

The Meaning of Colonization¹

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All peoples have a certain “meaning” in their evolution, when seen from a distance. One perceives it not in the details of its history, but rather in the whole of the essential facts and events that constitute it over a long period. Whoever observes this whole, and removes it from the mass of secondary incidents that always accompany it and often render it confused and incomprehensible, will not fail to perceive that it is formed from a masterly and uninterrupted line of events succeeding each other in strict order, always directed towards a determined direction. This must be sought first when approaching the analysis of the history of a people, whichever moment or aspect of it is of interest, for all moments and aspects are but parts, incomplete in themselves, of a whole which must always be the ultimate aim of the historian, however particularistic he may be. Such an investigation is all the more important and essential because it is by it that the individuality of that portion of humanity which interests the researcher is defined, both in time and space: people, country, nation, society, or any other appropriate designation. It is only there that he will find that unity which allows him to single out such a human parcel to study it separately.

The direction of a people's evolution may vary; extraneous events, profound internal transformations in its equilibrium or structure, or even both circumstances together, may intervene, diverting it to other hitherto unknown paths. Portugal provides a striking example almost domestic to us. Until the end of the 14th century, and since the establishment of the monarchy, Portuguese history is characterized by the formation of a new European nation and is articulated in the general evolution of the civilization of the West, to which it belongs, as part of the struggle it had to sustain, in order to establish itself, against the Arab invasion that

threatened, at a certain moment, the whole continent and its civilization. At the dawn of the 15th century, Portuguese history changed course. Having settled within the natural geographical borders which would definitively be its own, and having territorially constituted the Kingdom, Portugal was to become a maritime country; it detached itself, so to speak, from the continent and turned towards the Ocean which was then opening up to the other side; it would not be long before, with its overseas ventures and conquests, it became a great colonial power.

Seen from this more general and wider angle, the evolution of a people becomes explainable. The more or less complex details and incidents that make up the fabric of its history, and which sometimes threaten to cloud what truly forms the master line that defines it, pass into the background; and only then is it given to us to reach the meaning of that evolution, to understand and explain it. We must begin to do this regarding Brazil. We are not interested here, it is true, in all of Brazilian history, since we are starting from a precise moment—already very advanced in its development—which is the end of the colonial period. But this moment, though we may be able to circumscribe it with relative precision, is but a link in the same chain which takes us back to our most remote past. We have suffered no discontinuity throughout the history of the colony. And if I have chosen a moment in it, only its last page, it is only because, as I explained in the Introduction, that moment presents itself as a final term and the result of all our previous evolution. It is its synthesis. Therefore, if we entirely disregard that evolution, we cannot understand what was fundamental and permanent in it. That is, in a word, its meaning.

Sadly, this leads us to a relatively distant past of no direct interest to our subject. We cannot, however, dismiss it, and we must reconstruct the

whole of our formation by placing it in the broader framework, together with its antecedents, of these three centuries of colonizing activity which characterized the history of the European countries from the 15th century onwards; an activity that integrated a new continent into its orbit; parallel, moreover, to what was taking place, although in different moulds, in other continents: Africa and Asia. A process that would eventually integrate the entire universe into a new order, that of the modern world, whereby Europe, or rather its civilization, would extend dominantly everywhere. All these events are correlated, and the occupation and settlement of the territory that would constitute Brazil is but an episode, a small detail of an enormous picture.

Thus, the Portuguese colonization of America is not an isolated fact, the unprecedented and unfollowed adventure of a certain enterprising nation; or even an order of events, concurrent to other similar ones, but independent of them. It is only part of a whole, incomplete without the vision of this whole. Incompleteness that is often disguised under notions that we take for granted and that require no explanation; although indeed, they are only the result of vitiated thought habits. We have become so accustomed to occupying ourselves with the event of Brazilian colonization, that its initiative, its motives which inspired and determined it, and the course it took by virtue of those initial impulses, have been lost from our sight. It appears as a fatal and necessary event, derived naturally and spontaneously from the mere fact of discovery. And the directions it took also appear as an exclusive consequence thereof. Here we forget the antecedents that accumulate behind such occurrences, and the great number of particular circumstances which dictated the rules to be followed. The consideration of all these things is all the more necessary in the

present case, for the effects of all those early and remote circumstances, and the character which the Portuguese, impelled by them, will give to their colonizing efforts, will be deeply and indelibly engraved in the formation and evolution of the country.

Since the 15th century, European maritime expansion, of which the discovery and colonization of America constitutes the one of our particular interest here, has its origin in simple commercial enterprises carried on by the navigators of those countries. It derives from the development of continental European commerce, which until the fourteenth century was almost exclusively overland, and limited by sea to a meagre coastal navigation and cabotage. As we know, the great trade route of the European world which emerged from the crumbling of the Western Empire is the one which links the Mediterranean to the North Sea by land, from the Italian republics, through the Alps, the Swiss cantons, the great Rhine emporia, to the river estuary where the Flemish cities are located. During the 14th century, thanks to a real revolution in the art of sailing and the means of seafaring, another route would link these two hubs of European trade: the maritime route which bypassed the continent via the Strait of Gibraltar. This route, subsidiary at first, will ultimately replace the original one in the great place it occupied. The first reflex of this transformation, initially imperceptible, but which will prove to be profound and transform the whole European equilibrium, was to displace the commercial primacy of the central territories of the continent, through which the old routes passed, to those which form its oceanic façade: Holland, England, Normandy, Brittany and the Iberian Peninsula.

This new equilibrium was established from the beginning of the 15th century. Not only would it give rise to a whole new system of relations

within the continent, but also, as its farthest consequences, to European overseas expansion. The first step had been taken and Europe would no longer live inwardly facing the ocean. The role of pioneer in this new phase would fall to the Portuguese, geographically the best situated at the far end of this peninsula advancing towards the sea. While the Dutch, English, Normans and Bretons were busy on the recently opened trade routes, which bordered and surrounded Western Europe by sea, the Portuguese would go further, looking for businesses in which they could find no established competitors, and for which they had appreciable geographical advantages: they sought out the western coast of Africa, smuggling with the Moors who dominated the indigenous populations. As they advanced across the ocean they discovered the islands (Cape Verde, Madeira, Azores), and continued to stretch the Dark Continent southwards. This all takes place in the first half of the 15th century. By the second half of it a wider plan begins to be outlined: to reach the Orient by circumventing Africa. This would open to their advantage a route bringing them into direct contact with the wealthy Indies of the precious spices, whose commerce made the wealth of the Italian Republics and the Moors, through whose hands they passed as far as the Mediterranean. There is no need to repeat here what was the African pilgrimage, which was finally accomplished after the tenacious and systematic efforts of half a century.

Behind the Portuguese, the Spaniards threw themselves into the breach. They chose another route, to the West rather than East. They would discover America, closely followed by the Portuguese, who would also come across the new continent. After the peninsular countries followed the French, English, Dutch, even Danes and Swedes. The great oceanic navigation was now open and everyone endeavoured to benefit from it.

Only those who had dominated the old Mediterranean or land-based trading system and whose routes were passing into the background were lagging behind: geographically ill-situated relative to the new routes and stuck to a past that still weighed heavily on them, they would be the laggards of the new order. Germany and Italy became secondary to the new stars rising on the horizon: the Iberian countries, England, France and Holland.

Essentially, all the great events of this era, which has rightly been called the "Age of Discovery", are part of a whole that is but a chapter in the history of European trade. Everything that transpired were incidentals of the immense commercial enterprise to which the countries of Europe dedicated themselves from the fifteenth century onwards, and which would broaden their horizons across the ocean. The exploration of the African coast and the discovery and colonization of the islands by the Portuguese, the itinerary of the Indies, the discovery of the Americas, the exploration and occupation of its various sectors have no other character. It is this last chapter for which we are most interested here; but it will not be, fundamentally, different from the others. It was always as smugglers that the various peoples of Europe approached each one of those enterprises which provided them with their initiative, their efforts, chance and the circumstances of the moment where they found themselves. The Portuguese trafficked on the African coast with ivory, gold, and slaves; in India, they sought spices. To compete with them, the Spaniards, closely followed by the English, the French and others, searched for another way eastwards; America, which they came across during this search, was for them nothing more than an obstacle to the realization of their plans, something that had to be overcome. All efforts were then directed towards

finding a passage, whose existence was admitted *a priori*. The Spaniards, who had been in the Antilles since Columbus' discovery, explored the central part of the continent: they discovered Mexico; Balboa sighted the Pacific; but the passageway was not found. They then looked further south: the voyages of Solis, which resulted in the discovery of the Río de la Plata, had no other objective. Magellan was to be his follower and find the strait which retained his name and ultimately represented the famous passage so eagerly sought after; but it would prove to be impractical and would be disregarded. While this was happening to the south, the surveys are initiated to the north; the initiative falls upon the English, although foreigners were used for this, since they did not yet have enough practical national pilots for such large-scale undertakings. The first surveys were conducted by the Italians João Cabôto and his son Sebastião. The Portuguese were also to be involved in this exploration of the Far North of America with the Corte Real brothers, who discovered Labrador. The French would entrust the Florentine Verazzano with the same objectives. Others followed, and although all this served to explore and make the new world known, establishing its possession by the various countries of Europe, the long-desired passage, which today we know does not exist, was not found.² Still at the beginning of the 17th century, the Virgin Company of London included among its main objectives the discovery of the Pacific gap that was expected to be found in the continent.

This all sheds much light on the spirit by which the peoples of Europe addressed America. The idea of settlement does not initially occur to any of them. It is trade that interests them, and hence their relative contempt for

2 From the middle of the 16th century, attempts were also made to travel to the East via the Arctic regions of Europe and Asia. The initiative was taken by Sebastião Cabôto himself, who was already in America and once again in the service of the English (1553).

this primitive and empty territory that is America; and conversely, their fondness for the Orient, where there was no lack of objects for mercantile activities. The idea of settlement, not like what had been done until then in foreign lands, only as commercial agents, officials and military for defence, organized in simple trading posts intended to trade with the natives and to serve as a link between the sea routes and the occupied territories; but settlement with an actual population, this only emerged as a contingency, a necessity imposed by new and unforeseen circumstances. In fact, no European people could at that time bear the bloodletting of its population, which in the 16th century had still not completely recovered from the tremendous devastation of the plague which had ravaged the continent in the previous two centuries. Lacking precise censuses, at best, the population of Western Europe in 1500 did not exceed that of the previous millennium.

Under these conditions, "colonization" was still understood as what used to be practised; one speaks of colonization, yet what the term implies is no more than the establishment of trading fiefdoms, as the Italians had long been practising in the Mediterranean, the Hanseatic League in the Baltic, more recently the English, Dutch, and others in Far Northern Europe and the Levant; as the Portuguese had done in Africa and India. In America, the situation was entirely different: a primitive territory inhabited by a sparse indigenous population incapable of providing anything of real use. For the mercantile ends envisaged, the occupation could not be carried out in the same way with simple trading posts, with a small staff responsible only for the business, its administration and armed defence; it was necessary to broaden these bases, create a settlement capable of supplying and maintaining the trading posts that were founded, and

organize the production of the commodities of interest to their trade. The notion of settlement arose from there, and only there.

Here again, Portugal was a pioneer. His first steps, on this front, are in the Atlantic islands, advanced outposts on the American continent, due to the same conditions for the purposes intended; and this, still in the fifteenth century. It was necessary to populate and organize production: Portugal achieved these objectives brilliantly. The Portuguese have always been pioneers in all those problems which have been posed since a new economic order began to be designed for the peoples of Europe from the 15th century onwards. They elaborated all the solutions down to their finest details. The Spanish, then the English, the French and the rest, for a long time, did nothing but sail their waters; however, they sailed so well that they ended up supplanting the pioneers and snatching from them most, if not practically all, overseas achievements and enterprises.

The new colonization system's problems, involving the occupation of almost desert and primitive territories, would have a varied character, depending on the particular circumstances of each case. The first one would be the nature of the exploitable resources that each of those territories would provide. At first, naturally, no one would consider anything other than spontaneous, extractive products. It was practically the old system of purely commercial trading posts. Most of them were timber, for construction or textile purposes (like Brazil-wood for us); also the hides and skins of animals and fishing in the Far North, like New England; fisheries would be particularly active on the banks of Newfoundland, where Englishmen, Normans and the Vasconcelos had congregated since the first years of the 16th century, perhaps even earlier. The Spaniards were the happiest: they immediately came across precious metals, silver and gold

from Mexico and Peru, in the areas they had been given. But the metals, the incentive and enough basis for the success of any colonizing enterprise, only occupied a relatively small place in the formation of America. They drove the establishment and occupation of the Spanish colonies mentioned above; later, in the 18th century, intensified the Portuguese colonization of South America and brought it to the centre of the continent. Yet that is all. Metals, which the fevered imaginations of the first explorers thought to be found in any new territory, a hope reinforced by the early Castilian discoveries, did not turn out to be as widespread as expected. Most of America was at first exclusively devoted to timber, hides, and fishing; and the occupation of territories, their progress and fluctuations, were for a long time subordinated to the greater or lesser success of those activities. Later, a more stable, broader economic base would replace them: agriculture.

It is not my intention here to go into the details and vicissitudes of European colonization in America. But we can, and this is of great interest to our subject, distinguish two different areas, as well as the one where precious metals were found, in which colonization developed in entirely different directions. These are those corresponding respectively to the temperate zones, on the one hand; tropical and subtropical, on the other. The first, which roughly comprises the American territory north of the Delaware Bay (the other temperate end of the continent, today the platinum countries and Chile, would wait for a long time to take shape and mean something), did not offer anything valuable, and would remain restricted to the exploitation of spontaneous products for a long time to come: timber, hides, fishing. In New England, during the early years of colonization, any attempt at agriculture which diverted the activities of the

few settlers from the fur and fishing feitorias were looked down upon.³ If this temperate area was populated, which in fact only occurred after the 17th century, it was due to very special circumstances. It is the internal affairs of Europe, particularly England, and its political-religious struggles, which drew to America the attention of populations who did not feel at ease and who sought there shelter and peace for their convictions. This would last over a long period; one can even assimilate the fact, essentially identical, to a process which would continue, albeit with varying intensity, until modern times, the last century. To America came Puritans and Quakers from England, Huguenots from France, later Moravians, Schwenkfelders, Inspirationalists and Mennonites from South Germany and Switzerland. For more than two centuries all the residue of the political-religious struggles of Europe was poured into America. It is certain that it would spread to all the colonies; even in Brazil, so far away and therefore all the more ignored, French Huguenots would seek refuge (Antarctic France in Rio de Janeiro). Nevertheless, it would be concentrated almost entirely in temperate zones, where natural conditions were more like those in Europe, and therefore favoured by those who did not seek to "build America" but only to take shelter from the political whirlwinds sweeping Europe, and to rebuild a broken or threatened home.

An economic factor also contributes to this type of European emigration. It is the economic transformation which England underwent during the 16th century, and deeply altered the country's internal balance and its population distribution. The population was displaced en masse from the fields, which were cultivated and transformed into pastures for sheep whose wool would supply the nascent English textile industry. This

3 Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1680*, p. 13.

created a source of migration flows, abandoning the countryside and finding in America, which was just beginning to be known, a large influx centre. For similar reasons, these people would also preferably choose the temperate colonies. Those who will go further south, to colonies in the subtropical zone of North America, will do so only temporarily, as they were not always able to choose their destination ill-informed: most of them would return later, and as far as possible, to the temperate colonies.

Thus it is special circumstances, unrelated to the ambitions of smugglers or adventurers, which promoted the intensive and large-scale occupation and settlement of the temperate zone of America. These circumstances, moreover, arose after the discovery of the New Continent, and were not part of the general and primitive order of events which drove the peoples of Europe overseas. Hence, a new type of colonization developed - the only one in which the Portuguese were not the pioneers - taking on a character entirely separate from the commercial objectives hitherto dominant in such enterprises. The colonists of this category aimed to build a new world, a society that would offer them guarantees no longer available on their continent of origin. Whether for religious or purely economic reasons (these impulses overlap and intertwine), their subsistence had become impossible or very difficult there. They then sought a land sheltered from the upheavals and transformations of Europe, of which they were victims, to rebuild their threatened existence there. The outcome of this settlement, made in such a spirit and in a physical environment very similar to that of Europe, would naturally be a society which, though having its own characteristics, would bear a pronounced resemblance to the original continent. It would be little more than its simple continuance.

The history of the tropical and subtropical areas of America is very different. There, occupation and settlement would take a different direction. In the first place, the natural conditions, so different from the original habitat of the colonizing peoples, dissuaded the settler, who came as a simple peasant, from seeking the temperate zone. There has been much exaggeration regarding the in-adaptability of the white man to the tropics, a half-truth which the facts have demonstrated and re-demonstrated to be flawed in countless cases. Instead, the truth indicated a lack of predisposition among the races developed in colder climates, and consequently adapted to them, to endure the tropics and behave similarly in them. But it was only a lack, not an absolute one, which could be corrected, at least in subsequent generations, by a new process of adaptation. However, if this statement is false in absolute terms, it is true in the present case, that is, in the circumstances in which the first settlers came to America. The tropics were raw and unforgiving, a hostile and human-absorbing nature, sown with countless unpredictable obstacles for which the European settler was unprepared and against which he had no defence. The difficulty of settling civilized Europeans in these American wildernesses, still left to the free play of nature, was also common in the temperate zones. Answering to hasty theories which are very much in vogue (those contained in Turner's famous book, *The Frontier in American History*), a recent American writer analyses this fact with great attention, and shows that the English colonization of America, although taking place in a temperate zone, only progressed at the cost of a process of selection which resulted in a type of pioneer, the characteristic Yankee, who, endowed with a particular aptitude and technique, marched in the vanguard and opened the way for the more recent waves of settlers

arriving from Europe.⁴ If this happened in an area that, apart from being uncultivated, is so close in its natural conditions to the European environment, then what would happen in the tropics?

So to establish himself there, the European settler had to find different and stronger stimuli than those that compelled him to move to the temperate zones. Indeed, this was the case, although under special circumstances which therefore also particularized the type of white settler in the tropics. The diversity of natural conditions compared to Europe, shown above as a hindrance to colonization, would, on the other hand, prove to be a strong stimulus. Such conditions would provide the countries of Europe with the possibility of obtaining the kinds of products needed in Europe. Particularly attractive products. Let us imagine Europe before the 16th century, isolated from the tropics, only indirectly and distantly accessible, and let us imagine it, as in fact it was, deprived almost entirely of products that today, because of their banality, seem secondary, but were then prized as luxurious refinements. Take the case of sugar, which, although cultivated on a small scale in Sicily, was an article of great rarity and much demand; and even in the trousseaux of queens it came to figure as a precious and highly prized dowry. Pepper, imported from the Orient, was for centuries the principal branch of trade of the Italian merchant republics, and the great and arduous route from the Indies served for a long time no other purpose than to supply Europe with it. Tobacco, which originated in America and was therefore unknown before the discovery, would not have been of less importance after it was discovered. And would this not later be the case with indigo, rice, cotton and so many other tropical products?

4 Marcus Lee Hansen, *Immigration in American History* - see the chapter *Immigration and Expansion*.

This illustrates the attractiveness of the tropics to the cold Europe, located so far away from them. America would make available to them, in immense tracts, territories that only awaited the initiative and effort of Man. It is this which would stimulate the occupation of the American tropics. However, bringing with him this keen interest, the European settler would not bring with him the willingness to put the energy of his physical labour at his service in such a difficult and strange environment. He would come as a manager of the production of commodities with great commercial value, as the entrepreneur of a retrograde business; yet only begrudgingly as a worker. Others would work for him.

A first selection was made on this basis between the settlers who headed respectively towards one or the other section of the new world: the temperate and the tropics. For these, the European only headed, of free and spontaneous will, when he could be a leader, when he had the money and skills to do so; when he could count on other people to work for him. A further circumstance reinforced this tendency and discrimination. The character to be taken by agrarian exploitation in the tropics. It would be carried out on a large scale, that is, in large production units - farms, mills, plantations (the plantations of the English colonies) - each bringing together a relatively large number of workers. In other words, for each owner (farmer, lord or planter), there would be many subordinate workers without property. I shall return in another chapter, more fully, to the causes which determined this type of organization of tropical production. The great majority of the settlers in the tropics were thus condemned to a dependent and lowly position; to work for the benefit of others and only for their own daily subsistence. This, of course, was not why people emigrated from Europe to America. Even so, until the slave labour of other

racess - whether indigenous peoples of the continent or imported African - was universally adopted in the American tropics, many European settlers had to submit, albeit unwillingly, to this condition. Eager to leave for America, often unaware of their certain destination, or bent on a temporary sacrifice, there were many who left to engage in the tropical plantations as simple workers. This happened particularly, on a large scale, in the English colonies: Virginia, Maryland, Carolina. In exchange for transportation, which they could not pay for, they sold their services for a certain amount of time. Others left as deportees; also children abandoned or sold by their parents or guardians were taken in these conditions to America to serve until they came of age. It was a temporary slavery which was entirely replaced, in the middle of the 17th century, by the definitive slavery of imported black people. Yet most of these colonists only waited for the opportune moment to leave the condition imposed on them; when they could not establish themselves as planters and proprietors on their own account—the exception, of course—, they emigrated as soon as possible to the temperate colonies, where at least they had a way of life more agreeable to their habits and greater opportunities for progress. This unstable labour situation in the plantations of the South would last until the definitive and general adoption of African slavery. The European settler would then remain in the only position he was entitled to: as leader and large landowner.

The remaining tropical colonies, including Brazil, never even considered the white worker. For neither Spain nor Portugal, to which most of them belonged, had there, as in England, any available manpower, ready to emigrate at any price. In Portugal, the population was so insufficient that most of its territory was still uncultivated and abandoned by the

middle of the 16th century; there was a shortage of hands everywhere, and slave labour was employed on an increasing scale, firstly of Moors, both those who had remained from the ancient Arab dominion, and those captured during the wars which Portugal brought to its North African domains from the beginning of the 15th century; and later of Africans, which began to flow into the kingdom from the middle of that century. By 1550, about 10% of the population of Lisbon was made up of black slaves.⁵ There was therefore nothing to provoke a population exodus from the kingdom; and it is well known how the expeditions from the East depleted the country, bearing witness to the early decadence of the Lusitanian Empire.

Moreover, the Portuguese and Spaniards, particularly the latter, found in their colonies indigenous peoples who could be used as workers. Finally, the Portuguese were the precursors, again, of this particular feature of the modern world; the slavery of black Africans; and controlled the territories which supplied them. Thus, they embraced it almost from the beginning in their colony - possibly from the very beginning - preceding the English, who were always late imitators, by almost a century.⁶

As one can see, the tropical colonies took an entirely different course from that of their sisters in the temperate zones. Whereas the latter were colonies strictly for settlement (the name became established after the classic work of Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*), the outlet for demographic excesses of Europe that would reconstitute in

5 *História da Colonização Portuguesa do Brasil*, Introduction, vol. III, p. XI.

6 It is unclear when the first African slaves arrived in Brazil; there is a high probability that they came as part of the expedition of Martim Afonso de Sousa in 1531. In North America, the first batch of African slaves was introduced by Dutch traffickers in Jamestown (Virginia) in 1619.

the new world an organization and society similar to its European model and origin; while in the tropics, on the contrary, an entirely original type of society would emerge. It would not be the simple trading post, which we have already seen to be irrepressible in America. Instead, it would preserve a strong mercantile character; it would be the enterprise of the white settler, who would combine nature, rich in usable resources for the production of commodities of great commercial value, with the labour recruited from among the inferior races he dominates: indigenous people or imported Africans. There is an adjustment between the traditional mercantile objectives—which marked the beginning of the overseas expansion of Europe, and which were preserved—and the new conditions whereby the enterprise was to be carried out. Those objectives, seen as passing into the background in the temperate colonies, were maintained here, and profoundly marked the features of the colonies of our type, dictating their destiny. Taken as a whole, and seen on a world and international scale, the colonization of the tropics took on the aspect of a vast commercial enterprise, more complete than the old trading post, yet with the same character as always, aimed at exploiting the natural resources of a virgin territory for the benefit of European commerce. This is the true meaning of tropical colonization, of which Brazil is one of the results; and it will explain the fundamental elements, both economic and social, of the historical formation and evolution of the American tropics.

Certainly the colonization of the majority, at least, of these tropical territories, including Brazil, initiated and pursued on this basis, eventually achieved something more than a simple "fortuitous contact" of the Europeans with the environment, as Gilberto Freyre so felicitously put it, for which its initial objective was intended; and which European colonization

could not surpass in other similar places: for instance, in most tropical colonies in Africa, Asia and Oceania; in the Guyanas and some of the Antilles, here in America. For us, however, it went further towards the establishment of a "society with national characteristics and enduring qualities"⁷ in the tropics, and did not remain just a simple enterprise of distant and superior white settlers.

Nevertheless, such a stable, permanent, and organic nature of a society with its own defined features will only be revealed little by little, dominated and suppressed by what preceded it, and which continues to maintain its primacy and dictate the essential features of our colonial evolution. Once we delve into the essence of our origin, we shall see that in reality we were set up to provide sugar, tobacco and a few other commodities; later on, gold and diamonds; afterwards, cotton and then coffee for European trade. Nothing more than that. It was with this objective in mind, an external one, looking outside the country and heedless of any considerations other than the interests of this trade, that Brazilian society and the Brazilian economy were organized. Everything was arranged accordingly: the structure, as well as the activities of the country. The white European would come to speculate, to do business; he would invest his money and recruit the labour he needed: natives or imported Africans. With these elements, articulated in a purely productive, industrial organisation, the Brazilian colony was constituted. This beginning, whose character will remain dominant throughout three centuries up to the moment in which we now approach Brazilian history, was deeply and totally engraved in the country's features and its life. Secondary results will emerge tending towards something higher, but they

7 Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, p. 16.

are scarcely visible so far. The "meaning" of Brazilian evolution, which is the one we are inquiring about, is still affirmed by that initial character of colonization. Keeping it in mind is essential to understand the picture that emerged at the beginning of the last century, and which I will now analyse.