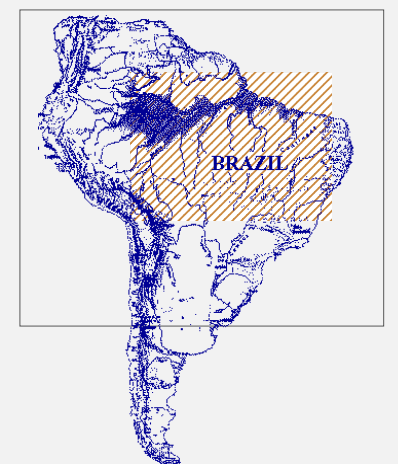

VIOLENCE, RAGE & DEATH

***T**he Amazon is full of violence and rage.
Even the forest rages when it burns. This
place is hard to look at. Everything around me
reminds me of my own rage, and I can't stand it.*

— Colonist from Rondonia



She sat the man down on a chair with the boy on his lap. The boy had curly brown hair. He looked about five or six years old, and was crying softly. The man was gaunt. He looked like he had malaria a few times. His beard was several days old. He was nervous and wouldn't look at the doctor. She pulled her stethoscope up on her ears and began listening all over the boy's body.

When she was done, she gave the man two bottles of medicine. One for the boy's cough, the other for his chest.

"He has a fever," she told him. "Give him this and take him home. He'll be fine in a few days."

The man looked relieved and gathered the boy into his arms and went out.

"He'll be dead before morning," she said without remorse. It was a prognosis, nothing more.

"Why didn't you tell him that?" I asked.

"Why should I? It will only make him more unhappy. He didn't bring him to me ten days ago when the boy first got sick. I could have helped him then. But it's too late now. No one can help the boy. Not here, not in the middle of nowhere."

"Why didn't he bring him here when he first got sick?" I asked.

"Because he lives upriver. Two days by boat, but he didn't have a boat. So he finally had to walk. He carried the boy, carried him four days through the jungle, but it was too much for the child. He killed his son. He killed him because he waited. That's why," she said.

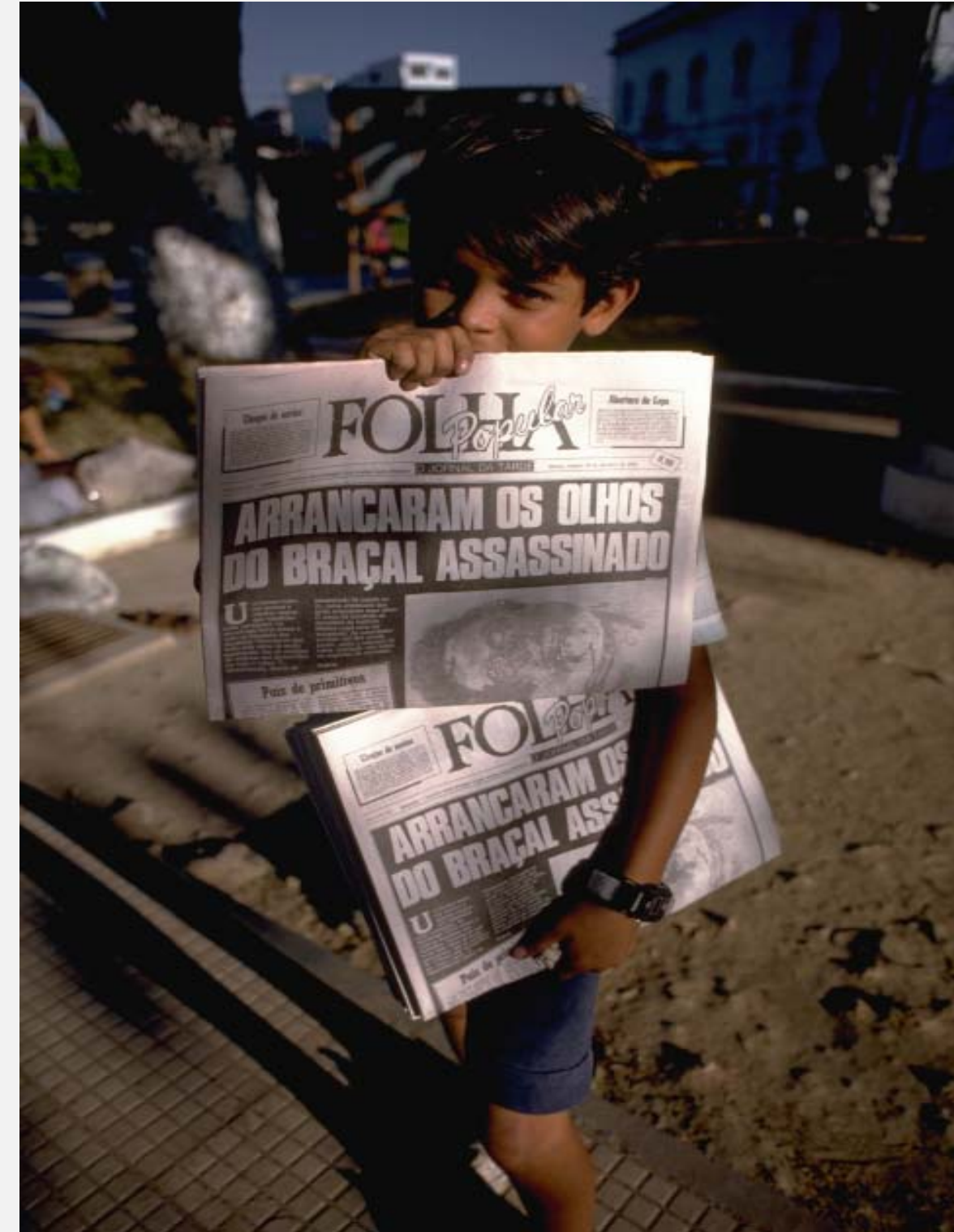
— Conversation with Dra. Elizabeta Lisboa dos Santos, Pediatrician, in a makeshift hospital on the Araraquarina River, between Altamira and Iaituba, 1972.





The world is mad at us. They say we're destroying the forest, the lungs of the world. That we're polluting the sacred forest and the skies with fire and smoke. And the world is preoccupied, occupied with trying to save the forest, a forest which doesn't exist the way they believe it does.

— Elton Rohnelt, Owner of
Goldmazon Mining Company



*“Eyes of laborer ripped out before being shot.”
(Newspaper Headline, Folha Popular, September 6, 1989)*

Manaus has more than forty murders a month. There's an economy at work here. A murder a day, a photograph a day. For the front page. One a day, everyday, forever.

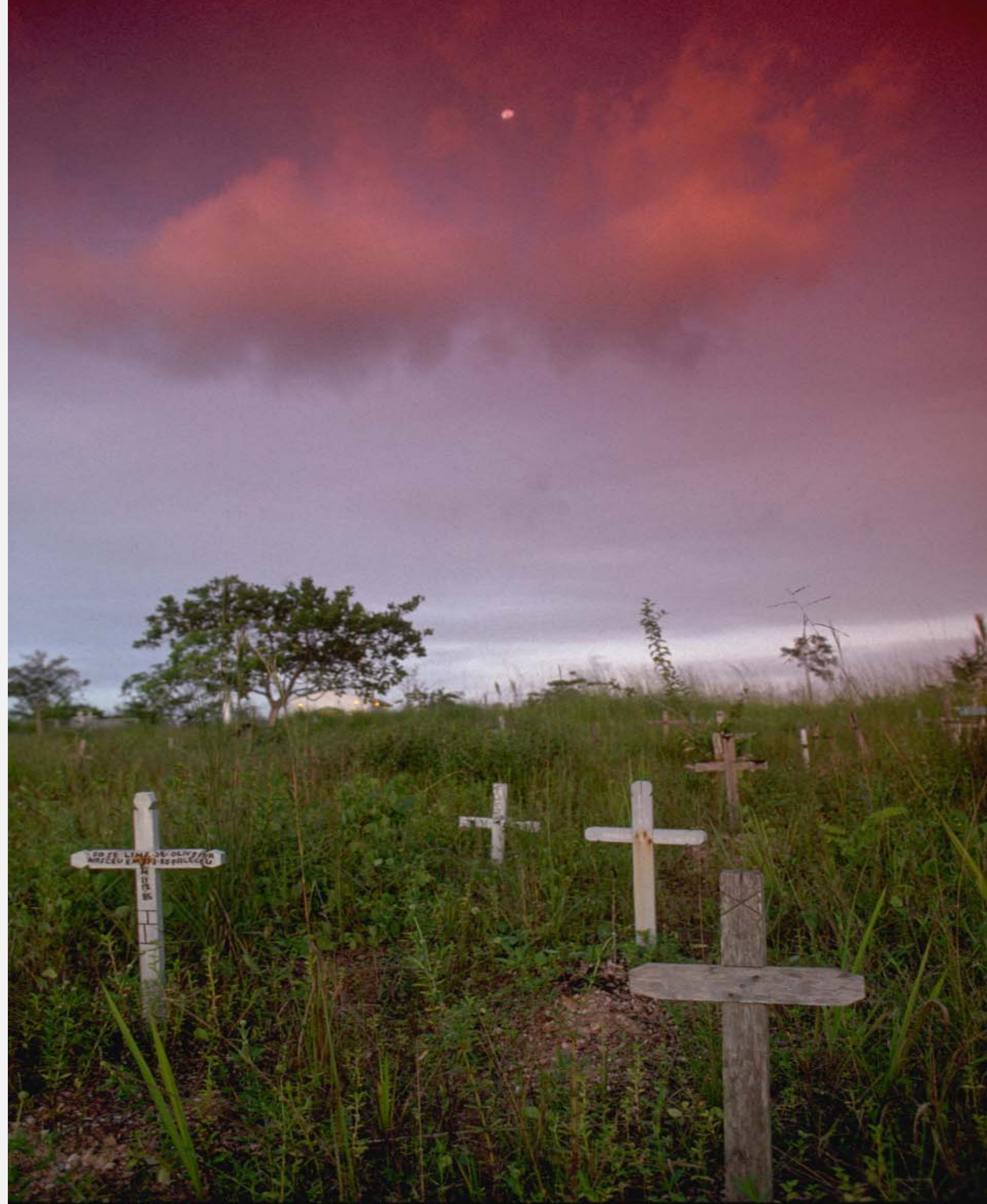
— Padre Jacy Cogo,
Salesian Missionary, Manaus



Alta Floresta was built by a man from the south. A Gaucho named Ariosto da Riva. He came to the Amazon in 1975 and planned the whole thing out. I know because I've been driving a truck down there delivering fish for years. But when the gold miners started coming and they found gold, the so-called Mafia took over and things got out of hand. That's when Ariosto hired a pistoleiro, a hit-man, called Ditao who in turn hired twenty more guns. They killed over eight hundred people in four months. Not just men, either, but women, children and young boys, too. They cleaned up that town. Anyone who didn't look like a Gaucho, someone from the South, was shot on site. Executed. I know, because there were many times that whole families would beg me to take them out of the city at night. I'd hide them in my cargo. If you had a face like a Paranaense or Maranaense, you were dead. They wanted only Gauchos left alive.

— "Liberal" Edvaldo Campos, a store owner in Itaituba

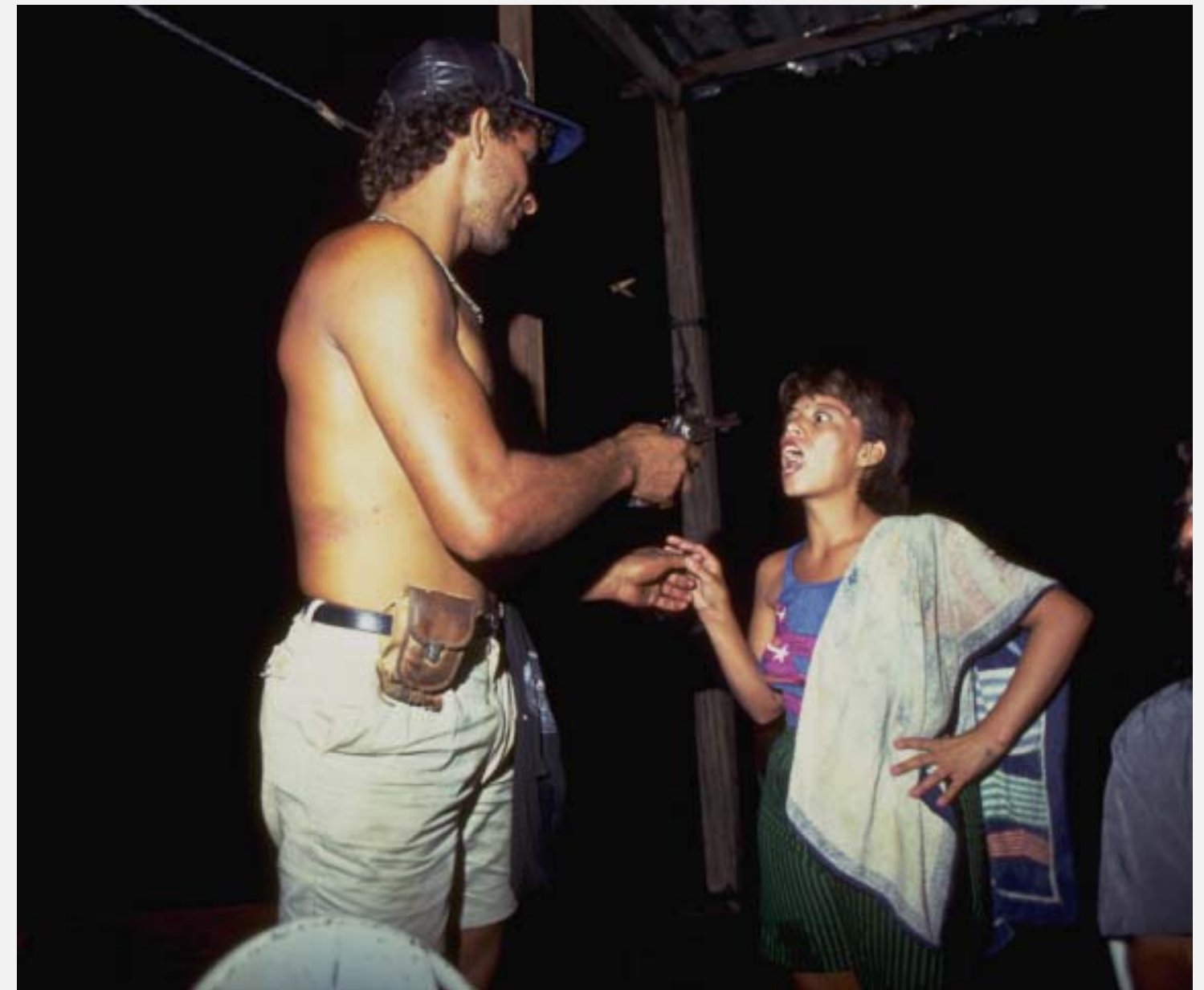
A dead man is only a dead man.
— Anonymous gold miner, while
burying his murdered brother, Altamira





*T*oday there are over forty murders a month here. Five years ago there were over 7,000 gold dredges on the Tapajos River. Today, there are fewer dredges. Less gold, but more murder.

— Mayor of Itaituba, Para'



*T*here's a place in Mato Grosso called Mata-Mata. That means Kill-Kill. That tells you everything about the place.

— Padre Mario Zingarini,
Missionary in Manicore'



“I want to eat”

The government has a new study with Surucucu’ snakes. They outfit them with radio monitors and track their movements from space. Can you believe it? They’re more interested in tracking a snake in the jungle than feeding their own people.

— Anonymous colonist in a bar, Humaita’

I hitched a ride with a Bishop in the middle of the night. The road was full of pot holes and it was raining. We passed a dead boy in the middle of the road. He was hit by a pickup truck trying to avoid a pot hole. A woman was holding the boy’s head in her lap. His face dripped with rain and blood. As we passed by, the woman looked up crying, reached out with one hand toward us and called out. The Bishop didn’t stop. He didn’t even slow down. “He’s probably already dead,” he said, and we continued down the road in silence.

— Diary entry, the author, on the way to Ji-Parana, Rondonia Ji-Parana’, Rondonia



It's easy to wage a war. It's hard to put out the fires of the multinational corporations."

— Gold miner's art, Creporzinho gold mine, on the Crepori River



*On the wall: "Take your hands off the Amazon. Get out imperialists!"
On the tree protector: "Grow Sibipiruna. The people are waiting for you."*



Where there's a road, there's a fire.
— A rancher from Rondonia



Gold is responsible for the end of the family. The miners, they leave a wife and who knows how many kids behind. Those are the ones I minister to. The ones without fathers or husbands. The women call it whoring after gold. That's what they call it.

— Padre Adolfo Rohl, known as Padre Moses, Abuna, Rondonia



“Disarm yourselves. No more violence. Black and White, we are all brothers, we all have the blood of one nation. What does violence bring! but unemployment, ignorance, poverty, hunger.”

— Slogan on placard carried in parade during Carnival

The hospitals in Manaus are shit, pure shit. They operated once but it didn't help. He went to Brazilia to a better hospital. My mother's there with him now. I want to cry when I talk about it. It's not right to say so, but if I knew who did this to my brother, I wouldn't kill him, I'd put him in a wheelchair, paralyzed like my poor brother, and he'd know what suffering my brother is going through. He's a beautiful person, full of life and vitality, a beautiful person and his life is ruined because of that shit who shot him.

— Washington Luiz A. Alcantara, 18, on his older brother who is paralyzed from the neck down from a drive-by shooting.





*O*ther countries sacrificed
their ecological and natural
resources to grow and prosper.
Why shouldn't Brazil?

— Rene', owner of five houses
of prostitution, Porto Velho, Rondonia





***T**hey fined me 11 million cruzados for a fire which burned only twenty-two hectares. But I already paid the damn tax, and I had permission to burn. I just didn't have the papers on hand when the government agency people showed up. They didn't care. They just gave me the fine and told me to pay it or I'd go to jail. Now I've got to get the order rescinded before it goes through. I've lost two days of work because of this and my ranch is fifty kilometers away.*

—A rancher waiting in the office of Dr. Paulo Benecia, Director of IBAMA, Acre State



My father was a Nordestino, but he worked as a rubber tapper, a *seringueiro*. By the time I was nine, I knew how to tap the rubber trees and gather latex. I was going to be a *seringueiro* like my father. We lived in the rubber tapper region near the Bolivian border. I don't remember how I discovered that we lived near a political exile from the Communist Conspiracy Movement. He was an army official who joined the Prestes insurgents. He was a great kid, only twenty years old or so. When the Prestes insurgents were destroyed, he was arrested and jailed, but he escaped and took off for Bolivia where he joined the Communist movement there. But they wouldn't leave him alone and hunted him down until he finally went into hiding in the jungle on the frontier. Eventually, he made friends with some of the *seringueiros* who taught him how to tap the trees and make rubber.

One day he passed by our house. I don't know how it was he got his hands on month-old newspapers, but he did. And during a conversation with my father, who hated the plantation bosses because they exploited us, he convinced him to let me spend the weekend at his house. Well, for the next three years, I spent every weekend with that guy. I had to walk three hours each way through the jungle to do it, too.

During those days, he taught me how to read. I studied every Saturday and Sunday, until sunrise, then I had to high-tail it back home to work on the plantation. I read those newspapers he got from God knows where. He explained everything to me and I became interested in the plight of the rubber tapper. He lent me a transistor radio, and I started listening to the international news from Moscow, the BBC in London and Voice of America. This was the beginning of my anger, my rage. It was the beginning of my fight for the rights of my people, the *seringueiros*, the rubber tapper, and those of us who were oppressed by powerful people.

One day, he said to me, 'Today the workers are being beaten down, but no matter how great the massacre, there will always be a seed which will remain and grow. One day, you will have to stand with them, even if it's eight or ten years from now.'



Chico Mendes, rubber tapper, founder of the Rural Worker's Syndicate of Xapuri' Acre State. Murdered on his doorstep the evening of December 22, 1988.

His name was Euclides Fernando Tavora. He got sick and decided to risk going into the city to find a doctor. He didn't think that they were still hunting him. He went but didn't come back. I never saw him again, so he must've died.

After that, I felt lost. But I began to articulate my ideas with my fellow workers, and because I knew how to read, I began to discover how much we were all being robbed by the rubber barons. That's when the seed Euclides talked about came to life in me. It was then that I began secretly working for the freedom and rights of the *seringueiro*."

— Interview with Chico Mendes, Secretary General of the Worker's Syndicate, Xapuri', Acre State, 1988



"They murdered Chico Mendes - Syndicate leader and defender of life -- Xapuri , 12/22/88"

The president of the Rural Workers' Syndicate of Pedro Canario (Esperito Santos), Valdicio Barbosa dos Santos, killed last Tuesday, September 12th, is the 42nd person murdered in 1989 due to conflicts related to land reform.

Included in these 42 deaths computed by the Movement of The Landless are the two Yanomani Indians murdered on the 11th of August in the Serra dos Surucucu, in Roraima.

The MTL has indicated that there is a proliferation of paramilitary groups who are acting in favor of the farmers and landowners. It was cited that there is an encampment of 300 hired gunmen in the Nova Cantu municipal area in the State of Para' and another group that acts in Esperito Santos."

— Newspaper article, The Sao Paulo, September 28, 1989, page 7

If an angel came down from heaven, and promised me that my death would strengthen our fight, it would be worth dying. But experience teaches us very differently. I want to live. Public demonstrations and burials won't save the Amazon.

— Chico Mendes, shortly before he was murdered. His work goes on.

*When the last chiefs die the sky
will fall upon the earth. And the
stars will fall and everything will be dark forever.
— Yanomami Indian Legend*

