

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

FOR AN AMAZON FROM AMAZONIAN VIEWS: REFLECTIONS AND RESISTANCE

Higor Paiva Nascimento

Graduation student in International
Relations, UFRJ

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: The work seeks to offer a brief historical economic overview of how the Amazon, especially the Brazilian Amazon, was viewed from European colonization to the contemporary era, in order to problematize colonial logics, present in this trajectory. The method used was based on the bibliographic review of articles and documents, which deal with each moment analyzed (Country side drugs, Rubber Cycles and Contemporary Economy) as well as the use of IBGE data. At the end of the work, it is concluded that the predominant vision in relation to the Amazon territory restricted it only to its natural resources, in this sense, the work questions the prerogatives of this perspective and presents the need for another vision that privileges local populations, especially in a context of climate change.

Keywords: Amazon, Colonial Vision, Dehumanization, Local populations, Natural Resources.

INTRODUCTION

As the effects of Climate Change become increasingly concrete, the theme “Amazon” gains more notoriety in the national and international debate. Being the largest tropical forest in the world, possessing the greatest biodiversity and quantity of natural resources, its relevance for climate regulation is of paramount importance. However, when the world looks at the Amazon, do they see the Amazonians? This view is based on what assumptions? Does it exclude or include the local population? Based on these questions, the paper will analyze how the territory has been viewed historically up to the present day, suggesting other ways of interpreting and managing the region. In view of the intensification of global warming, discussing the Amazon based on non-traditional perspectives helps to better understand this immense territory that is vital for the world

and especially for local populations.

Based on bibliographical, documentary and exploratory research, the work has a main objective and a secondary objective. The first stands out for demonstrating the colonial bias and the consequences contained in the representations of the Amazon in locations outside its territory, which created it with the aim of exercising control. This way, building it focusing only on the value of its natural resources, in addition to promoting the dehumanization of its inhabitants, supports external interventions in the region. The second is based on questioning this interpretation and presenting the need for others originating from the territory and above all for its benefit. Dealing specifically with the Brazilian portion of the legal Amazon, the work is divided into two blocks.

Initially, the main moments in Amazonian history are presented, in order to analyze the vision created in each of them. From when Europeans arrived to when it became a Global Ecological Symbol. In the second part, the relevance of Amazonian roles in the construction of a vision of the territory that includes all its cultural, ethnic, linguistic and economic diversity is highlighted. In conclusion, a general overview of what was discussed throughout the writing is made, as well as it is concluded that Amazonian points of view, which can decolonize the traditional idea of the region, are a way to reflect on better management of one of the main global ecosystems.

DRUGS FROM THE COUNTRY SIDE

In her work “The invention of the Amazon” (2007), Professor Gondim uses the first documents written about the territory, to indicate and problematize the perceptions reported arising from the clash between the European and the “discovered” region. From

the descriptions of friar Gaspar de Carvajal and the Jesuits Alonso de Rojas and Cristobal Acuña, one can see the intense relationship between European cultural assumptions and the narrative construction of that “new” territory, since it will be referred to several times as the “El dorado”, “Garden of Eden” or the home of the “amazons”. Such nomenclatures evidently point to the European perspective: the first reveals the greed for gold given the mercantilist context, the second highlights the Christian religious vision related to the desire to find an “Earthly Paradise”, the last demonstrates the use of classical mythology to name the supposed existence of a group of female warriors who inhabited that location, which would soon be called “Amazonia”. As the author corroborates:

The amazement, enthusiasm, ecstasy and novelty witnessed by each of these travelers, recorded in their notes, are linked to the imagination of each of them, without ceasing to have as a framework the dissemination of the cultural tradition representative of their ethnic origin. and/or religious (GONDIM, 1994, p. 29)

However, according to Gondim (1994), while the immense Amazonian biodiversity enchanted travelers, the climate, the density of the forest and the lack of knowledge of local geography promoted unhealthy conditions for the editors to survive. The search for “Earthly Paradise” provided seasons of “Hell”, resulting in the need for communication with the original peoples, in order to try to adapt to the environment they explored. This way, the contact between Europeans and natives establishes a new relationship that will be marked by exploitation, catechization and slavery between the white man and the “Indian”.

Lazy, abusive and promiscuous were one of the characteristics elucidated by the

invaders, when describing the way of life of the people found along the Amazon River and its tributaries. As they witnessed a daily life not linked to productivism, reconciled with the rhythm of nature and free from the moral paradigms of Catholicism, Europeans judged them as barbaric and backward, in order to construct prerogatives that subjugated them to the mercantilist Christian universality of the time. Thus, due to their extensive knowledge of the local environment, the natives were subjected to European demands for natural resources, therefore inaugurating the “first economic cycle” in the Amazon, the so-called extraction of “Country side drugs” (OLIVEIRA, 1988).

Parsley, cocoa, guarana and vanilla were some of the products extracted by Europeans during this economic phase. Taking into consideration, the various specificities of the Amazonian territory, such as the intense density of the forest acting as an obstacle to more predatory attacks, indigenous labor was established as preferable, at least initially¹, due to his knowledge about the location and management of the aforementioned Amazonian spices. The church also played a crucial role in this colonization, by founding Jesuit missions, the clergy separated the indigenous people from their culture and language, with the aim of making them devotees of Catholic dogmas, “saving” them from paganism. However, despite these constant violations, this process was marked by intense rebellions and escapes by natives who resisted these series of impositions (OLIVEIRA, 1988).

Given the information presented, it is clear that the beginnings of the European presence in the region were marked by the construction of an idea that suited external demands, and justified the colonizing actions of the newcomers in that territory. This place was

1. It is worth mentioning that there was not only the enslavement of indigenous labor, although it was preferable in relation to black Africans at least in the initial decades of colonization.

diverse in terms of populations, cultures and customs, however, naming such vastness to just one idea - the Amazon - and summarizing its people to a single identity, based on prejudiced racial criteria - Indians - inaugurated the "inclusion" of the region in the conception modern European state centric. In this sense, the colonial assumption emerges that links the Amazon only to a location abundant in natural resources (to be explored), charged with mysticism and folklorization, populated by barbaric and backward inhabitants. (to be eliminated or enslaved).

RUBBER CYCLES

The second economic phase was consecrated as a watershed in the history of the Amazon, given the importance that this region received for producing an essential product for modern industrial development: rubber. Present from military arsenals to footwear, this product became essential for the economic strategies of power dynamics between the National States of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this sense, the syringe extracted from the Amazonian trees called rubber trees, acquired a key role in sustaining the modern living standards that were being structured, also modifying the political, economic and social relations of the Brazilian Amazonian states.

The demand for rubber triggered a restructuring of Amazonian production chains to include new actors and dynamics, however, the majority role of raw material exporter remained. At that time, the Amazon received thousands of migrants, especially from the northeast, to serve as labor to extract latex from rubber trees, transforming it into balls through smoking, in order to export it to countries that had rubber industries. processing of this product. In short, the rubber period consisted of two cycles, the first occurring during the late 19th and early

20th centuries, and the second at the time of the Second World War. The context for the development of these economic upsurges was based on the growing demand for rubber given the change in global industrial production patterns, available northeastern labor, and the good quality of latex coming from rubber trees in the Amazon.

The initial cycle declined mainly due to biopiracy carried out by the Englishman Henry Wickham, who illegally transported 70,000 rubber tree seedlings to Malaysia, at the time an English colony. As a result, due to better infrastructure compared to the Amazon case, synthetic rubber was produced on a large scale, which resulted in the loss of competitiveness of Amazon latex and a sharp drop in the price of the product, consecrating an intense economic crisis in the Amazon. region. The second cycle was created more briefly than the first because it was linked to the international situation that the Second World War created. As Malaysia was allied with the Axis, the triple alliance turned to Amazonian rubber for fear of losing access to this product so fundamental to the industry, especially the military. However, with the victory of the allies, there was once again the Amazonian economic decline.

It is possible to note that, despite this economic period being inserted in a different temporal context in relation to the era of "Country side drugs", the core of the colonialist structure persists in its social dynamics. The predominant work system, known as "aviation", forced northeastern migrants to operate in a regime similar to slavery, as they worked in unsanitary conditions in the middle of the forest, in addition to not receiving the necessary pay given their intense activities. The export of rubber was carried out without any processing, leaving the extraction of latex as the main source of employment. This way, the rubber tappers began their journey with

debts to the rubber collector, since they needed tools and transport to the rubber plantation. However, they were generally never able to settle these outstanding issues, due to the little financial return that selling the rubber to the rubber collector provided.

The economic gains from rubber were restricted to an elite, located mainly in the cities of Belém and Manaus, responsible for exporting this product after its arrival from the rubber plantation. However, the processing industries located in Europe and the United States were those that benefited most from the economic surplus generated by rubber trees, due to the creation of various uses promoted with the management of this raw material.

According to Loureiro (200), the absence of state incentives and business actions to promote the industrialization of rubber, as well as the lack of organizations to support the demands of rubber tappers and the encouragement of better handling of latex, became decisive for the increase of social inequality in the region and the failure to take advantage of the Brazilian Amazonian economic potential at the time.

In this sense, we can see a certain constancy in the idea of the Amazon in public opinion. This view restricts it to the value of its natural resources, linking it with the dehumanization of its inhabitants, precisely as a means of exploiting these resources themselves. In the rubber economy, smoked latex from the Amazon gained global prominence due to its extreme economic importance, however, for greater use of its riches by a local and international elite, it became necessary to establish a rubber production hierarchy that restricted the majority of the population the intense exploitation of their workforce: the aviation system. The image of the pamphlet below, corresponding to the second cycle, reflects this situation of seeing the region only through the lens of its “abundance”.

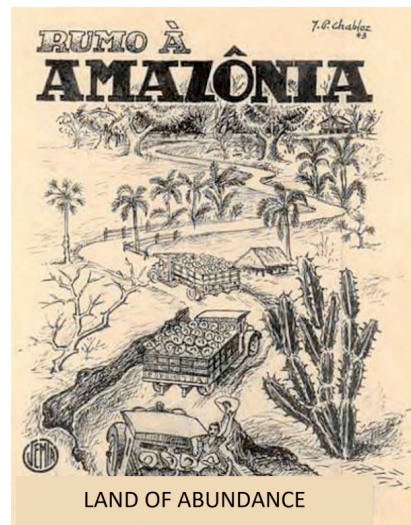


Figure 1: Advertising pamphlet encouraging migration to the Amazon during the second rubber cycle. Source: Created by Swiss painter Jean Pierre Chabloz

It is worth mentioning that indigenous labor was no longer the main one, given the presence of northeastern migrants, however, the view of native peoples as an “obstacle” to progress, as well as barriers on the way to the rubber trees, was reinforced, causing several conflicts between indigenous people and rubber tappers. However, after the decline of the rubber economic phase, many of the workers returned to their places of origin or went to the outskirts of Amazonian cities, but many continued in the forest carrying out other extractive activities, such as fishing or collecting nuts, sometimes even becoming familiar with the indigenous people. In this sense, understanding the relationship of these Amazonian populations with their environment is fundamental to understanding the challenges and issues that the next economic period will bring to the region.

CONTEMPORARY ECONOMY

The construction of the highway known as Belém-Brasília inaugurated a series of projects planned for the Amazon from the 1960s onwards, from the perspective of integration of a region historically isolated from the rest of the country. This objective emerged more strongly during the military governments, which viewed the vast territory as an opportunity to nurture the “Brazil Power” project through the exercise of sovereignty and capital agency. In this sense, a series of mining, hydroelectric and road projects began with the aim of “integrating so as not to deliver”² combined with encouraging the immigration of populations from other Brazilian regions, especially from the Northeast, in order to serve as labor, in addition to occupying the new Brazilian economic frontier before a supposed external threat did so (LOUREIRO, 2005).

To achieve this goal, the military dictatorship was inspired by the colonial idea already present in the social imagination outside the region, in order to justify its actions in the territory. In this sense, reinforcing the conceptual restriction of the Amazon only as a territory with vast natural resources, inhabited by few populations, which would constitute themselves as “backward” due to their “primitive” way of living, produced the notion that the Amazon needed some form of control. And, given the international interest in the territory, the Brazilian State took charge of exercising this control (LOUREIRO, 2005). In addition to state actions themselves, the use of propaganda has become essential for the achievement of military aspirations, as seen in the following image:

This advertisement aimed to attract investors to the road project in the Amazon. From viewing the division of the Brazilian

map into an Amazonian part and a non-Amazonian part, it is possible to perceive the rejection of the more cultural character of the traditional people of the territory, “No more legends”, in contrast with the demonstration of interest in capital value, “Let’s make a profit”, which would be produced according to the development model suggested by the images of the “ox” and the hydroelectric plant, for example, as a form of analogy to agriculture and hydroelectricity. The place in the image where the statement is located and where the economic symbols are present symbolizes where the action is coming from, that is, economic models produced from locations outside the Amazon region apply an exploratory developmental logic to it. The Amazon is a victim of the Brazilian state (LOUREIRO, 2022).

The cost of this integration resulted in intense environmental degradation, agrarian conflicts, land concentration, death and expulsion of several indigenous and traditional peoples to the outskirts of Amazonian urban centers. However, while this project was unfolding, environmental concerns became increasingly relevant on the international agenda, which led to numerous criticisms of Brazilian environmental management, especially with regard to the treatment of the Amazon.

This way, especially from the Stockholm Conference, a new narrative is constructed about the Amazon biome, since its preservation is considered essential for global Environmental Security. However, even though this approach has an agency distinct from predatory exploitation, it is based on the same colonial assumptions that shaped the modern image of the territory (CAMPELLO, 2013).

The relevance of the aforementioned conference stands out for the reason that it

2. Motto used during the military government that symbolized the creation of integrationist plans for the Brazilian Amazon in the face of supposed foreign threats.

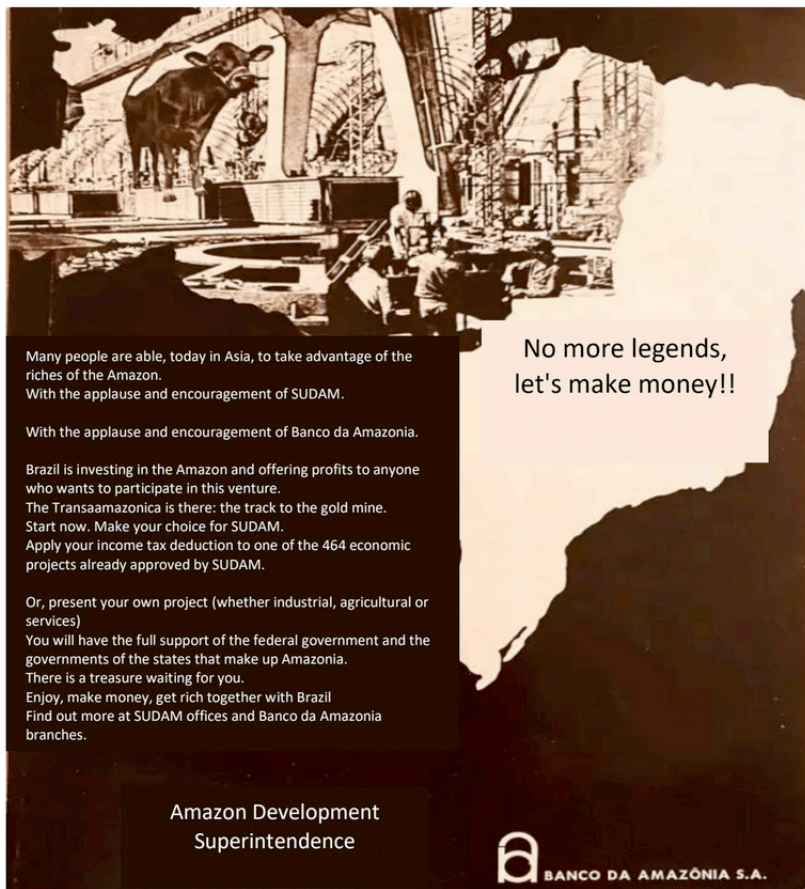


Figure 2: Advertising pamphlet encouraging economic exploration of the Amazon through the construction of BR-230 (Transamazônica). Source: Ministry of the Interior

establishes the first steps in organizing global governance to deal with the environmental challenge, taking into consideration, the institutionality of awareness of the finiteness of essential natural resources and the global climate issue. In this sense, the Amazon, being the largest tropical forest on the planet, holding a fifth of all fresh water on the globe and home to the greatest biodiversity of living beings, the region easily became the target of this new environmentalist debate led mainly by the nations of the North Global. This way, the narrative of the biome as the “Lung of the World” was disseminated in the imagination of society, therefore its preservation would be a priority for the existence of society, leading to the construction of its image as a “global ecological symbol” (CAMPELLO,

2013, p. 139). This prerogative is evident in the statement made by the French President, Emmanuel Macron, on the digital platform: “X”.



Figure 3³ - Source: Twitter (X)

3. (Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rainforest - which is responsible for producing 20% of the planet's oxygen - is

In the statement, the image of the Amazon as vital for the quality of atmospheric air is noticeable, which is undeniable, however, the number presented does not match the reality according to xxx, which states that a large part of the oxygen generated comes from algae marines. Based on this prerogative, the presentation of untrue information by a prominent leader from the Global North is verified. with the aim of linking the Amazon fires to a serious international crisis, which in turn must be debated by the G7, that is, by the Western powers. In this sense, the manipulation of a serious problem in the Amazon region is seen in order to motivate actions by actors outside it, who use “environmental concerns” to reinforce restrictive visions and ensure their international protagonism.

However, especially after the 2000s, this preservationist discourse adheres more clearly to liberal contours, operating in a marketing logic based on a discourse of apparent sustainability (BECKER, 2011). In this sense, programs are created that make these prerogatives compatible, such as the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and the Carbon Credit Market, which, in general, promote a policy of financial compensation for countries that preserve their forests and, in exchange, the financing entities had the right to emit the amount of carbon that would be retained by a certain area of protected forest (CAMPELLO, 2013).

These initiatives, although they advocate the non-destruction of the forest, commodify it, reinforcing global regional asymmetries between the Global North and South, thus contributing to the maintenance of the status quo.⁴ However, in the case of the Amazon

burning. It's an international crisis. Official members of the G7 will discuss this emergency as a priority over the next two days! #AçãopelaAmazônia, our translation)

4. Bertha Becker (1992) states that the ecological issue is also a technological issue, in this sense, it is not interesting for the Global North to include these populations since it would mean democratizing these technologies, which would reduce the exclusive dominance of hegemonic power over this indispensable artifact in hegemonic power dynamics.

5. The Amazon is diverse in its cultures, peoples, histories and geographies.

specifically, these actions are legitimized by the construction of the territory as an essential ecological symbol for climate stability, highlighting its natural elements as a central material in this process. As a result, the demands of urban populations and forest people are neglected precisely because they are seen as separate from the biome, thus not consecrating themselves as relevant subjects in this “Green Neoliberalism”.

The approaches demonstrated in this topic still persist in the reality of the contemporary Amazon and compete for space for greater action. However, despite resulting in different actions with regard to forest management, they share the same vision that restricts the understanding of the territory to its natural resources, which must be either explored for the “development” of the nation or preserved for “save” the planet, thus belittling the views of the population who experience the region on a daily basis. As Professor Porto Gonçalves, concludes.

Studies on the Amazon tend to prevail two central forms of representation. On the one hand, a territory rich in resources to be explored, therefore, a region to be “developed”. On the other hand, the Amazon is essential for the climate balance and life on earth, therefore, as a territory that must be “preserved”. (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2015, p.65).

FROM ANOTHER LOOK

If the colonizing gaze homogenizes the region, it only considers its natural riches and belittles its populations. The way to decolonize this narrative is to talk not about “the”, but about “the” Amazons⁵, in its most diverse social, economic and cosmological facets. It is

essential to “listen to local voices, pay attention to the research carried out by scholars from the region, dialoguing with the great diversity of their perspectives” (NENEVÉ, SAMPAIO, 2015, p. 29).

The Brazilian Amazon, far from the idea of a “demographic void”, has approximately 28 million inhabitants residing in its locations, with a little more than 70% of this population living in urban areas, mainly concentrated in state capitals and hub cities. Such as the city of Manaus, capital of Amazonas, ranking seventh among the largest cities in the country, being the city that grew the most demographically according to the last census with its 2,063,547 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2023). In addition to the urban population, in the rural area and in the forest, there are several traditional communities such as rubber tappers, border producers, açaí producers, quilombolas, among others. Added to this diversity are approximately hundreds of indigenous ethnicities that speak countless different languages (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2017).

Farmers, miners, miners, loggers, multinationals and state-owned companies also make up this range of actors, most of whom interact from the perspective of a dispute for power over territories (CAMPELLO, 2013). Therefore, in the same way that there are agrarian conflicts, deforestation, river contamination, there are also urban problems related to social inequalities, which are mostly interrelated given the history of the formation of Amazonian cities. In this sense, in order to have a decolonization of the idea built on the territory, which Amazonian subjects⁶, among so many, should they be heard?

Bringing the idea of “listening to those who were once silenced” (SILVA, SILVA, SAMPAIO, 2022; p.126) it is concluded that the protagonists in this task of deconstructing colonial narratives must be those who were victims of such instruments. This way,

6. Subjects who have a relationship of belonging to the Amazon territory

indigenous and traditional communities, the so-called “forest people”, deserve a prominent place in this process, but also the populations on the outskirts of Amazonian cities, many of whom were once “from the forest” or migrants in search of a better quality of life.

Conserving the forest is essential to mitigate climate effects, however, in addition, considering the improvement of social indicators in the region is also essential. (CAMPELLO, 2013). Therefore, a decolonized vision of the Amazon is urgent to guarantee a form of development that is built by Amazonian eyes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In view of the above, it is possible to systematize the information from the work, linking the predominant view of the territory to the dealings with its population at each economic historical moment since European colonization.

ECONOMIC PHASE	HEGEMONIC VISION	EFFECTS ON THE POPULATION
Country side Drugs	``El Dorado``, ``Jardim do Eden``, ``Inferno Verde``	Enslavement and colonization of original peoples
Rubber Cycles	Land of abundance, Battle field	“Enslavement” of northeastern migrants (aviation) and conflicts with indigenous people
Contemporary Economy	Economic Frontier, Global Ecological Symbol	Invisibilization, peripheralization and deterritorialization of local people.

Thus, according to the table, it can be seen that there is a conformity between a hegemonic look at the region, which only privileges its natural resources of interest, and the imposition of an economic model that dehumanizes its populations, causing a series of losses social and environmental aspects

to the Amazonian socioeconomic fabric, as already evidenced throughout the writing.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Therefore, based on the content highlighted, we understand a set of some considerations, intertwined and juxtaposed, that built the social imaginary about what is understood when talking about the Amazon.

Firstly, since European colonization, the Amazon has been viewed and managed based on a colonial vision that restricts it to the value of its natural resources. Second, this approach is premised on dehumanizing its populations with the aim of justifying intervention actions in the region, promoting a series of negative

consequences.

Finally, in a context of Climate Change, which already has severe impacts on the region itself, it is necessary to adopt another vision that prioritizes not only environmental but also social causes in the Amazon. It is essential to place Amazonian subjects as protagonists in the debate about their region of residence, in order to achieve economic alternatives that are more democratic and meet the demands of local populations. Deconstructing the traditional vision of the territory while building a new one based on the diversity of Amazonian experiences is a path to better management of the region that is key to the planet's climate balance.

REFERENCES

BECKER, B. K. Geopolítica da Amazônia. **Estudos avançados**. p. 72. 2005.

BECKER, Bertha K. Significância contemporânea da fronteira: uma interpretação geopolítica a partir da Amazônia Brasileira. **Fronteiras**. Brasília: Editora UnB, p. 60-89, 1988.

CAMPELLO, Marcelo de Moura Carneiro. A questão ambiental e a nova geopolítica das nações: impactos e pressões sobre a Amazônia brasileira. **Espaço aberto**, v. 3, n. 2, p. 131-148, 2013.

DA SILVA, Bárbara Maria Santana; DA SILVA, Rozilda Ferreira; SAMPAIO, Sonia Maria Gomes. EM BUSCA DE DESCOLONIZAR: DESCONSTRUINDO A HISTÓRIA INVENTADA DA AMAZÔNIA PARA QUE SE CONTE OUTRA HISTÓRIA. **Revista de Estudos de Literatura, Cultura e Alteridade-Igarapé**, v. 14, n. 4, p. 114-128, 2021.

GONÇALVES, Carlos Walter Porto. **A globalização da natureza e a natureza da globalização**. Editora Record, 2006.

GONÇALVES, Carlos Walter Porto. **Amazônia, amazônias**. Editora Contexto, 2005.

IBGE – INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA . **Censo Brasileiro de 2022**. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2023.

LOUREIRO, Violeta Refkalefsky. **Amazônia colônia do Brasil**. Editora Valer, 2022.

LOUREIRO, Violeta Refkalefsky. Amazônia: uma história de perdas e danos, um futuro a (re) construir. **Estudos avançados**, v. 16, p. 107-121, 2002.

NENEVÉ, Miguel. SAMPAIO, Sonia Maria Gomes. Reimaginar a Amazônia, descolonizar a escrita sobre a região. In: ALBUQUERQUE, Gerson Rodrigues et al(Orgs). **Literaturas e Amazônias: colonização e descolonização**. Rio Branco: Nepan, 2015

OLIVEIRA, Adélia Engrácia de. **Amazônia: modificações sociais e culturais decorrentes do processo de ocupação humana (séc. XVII ao XX)**. In: Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Série Antropologia 4(1), 1988, pp. 65-115.