gave way to a large avenue, the *Avenida José Jatahi*. It is possible to recognize where the train tracks used to be: now a boulevard and walking path in the middle of the avenue. Right after the intersection between the six-lane Avenue *José Jatahi* and the eight-lane Avenue *Bezerra de Menezes*, there is a graffiti mural painted where the former train station used to be, informally commemorating that space's past. There is an enlargement of the boulevard in that area, with the footprint of the station clearly recognizable (Figures 6.6 and 6.7). Together with the graffiti painting, a written portion of the mural explained the story of the space, but only mentioned the station's and railroad's history, with no recollection of the concentration camp. The station had been taken down just a few years prior, in 2016. After the Baturité Rail Line was deactivated in 2009, the construction became obsolete and left in ruins until it was demolished during an urban redevelopment process involving the enlargement of José Jatahi avenue (Figure 6.8). There was some popular resistance asking for the structure to be landmarked, which helped delay the demolition of the station at the time, as reported by local news outlets.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, there was a larger push for the ruins to be taken down, as most neighbors would claim that since 2009 that spot had become a trash dump as well as a spot for drug users and robbers to hide. The redeveloped area was inaugurated in November 2018, and today the space is officially called "Bosque Ferroviário" (Railroad Forest) by the city hall²⁰².

²⁰¹ "Nova via ligará Bezerra de Menezes à Carapinima" ("New highway will connect Bezerra de Menezes to Carapinima"). *Diário do Nordeste*, June 3, 2016. Available at: <https://diariodonordeste.verdesmares.com.br/metro/nova-via-ligara-bezerra-de-menezes-a-carapinima-1.1560391>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

²⁰² "Prefeitura de Fortaleza Inaugura Novo Espaço de Lazer na Bezerra de Menezes" ("Fortaleza's City Hall Opens New Leisure Space in Bezerra de Menezes"). Portal Prefeitura de Fortaleza, November 9, 2018. Available at: <https://www.fortaleza.ce.gov.br/noticias/prefeitura-de-fortaleza-entrega-novo-espaco-de-lazer-na-bezerra-de-menezes>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.



Figures 6.6 and 6.7: Photos from *Avenida José Jatahi*, where the former train station used to be. Today there is a mural celebrating the space, and a boulevard following the track lines.

Source: Photos by Laura Belik, 2018.



Figure 6.8: Ruins of the Octavio Bonfim train station in 2015, the year it was demolished.

Source: Photo by Moacir Felix, June 2015. Available at: http://www.estacoesferroviarias.com.br/ce_crato/otavio.htm. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

Buriti: hiding its complicated pasts

Once I arrived in Crato (Ceará) to see the former Buriti concentration camp, our first stop was not, however, the camp.

James [my local guide in the Cariri region] drove to the top of the hill, and parked at an enormous parking lot right by a 38-meter-high *Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (Our Lady of Fatima) statue (Figure 6.9). “This is the city’s newest acquisition. It was recently inaugurated in 2018 and it is already very popular,” said James.

“People come to Muriti Neighborhood today because of the statue of Our Lady Fatima, but no one knows about the concentration camp that was once located just a few meters from this new pilgrimage site.” (Notes from fieldwork, Laura Belik, 2019)



Figure 6.9: *Nossa Senhora de Fátima* statue, in Crato (CE).

Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.

Similarly to the Pirambú and Urubú camps within Fortaleza’s metropolitan area, the camps in the countryside within Ceará’s state boundaries are also absent from eyesight. **Buriti camp**, for example, known as “the corral of Buriti,” a space that once assisted *flagelados* from the entire Cariri region, is now completely erased from the landscape (Neves, 1995: 109)²⁰³. Today, Buriti camp’s former neighborhood is called Muriti.

²⁰³ Cariri is known as a very fertile area in the region, attracting many displaced populations during times of drought crisis. When Buriti concentration camp was established by the government in 1932, the chosen location for this particular camp reflected an already-known influx of people in the region. Drought refugees were attracted to the facility in hopes of receiving aid and support. There were, however, alternative refuge spaces for the newcomers who were aware of them, such as the self-governed socio-political-religious community of *Caldeirão de Santa Cruz do Deserto*. Only 30 kilometers (18 miles) from Buriti, Caldeirão was a self-governed socio-political-religious community located on lands donated by Padre Cicero and led by Beato José Lourenço. The community housed over 500 families and doubled in size with newcomers during the 1932 drought. Caldeirão embraced an egalitarian division of labor and distribution of food and assets. Construction of housing and community facilities was a joint effort. The success of this alternative model of agrarian settlement alarmed regional land-owning elites, however.

Originally the area was called Buriti, like the concentration camp, because of the abundance of Buriti palm trees in the region. But precisely because of the former camp and the “need” for the neighborhood to untangle itself from its complicated past, Buriti became “Muriti.” Generally, there is no memory left of what was once a 70,000-person drought refugee center between the years of 1932 and 1933²⁰⁴ (see Figures 6.10 and 6.11 portraying images from the 1933 Buriti camp). Buriti camp’s original site is today cut through a major road called Padre Cicero’s Avenue that connects the city of Crato to the city of Juazeiro do Norte. On one side there is a soccer field where the concentration camp’s mass graves for the dead used to be (Figure 6.12). On the other side of the road only a wasteland is visible (Figure 6.13).

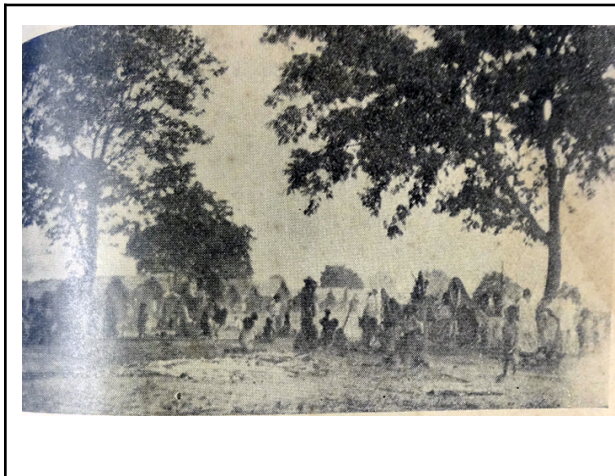




Figure 6.10: Buriti concentration camp, 1932. **Source:** *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/Acervo DNOCS, n.p.



Figure 6.11: Newspaper article from “A Noite” periodical about the concentration camp in Crato. **Source:** “As visitas da seca no campo de concentração do Crato.” In: “A Noite” (RJ), 8 Agosto, 1932. Edition 07436(1). Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00027.0171/Label: 348970_03.

Their efforts to lobby government officials to suppress the upstarts culminated in a 1937 bombing raid that eradicated much of Caldeirão. While largely ignored in national histories, the Caldeirão site and remaining structures received local recognition as a state heritage site in 2005.

²⁰⁴ Based on a site visit and conversation I had with current local residents and with James Brito, a psychopedagogue and advisor to Crato's city councilor, who was designated by Crato's secretariat of culture, Wilton Dedê, as my local guide.

	
<p>Figure 6.12: Soccer field in Muriti neighborhood in June 2019, where Buriti concentration camp supposedly was located in 1932. Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.</p>	<p>Figure 6.13: Empty lot in Muriti neighborhood in June 2019, where Buriti concentration camp supposedly was located in 1932. Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.</p>

Patú: landmarking

The only exception and physical memorialization of the camps' histories lies in the **Patú camp**, in Senador Pompeu, a facility that used previously-existing construction from their given site. Because of these remnants of construction, *Campo do Patú* became a symbol of resistance and remembrance, fighting for recognition of an overlooked version of this local yet also national history. Despite having been previously rejected as a national heritage site by the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage IPHAN in 2014 (a process initiated in 2007)²⁰⁵, Patú was recently landmarked at a municipal level (2019) and state level (2022)²⁰⁶. These processes helped shed light on Patú and also called attention to the broader history of Ceará's concentration camps.

²⁰⁵ Iphan's rejection document can be found at: Informação Técnica nº 0134/14 - DITEC/IPHAN-CE. Iphan's initial process from 2007 can be found at: Informação Técnica nº 019/07/DITEC/4ª SR/IPHAN. The official report from IPHAN from November 5th, 2014, signed by Architect Julia Santos Miyasaki, states that IPHAN was unable to move forward with the landmarking request, considering this was a matter of greater importance at the State level, not national, thus it should have been handled by the Secretariat of Culture of the State in order to move forward with the heritage recognition. During an interview I did with architect Julia Miyasaki in July 2018, Julia stated that budgetary and safety issues were also a concern. Julia described her official field visits and how precarious and dangerous she found that region to be, considering gang violence and a lack of governmental support.

²⁰⁶ During the months of June and July 2019, I worked with the Secretariat of Culture of Ceará (SECULT) to help organize existing documents and write a comprehensive description of Ceará's camp's history as part of the landmarking dossier the Coordenadoria de Patrimônio Cultural e Memória - COPAC (Department of Cultural Heritage and Memory Coordination) under the guidance and mentorship of Francisco Alexandre Veras de Freitas, SECULT'S architect leading the landmarking process.



Figure 6.14: Former “casarão” from Patú concentration camp. Today the ruins are covered in tags and other graffiti and are taken over by plants.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

While municipal and state recognition are important steps toward guaranteeing that remnants of camps will not be destroyed, further land disputes by local gangs and consequential misappropriations of the spaces continue to be a local reality in Patú. I experienced this first-hand during a site visit in June 2018 while accompanied by Sarajane Alves, known as Sara, a local resident from Senador Pompeu.

The multiple hidden layers of complexity of Patú camp are similar to what is left of the constructions on site today. Some buildings were squatted by local families; others, as Sara mentioned, are often used for clandestine parties. Some of the spaces have been taken over by bushes and are harder to access. Most of the buildings are covered in tags and other graffiti (Figure 6.14). But the most impressive part is that all of the buildings are still standing. It is possible to trace how each building operated and imagine how the space was used when over 20,000 refugees and workers shared those facilities. It is also easy to recognize how the remaining buildings mainly supported the refugees, who themselves lived in tents and temporary shacks on the open grounds.



Figures 6.15 and 6.16: Former train station, and one of the *casarões* constructions in ruins, at *Campo do Patú*, July 2018.

Source: Photos by Laura Belik, 2018.

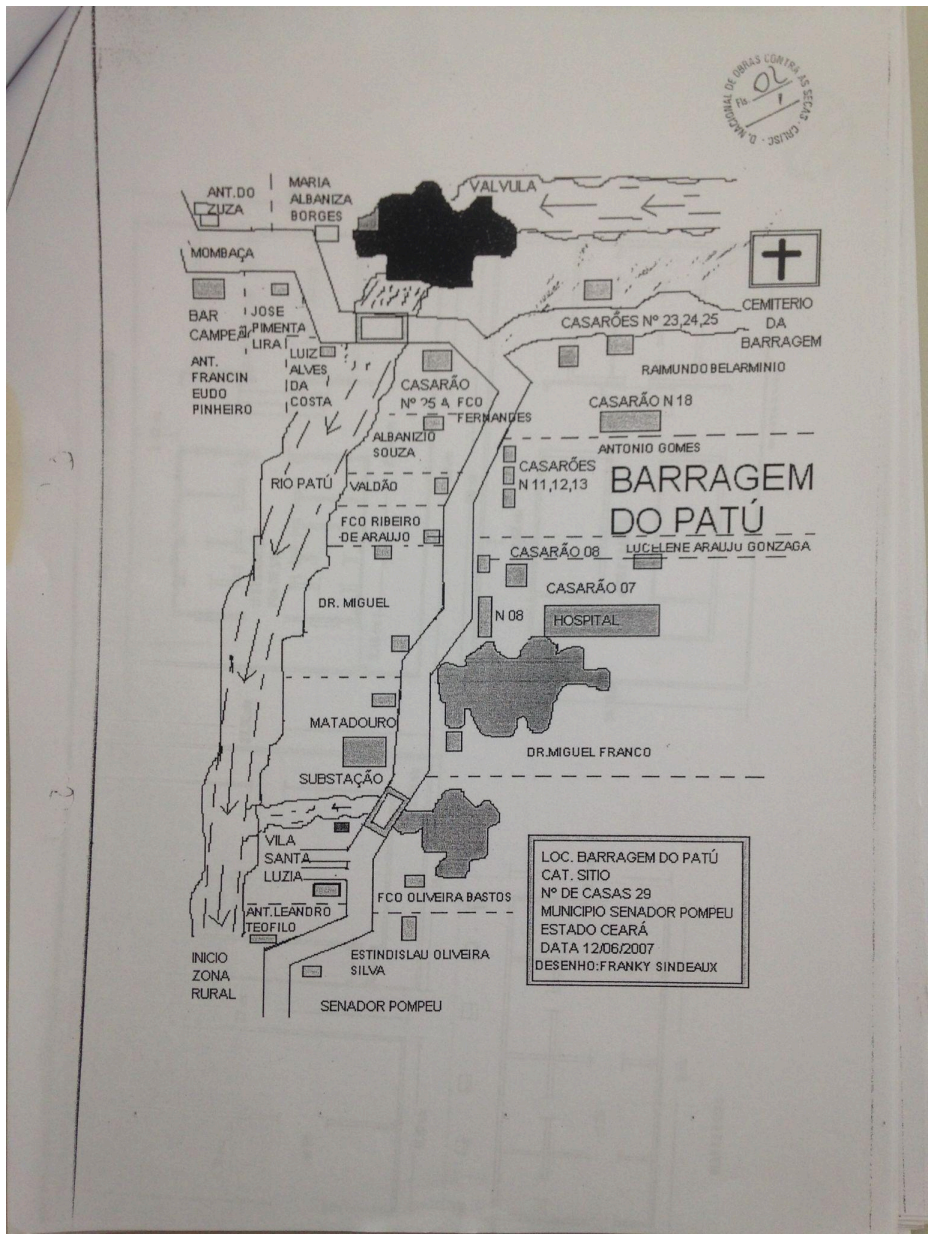


Figure 6.17: Map of Patú’s facilities and buildings, designed in 2007 by Franky Sindeaux.
Source: SECULT’s archives at Coordenadoria de Patrimônio Cultural e Memória - COPAC.

Patú’s facilities are spread across the land, about two kilometers (1.2 miles) away from the city of Senador Pompeu. While Senador Pompeu had an official train station, there was a secondary stop specifically to serve the dam and the camp (Figures 6.15 and 6.16). Several supporting buildings were situated along the road connecting the train stop to the dam (Figure 6.17), such as the *casa de pólvora* (gunpowder house), houses built for the dam’s officials (now occupied by local families), the *casa de máquinas* (engine room/house of machines), the hospital, the power plant locally known as “Gothic Power Plant” because of the arches that compose its façade, and finally the

dam, which was finished in 1987 by the company *EIT - Empresa Industrial e Técnica S.A.*, and is still operating to this day. The main and largest buildings left in Patú are known as *casarões* (big houses). According to IPHAN's documentation on Patú's heritage process, there are only six out of nine of the original British buildings remaining. Three of these are houses for staff members, two are houses for the engineers, and the largest house was used by the chief engineer.²⁰⁷ While these spaces remain mostly standing, they face severe structural damage. Not only that, but today most of the removable construction elements such as wood, copper, and metal are gone, due to numerous thefts throughout the years. There are few to no ornaments left in the constructions as well, with the exception of the house of machines, recognizable by its large insignia on top of the date of the construction ("1922") at the pediment (Figure 6.18).



Figure 6.18: *Casa de máquinas* (house of machines) at *Campo do Patú*. Notice the insignia on top, dating from 1922.

Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

²⁰⁷ Source: National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN- Ceará) Informação Técnica N° 035/14 - DITEC/IPHAN-CE

Memory beyond its physicality: Intangible heritage

Their physical remnants are precisely what pushed Patú camp forward in local and national landmarking discussions. The physical structures also helped bring to light the need for the understanding of heritage beyond its physicality. Patú became a space where there are conflicts and negotiations between sacred and political views (Silva, 2017), and this is particularly evident once a year at the *Caminhada da Seca* (Drought Walk) (Figures 6.19 and 6.20). In 1982, local Priest Albino Donatti started leading an annual pilgrimage gathering over 10,000 participants marching in devotion to the “sacred souls of the dam” (Martins, 2017: 22). People march for about three kilometers (1.8 miles) from the nearby town of Senador Pompeu to the camp’s cemetery, a symbolic space built years after the camp’s deactivation by the time the dam’s construction resumed in the 1980s.

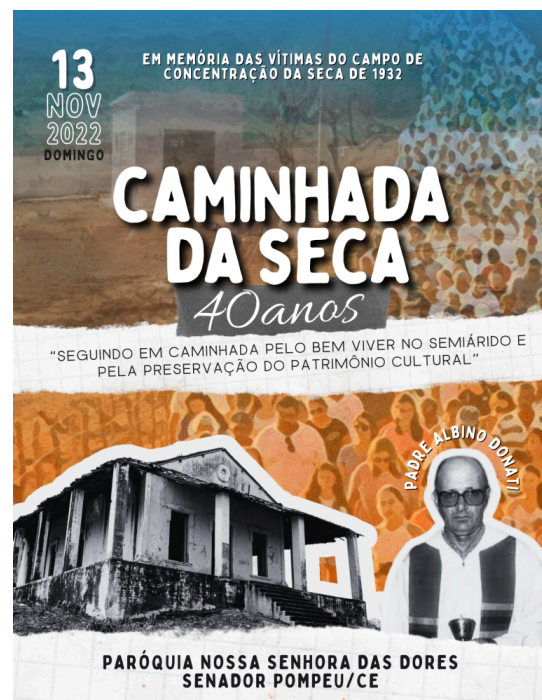


Figure 6.19: Poster for the 40th Drought Walk pilgrimage that took place in Senador Pompeu in November 2022.

Source: Diocese de Iguatú (CE). Available at: <https://www.diocesedeiguatu.org.br/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.



Figure 6.20: The 40th Drought Walk in 2022, in Senador Pompeu.

Source: “40a Caminhada da Seca homenageia retirantes da seca de 1932.” In: *Jornal “O Povo,”* November 14th, 2022. Available at: <https://www.opovo.com.br/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.

The cemetery is not one of the original constructions at the 1932 camp. However, this space became the main celebratory and ritualistic space of the area as it was used as the final stop on the Drought Walk pilgrimage (Figure 6.21). This emblematic site was built where the camp’s mass graves once were. The area consists of a walled space with a single cross in the middle. Upon arrival at the cemetery, people place water bottles and light candles devoted to those who died during the droughts. While the Drought Walk is guided by a local priest, it transcends a purely religious nature by blending political and religious elements. Participants engage in contemplation not only about spiritual matters but also in a wider context, delving into the ongoing struggle for the rights of Patú Dam residents who continue to inhabit and adapt to the challenging semi-arid terrain (Silva, 2017). In 2021 the drought walk in Senador Pompeu became listed as part of Ceará’s tourist, religious, and cultural itinerary, and in 2022 the walk was also landmarked as part of Ceará’s intangible heritage²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁸ “*Em Audiência pública em Senador Pompeu, Secult assina termo de cooperação para o tombamento estadual do Campo de Concentração do Patu e registro da “Caminhada da Seca” como patrimônio imaterial do Ceará*” (“In a public hearing in Senador Pompeu, Secult signs a cooperation agreement for the state listing of the Patu Concentration Camp and registration of the “Drought Walk” as an intangible heritage of Ceará”). Portal Secretaria da Cultura Governo do Estado do Ceará, November 23, 2021. Available at: <https://www.secult.ce.gov.br/2021/11/23/secretario-da-cultura-fabiano-piuba-participa-de-audiencia-publica-sobre-o-tombamento-estadual-do-campo-de-concentracao-do-patu-e-registro-da-caminhada-da-seca-como-patrimonio-imaterial-do-ceara/>. Last accessed March 28th, 2024.



Figure 6.21: The cemetery site at the Patú camp.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2018.

Concentration camps and *flagelados*: infrastructure as legacy

With the exception of the Patú camp, other facilities from 1932 have little to no physical traces left, and little evidence of the past uses of their spaces remains. Yet, I claim that the 1932 camp's legacy is recognized on a much broader and less direct scale through both the prejudiced social construction and memorialization of the *sertanejo nordestino* identity as cheap labor force, as well as via the infrastructure projects that were actually built from the group of the population who were interned. While the camps were originally established as temporary locations of occupancy, the principles of the camps' urbanization were incorporated as planning positions that shook the infrastructural thinking of modern space.

It is important to notice that camps not only shaped modern infrastructural thinking because of their location and internal organization, but also and mainly because their characteristics related to the control and exploitation of bodies. Giorgio Agamben calls this the camp as a biopolitical machine (Agamben, 1998). Camps helped establish rules of belonging and non-belonging as well as population management; at the same time,

they benefited from the control of those in isolation, which also meant using these bodies as a labor force in larger projects of conquest and modernization. This kind of situation is bound to biopolitical values, and was particularly adopted in concentration camps and labor camps, which often also enhanced ideals of sanitation and eugenics to justify segregation. By the mid-twentieth century, building infrastructure became as much a social as a physical construction, functioning as both a project of nation-building as well as an effort to discipline and control certain groups of the population, such as the rural proletariat on the move.

POUSOS TODAY

A portrait of a Rubber Soldier

Terezinha

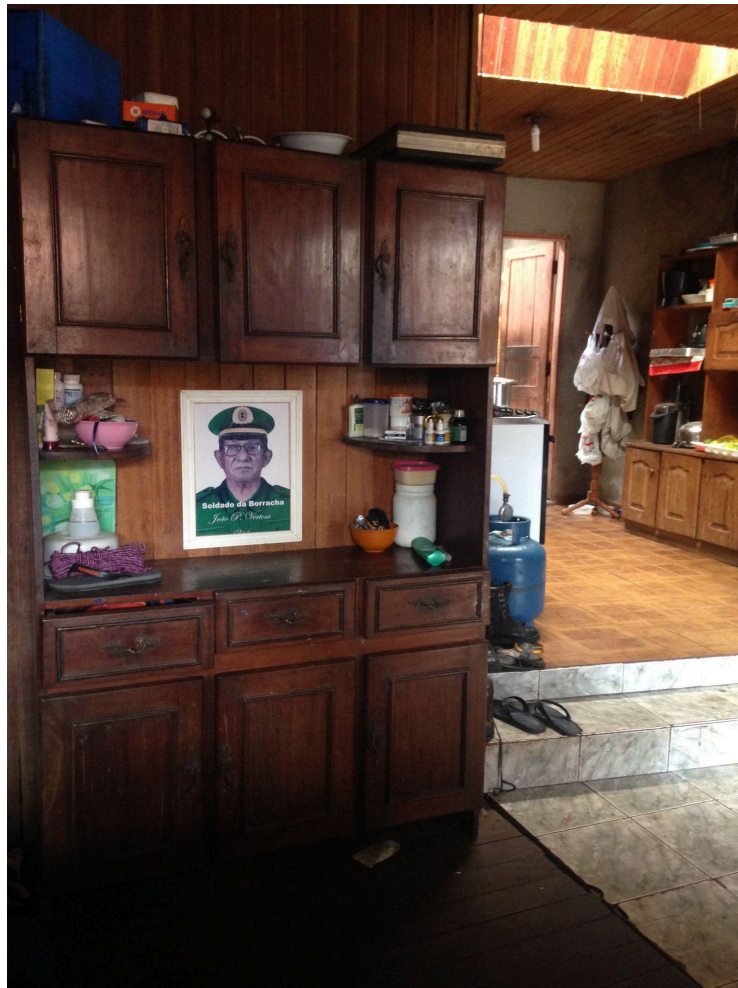


Figure 6.22: João Vertosa's Rubber Soldier portrait on top of the china cabinet in Terezinha de Jesus Bezerra Vertosa's living room in Rio Branco, AC.

Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2020.

The evening was warm and muffled, as they usually are in Rio Branco, Acre's capital city. I was going for a stroll in the neighborhood and spotted the inside of one of the houses that had its doors and windows open for ventilation. I took a glance from outside the gate, and right by the entrance door, hanging on top of a china cabinet in the living room, there it was: a portrait of a Rubber Soldier (Figure 6.22).

Seringueiros working as latex extractors tapping *seringueira* trees in the Brazilian Amazon during the Second World War were popularly known as Rubber Soldiers. By 1942, Brazil became part of the Allies. Through the Washington Agreement the country became the main rubber provider for the U.S. military, as the Asian blockage limited latex imports coming from Malaysia. The increased demand for Amazonian rubber also meant the need for workers in the region, which led to a massive national migratory campaign. By 1943, the government started the Serviço Especial de Mobilização de Trabalhadores para Amazônia, SEMTA (Special Service Mobilizing Workers to the Amazon), recruiting voluntary workers across the territory to “enlist to serve their country”²⁰⁹. This campaign was mostly focused on the Brazilian Northeastern region, which was the poorest area in the country and highly affected by extensive periods of drought. This migratory arrangement of people coming particularly from the Northeast towards the North to work as latex extractors in the Amazon had happened before under different conditions, creating what is known as the First Rubber Boom at the end of the nineteenth century. The First Rubber Boom also led to the colonization of the territory of Acre, the largest latex-producing area in the Amazon²¹⁰. Beyond being *seringueiros*, the latex tappers of the Second Rubber Boom in the 1940s believed themselves to be part of a grander national gesture. Through their portraits, this group of people were eternalizing their roles not as mere workers, but as soldiers contributing to the war efforts.

²⁰⁹ It is important to highlight that SEMTA was the governmental agency responsible for the recruitment and transportation of volunteer workers to the Amazon. Nevertheless, this agency was not responsible for making any further arrangements accommodating workers within the *seringais* once they arrived North. There were different agencies that would make the connections between workers and *seringal* landowners. Volunteer workers that traveled with SEMTA signed a contract that guaranteed their transportation and arrangements throughout their travels, but this did not guarantee them work for when they arrived. Another point to be made is that while SEMTA's contract did not enlist volunteers in the Brazilian Military force, it did, however, exempt them from compulsory enlistment while they were in the Amazon.

²¹⁰ Similarly to the recruitments by SEMTA in the 1940s, in the early 1900s, there were also incentive programs (mainly privately-led) to help transport and attract workers to the North. These were not centralized by the national government. In **Chapter 2**, I mention the government's distribution of tickets for drought refugees to migrate to other states during the drought of 1877. One of the most popular destinations, with tickets financed by both public and private parties, was the Amazon region because of the need for workers in the latex-extraction business.



Figure 6.23: Terezinha de Jesus Bezerra Vertosa proudly shows her father's Rubber Soldier portrait, as well as her own birth certificate, proving that she was born at the Seringal Campos do Gavião.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2020.

I returned to the house where I saw the portrait the next morning, and was greeted by Terezinha de Jesus Bezerra, who invited me into her home to talk. The first thing she did when I arrived was to bring her father's picture for me to have a closer look (Figure 6.23). Terezinha introduced me to her life through the portrait of her father, João Vertosa. According to her, the portrait represented one of the only memories left of her family's past. Terezinha was born at the Seringal Campos do Gavião, where she lived for most of her childhood with her parents and siblings. Similarly to most *seringueiros'* stories in Acre, by the 1970s Terezinha's Seringal's land was sold and transformed into pasture for cattle farms. The *seringal* owner gave smaller parts of the land near the road to the families working them. Together, these families started their own "*colônia*" by the kilometer 78 of the Xapuri road, where they managed small agricultural activities for subsistence. Terezinha's parents stopped being latex extractors to become farmers. They lived in the *colônia* until Terezinha's parents divorced and sold their property. Terezinha and her siblings moved to the capital city, Rio Branco, with their mother, and lost contact with their father. For over fifteen years she actually did not know where her father was, until one day her family decided to look for him to reconnect. After months of searching, a bus driver from a nearby town told them they had seen João, and the family managed to track him down. João was then 81 years old, and right after being reunited with his family, he had a stroke that put him into a coma for a few days. After waking up very much debilitated, Terezinha took him in and served as his primary caregiver for the next six and final years of his life. João Vertosa was already receiving the government's retirement package from being a Rubber Soldier, and Terezinha started to manage her father's finances. "It was hard at first. I came to realize that over the past decade my father had a lot of girlfriends. They were all interested in his retirement money, so he had no savings, and was in debt with the bank."

While she showed signs of tiredness from managing João's complicated final years, Terezinha spoke fondly of her father, sharing sweet and kind memories of their time together. Terezinha was not trying to convince me of her father's deeds as a Rubber Soldier or to legitimize him as such. That had already been done. She received her father's pension while he was alive, and she proudly hung his portrait on the wall. The portrait legitimized Terezinha's family history as part of Acre's (and Brazil's) history to her neighbors and other social circles. But it wasn't really the portrait that legitimized João Vertosa's works as a Rubber Soldier to the government. Despite being a local status symbol, a recognizable and characteristic image of pride, the Rubber Soldier portrait is also an often-misleading piece of documentation. Still, portraits often represent a success story in the long-lasting battle for recognition and indemnity by Rubber Soldiers and their families. One could argue that it was in fact the series of Rubber Soldier portraits that helped legitimize the need for a grander recognition of this group of latex extraction workers as war heroes.



Figure 6.24: Photos of multiple Rubber Soldier portraits, including women's.
Source: Acervo MAUC/UFC.

Looking closer at João Vertosa's portrait (or any of the Rubber Soldiers' portraits), the first thing one notices is that the image is in fact a collage (see Figure 6.24). If this is not obvious from the portrait's aesthetics, there are two main reasons why it is safe to assume that this is a composite image: First, Rubber Soldiers had no military-attire-looking uniforms. SEMTA did provide newcomers with basic clothing, such as a pair of trousers, a jacket, sandals, and some utensils for eating. By the arrival at the *seringal* where the newcomer was going to settle, workers were also provided with a rifle and a shovel by the *seringal's* owner. In either case, by the recruitment or the arrival of these migrant workers, there is no mention and no record of a special "soldier's" attire. Second, we notice that amongst the many portraits collected by the Museu da Borracha (Rubber Museum AC), for example, there is a series of women's portraits as soldiers as well. Yet, SEMTA was only officially recruiting men at first, and their families were left behind in special facilities (the family nucleus) as dependents (Morales, 2002: 192).

I asked Terezinha if she knew where her father had his portrait made. She didn't know, but she said it was very common to find people who would do this kind of work in printing and xerox shops where today one would get their passport pictures taken, for example. Terezinha did not mention anything related to acknowledging the portrait being a collage. After all, for Terezinha, this is a portrait of a Rubber Soldier, collage or not. The sheer fact that there never was a proper uniform for Rubber Soldiers, and that the construction of this image had to be made by the Rubber Soldiers themselves, is in many ways the strongest tool legitimizing people who fit into this category.

I thought I would see portraits of Rubber Soldier all around the city, considering that Acre's growth was based on latex extraction and most of the population is connected to this economic activity's recent past. Yet, to my surprise, it was at Terezinha's house that for the first time I had the chance of seeing one of these portraits firsthand. Later I learned that while having a relative that was a Rubber Soldier was indeed very common in Rio Branco, being able to gather their documentation, let alone their portrait, was a privilege not everyone could benefit from.

Edite

That Friday evening, I went to the Senior's Weekly Forró Dance night at the *Centro Cultural Nenem Sombra* (Cultural Center Nenem Sombra) in the Bairro Quinze, a traditional neighborhood right by the Acre River, and a central location where the city of Rio Branco started receiving newcomers beginning in the early 1900s. It did not surprise me that the majority of the senior attendees at the dance that night were the sons and daughters of migrant workers from Northeast Brazil (*nordestinos*) who came to Acre in the 1940s during the Second Rubber Boom cycle. Unlike Terezinha, today most of the individuals I met at the cultural center are still fighting for the government's recognition and indemnity regarding their parent's and their family's work (and suffering) at the *seringais*. The "Rubber Children," who are now senior citizens themselves, aware that their parents were unable to get indemnity during their lifetime, are now fighting for their

relatives' honor and, at the same time, claiming that reparations should not end at the first generation of Rubber Soldiers.

"I was born at the Seringal de Santa Rosa. My father died in 2015. His name was Juarez Tomé de Oliveira. He was from Ceará, and so was his father. By the Second World War, my father arrived in Acre and met my mother at the Seringal Santa Rosa, where they got married and had eleven children together. At the age of five I started to work. I would start by plucking and scalding chickens, killing armadillos...I would have to help at home somehow. How can I prove my story?"

interview with Edite Oliveira (54) on January 31st, 2020.

Translation by Laura Belik



Figure 6.25: Edite Oliveira (54) interviewed at the Cultural Center Nenem Sombra, in Rio Branco, Acre.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2020.

Edite Oliveira (54) was born in a *seringal* by the border of Brazil and Bolivia, and migrated with her parents and siblings through different latex farms in the state of Acre over the years (Figure 6.25). Edite complained about how hard it was to find her late father's documentation as well as to acquire any of her own paperwork considering her turbulent and transitory childhood. She carried the little documentation she had with her at all times, in case she found the opportunity to present her story to someone who could help. Similar to most of the interviewees I talked to that night at the cultural center, Edite claimed that the Rubber Soldiers' fight for indemnity also needed to include the

Rubber Children as well. “I am illiterate. I moved to Rio Branco [Acre’s capital city] as an adult and today I get by as an informal worker, selling coffee and cake in the streets. My father’s story is my story as well, and what made me who I am today. Getting the recognition and reparations for that is what I want.”

While Edite did not migrate from the Northeast to Acre herself, her testimony questioned the Rubber Soldiers’ limitations of repair by being both insufficient and time-limited, directed at only the patriarch, if any family member. Not everyone has a Rubber Soldier’s portrait hanging in their china cabinet, nor will they ever enjoy any sort of governmental restitution directly or indirectly.

Rubber Soldiers, however, were only officially “soldiers” transitorily. When recruited in Ceará, they left the dry sertão as *flagelados*. Upon their arrival in the Amazon, they soon became workers, extracting latex as *seringueiros*. The construction of these military personas was purely a way to justify their migratory push by the government towards the North. Yet, the Rubber Soldiers’ ephemerality and seasonal work had enduring consequences. And those who lived through the stigma of being a Rubber Soldier or working in such roles and conditions have wounds that are not as temporary. The government might not recognize Rubber Soldiers as such once they become *seringueiros*, but *seringueiros* do see themselves as Rubber Soldiers to this day. How to talk about memory, recognition, and repair of a transitional moment? I claim that this can be achieved through a closer analysis of the role of the built environment in creating these social, political, and economic constructs.

After the war: the battle for recognition

Between 1943 and 1945 there were over 60,000 *seringueiro* latex extractors recruited and sent to the Amazon. Most of these people were coming from the state of Ceará²¹¹. “My mother begged me to choose to go to Amazonia instead of Europe,” recounted one *seringueiro* latex extractor in an audio interview exhibited at the *Museu da Borracha* (Rubber Museum, January 2020), describing the pressures of the government’s recruitment and enlistment processes during the Second World War. Choosing SEMTA’s program to go to the Amazon was quite irresistible at that time, as those persuaded to live in Acre, Pará, and Amazonas, in the Brazilian Northern Region, were told they had better chances of survival, and better yet, becoming rich in comparison to becoming an army soldier in the FEB. Yet, in comparison to the approximately 30,000 rubber soldiers who were deceased or went missing in the Amazon region, of the total of 25,000 Brazilian servicemen in the FEB sent to Europe, only 454 people died on the battlefields. These FEB soldiers were buried in a local cemetery, with their ashes later

²¹¹ Baars, Renata. 2009. “Comparação Entre os Direitos dos Soldados da Borracha e dos Ex-Combatentes da 2ª Guerra Mundial.” Biblioteca Digital da Câmara dos Deputados - Centro de Documentação e Informação Coordenação de Biblioteca. Available at: http://bd.camara.gov.br/bd/bitstream/handle/bdcamara/2501/direitos_soldados_baars.pdf?sequence=3. Last accessed: March 28th, 2024..

collected, brought back to Brazil, and displayed and memorialized at Rio de Janeiro's National Monument to the Dead of World War II.

In addition to the unexpectedly high death toll, which came as a shock to those recruited, the majority of Rubber Soldiers never received the national recognition and honor they had been promised. The initial rationale behind their enlistment was that both those sent to the Amazon and those deployed to Europe would be considered equally as Brazilian soldiers. However, this promise was not upheld once the war concluded. The ongoing struggle for recognition of these soldiers' contributions was consistently highlighted in local newspaper articles and letters from readers in the subsequent years, such as this example from 1946 in the "*Jornal do Brasil*":

"The victorious who were defeated: A painful paradox is taking place regarding the Rubber Soldiers. They were the anonymous but no less heroic and no less indispensable combatants in an astronomical battle won by the United Nations. The moment of victory should be shared by all of those who contributed to it. However, Rubber Soldiers appeared dispersed, defeated and abandoned like a decimated troop [...] What do those responsible for the agony of those victorious soldiers do?"²¹²

In a special feature in the magazine "*O Cruzeiro*" from 1947 (see Figure 6.26) reporters looked back at SEMTA's recruitment campaign from 1943, criticizing the unfulfilled promises made to future *seringueiro* workers. "*O Cruzeiro*"'s headline asked, "Where are the generals from the Rubber Battle?," both (1) exposing a discussion regarding the country's lack of attention and absence of recognition for those who fought the war but hadn't yet received any compensation for their efforts two years after the battles were over; and (2) uncovering the reality of the recruitment centers in 1943 that was not advertised to the public at that time, such as overcrowding and transportation problems, amongst other problems.

²¹² Original Portuguese version: "Os vitoriosos derrotados: Está se dando com os soldados da borracha um doloroso paradoxo. Eles foram os combatentes anônimos mas não menos heróicos e não menos indispensáveis em uma astronômica batalha ganha pelas nações unidas. Entretanto, na hora da vitória, o que deveria ser compartilhado por todos os que a ela contribuíram, os soldados da borracha aparecem dispersos, vencidos e abandonados como uma tropa dizimada [...] Que fazem os responsáveis pelas amarguras desses soldados vencedores[...]?"

Source: "Os vitoriosos derrotados!" In: "*Jornal do Brasil*" (RJ), 25 Agosto, 1946. Edition: 00199. Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB00556.0072/Label: 030015_06.

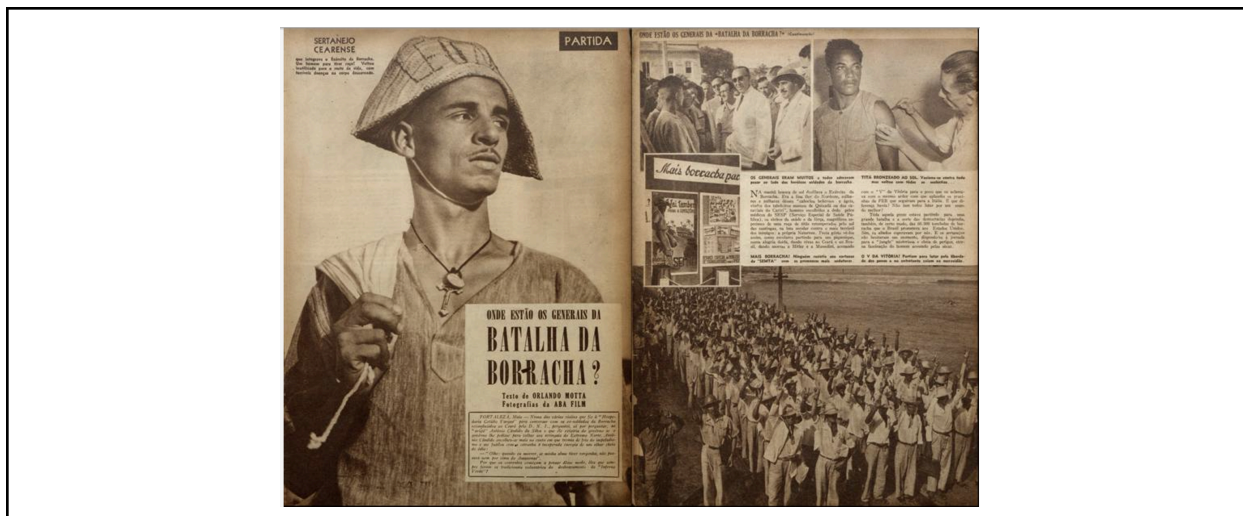


Figure 6.26: “Where are the generals from the Rubber Battle?” magazine article from “O Cruzeiro,” 1947.

Source: “Onde estão os generais da borracha?” In: *O Cruzeiro : Revista (RJ)*, August 9th, 1947. Edition 0042 (4). Biblioteca Nacional Digital. Code: TRB01844.0171/Label: 003581.

The end of the War also meant a decrease in the demand for rubber. Once again there was an abrupt decline in rubber production and internal reallocations. *Seringais* then slowly started being dismantled or repurposed as ranches or farmland. The latter started a new era of familiar agricultural production in Acre and other parts of the Amazon in the 1970s – which later became a new environmental and social battle led by activists such as Chico Mendes and Wilson Pinheiro, fomenting resistance movements in favor of land use rights by former *seringueiros* (Rubber Soldiers or not). It was only by the 1988 Brazilian Constitution (Article 54 of the *Ato das Disposições Constitucionais Transitórias*) that recognition and reparations for Rubber Soldier veterans and their dependents started. Those who successfully proved having been Rubber Soldiers were granted a life pension in the amount of two minimum wages, such as the one Terezinha’s father received²¹³. By 2014 a new amendment was made to this reparation law, adding a one-time payment of twenty-five thousand *reais* on top of the pension to the soldier and their dependents. According to the National Social Security Institute (INSS), in order to prove having been a Rubber Soldier, “the author needs to demonstrate they have worked during the period of 1938 to 1945 as a *seringueiro* latex extraction worker in the Amazonian *seringais*. They need to show not only a judiciary

²¹³ Starting in 1944 (the same year that Brazil sent the first combat troops from the Força Expedicionária Brasileira FEB—the *pracinhas*—overseas to fight the war in Italy), *seringueiros* and their families began to ask for reparations from the government considering their conditions of work and lack of recognition by or support from the State. There was a *Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito* (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry) in 1946 which established a public hearing, gathering a series of depositions regarding the consequential problems related to the latex extraction efforts in the Amazon (part of the Washington Agreements), and highlighting the need for indemnity to rubber soldiers. A decree law DECRETO-LEI Nº 9.882 was proclaimed by the then-President, Eurico Gaspar Dutra (President from 1946-1951), but no compensation was actualized (Lima, 2014: 154).

action itself, but also trace elements and material proofs to favor a reasonable conviction.”²¹⁴ This is not, however, a seamless task, as I learned from Edite’s story.

Most rubber veterans never lived to witness the commemoration or acknowledgment of their efforts. However, some fortunate individuals did receive reparation money in the final years of their lives. Yet, the struggle persists for their family members. As I discovered during the Senior’s Dance Night at the local community center, most of these family members spent a significant portion of their childhood and adolescence in isolation, working in the *seringais* alongside their parents. They endured a heavy workload and a deprived childhood with limited choices. As they were not the ones officially enlisted as Rubber Soldiers, the Rubber Children have no rights to receive restitution for themselves, nor can they claim a share of their deceased parents’ late rewards.

While the legal battle of their parents was often a lengthy and inconclusive process, today, the Rubber Children are fighting for their own continuation and justice. Some have been lucky enough to gather sufficient documentation to support their claims, but the majority of the Rubber Children are struggling to succeed in securing indemnity.

***Pousos* and soldiers: transitory yet enduring**

From the government’s perspective, Rubber Soldiers were officially recognized as such only during their recruitment and transportation to the Amazon. However, from the viewpoint of the Rubber Soldiers themselves, their dedication to nationalism extended over a much longer duration, culminating during their time and placement in the *seringais*, where they engaged in the actual work they were hired to perform once they left their hometowns. It’s worth noting that the *pousos* are rarely recalled by former Rubber Soldiers. Nonetheless, I maintain that these very spaces played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of Rubber Soldiers. I argue that the *pousos* validate SEMTA’s program and legitimize the credentials of the Rubber Soldiers.

The *pouso* was a space of transition and passage, and because of its volatility, it allowed for the development and personification of the transitional character of the Rubber Soldier. The *pouso* was a key agent and instrument in shaping a historical narrative. Similarly to the role of Ceará’s concentration camps in the 1930s, I argue that it is precisely the constant state of transit and impermanence of spaces such as the *pousos* that manages to impose a very permanent state of identity in the ones who experienced them.

At the same time that *pousos* validate the narratives of the Rubber Soldiers, it is the self-fashioned legitimacy of the Rubber Soldiers through their self-portraits, for instance, that provides one of the few available means for remembering and acknowledging this

²¹⁴ Original Portuguese version: “*trabalhou como seringueiro recrutado nos termos do Decreto-Lei nº 5.813, de 14 de setembro de 1943, durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, nos seringais da região amazônica, e foi amparado pelo Decreto-Lei nº 9.882, de 16 de setembro de 1946.*”
Source: Brazilian National Social Security Institute INSS.

much larger national migratory program that once transpired. The photograph collages featuring individuals in soldier attire may not adhere to official accuracy; nevertheless, they authentically represent SEMTA's migratory routes and rest stops, the program's recruitment campaign, and, above all, serve as identity documents that illustrate the experiences of over 60,000 individuals who were compelled to relocate and labor from one end of the country to the other.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Summary

My dissertation adds to the body of knowledge on camps, refugees, climate studies, and spatial memory. Uncovering the histories concealed within Brazilian concentration camps and *pousos* spaces is my modest yet significant contribution to filling some of the gaps in building a more comprehensive narrative of the formation and development of the modern Brazilian state, through a spatial analysis of the social, political, and economic dynamics inherent in the early twentieth-century Northeast region. This historical exploration aids in elucidating contemporary connections between migration, climate, and labor.

My main contributions with this dissertation work are two-fold: (1) bringing to light the 1932 concentration camps and 1943 *pousos* histories as defining, yet mostly unknown, passages in Brazilian labor history, and their connections to the history of the built environment; and (2) discussing the possibilities and difficulties of a physical commemoration and memorialization of spaces and experiences that are no longer present. What illustrates and further justifies my main arguments is precisely my understanding of the “camp” space as a social-spatial typology.

In order to address and uncover the camps and *pousos* histories, I have visited public and private archives in Brazil and the United States, gathering documentation from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries about Northeast Brazil, including medical reports, service diaries, newspaper articles, governmental officials’ files and correspondence, advertisement materials, engineering reports, and financial records, amongst others. I have also conducted site visits in the states of Ceará and Acre, documenting them through photographs, videos, audio recordings, drawings, and informal unstructured interviews.

I have organized and divided this dissertation in seven chapters, starting with a brief theoretical acknowledgement placing my work within the broader theoretical grounds of the growing research field of camp studies. Chapters 2-5 presented the two case studies of the 1930s Brazilian camps and the 1940s *pousos* chronologically, first contextualizing for the reader the conditions that gave way to the construct of each space, followed by a more detailed description of the camp and *pousos* specifically. Chapter 6 was built not from a historical perspective, but based on my fieldwork experience, showing the current status of former camps and *pousos* spaces, and the ongoing efforts toward their acknowledgement and memorialization, leading to the seventh conclusory chapter. By following the early moments of the *flagelados Nordestinos* migratory histories, focusing on the physical spaces and stops within their long-lasting journeys, I claim that it is possible to recognize a cyclical socio-spatial typology (the camp) that illustrates and continually sustains ongoing power structures.

The not-so-empty lot

“As we arrived in the lot where supposedly the Buriti concentration camp was once located, holding over 70,000 *flagelados* by the early 1930s, all I could see was an empty lot (Figure 7.1). I took a photo of the area and was feeling a little ludicrous. A photo of nothing. What am I looking at, really? James, my designated guide in the region, commented: “You are taking a photo of *nothing* where a *crowd of no ones* used to gather.” The space was indeed not so empty anymore.

James confirmed that was the correct location, as he could spot a paper factory nearby. He pointed out the chimney of the factory (Figure 7.2) and said, “This is how you recognize the precise location of the camp. The factory has always been here, and the camp was located exactly in the lots in front of it. You can even recognize this chimney in photographs from the 1930s!” A few days later, I found the photo James was referring to in the archives from IFOCS/DNOCS (Federal Superintendence of Drought Works), in Fortaleza (Figure 7.3). The photo was taken during an official medical expedition to Buriti in 1933. In the photo, the medical team was posing in the front row, wearing white coats or suits. Some of the camp’s residents were standing near them, right in front of the shacks where they took shelter. There was a building in the back and to the left of this construction there was a white mark on the paper. It was hard to say if this was a scratch on the old and worn-down report’s page, or if this blurry form was originally part of the picture. There were no other copies of the report available. I decided to stick with James’ story.” (Laura Belik’s notes from fieldwork, July 2019)



Figure 7.1: Current photo of the former lot where the Buriti concentration camp was located.
Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.



Figure 7.2: Site visit to the former Buriti camp in July, 2019. In the photo James is pointing at the factory's chimney.

Source: Photo by Laura Belik, 2019.

Figure 7.3: The Buriti camp, 1932. This photo was taken during one of the official visits from Ceará's medical team, and it is found in the 1933 Medical Report from the Federal Superintendence of Drought Works IFOCS/DNOCS. In the first layer we can recognize some of the professionals visiting the Buriti Camp; the second layer consists of some of the temporary shacks where refugees lived; and in the back we can see a larger construction: the former sugar factory, with a blurry white tower which can be recognized as the chimney.

Source: *Relatório da Comissão Médica de Assistência e Profilaxia aos Flagelados do Nordeste apresentado ao Sr. Diretor Geral do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública em 30 de Agosto de 1933 pelo Dr. J. Bonifacio P da Costa- Chefe da Comissão.* Rio de Janeiro: Heitor Ribeiro & Cia. 1936/ Acervo DNOCS. n.p.

Part of the work in writing a dissertation about historical spaces that are no longer standing is to reflect on the challenges of historical knowledge and ways of knowing, as well as the idea of validation. What is truth, what is evidence, what is tailored, what is hidden? History is never singular or objective, and is always built of multiple narratives, yet, oftentimes some of these narratives are lost, created, strategically hidden, or simply forgotten. Missing documentation can also be considered as telling of a certain social and political context. Bringing to light the existence of spaces such as the 1930s concentration camps and the 1940s *pousos* is an act of resistance. Camps and *pousos*' memories and memorialization are essential tools helping us understand missing pieces of history, or the stories that did not make it into the official handbooks. More than that, bringing to light the stories of these spaces is to bring forward and legitimize the stories of a great number of the population that is left behind, the "crowds of no ones"²¹⁵. As an architectural historian studying these particular spaces, the lack of a proper physical site to conduct my studies was both the biggest challenge I faced while writing this dissertation, and also one of the greatest satisfactions in rethinking my role as a historian of the built environment. What does it mean to study ephemeral spaces of

²¹⁵ This phrasing used by James was referencing Brazilian researcher Ronald de Figueiredo e Albuquerque Filho, citing the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano's essay "Os Ninguéns" (Galeano, 2002).

exception? The (not so) empty lots opened my eyes to a layered and ongoing history that is often hiding its tiers.

Camps as labor history

The history of the Brazilian camps illustrates the complicated and backward labor relations in the Brazilian Northeast region in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a part and lasting consequence of the *drought industry*. When choosing to look at the cases of concentration camps and *pousos* recruitment centers together, I have built a new perspective and narrative through the lenses and connections between work and the built environment; between power and place. Camps disciplined migrant peasants into becoming capitalist workers. This was accompanied by a sanitary civilizing mission and political tool masked as governmental aid and relief programs, and pushed by local landowning elites. What first started as the segregation, discipline, and control of the poor escalated into transforming this population as subjects to a grander national project, using them as labor power in public and private works. From peasants to *flagelados*, from *flagelados* to Rubber Soldiers, from soldiers to *seringueiros*. The categorization of this particular population into certain social roles helped justify these cyclical, and, as I argue, ongoing, top-down patterns of migration and control of a cheap workforce. Yet, these stories are only truly and fully revealed not by looking at official documentation, but by reading between the lines. Looking for the missing pieces, and acknowledging the untold or unheard stories, the hidden spaces, the bottom-up perspectives.

Camps, in different yet analogous forms and contexts, continue to exist to this day. If I were to follow the *sertanejos nordestinos*' paths further through their long-lasting journey as laborers, it is possible to acknowledge resemblances from the 1930s concentration camps and the 1940s *pousos* in the following decades as well, through the work of the *candangos* building Brasilia in the late 1950s-early 1960s, or the peak of *nordestinos* working as industrial blue collar laborers in the 1950s onwards in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, for instance.

Memory and memorialization as empowerment

By shedding light on the events at camps and *pousos*, I interpret the experiences within these spaces not merely as components of a "minor history" (Stoler, 2013), relegated to the sidelines as secondary incidents in cultural and social development. Instead, I perceive them as a crucial series of events that have contributed significantly to shaping Brazilian modern history. By putting forward the neglected archival material and the challenges arising from a lack of documentation regarding the camps, particularly the absent perspective of those encamped, I am not only questioning an exclusionary social and political structure from over a century ago but also challenging our current constrained approach to remembering and memorializing these spaces and their inhabitants. This perpetuates existing hierarchies of power.

Acknowledging, memorializing, and physically commemorating the human experiences within the cyclical iterations of camps can empower the populations that have been and continue to be impacted by the existence of such spaces. Simultaneously, this process aids in demystifying the prejudices surrounding these specific groups of people, with the hope of halting similar temporary yet very permanent social and physical constructs.

Camps can speak: the camp as a typology

Recognizing the protagonism of the camp helps us reflect on the Brazilian case studies not in isolation, but as part of a larger and global modern history of colonial and imperial powers, where these types of spaces were recurrently and cyclically used as technologies of emergency, relief, discipline, and above all, social control. The Brazilian case studies also help us identify and testify to how comprehensive the growing field of camp studies is, encompassing different models of encampments and how they shift between various nation-states and periods of time.

I started this dissertation by presenting the figure of the *flagelado retirante*, the poor and landless Northeasterner drought refugee that always wanders, but never gets to reach their final destination. In showcasing the two case studies of the concentration camps and the *pousos*, I exposed the reader to two stops on a longer journey this population is still making, and argued that these spaces, as much the people who pass through them, are leading powerful agents in a broader story of displacement.

Portinari's "Os Retirantes" painting and Graciliano Ramos' "Barren Lives" novel portray the *retirantes'* migratory odyssey during the 1877 drought in Northeast Brazil. In these works, the main characters are marching towards an [uncertain] destination, yet, what we learn from these masterpieces is that the destination is precisely their journey. Their transitory condition is what builds their permanent state. Similarly, I argue, we can recognize this impermanent condition when looking at the built environment, since the ephemeral spaces of the camps (in this case, the concentration camps of 1915-1932 and the *pousos* of 1943) are leading and fundamental actors in telling a broader story of modern national and international powers and in shaping people's identities. At the same time, I also see the potential of these spaces' remembrance as key agents in the process of resistance, a tool for building visibility and recognition of the rights of their former temporary residents' permanent stories.

The ephemeral condition of a place such as the camps, similarly to the position of the transient migrant, lies in being provisional and thus suspended from the normal system of legality. Camps represent the status of the exception, and, therefore, reconfiguring social and political rules are justified by camps' position of anomaly. This state also translates to the encamped ones as well.

In this condition of exception, the *retirante flagelado*, differently from a regular migrant, is considered a person with no agency, a person perpetually longing, lacking a clear

permanent destination (Buckley, 2017:21)²¹⁶. Neither camps nor *pousos* were ever designed to be someone's terminal stop. They were always seen as a transitional moment, built by and for those excluded, and at the same time reinforcing and officializing their status of exception.

Despite this symbiotic relationship, the stereotyped figure of a *retirante flagelado* is recognizable in national imagination, yet camp spaces are not. Ceará's camps and *pousos* spaces that this particular group of people was confined to are mostly unknown. Being unrecognized, however, is strategic for controlling certain official narratives as well. Spaces can work as archives helping us reconstruct multiple untold stories of those who once built, lived in, or passed through them. The ephemeral character and the lack of traces of a space is also very telling and powerful.

Ultimately, both the 1930s concentration camps and the 1940s *pousos* were spaces for gathering cheap labor. The spaces, however, were masked in different ways according to the context in which they were inserted as well as the moment the country was going through. The 1930s concentration camps were advertised as spaces of refuge and aid by the government, dealing with an imminent drought crisis. The *pousos* in the 1940s were publicized as transformative spaces promising *sertanejos* to become Rubber Soldiers. Being assisted or becoming a war hero ultimately actually meant gathering manpower for the government. Presenting two case studies related to the *nordestinos retirantes* during Getúlio Vargas' modern dictatorship helps us understand and observe the cyclical patterns of displacement a certain group of the Brazilian population was subjected to. These periodical constructs are supported by a specific type of exclusionary ephemeral spatiality—the camp—that portray enduring social and political conditions of power. To recognize camp spaces as a typology that is cyclically built and used is to also acknowledge the *retirantes'* condition as perpetual. There will always be *retirantes*, and, simultaneously, there will always be camps to withhold them as part of their journey. This condition, of course, goes far beyond the Brazilian case studies presented, but speaks to a broader history of migration, camps, and refugee studies globally.

²¹⁶ The migrants of the 1940s were not necessarily *retirantes*. However, by exaggerating the severity of the 1942 drought, the government aimed to persuade *sertanejos* that their living conditions were far more dire than reality, making migration appear similar to their relatives' experiences as *retirantes*.

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Secretaria de Cultura do Estado do Ceará
 Coordenação Patrimônio Histórico e Cultural (COPAHC)
Acervo Iconográfico Instituto do Ceará

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Fundação Oswaldo Cruz - Casa de Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz - COC)
 Departamento de Arquivo e Documentação (DAD)
 Fundo Fundação Rockefeller
 Fundo Fundação Serviços de Saúde Pública
Arquivo Nacional
 Fundo Paulo de Assis Ribeiro
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Museu da Borracha (Latex Museum)
Museu dos Autonomistas
Museu do Palácio de Rio Branco
Fundação de Cultura Elias Mansour- Governo do Estado do Acre (FEM)
Fundação Municipal de Cultura Garibaldi Brasil (FGB)
Biblioteca Pública Estadual do Acre

Biblioteca da Floresta Marina Silva
Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage/ Acre State (IPHAN/AC)

Belém (PA):

Companhia Docas do Pará (CDP)
Arquivo Público do Estado do Pará

São Luís (MA):

Arquivo Público do Estado do Maranhão

Brasília (DF):

Arquivo Nacional
Itamaraty - Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

São Paulo (SP):

Álvaro Vital Brazil family archives (courtesy of Paulo Brazil Esteves Saint'Anna)
Cinemateca Brasileira
Fundo de Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes
Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros - Universidade de São Paulo (IEB USP)

U.S.A.:

Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Tarrytown, New York
International Health Board/Division records, RG 5
Library of Congress (digital)
Office of War Information
National Archives of the United States(digital)
Records of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation [RFC]
National Library of Medicine - National Institutes of Health (digital)
Collection World War 2
Smithsonian Institution Archives (digital)
Center for Research Libraries Global Resources Network (digital)
Brazilian Government Documents

Interviews and conversations

Professor Kenia de Sousa Rios (Federal University of Ceará)
Professor Frederico de Castro Neves (Federal University of Ceará)
Professor Clovis Ramiro Jucá Neto (Federal University of Ceará)
Raimundo Aterlane Pereira Martins (historian and independent researcher)
Architect Francisco Alexandre Veras de Freitas (COPAC/SECULT Ceará)
Architect Julia Santos Miyasaki (former IPHAN)
Sabina Colares and David Aguiar (Além Mar Filmes)
Sarajane Alves (local resident of Senador Pompeu)
Sandra Paula Evaristo Monteiro (geographer and independent researcher)
Dorinha Nascimento (local resident of Pirambú)

Wilton Dedê (deputy secretary of culture of Crato)
James Brito (local resident of Crato and independent researcher)
Pedro Eymar (former director at MAUC)
Wolney Oliveira (Federal University of Ceará)
Marcos Vinicius Andrade (historian and independent researcher)
Terezinha de Jesus Bezerra Vertosa (local resident of Rio Branco; “rubber children”)
Edite Oliveira (local resident of Rio Branco; “rubber children”)

Film and video

Oliveira, Wolney. 2005. “Borracha! Para Vitória” (Brasil, 54 min)
Oliveira, Wolney. 2019. “Soldados da Borracha” (Brasil, 82 min)
Colares, Sabina and David Aguiar. 2019. “Currais” (Brasil, 90 min)
Samba School Paraíso da Tuiuti. 2019. Carnival Parade theme “O Salvador da Pátria”.
(Rio de Janeiro, 2019). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoQ8JLXT5Lo>.
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