

# Euclides da Cunha journey across South American backlands: insights of the strategist and poet

As the sun went down over Urubamba, our marveled eyes encompassed, at a glimpse, three of the largest valleys in the Earth; on those astonishing wide horizons, bathed by the light of that incomparable afternoon, what I could clearly perceive, breaking out from three wide-open quadrants and enclosing them entirely – South, North and West – was the breathtaking image of our Motherland, which I had never realized to be so vast.

(Euclides da Cunha, Interview to *Jornal do Comercio*, Manaus, October 20, 1905).

**1** Euclides da Cunha, writer, army engineer and man of science, was on a Brazilian diplomatic mission to Peru for technical and strategic purposes. He had long planned a field trip somewhere in the Amazon region – Acre, Mato Grosso, Rio Negro – as he had anticipated in letters to his friends. In 1904, this finally came true, when he was appointed Head of the Brazilian team for the Joint Peruvian-Brazilian Mission for Identification of Purus River springs, one of the three major tributaries of the Amazon River.

Since the beginning, it was a painful and difficult mission. Euclides da Cunha, after navigating along the Brazilian coast

from Rio de Janeiro and crossing the long Amazon river from its mouth to Belém and then to Manaus, on a journey of nine thousand kilometers, he stayed in Manaus four long months – having navigated until then some 6,000 km – to untangle the obstacles that were delaying the expedition; then he left Manaus aboard of Brazilian and Peruvian entourage boats along the Amazon river until reaching Purus River and crossing Brazil-Peru border for more than three thousand kilometers; after this long journey the engineer finally arrives tired, sick, feverish and suffering from malaria at the springs of that river. Nevertheless, he insists on crossing afoot the Pucani river mouth, the last Purus River slopes, together with his assistants and pathfinders, using *varejões*, as no other boats could reach the shallow ponds, aiming at completing the land survey. The Commission's report "Journey Diary" recorded an emblematic event occurred that day: "Dr. Euclides and four men led the way (...). They were all very tired. Dr. Euclides had to be helped by an assistant on his way back."

Euclides da Cunha's route across the Amazon Region includes such events in a text where the characters and actions are driven to marked challenges and marked incidents. In fact, the writer had not only his journey ahead, but also that what Iberian languages call prowess, equivalent to the Latin term historical feat. The reader is required to perceive the strokes of that eventful writing to understand the sense of Euclidian mission. It is the writer's letters to his friends and to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baron of Rio Branco, that reveal the problems that worried him, such as the reduced budget, the poor conditions of staff and equipment, and his requests that had never been replied. Among other factors, the Peruvians also delayed the preparations. And Euclides da Cunha strongly feared that his journey could be delayed, that is to say, made unfeasible by low waters, when navigation of deep-draft boats on shallow waters is impracticable close to river springs. Then, he decides

to inform the Baron of Rio Branco (on 03.10.1905) that he would leave in spite of actual circumstances:

...the forced reduction of supplementary allocation of fifty *contos* (...) shall not prevent us from departing (...) **We are leaving late - when waters are low - and we will most certainly face some difficulties** that could be avoided had we left in January, as I had always desired.<sup>2</sup>

In the same letter, however, he reassures his decision to leave at any cost, even if some of his requests were not fulfilled:

I could rely on many more kilometers of steam navigation if I were granted the small 2-foot Navy boat anchored nearby. However, I have not received so far any reply to the telegram sent to Your Excellency about this matter. Nevertheless, even if I am not provided with that boat, I still believe it possible to carry out the reconnaissance mission, for which I have taken all required actions...<sup>3</sup>

Ten days later he records that the requested boat had not arrived. Finally, the fleet left in April, in dry season, the most improper for navigating the great river, which caused, amount other problems, the sinking of the ship carrying the crew supplies. He also records the Peruvians' desire to abort the mission after that accident, thus creating a substantial tension – that would mean the end of the journey. The engineer, now turned into a diplomat by the circumstances, endured all difficulties. He was not at leisure – he moved on. The others did not desert him.

This last stage of entering the rain forest was the most dramatic for the expedition. It unfolds according to the writer's nature, in the dark, in the mid of the desert; hobbling, like the steps of Passion, without the glory of redemption, but supported by faith – in history. It reminds the reader of the first adventure lived by the military engineer in 1897 in Bahia backwoods, which would throw him strongly to Brazilian literature, science and historiography.

After that first adventure in the backwoods, where Euclides da Cunha acted as a correspondent to *O Estado de São Paulo*

newspaper to report Canudos War, he became a canonic writer, a member of the two most prestigious national institutions: the Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute and the Brazilian Academy of Literature. However, it was the mission in Amazon rainforest that would reveal, since its preparation, his attributes other than those of celebrated writer and scientist. Some of such little studied attributes are those of strategist and diplomat, who formulated a plotted national strategic conception for the continental insertion of Brazil in South America, in addition to establishing analysis and action criteria for relationships between underdeveloped and most vulnerable capitalist nations and dominant, imperialist nations.

Another little known feature of the writer disclosed during his last trip is that of poet. Before translating himself into his writings, the poet emerges from his communion with the land in need of that journey as a return ticket to remote places – perhaps to reminiscence territories. The trip to the Amazon region, nearly aborted by bureaucratic and political constraints, was marked, until that final instance, by a sense of need and urgency, as we see the writer, as a last sacrifice, to surrender himself to his undertaking, as an offering.

It may be in fact more difficult to recognize the Euclidian poetry in that itinerary – some of his readers do not – due to his strange, intricate prose, which seems to be more committed to politics and science requirements, moving through heavy erudition and several restrictions. But he was a poet, even when his desire was to clear up secular legends and spells associated with the majestic rainforest landscape. His live interest for the rainforest, which was beyond scientific curiosity and technical duty, rather resulted in a strong disappointment with the monotony of river routes.

**2** Reading Euclidian writings on the Amazon region<sup>4</sup> may reveal rates of thematic concentrations and insistent issues that indicate the unwritten project that encouraged the writer to

undertake that so-expected journey. First we find there two complementary axes that structure the text, which relate to knowing the Amazon region. The first, a syntagmatic text, refers to the science's historical criticism of Amazon region; the second refers to selection and expansion of that knowledge, especially by including and appropriating new knowledge sources.

The position of the enunciation subject is quite interesting. He mastered the discourse, but outside of the field. He is not a scientist offering to his peers a speech or a novelty about a certain phenomenon. He is a wise man addressing to the Republic authorities as a "king advisor", who shows the limits of knowledge produced so far and tries to produce political and practical effects – engineering, health program, labor rights – and strategic effects in Brazil relationships with other countries, not only continental countries.

Euclides tried above all to remodel the existing knowledge on a region that was strategic for the country, to allow that knowledge to be reevaluated and recreated taking into account national aspects and interests. It should be considered that, above all his vocations, he was truly considered a writer with technical and scientific background. But science made use of the writer's resources. The Euclidian narrator wants to unveil, astonish and teach. Like the surprise caused by his first remarks upon transmitting the knowledge or scientific expeditions to the region. Strangely, his first observations have a strictly visual and aesthetic aspect, like those of a painter who appreciates the composition of his paintings, one after other, always the same, although changing his point of view during his travel. The plain and repetitive landscape appearance bothered him.

The exuberant forest is transformed into a sad picture, which discourages a reader eager for adventure from taking those fancy paths, as shown by the following text: "Instead of admiration and enthusiasm (...) a disappointment". The reader is

led to wonder, as his view conflicts with the magnificent image commonly disseminated of the forest that, according to the writer, has dazzled even the sages who “since Humboldt days have contemplated the prodigious forest, with an almost religious amazement”. A different Amazon region will be unveiled by the Brazilian scholar – this is the promise:

This is indeed the greatest picture on earth: however, lying flatly on a horizontal plane that hardly rise on one side, **like the remains of a huge broken picture**, are the sandstone Monte Alegre Mountains and granite Guyana ridges. As it lacks the vertical line, superexcellent for landscape movement, in a few hours the observer surrenders to the fatigue of boring monotony, and feel that his eyes strangely get tired of those endless, empty and undefined horizons, like in the sea.<sup>5</sup>

He makes a great investment in analyzing the forest habitat, as one of the youngest lands in the planet – “it is perhaps the youngest land in the world, according to Wallace and Frederico Hart well-known deductions”. Such unstable grounds make it difficult to make a classification according to geological, hydrographic and geographic characteristics – what makes population settlements difficult. The winding river beds indicate the instability of watercourses, which spread out onto the margins in the form of large reservoirs, *igarapós* and *igarapés*. A huge amount of organic material is dragged along the river bed, such as sand, tree branches and whole trees amounting to 3 million cubic meters of sediments per day, what changes incessantly the region facies by creating isthmus and gorges, as well as “six-month islands and lakes and even new topographical forms (...) which makes it impossible to realize whether it is a fluvial basin or a sea richly cut into channels”<sup>6</sup>.

The writer’s grief is that such streams draw that wasted, amazing wealth violently from the soil and drag it along the rivers and their tributaries without setting it down or forming a delta that could expand the territory and serve as basis for navigation. All this river work is dragged to the sea, to the North,

and doubly wasted. "After a single flood, a hydrographer's work is lost"<sup>7</sup>.

In light of such an anomalous geographic condition, Euclides suggests a geography that would deal with the dynamics of such geographic factors and translate the permanent action of rivers on relief aspect. He wishes, however, practical knowledge effects. He suggests projects for intervention, recovery and intercommunication between the rivers to improve social life and strategic occupation of the area. The scientist and publicist's endeavor to get acquainted with the region is revealed by the historic and geopolitical interest that he attaches to the mission, and projects designed for that border region, which is a way between Brazil and other South American countries.

It is in this context that his criticism of scientific and technical knowledge of previous exploratory missions can be understood.

... the whole America is the region most investigated by the sages, although the least known. From Humboldt to Emilio Goeldi ... Wallace, Mawe, W. Edwards, d'Orbigny, Martius, Bates, and Agassiz, to mention only those who first come to my mind, they were all reduced to brilliant monograph writers.<sup>8</sup>

He knew well the production of those scholars, some of them from the times of *Os Sertões*. In addition, he includes the oldest naturalists and explorers in the Amazon region, such as Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira and the French La Condamine and d'Orbigny, among others. All of them had been scientists respected by Euclides, who now boldly and relentlessly qualifies them, with the least flattering paradox – as "brilliant monograph writers".

It can be deduced from Euclidian writings that what was lacking in those scientific monographs abounded in imagination, like those old historians who were fascinated by the magnificent landscape, unaware of the systemic characterization of Amazon basin, and ignorant of the historical scenario found

in the region. Euclides da Cunha wishes to give an unambiguous, articulate explanation, having the power of the biblical epics of origin of the world, which lacked in specialized “fanciful theories” that upset him.

He did not find endemic causes in the forest. He finds rather, in geographic and historical field, a terrific scenario. Land devastating rivers, abandoned rivers like Purus, without any care for its navigation conditions and regional integration; an unhealthy, hot and humid, almost inhabitable forest; chronic epidemic diseases that tormented the immigrants and made difficult the adaptation of those *caboclos* (backwoodsmen) that head for that region at every drought cycle in the Northeast; or made immigrants that came from the south in search of wealth to give up and go back home frightened. And, above all, a fact which most impressed him was to find in *seringais* (rubber extraction plantation) “the most criminal organization of work” ever conceived, which punished the population of *caboclos* that populate the region.

Everything there is incompatible with human life. The distressing monotony reduces vital activity, while the “dreadful climate” produces weakness, morbidity conditions and muscle slackness; Epidemic diseases led forest immigrants to the most reduced activity level. In addition to land insalubrity, he considers that working regime as the most perverse among all other forms of slavery exploitation.

That is a poor land, without hills or adornments other than the superficial layer richly covered by its biomas, which needs to be properly known. Men, like rivers, are abandoned. Despite the efforts of knowledgeable naturalists in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as the vast material collected by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira’ *Philosophical Journey* (1783-1792)<sup>9</sup>, and of 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists, all that accumulated knowledge “well reflects Amazon physiography”, in what remained unconnected and segregated “in the corner of a speciality”. Whether through



natural sciences or history and ethnography discourse, the writer makes the reader familiar with the dark and distressing jungle environment. Amazon region becomes then a desert to be tamed by science, and now integrates the people, the forest history to the nation history.

This criticism to the deficient scientific and historical knowledge separates into a second aspect of analysis, which is inseparable from the first one. Under such a meager science, the writer redirects his reconnaissance task by looking for other knowledge sources, starting with aquatic desert explorers. He surveys the role and knowledge of native backwoods people and also focuses the narration time on future perspective. He starts to study the region and neighboring countries' history. Science was inferior to reality, where only strong people used to ups and downs resist. His task would be that of those who takes possession of a territory, integrates and expand that fragmented knowledge to put it at the service of a **national and international strategy**.

It is necessary to return to the aspect of the writer's education to better understand Euclidian choices. As a man of his time, he moves himself between a universalist knowledge program and the opposite direction, guides himself by an intimate positiveness, a telluric-poetic territory, which demand from him a commitment to history. On these two extreme limits, he finds the power of scientific knowledge associated with imperial interests and colonization policies on one side; and the narrow specialized knowledge on the other side. In that part of Brazil that was then already disputed by science, by different countries and by the greed of adventurers, it would not take long for foreign capitalists to acquire territories in the forest for great investment purposes, like the American magnate Henry Ford<sup>10</sup>. It is more strongly and clearly restated by the writer the need of **appropriation of the nationality destiny** – to assert the national interests, as required by the time.

The binational commission itself, which he had endeavored

to create, was transformed into or became a requirement for nationalization of scientific, history, and geopolitical knowledge on the Amazon region. That demand goes beyond the scope of knowledge, as it is pragmatic and has of course a strategic purpose. However, it stems from a personal condition that one could call a vocation – it was never so relevant to talk about the “autarchic territory” of each subject.

Variable forms of treatment may be highlighted in Euclidian essays with respect to other countries in the continent, especially those most involved with Brazil in Amazon issues. After the expedition he will expand his interests in South America in terms of knowledge, by reading documents on geopolitical and historical issues and strategic propositions, including some criticisms to neighboring countries. He created a true reading and action route containing various common and complementary problems between Brazil and neighboring Spanish speaking countries, and developed an embryo a national defense and sovereignty project.

His focal point of interest is clearly the Brazilian national matters. An insistent request can be found in the engineer actions and writings - the need for national autonomy in relation to powerful nations, as well as for continental integration, especially river and land communications linking the continent to access ports in both the Atlantic and the Pacific<sup>11</sup>.

**The strategist and the poet**, in that order, seem to meet each other again at this crossroads. I think that this should be distinguished to better understand the Euclides da Cunha’s journey across South American backwoods. It is necessary to examine more closely how such issues were developed.

**3** Euclides considered knowledge and ideological propaganda – although he did not use the latter – a privileged gateway for new colonialisms. During his long journey across Bahia backwoods, the focus of his so-called “revenge” was on national elites, which he considered too far away from land and people’s

reality that was unknown to them. There, he realized that ‘copyist elites’ in a dependent country could be as inattentive and strange to their own nation as an enemy army. But he also noticed that science also ignored the characteristics of that part of desert where an army of rebellious penitents had camped. As he pointed out, Hegel, the leading philosopher of classifications, had not included the arid *caatinga* backwoods like that located between *Itapicuru* and *Vaza-Barris rivers*... “There is a missing place in the German thinker’s pictures” – he proudly boasts. Let’s say that the immediate and surprising reception of his first work, *Os Sertões* (1902), can be partly credited to the historical relevance of that view amplified by the writer. He gave voice to the “spirit of time”.

As a sign of those times, Euclides da Cunha subordinated all effort of national civilization process to the imperative of national progress – “either we progress or vanish”. But he did not accept progress out of historical conditions. He opens fire against commissioned scientists from hegemonic countries, or simply analyzes the colonial health policies and public works, and the way how they are transplanted from the old continent to peripheral countries and protect the settlers as an example to be followed. He also noted that colonial medicine and engineering supported settlers’ adaptation to land away from metropolis – England, France – and adopted “the safeguards applicable to people transfer to new habitats”, including the groups of settlers and rubber-gatherers migrating to that inhospitable region, which are given no support to carry out an even more valuable work that is civilizing and of national interest.

Perhaps the positivist Euclides da Cunha was expecting the mitigation of war ferocity under a new political scenario based more on knowledge rather than weapons. In the engineer’s words,

there is a trace of nobility in modern expanding imperialism, which is able to forgive its worst deeds: its brilliant generals have transfor-

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med themselves into anonymous pathfinders for physicians and engineers, their greatest battles are the simple reconnaissance of further campaigns against the climate (...).<sup>12</sup>

However, he requires the nation strengthening to guarantee his trust.

He was not alone in this political program of technical-scientific knowledge nationalization and the “incorporation” of those regions in the territory that were of the margins of history. Neither was it only a symptom of a time. There was, rather, a legacy from the monarchic period, markedly from Dom Pedro II, to promote science, the historical knowledge of Brazil and illustration in general. Note that the nation independence took place under monarchy, which lasted seven decades. An effective movement to create signs of autonomous nationality and border inspection emerged from there. The project gained momentum impetus at the newly-born Republic (1889), after the initial crisis had been appeased, including programs for rail and telegraph communications expansion under the control of the Brazilian Army, from marshy region to the Amazon rainforest.

As we know, the discourse of modern science presents itself as universal, the results of which would be available to mankind progress. In modern days, it has fed the world governments’ aims to support the enlightenment of the prince and nations – according to Kant’s messianic discourse. A particularity in Brazil was that the introduction of scientific was late and there were no conditions for absorbing the modern Enlightenment program – *Aufklärung*. Here, particularly in the Brazilian Army, a beacon of enlightening philosophy was adapted to nationalization program, which has become a symbol of universalism in national terms. This fact can be noted from the establishment of institutions for Brazilian knowledge custody and production – such as the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute, founded in the Second Kingdom.

It was then necessary to create that institutional body for a nation that, strangely, had showed itself better in a religious rebellion and fratricide war. However, steady anonymous sediment of culture was already seen in the language, street singers, music, tales, dances and parties and cooking habits throughout the territory. Most of that “Brazilianization” occurs to fill the gap between the real nation and the institutions that were created on colonial legacy. In the line of writers and publicists who designed that project over more than one century, Euclides was one of the main formulators and designers.

It should be remembered once again the purpose of investigating the Purus River headwaters by that Brazilian-Peruvian Commission, and the priority of arriving first at the last portion of the river, what had not been achieved by previous missions. But Euclidian mission was to be well beyond. In principle, it would give continuity to the mission to Purus River by the English geographer, William Chandless, commissioned in 1864 by the Royal Geographical Society in London, whose exploratory trip disclosed to the scientific world the relations among the three major rivers in that area.

Following those epistolary notes, we find Euclides, before leaving Manaus in direction of Purus River, informing the Brazilian foreign affairs minister, the Baron of Rio Branco, that corrections would also be made to measurements made by Chandless, apparently extending the objective of the mission to the improvement of the river cartography<sup>13</sup>. In fact, Euclides da Cunha reviewed all cartographic measurements of the river course, and upon mapping Purus River headwaters, he completed the physiography of that Amazon basin area. Until now, this appears to be only the trivial aspects and practical purposes of a mission. However, there was a strategist behind the army engineer, and Purus River would become associated with the Brazilian-Peruvian expedition through the Brazilian commissioner.

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Both knowledge nationalization project and Euclidian historical discourse highlight the intelligence and presence of some anonymous Brazilians, such as the experienced navigator, Manuel Urbano, who was very familiar with such rivers and was called to assist Chandless. Urbano played in decisive role in the English entourage, because he was familiar with those routes. As a heir of positivism and an admirer of *gens* formed over the centuries, which make the territory because they adapted themselves to the land, and defend it – “to the death”, as he referred to Canudos people – Euclides considers this level of experience for the construction of scientific knowledge. Navigators of the great river know its routes not only from a single trip but for a whole life; they were, after all, the real “guides” of scientific expeditions.

The tradition of assigning importance to “social groups”, which are sources of people and national traditions, was started in Brazil by Romanticism principles. They are indicative of the way to bring to the political and artistic scenario cultural elements that had not been yet designated and integrated by history discourse, artistic transfiguration of current ethnic groups and indigenous languages, or the inclusion of Brazilian popular and regional human groups in romance, as well as the cause for slavery, as nationality components. However, it was left to positivists, such as Silvio Romero, Capistrano de Abreu and young Euclides, to recognize the role of the contributing popular knowledge science. There would be among the people, the writer asserts, a science built by common experience, a source of the whole Classicism and the base of modern nations. Science and praxis, even when underdeveloped, is much more elaborated than that of concrete knowledge found in indigenous people by Lévi-Strauss.

Euclides will incorporate to history discourse and ethnography this new character - the rubber-gatherer. They are those anonymous Northeastern backwoodsmen from emigration

intensified by 1877-89 droughts, who have always been fighting on the history background, as the practical men that Euclides recognized as pioneers of Amazon region occupation, which produced an experience knowledge in that “unfortunate region”. They invaded the region and fight on the history background:

... in that extreme, nearly mysterious Southwestern portion of the Amazon region, where an admirable man, William Chandless, had penetrated the land some 3200 kilometers without finding its end - one hundred thousand backwoodsmen, or one hundred thousand resurrected people, appeared unexpectedly appeared and repatriated themselves in a unique and heroic way: extending the motherland to the new lands they had discovered.<sup>14</sup>

We should finally consider that what we could call Euclidian geopolitical knowledge the presence of an important erudite contribution: that of the army engineer and professor of geology and mineralogy at the Polytechnic School of Rio de Janeiro, João Martins da Silva Coutinho. Euclides had been a student at that school. Coutinho was a pioneer in the survey of Purus River, where he performed geological, botanic and ethnographic studies of indigenous tribes in the region. That Euclides' predecessor had the multiple spirits of the naturalist scholars, which was highly appreciated by the Brazilian writer. A true political-strategic and scientific journey, not only a trip to explore river springs, was being considered at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**4** There would be significant disclosures in literary works on the Amazon region from both political and strategic standpoint, starting with the inclusion of social drama in narrative about the Forest. Instead of just scenery, the land - or *physis*- is an integral part of riparian people's drama.

The fate of those Amazon region immigrants deeply affected the writer. The enduring, fighting backwoodsman, the hero

of the warlike epics *Os Sertões*, is now the people expelled from their own land and exiled in the forest. There, they are impoverished, enslaved, victim of diseases. Movement of Euclidian writings in *Os Sertões* is compared to thorns and sharp-pointed lianas in *caatinga*. Now, they flow, move and mix together with the boldness of Amazon rivers. The writes makes an ethnography of rubber-gatherers' lives. He mentions aspects of those men's saga, since they left their homeland to their confinement in the forest<sup>15</sup>. He offers revealing details of employment relationships in rubber tree plantations, such as the calculation tables applicable to rubber-gatherers' very low earning and never-ending debts to the "groceries", accumulated since their arrival at the rubber tree plantation.

It is worth while mentioning them. Rubber-tree plantation property system includes few components. In addition to groceries, there are 'roads' and wooden houses on piles (*palafitas*) for rubber-gatherers. However, it is turned into a highly profitable extractive land by criminal methods. In isolated jungle, workers depend on groceries to acquire whatever they need (food, weapons and gunpowder, tools, medicines). Grocery is then a mix of compulsory trade of supplies and toll collector, which is a kind of exploitation usually found in colonization areas or in agricultural border expansion by immigration. It is something similar to that found by Oklahoma farmers in California farms in the United States in the 1930s – as depicted by John Steinbeck in *Grapes of Wrath*. Workers' future gains are transformed into debts. In rubber-tree plantations, even a portion of what workers "buy" from groceries belong to the landowners, as well as the work tools. Should they decide to leave, they are required to return to the landowner all appliances, weapons and improvements make in houses.

Why do such conditions continue to be accepted even by local backwoodsmen that do not migrate? Which atavistic sluggishness makes them bound to such submissive ties, serving



a revocable sentence? – asks the narrator. Why do immigrants from the south of the country take the way back at the first symptom of malaria? These are questions in the text. Then the frightened ethnologist, the relentless, meticulous observer, appears to disclose the unheard misery of rubber-gatherers, which are subject to an agreement that acts as a life sentence. It is then that the writer states the most surprising formula of his oxymoronic works to explain that cruel reality: “The rubber-gatherer is a tremendous anomaly... he is the man that works to enslave himself”.

The writes continues to look for an answer to his wonder at that uncommon reality in some imaginary places – labyrinth, hell, paradise – and adopts them in metaphoric use and radical collision of terms to enhance the scenario in support of the history discourse – a narrative style also revealed in *Os Sertões*. He seeks for language, poetry and rhetoric resources in addition to specific science instruments, to address unintelligible phenomena that only poetry or mythic narratives are able to joint together. Then, Amazon region is a “fluvial labyrinth” enclosed itself, to explain the unconceivable state that attracts forest immigrants and keeps them confined there. He improves the collision of terms to paroxysm, and the region becomes the “Tenebrous Paradise” – oblique forms to refer to the terrific reality that keeps some image of paradise. In that labyrinth, the rubber-gatherer lacks the saving help of Ariadne’s Thread. He is in the hellish abyss of the Old Testament. No saving thread will free that angelic legion attracted to Hell and arrested by a diabolic agreement.

It is then that one of the most surprising movements of Euclidian text takes place. It emerges as a warning to the reader, to prevent them from getting used to his uneven prose. But he always sets a greater surprise ahead, which makes the reader to restart the whole journey to follow him. Suddenly, in a brief transition, the narrative that until now was following the

backwoodsman's fall as the master of the wilderness, takes an unexpected direction. Is the defeated hero raised in the text, as a prediction of a forthcoming resurrection – when his descendants shall be able to overcome the hellish chains? Upon meeting again the backwoodsman in the forest exile and abandoned to his fate, most surprisingly the narrator changes the hero's destiny, overtakes him, and recognizes his ability to resist to slavery to perform his historical role. It is incumbent on that hero – this is the prophecy – the mission of opening a trail to the future. This is an overturn, a promise to save the work, not the man. Among all forest explorers, the narrator perceives the work of the civilizing hero, the backwoodsman, once again:

People who populate it are driven by bravery. They do not cultivate or embellish it: they rather tame it. People from Ceará, Paraíba, northern backwoodsmen in general stand there to perform, although unknowingly, **one of the greatest endeavors of the present times. They are taming the desert.** And their simple souls, both naive and daring, trained by ups and downs, ensure them, more than robust bodies, the victory in their formidable campaign.<sup>16</sup>

In support of Euclides' renewed admiration of all backwoodsmen, there was a historical event that was favorable to the recognition of popular characters. It was the "Acre Issue", a territory that belonged to Bolivia and had been conquered by rubber-gatherers. It is known that the successful agreement that put the territorial dispute between Brazil and Bolivia to an end was due to the excellent performance of Brazilian diplomacy led by the Baron of Rio Branco and Plácido de Castro at the military rear-guard. Brazil recognized the Bolivian area; however the dispute was only settled by the Petrópolis Treaty in 1903, under which the Brazilian government agreed to pay 2 million sterling pounds to Bolivia for Acre, in addition to granting other benefits<sup>17</sup>. Rio Branco first brought the negotiation to the House of Rothschild, in London, to allow the financiers to mediate an agreement with North-American interests in the disputed Bolivian territory. That operation cost Brazil 110,000

sterling pounds, which were paid to North-Americans for their relinquishment of investments in that territory.

However, such governmental decisions were highly influenced by the willingness of rubber-gatherers, now organized into a labor union, to make a war to defend the land that they occupied for living. Their resistance aroused the sympathy of scholars in Rio de Janeiro and all over the country. The Brazilian government had to defend the territory for the rubber-gatherers and paid the burden of that conquest. Besides, were not there in Acre a force of brave "drought escapers" – a term that imposed itself – from the arid region, some of which had survived the 1897 massacre of Canudos War? Were not they expatriates after an exodus for thousand of kilometers from their homeland? Was there not in that expanded national feeling an unspeakable amazement, a germ of recognition of the huge debt to that people, "peasants unprotected" by their masters, but able to found villages and repatriate the foreign land? Did not stem from there, that backwoods, the Euclidian feeling?

After his hard start in the jungle, Euclides rediscovered his ties with such anonymous pioneers. The hero of that first war-like epics returns to his narrative. His attraction for that last journey was not by chance. It was Acre, as we remember when Petrópolis Treaty negotiations were just starting, the first destination considered by the writer to know the Amazon Region. Euclides had already declared himself a "tame gunman", a nomad able to live in an "Arab tent". He now writes in those essays a true claim in favor of rubber-gatherers by disclosing and evaluating the facts and raising his voice to the Republic, scientists and imperialist countries.

The writer could then catch a glimpse of the possibility of that hellish situation transcending to the secular backwoods people's work for Amazon region colonization. The 'heart of nationality' reappears in Euclidian poetry. With his witness, the Brazilian strategy for Amazon region occupation should be cre-

dited not to governments or science or colonial or imperial metropolises, but to backwoods people, to their capacity of venturing themselves to the unknown and develop a knowledge about the forest.

**5** Amazon region crossing determined the passage of the military engineer, scientist, writer and reputed publicist by Canudos Campaign; for the strategist in continental geopolitics matters, as evidenced in the Brazilian-Peruvian Commission, this is the greatest evidence over the cycle started in that expedition. Euclides comes to make pioneering statements by examining the border disputes and the actual insertion of Brazil in the southern continent under a world-level political system. Important discoveries of Euclidian Amazon routes are in narratives on the formation of South American countries. After all, that forest region is in the border of Brazil with Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela – a significant portion of Hispanic America in south cone. By reading again his writings, we can note that the geographic exploration mission remains just as motto patiently constructed by Euclides da Cunha to give substance to and nationalize the Amazon region knowledge while expanding the understanding of relationships between Brazil and South America.

It is useful to characterize some of geopolitical matters addressed by the military engineer. During Acre negotiation, support was sought from Portuguese and Spanish America border regulations consolidated in Madrid Treaty of 1750, as the base for successive agreements – reiterated by most of Saint Ildefonso Treaty of 1777 – to settle border disputes between Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America. Madrid Treaty, as shown by Euclides, was founded on the former “Leyes de Indias” of 1680, Royal laws that provided for Spanish-American colony matters. Such laws lacked definition with respect to borders and cartographic location for vast continental are-

as. The historical criterion of effective soil use and title - *Uti possidetis solis* - had to be called to settle the disputes. Under Petrópolis Treaty, tradition was considered where that criterion also prevailed, which ensured the rubber extractors the right to the land.

Euclides da Cunha reported extensively the disputes between Peru and Bolivia. Here, there is another surprise that is an evidence of the Euclidian style. It is his increasing affection, beyond historical interest, for Bolivia, a nation that called his attention for its extreme originality within the Spanish-American world that, in contrast with Peru that had inherited 'vices' and 'virtues' from its colonizer, Spain, saw the decline of the *Siglo de Oro*. Bolivia, the most indigenous of all South American nations, where Creole culture coexists powerfully, its dramatic isolation, everything arouses the Brazilian writer's sincere emotion. Before becoming the republican Bolivia in 1809, the former *Hearing of Charcas* emerges too late from a *sui generis* conditions among Spanish-American colonies, insulated between the colonial expansionism of Portuguese and Hispanic Americas. On the other side, the two Spanish Vice-Kingdoms in South America, Peru and Prata, were in the middle of the dispute. That condition of enclave and predomination of popular-indigenous power, which were the sacred places of the poet's immemorial toponymy – do not they remind us of Canudos? – return in his *Peru versus Bolivia*.

The strategist made an in-depth study of old border-related disputes between Peru and Bolivia. Bolivia had already lost to Chile the exit to the sea through the Pacific Ocean. Derived from the annexation of parts of Peru and Vice-Kingdom of Prata, the Hearing of Charcas was designed under the same cartographic "fiction" of "Leyes de Indias". The inaccurate distribution of conquered Spanish territories led the republics to have their own disputes on borders. Peru and Bolivia disputed their territories for at least one century, until the Ar-

bitration Treaty of December 31, 1902, under the judgment of the Argentinean Government.

At analyzing the border relationships between Brazil and Peru, Euclides also resorts to the old civilizing criterion of settling the people in the land and founding settlements, which guide his view of history since the first backwoods epic, and also guide his narrative of population traffic and territorial occupation of South-American republics. That issue could not be more “Euclidian”. Euclides himself, upon examining Peruvian official documents, finds occurrences of pioneer activities of backwoodsmen on the other side of the border. By going back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he brings the saga of Brazilians in Peruvian Amazon, which was still unknown to national historiography. He collected news about men who, by adapting themselves as scouts to the jungle environment and to the language, and living peacefully together with the Indians, have left written marks in the history of that country.

The essay briefly titled “Brazilians”, included in *À margem da história* (On the Margin of History), was written with surprise and restrained emotion. The narrator slows down his pace to appreciate the discovered scenery. He found some “fearless adventurers” that had crossed the border in “slender *ubás*” regardless of cartography and national authorities, by dealing with *caxibos* – “a tribe that carried in their own name the legend of their ferocity.” He describes them slowly: “They were broad-shouldered, dark-brown half-breeds with dry and powerful muscles”, a kind of “peaceful bold people” who would become pioneers in the area.

Euclides recognized well – and revered – those pacified bodyguards. One of them, the “laborious José Joaquim Ribeiro”, introduced rubber collection and extractive industry in the Peruvian region. Its success made the product “appear in the catalogue of goods exported to Brazil by the Department”, an extraordinary event that would change and attract population

to those places toward the eastern portion of that country. Another Brazilian, Pedro C. de Oliveira, founded a prosperous crop-rich settlement full of house villages, facing the Amazon River in Porto Vitória, in Peru. The settlement was recognized by the Peruvian government as “the most appropriate place for military garrison and customs.” Local jealousy would put an end to privileges obtained by northeastern backwoodsmen and their pioneer brightness in Peruvian territory – remarks the writer.

Such passages only includes the anonymous heroism that moves so much the narrator, and Euclides da Cunha’s refreshed admiration for his major character: the backwoodsman experienced in vicissitudes, who is now an entrepreneur linked to the common history of the jungle, Brazil and Peru. He becomes then a researcher of Peruvian history. He elects his characters and micro-narratives among empty spaces of the jungle: the Peruvian rubber-gatherers, brutal, lonely explorers and “producers of ruins”; the tragically uprooted Indians, the “depressed, useless *quichuas*”; a brutally murdered *amauaca* Indian woman; “the most interesting South-American aborigines” at final extinction stage; wealth hunters from everywhere at full border nomadism.

He evaluates the historical scope of what Peru calls “El problema del Oriente”. In Peru, the march from the coast to the Amazon region - the “exodus to East” – would have set free the Peruvian nationality isolated in the narrow land strip between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes. Upon crossing the mountain ridge, “the best portion of the country” appears, that is, the long valley where Amazon River tributaries begin - Purus, Juruá and Ucaiale rivers – the only unobstructed way out that could link that country “through commercial interchange, to the remote civilization, the Atlantic Ocean”. The military engineer perceived more factors for an integrationist strategy through communication, trade and other exchanges that could arise from bilateral relationships with Brazil. In this part of the narra-

tive, a theme that is precious to the writer stands out. Once again, the Euclidian discourse mentions the “infertile coast” fighting the “obscure and fertile hinterland”. In *Os Sertões*, he treats disdainfully the *pale riparian people of the coast*.

Also in the sphere of South America, he was the first to defend projects of multinational interest, such as the future continental roadway and railway integrating the Atlantic and the Pacific. He indicated the constraints in the way for a strategy of political integration of the continent, which was difficult, but necessary<sup>18</sup>. He recognized Brazil as a stable place to make integration possible, “by conceiving a South America strengthened by republican fraternity to be the supreme and perhaps the only guarantee for the whole Latin race, in light of the formidable competition of other peoples”.<sup>19</sup>

The writer’s progressive involvement with geopolitical and political continental strategy matters would open to the plan of international relations with dominant countries. The background issue that comes to guide his writings is the contrast between Brazilian interests extendable to the group of geopolitically similar countries, and the corrosive actions of imperialist and expansionist nations that he called, in a more symbolic style, “robust nations”.

Within the sphere of such uneven relations, he formulated the concept of “provisory nationalism”<sup>20</sup> to guide the internal and external actions of countries that lack sufficient ethnic unit and national policy, which are therefore vulnerable in relations with imperialist and colonialist countries. He defines nationalism as an armor for the necessary protection of countries that, being on the point of constituting and solidifying themselves, require preventive and temporary precautionary, restrictive and defensive actions (“maximum safeguards”) against such “robust nations” that impose their activities and creativeness to all others. He refers to English expansionist interests and predicts the North-American imperialism. This peculiar nationa-



lism is not inconsistent with the scientific, political and philosophic *ethos* of modernity adopted by Euclides. It could not even be called merely nationalist, as it has a protectionist direction toward the territory in defense of nationality.

I believe that such issues related to national defense of Brazil and other countries in the continent - a chapter on geopolitics of Amazon crops in Euclides' work - have not been viewed so far as a strategic discourse in behalf of a nation. It is actually an articulate discourse in behalf of a nation, Brazil, which was emerging from beneath the expansionist influence of two empires toward a historical destination that at the same time has made it approach to and isolate from the countries of the region since the territorial division of Iberian colonies. That particular historical insertion of both sides of Latin America strengthens the novelty of Euclides' work as a forerunner at his time. And that resulted from Amazon scenery, common transits along fluvial ways, as he was assured, like Humboldt, that the way to a future civilization was there.

**6** A melancholic note triggers almost all references to Euclides da Cunha's second epic: the Amazon book remained unfinished after his premature death at the age of 43 years, in August 1909 - about one hundred years ago. I leave this comment for the end of this essay, as I understand that this fact of this life, his tragic death, is not more important than the achievements of the great author of Brazilian literature and history, who opened decisive ways to arts and politics in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Leopoldo Bernucci, most appropriately, when making reference to the hundredth anniversary of the writer's death, highlights not his loss, but the mystery of the existence of his great work: "How can we understand that, in his busy engineer's life, Euclides could produce a book like *Os Sertões*, magnificent essays and other remarkable texts?" - that is Bernucci's ques-

tion<sup>21</sup>. A busy and short life and a monumental work built in the obscurity in the province by a writer who was as stoical as his heroes and made a civilizing work like his characters, without any support from governments, without any acceptance by republican institutions, without traditions or family legacies – this is the Euclidian appearance. Unknown territories of this original work remain to be explored.

Amazon writings do not constitute an unimportant or little voluminous portion of Euclidian work. However, few readers have visited it at leisure. By looking at the writer's critical wealth, one can see that even today the "backwoods cycle" writings located within the sphere of literature works predominate strongly over Amazon writings. I believe that reading the complete works and considering the importance and most obscure locations of such last writings, may bring new elements that would allow us to advance in the exegesis of the unfinished book and possible developments of that book and other projects of which the author only gave some hints. Many of themes and matters formulated or refined by Euclides da Cunha precede him and have fixed firmly in literature, human sciences and related fields, or even in the common sense, thus indicating that the transmission of that work is underway. His issues have become "Brazilian". This fact alone characterizes it as a "great work."

There is a *Euclidian space* in Brazilian culture, which is based on the symbol of national development since the colonial origins, as highlighted by the writer – the backwoods. Today no one denies the critical position of this work that had been refused for decades by the sociological critique and history, which came to qualify *Os Sertões* – the writer's only book known by that critique – for example, as "colonialist ideology". They also called the modern essayists, from Euclides to Gilberto Freyre, "literate", in the sense of negligible and disqualified writers. There were many mistakes caused by the deficient so-

cializing reading, based on an arrogant attitude or a narrow view of arts and science – as I could analyze in another work<sup>22</sup>.

That was a time when the academic discourse of the social science was assumed to have a greater scope, or even an exclusive legitimacy, over other previous discourses on humanities. However, ironically *the supper was the harvest*; such academic works drew upon certain foundations established by Romanticism classics, first of all. And they took possession of schemes for interpretation of the Brazilian historical development that had structured the works that had been rejected by them, schemes that were extendable to the Latin-American development originally formulated by Euclides da Cunha and Capistrano de Abreu – almost contemporary of each other – as I also had the chance to analyze<sup>23</sup>.

The meaning of *sertão* (backwoods), an old term introduced in America by Portuguese colonization was changed in Brazil over more than two centuries. That new meaning was initially incorporated to literature and then to historical discourse. The term was changed from its original meaning of desert backwoods unknown to colonizers to housing, “redeemed” backwoods – although constantly affected by wars and skirmishes. That meaning was absorbed by and used in José de Alencar’s *O Guarani* and *Iracema* novels. But the actual Alencar’s works, such as *O Sertanejo* (1875), his last novel, would highlight the backwoods space elevated to scenery and fabled character, like a tamed backwoods where the backwoodsman, an honorary title, was the odyssey hero<sup>24</sup>. It should also be remembered that the first chapter of Brazilian historiography that highlighted the backwoods as a theme and a title, was published in *Capítulos de História Colonial* (Chapters of Colonial History) (1907) by Capistrano de Abreu<sup>25</sup> – a historian that was influenced and presented to Rio de Janeiro court by José de Alencar.

This retrospective genealogy gives more consistency to the Euclidian Project. It conflicts with that situation of reverse trans-

mission produced by university professors, where they cut the links with Brazilian literature classics and essayism, and in particular with the Euclidian work – and others, like Gilberto Freyre's work, a situation that will last from the 1940s to approximately the 1980s. Aside from that trend, let's consider the places of cultivation of reading those classics that resisted to that exclusion and allowed the significant Euclidian work to operate and be transmitted historically. Gilberto Freyre himself publishes in 1944, when the characteristic Jacobinism was already consolidated in Brazilian intellectual life, a remarkable essay - *Perfil de Euclides da Cunha e outros perfis* (Euclides da Cunha's and other Profiles) – returning the writer's presence to Brazilian literature and culture

There are exceptions, however, in university itself, but we have only recorded the pioneer critical Works, such as the recovery of excerpts of the complete work and the critical edition of *Os Sertões* by Walnice Nogueira Galvão<sup>26</sup>, or other works such those by Frederico Foot Hardman, which may be considered to be within Euclides' view when he was still addressing miscellaneous topics<sup>27</sup>. Oblivion ended at the commemorations of the hundredth anniversary of Canudos War in 1997 – more voluminous than those of the hundredth anniversary of *Os Sertões* in 1902. It was seen at that time of revival of reading Euclides da Cunha that this space is too vast in cultural and artistic creation, in addition to the recent academic production, and also in history and politics, if we understand that such productions may be in the field of Euclidian problems, even when they are not expressly referring to Euclides da Cunha's work.

Another aspect that should be noted upon reading this classic is the continuity of issues addressed throughout this author's work. Many of Euclidian problems, his questions and characters, and his great themes remain from his first work to his unfinished book – they go through both epics. In addition to the spatial and historical and mythopoetic symbol, the *sertões plu-*

*raist* that the writer separated from the Brazilian colonial development and made it the center of Brazil interpretation, many concepts and components of his work – antitheses especially – derive from the occurrence of that symbol in his work.

Not less important is the space of *historical border* and *internal borders* which covers the several names of deserts and designates the condition of populations living in the territory, which are “on the margin of history” and have not been yet incorporated by nationality. The Euclidian surprise is that remoteness, which survives on the margin of the radiation center, may be the genuine and strong factor – the “live rock” of nationality.

In this historical and genealogical sense, the whole work is or may come to be permanently unfinished. As it occurs in the footprint of every great work, it is up to the readers to recover it and make developments. Books, essays, discourses, the vast collection of epistles, diaries, and projects constitute material sufficient for the generations to make endless exegeses and updates. How could not the most diverse readers sharpen their hearing, imagine and develop important threads of the work and fill gaps by following the footprints of Euclidian deserts?

A book remained unfinished: that referring to the Amazon odyssey (unfinished only in terms of biographic perspective). The book and the Euclidian odyssey both have that disturbing suspensive punctuation. In that same year of 1909 essays that would comprise the book were published as they were, in a hurry, with review problems. They were titled *À margem da História* (On the Margin of History) and published by Editora Lello, in Portugal, which had published two years before the book *Contrastes e confrontos* (Contrasts and confrontations).

It had not the title that would be given by the author, but it drew upon the Euclidian concept referred to by himself in the introduction and throughout his work, of “peoples without history”.

This journey book, conceived even before his departure, was

predicted by Euclides to be his masterpiece. The genesis of his studies on the Amazon region prior to the Commission were recorded in his correspondence to his friends – the historian and diplomat Oliveira Lima, the poet Coelho Neto and the critic José Verissimo, among others – when he started to express his wish to know the forest and join any official mission to make that so desired journey to that region. A journey book, an odyssey, is the actual end of his project. The hurry was the prediction of the last act – perhaps the writer Milton Hatoum would not disagree with this statement.

We only know that the book would keep, in the core theme and plot, in the construction of the hero and probably in the composition of plans and progress, markedly biblical characteristics. That book was given a title even before the journey. It should be titled *Um Paraíso Perdido* (A Lost Paradise), as a reference to the Renaissance classic by the English poet John Milton (1667), a version of the history of origins according to the Old Testament. Published Euclidian essays include, although fragmented, the writer's scientific vision of human life in Amazon region, the imprisonment of the army of angels in unhealthy boundaries of the wild land. The jungle does not belong to Eden, but to the abyss where the army of disobeying angels was thrown. It speaks of the world after the banishment of the first human beings from Paradise, there in the jungle as exposed as Adam and Eve after the punishment for their transgression, when they were seduced by Satan, the Enemy of the Heavens.

Euclides wished the impossible redemption of “tenebrous paradise” orphans, but his road was sadly terrestrial and historical to the time when the backwoods ferocity had been tamed. But he had faith in “progress” by governmental interventions – the laws, the teacher and health – science and technique. He expected that the delayed movement of people would bring the chance to untie knots in the history tragedy – Euclides

was a great tragedian. He foresaw the ways to be opened in the work for “incorporation to nationality” of unknown regions, as a continued work of the governments - “a credit to future”. He was, therefore, a refugee in the barbarism of present times. Well before the end, he had put credit to writing historical submerge, ignored and undesirable truths – this is the reason of his work, and he wrote for that.

This loving Renan reader reached the core of misery on which the colonial relationship was reproduced and transformed free men into slaves, adding the civilizing work to barbarism reigning in the midst of order to be restored by modern citizenship. There, he did not follow his master on the principle that secrets buried in nation foundations should not be disclosed. A new chapter of republican life then started.

**7** I would like to bring back, in the form of epilog, that final crossing scene mentioned above: the oneiric mirage of Euclidian passion. By following him only along the prosaic route of his journey, it may seem strange that brief movement, the vision arising in the last stretch of Purus River springs, when the writer turns over and looks back to the way he had already followed, as if he wanted to ensure that he reached the third crossing margin. But what he sees – he narrates at the return of the mission to the border in Manaus – is a magnificent picture, a solar fulguration spreading and extending over the valley where rivers join together. He sees the homeland – that is how he calls it. A real amazement overflows the traveler’s soul, an extension to which he had not allowed himself until now as a guardian of weapons. It is a sudden discontinuity, a contrast between Euclidian Amazon – the writings on Hell – and the magic sight of the sacred territory.

It appears as a remembrance or “recognition” – in the meaning of classic poetry. On all sides lies the vast valley where Purus and Ucaiali river waters join together; farther away, is

Madre de Dios River to the south and Juruá River to the north. Horizon opens up suddenly: *Our dazzled eyes covered at a glance three of the largest valleys in Earth*. At a transportation, a picture divided into three ascending lines is designed to fill the whole visual space over a sudden general plane (*three expanded quadrants... to the South, North and East*) – what also comes into collision with the always descending or flat movement predominating in the narrative of Amazon history and *habitat*.

*Moto continuum*, there is a surprise, a variance of focus on the same picture – which can be easily operated by the movies. Inside the picture, focus in on a pulsing detail (a *punctum*) that stands out and emerges to the first plane to occupy the whole visual space – that is the metonymic operation, the crossing. The narrator admires surprisingly and knowingly what he sees. He recognizes that old vision – when did he see it before, under which circumstances? – and prepares the whole sentence to receive it, without any constraint to utter his verses as a prayer: *at that wonderful expansion of horizons / bathed by the splendor or the incomparable afternoon, / what a especially perceived, / arising from three expanded quadrants / and fully locking theme was... / the ravishing image of our Homeland / that I had never imagined to be so large*. The emerging image attacks him to the limits of his strengths on the other side of the border. Under that perspective, he sees his homeland, a stable point of convergence in the picture, like brightness on the top tackle of a principal altar in a baroque church. It is a turn back, a recognition of the former vision updated that would astonish only for its magnitude. The loving vision reappears to the exalted, penitent that left the purgatory deeply touched, and finally soothed by the grace of figuration of love – like the Latin poet before Beatriz splendor.

The narrator does not speak of himself alone, but of “our homeland”. His book would reach many of his implicit readers.



Perhaps he wished to share *our Homeland* with them, the telluric homeland, that which establishes itself so early in everyone's individual history. This circumstance experienced by Euclides da Cunha is emblematic, which gave rise to the national feeling where nature seems intact and indifferent<sup>28</sup>, even hostile when dazzles the traveler's expectations. Was he looking for his ancestral homeland and needed to figure it out beyond the political reality? Where does this vision come from, what is its aim?

It was already said that in writings on the Amazon region, the politician and man of science seem to suffocate the writer. For an extreme irony, all that preciousness of cartographic survey will give the Brazilian writer a good pretext for his adventure, the one that he designed within the Brazilian project and his personal insistent adventure to demarcate his never owned homeland and taking possession of the most remote and forgotten regions. Geography becomes a friend of politics and arts.

Euclides da Cunha, all over his life of writer and man of science wanted to join together arts, science and the political militancy of his time into expression, by predicting "a closer cooperation" between such muses that quite infrequently meet one another. If in the essays of his unfinished book he seems to betray himself at the rigorous exegesis of all his accounts, the history, science and geopolitics, he made the most radical trip of his journey. Probably, if we seek in Euclidian writings, read them again through the intimate records, details and intervals of the text, there will be in the publicist's works more favorable places to understand the gentle and visionary narrator's rare insurgency, probably that one which governs all the others even when it is hidden. The last appearance of crossing suggests a transformation of the narrator along the route. It also suggests his surrender to another situation, rather than to his implicit readers whom he had aimed before. Whom was he aiming then? That is the question.

# EUCLIDES DA CUNHA JOURNEY ACROSS SOUTH AMERICAN BACKLANDS: INSIGHTS OF THE STRATEGIST AND POET

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The first version of this essay was presented at Abralic (Associação Brasileira de Literatura Comparada) 2004, Salvador, Brazil, at the workshop “Atravessando os Sertões”, coordinated by Antônia Torreão Herrera (Federal University of Bahia) and Pedro Barboza (Catholic University of Bahia).

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Traduzido do português por Durval Macedo Filho

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>A long stick used to drive flatboats in shallow waters (T.N.).

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<sup>2</sup>GALVÃO, V. e GALOTTI, O. *Correspondência de Euclides da Cunha*. São Paulo: Edusp, pp. 264-265.

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<sup>3</sup>Idem, *ibidem*, p. 265.

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<sup>4</sup>I will use digital editing in notes or references to Euclidian work to allow the reader easy checking and recovery of said passages. At [www.dominiopublico.gov.br/](http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/) ; [www.bibvir.futuro.usp.br/](http://www.bibvir.futuro.usp.br/); [www.euclides.site.br.com/obraseuclides.htm/](http://www.euclides.site.br.com/obraseuclides.htm/)

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<sup>5</sup>CUNHA, Euclides da. “Terra sem História”, In: *A margem da história* (See suggested virtual editions).

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<sup>6</sup>Idem, *ibidem*.

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<sup>7</sup>Idem, *ibidem*.

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<sup>8</sup>Idem, *ibidem*.

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<sup>9</sup>José Cândido de Melo Carvalho informs among the writings on the philosophical journey “57 works were found in the original inventory” – Memories, News, Travel Diaries, Relationships. Some 86 other writings related to the trip could also be attributable to Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, according to introduction to FERREIRA, Alexandre Rodrigues: *Viagem filosófica pelas capitânicas do Grão Pará, Rio Negro, Mato Grosso e Cuiabá*. Rio de Janeiro: Federal Culture Board; Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia 1972.

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<sup>10</sup>The North-American magnate Henry Ford (1863-1947), the car industry pioneer, founded Fordlândia in Pará hinterland in 1927, a town engaged in rubber extraction activity. Ford invested some U\$25 million in the construction of that and other unsuccessful towns. It is said that in Fordlândia, rubber-gatherers’ activity was regulated similarly to that of workers in his plants, where diet determined a breakfast composed of oat and canned peach, products that were not known by backwoodsmen, what was a factor for rubber-gatherers’ rebellion (1930).

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<sup>11</sup> About the continental integration, see particularly the essays found in *Contrastes e confrontos*. Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1975. First edition: Editora Porto, 1907.

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<sup>12</sup> CUNHA, “*Um Clima Caluniado*”. In: *Contrastes e confrontos*.

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<sup>13</sup> GALVÃO, Walnice, GALOTTI, Oswaldo. *Correspondência de Euclides da Cunha*. São Paulo: Edusp, 1997, pp. 260, 275 and 281.

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<sup>14</sup> CUNHA, Euclides. “Terra Sem História (Amazônia)”, In: *À margem da história*.

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<sup>15</sup> In *À margem da História* he writes: “the exclusive concern of public authorities consisted of make them (the towns) free as soon as possible from those invasions by dying barbarians that infested Brazil. (...). They were sent to the Amazon region — a very vast, unpopulated, almost unknown region — what was the same as expatriating them in their own country. The crowd was martyized, all rights were lost, family ties were broken... upon the turbulence of accelerated embarkations (...). But, once the expurgatory task was completed, there would be no cure”.

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<sup>16</sup> CUNHA, Euclides. *À margem da história*, Cf. in the mentioned desktop publishing.

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<sup>17</sup> Brazil committed to surrender, in exchange, areas in Mato Grosso borders and start the construction of the 400-km long Madeira-Marmoré railway to provide Bolivia with an exit to the Atlantic Ocean through Madeira and Amazon rivers – as already agreed in 1867.

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<sup>18</sup> In light of this, Euclides da Cunha was not so far from imagining the novelties on South-American integration started with the customs integration of Mercosur and currently taking other directions, such as the Union of South-American Nations (Unasul). Constituted of 12 countries of the region and having an itinerant chair, the new corporation (2008) has established among its areas of operation, the political dialogue, physical integration, the environment, energetic integration, and even the creation of financial mechanisms and liminary alliance, what excels the Euclidian dream – after one century.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. CUNHA, Euclides, “Solidariedade sul-americana”, In: *Contrastes e confrontos*.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. idem, *ibidem*, in “Nacionalismo provisório”.

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<sup>21</sup> BERNUCCI, Leopoldo, “Gênio vulnerável”, *Folha de S. Paulo*, Caderno Mais, 08.02.2009.

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<sup>22</sup> Livros emblemáticos deste “ciclo”, e que os tomei por paradigma, são os de Dante Moreira Leite, *O caráter nacional brasileiro*, São Paulo, Livraria Pioneira, 1983 (a 1ª edição é de 19..); de Carlos Guilherme Mota, *Ideologia da cultura brasileira*, São Paulo, Ática, 1977 (1ª edição de 19..); based on ideological critique, Nelson Werneck Sodré’s *A Ideologia do colonialismo*, São Paulo, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1984 can be included here. Cf. ROLAND, Ana Maria. *Fronteiras da palavra, fronteiras da história*. Brasília: Editora da UnB, 1997.

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<sup>23</sup> According to the aforementioned book, especially the chapter “Latin-American *Paidéia*: an unfinished odyssey”, and chapter 4, where I analyze the reception of essayism classics focused on historical interpretation.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. ROLAND, Ana M., “A Terra de exílio e o Sertão redimido – Notas sobre a crônica sertaneja de José de Alencar”, In: CARVALHO (org.), Gilmar de. *Bonito pra chover*. Fortaleza: Edições Demócrito Rocha, 2003.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. ROLAND, Ana Maria. *Fronteiras da palavra*, p. 131.

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# EUCLIDES DA CUNHA JOURNEY ACROSS SOUTH AMERICAN BACKLANDS: INSIGHTS OF THE STRATEGIST AND POET

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<sup>26</sup> I refer to volume *Euclides da Cunha*, the 45th volume of the collection "Great Social Scientists", organized and prefaced by Walnice Galvão under the general coordination of Florestan Fernandes. GALVÃO, Walnice Nogueira. *Euclides da Cunha*. São Paulo, Ática, 1984.

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<sup>27</sup> HARDMANN, Francisco Foot. *Trem fantasma: a ferrovia Madeira-Mamoré e a modernidade na selva*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1988.

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<sup>28</sup> When preparing during months for the journey that seemed imminent, he wrote to a friend in September 1904, full of ironies and the prevailing Gallicism: "and here I am making preparations for the 6,000-km long pilgrimage to Purus River. He almost mentioned Paris. Indeed, no *rastaqüera* will pack for simple fun in *boulevards* with an enthusiasm greater than my enthusiasm for going through the desert". Cf. GALVÃO, W. e GALOTTI, O., op. cit, p.234.