

## **Space and Brazilian Thought: The American Russia in the Writings of Euclides da Cunha and Vicente Licínio Cardoso \***

**João Marcelo Ehlert Maia**

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to discuss the issue of space in the Brazilian social imagination. My working hypothesis is that the spatial images contained in some of the reflections by "interpreters of Brazil", like the Amazonian writings of Euclides da Cunha and the incipient comparative sociology of Vicente Licínio Cardoso, are not related to an essentialist search for a fixed cultural identity, but to a vision of a national civilizing process that highlights the pragmatism and openness of this experience. I contend that the "land", as outlined by these figures, approaches Brazilian society to other national formations – Russia and America –, thereby shaping a political sociology from the periphery.

**Key words:** space and social theory; peripheral modernity; Brazilian social thinking; Euclides da Cunha; Vicente Licínio Cardoso

Time and space are fundamental dimensions in human imagination, and they carry a special meaning in the West. A central vision on these themes can be found in the work of Giovanni Arrighi. In his *O Longo Século XX* (Arrighi, 1996), capitalism is investigated from its long historical duration and identified with systemic movements of accumulation which imply the formation of extensive temporal cycles. In this Marxist perspective, the dynamics of capital is associated to the compression of time and the possibility of instituting a social order based in the equation  $D-D'$  (economic formula used by Marx in order to represent the transformation of money into capital). According to Arrighi, the logic of capitalism is different from that of territorialism, since the latter situates in the multiplication of controlled spaces the primary source of the State power. The Iberian case is the best example of this latter tradition, which is refractory to the constant temporal movement. In this

---

\* I am grateful to the anonymous advisers of *Dados* for their always pertinent and productive comments and criticisms. I emphasize, nonetheless, that I am entirely responsible for the incorporations and modifications.

tradition, the distribution of territories is the main mechanism for the maintenance of a hierarchically constituted social order.

The identification of space with permanence is outlined from the delimitation of the relation of maladjustment between the temporal rhythm of the European modernity – marked by the dynamics of capital – and the persistence, in peripheral societies, of *spatialized* forms of life and power. That is, time would be the fundamental dimension associated to the central project of modern men, and translated into classical sociology through the concepts of *revolution*, *charisma*, *change*, etc. Such maladjustment found countless formulations in Brazilian imagination, haunted by the challenge of adjusting a vast continent of places and people to the clock of the West and the codes of liberalism. A radical version of such *malaise* can be found in the writings of Paulo Prado, a refined aristocrat from São Paulo. In *Retratos do Brasil*, Prado (1981) resorts to travelers' accounts in order to depict a disenchanted panel to which lacks a moral code able to organize our civilizatory process. More recent interpretations (Lima, 1999) emphasize the dualism that characterize Brazilian imagination, split between the celebration of the authenticity of our *sertões* [backlands] and the perception of the lack of social integration of these same spaces. In general, the alterity is always perceived as a problematic feature of our spaces, thought as places strange to the rhythms and times of modernity.

This article intends to rediscuss this matter from a point of view that resorts to other spatial images not identified with permanence and resistance, but with *innovation*. Such place is the periphery, understood here as social formations strange to the hegemonic codes of the central modernity.<sup>1</sup> In order to accomplish such purpose, I have opted for readdressing the so-called *Brazilian social thought*, a rich source of questionings and suggestions on the singular characteristics of the national civilizatory process. I believe this form of imagination propitiates clues for outlining a vision of the relation between space and modernization aiming at an adjustment between these terms. Accordingly, I analyze the theme of the *land* in the writings of Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) and Vicente Licínio Cardoso (1889-1931). The choice of the former is justified by his centrality in the republican imaginary and the consistent reception of his spatial images, as testifies the work of Regina Abreu (1998). The texts of Vicente Licínio, in their turn, constitute an evidence of the routinization of those images and their circulation among several intellectuals in the 1920's. The option for a more detailed analysis of two authors comes from the small analytic return that would be obtained, in the space of an article, from an extensive presentation of intellectuals whose production is oriented towards similar themes. It is not the case of verifying the persistence of those categories in Brazilian imagination – what, by the way, has already been done by Lima (1999) and Souza (1997) -, but of interpreting more carefully the writings of personages that, besides being significant, share a similar sociological insertion, what allows for a more precise fixation of their symbolic productions. Both Da Cunha and Cardoso were engineers<sup>2</sup> who shared a diffuse technical culture and considered positivism a sort of

moral code of a new intelligentsia. However, they both highlighted *land*, and not the city or the urban themes, as an image associated with the potentialities of the Brazilian civilizatory process.

As hypothesis, I suggest that this image, far from being restricted to an essentialist allegory of our ethnic-cultural origin or from appealing to a program of rural nature, renders an interpretation of Brazil that emphasizes the *pragmatism* and the *unaccomplished modernity* of our social formation. In other words, instead of reiterating the dichotomy between the West and other native spatial forms, presented in the former paragraph, the reflections of these two interpreters are helpful in the elaboration of a political sociology of the periphery which reshapes the geography of the modern and situates Brazil in a civilizatory axis characterized not by *backwardness*, but by novelty. Besides Brazil, this axis incorporates Russia and the United States, societies which Euclides and Licínio depict as bearing positive characteristics in face of the Old World.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the article, I will explore this comparative matrix, for I believe that the elucidation of my guiding hypothesis implies the decipherment of the intellectual cartography that inspired some members of the republican intelligentsia. An observation must be made before going on with the argument.

As I deal with spatial images more ordinarily associated to geographical studies, it could be expected that the analysis should be restricted to the explanatory parameters of that discipline. In this investigation, however, I am interested in the symbolic potential of those images, and not in the mere description of the physical referents associated to them. The spatial images under consideration here are taken as forms of thinking that extrapolate their places, in the same way that the cartography elaborated by Montesquieu in his *The Spirit of the Laws* is not tied to really existing spaces, but constitute expressive forms that can be transported to several localities of the planet (as the *desert*, a category that translates isolation and lack of social vertebration). Such is the analytical key that guides me in this study. Thus, the clearing up of the category *land* transcends a discussion about the Brazilian rural world, for I believe that such images are not tied to their specific referents. In fact, they work as symbols that allow for thinking the global process of Brazilian modernization. That is, the *land* is not associated to the *agrarian* only, but operates as well as a symbol of a metaphysical narrative about Brazil and its civilizatory qualities.

The article is structured into three sections. In the first, I resume the more well known arguments about the theme of the space in Brazilian imagination. I show how recurrent is the association between spatiality and permanence, but I also point to the existence of a variant perspective, which is organized around more recent reflections on the Brazilian Baroque. In such a perspective, the theme of *invention* is outstanding. After that, I explore the historical cases of Russia and the United States, societies in which the theme of the space was strongly related to the process of modernization. The purpose of this second section is to draw a comparative framework aimed at unveiling the incipient

sociology outlined by Euclides da Cunha and Vicente Licínio Cardoso, which is presented in the last part of the text. At the end of the article, I resume the initial argument, exploring its possible efficacy as an instrument for the interpretation of Brazil.

## THE LAND

Moraes (2002), an analyst concerned with the theme, points to the intrinsic relation between the societies produced by the dynamics of the colonial expansion and the symbolic constructions in which the space is the structuring axis of national identity. Such societies were born under the sign of territorialism, as byproducts of a logic of expansion that privileged the constant acquisition of new spaces. In such a template, the *spatialization* of the reflection and the symbolic activity would be linked to a state project, as if the reification operated by the geographic argument permitted the immediate identification between State and land, overcasting the concrete personages entangled in the civilizational process – Indians, blacks, and other subaltern elements. Thus, the conclusion of such reasoning is inevitable: the dynamics involved kept an authoritarian flavor, for it concealed the historicity of the social formations and the issue of the identities emerging in these spaces. One comes to an eminently critical judgment about the geographical theme in the process of national construction, in a strong condemnation of naturalistic arguments. The same Moraes, in analyzing the diffusion of those arguments in Brazil as from the independence process, observes that:

In this framework of social formation, one can notice a territory to be occupied and a State being built, but the available population is not adjusted to the identification of a *nation* according to the identity models established in the hegemonic centers. In such context, once abandoned the path proposed by José Bonifácio for the construction of the nationality (whose axis was based on a gradual abolition of slavery), a conception identifying the country not with its society, but with its territory, begins to take shape. That is, Brazil will not be conceived as a people, but as a portion of the earth space, not as a community of individuals, but as a spatial domain”. (*Idem*: 115-116, emphasis in the original).

In this perspective, Brazil was produced by a territorial logic, and our national mythologies subsume history into geography, as if space compensated for the absence of a consensual cultural tradition. After all, slavery and the hierarchical complex of racial and social relations made inglorious the task of shaping a totality that could represent the necessary democratic fiction of the *sovereign people*. In addition, territorialism implied the resilience of social relations and life forms that resisted historical transformation, creating spaces adverse to the historical time of modernity. Such would be the fate of peripheral societies once conceived as spaces.

In a more sophisticated formulation, Arrighi (1996) explores the territorial logic in contrast with the capitalist logic of power, emphasizing that the latter sees geographic expansion mainly as a means to capital accumulation, while the former sees the space as an end in itself, as the final goal of its structure of power and management.<sup>4</sup> In his words,

The difference between these two logics can also be expressed by the metaphor that defines the states as 'continents of power' (Giddens, 1987). The territorialist rulers tend to increase their power by expanding the dimensions of their 'continent'. The capitalist rulers, in contrast, tend to increase their power through the accumulation of wealth within a small 'continent', and to increase its dimension only when such increase is justifiable by the requirements of capital accumulation (*idem*:33, emphasis in the original)

Implying the distribution of the subjects along fixed and hierarchically ordered places, the territorial logic of baroque kingdoms tended to hamper the temporal dynamics of capital. One senses in Arrighi's and Moraes' views an association of territoriality, which would have characterized the colonization process, with a logic of permanence, adverse to the rhythm of the central modernity. In the Brazilian imagination, such association is a recurrent theme, and can be analyzed in the fictionalizations of Brazilian romanticism. Differently from their European peers, inspired by an aggressive anti-capitalism, Brazilian native romantics established another relation between nature and nation. In their view, the natural world was the territory of melancholy and sentimentalism, but not of a utopian shelter. In addition, the romantic obsession with the theme of national identity was translated into a literary practice oriented towards a description of national types from the perspective of an American nature. Therefore, the spatial images produced by the romantics were grounded on the idea of an original civilization, brought to the present and sensed as stable. This association between space and origin is discussed by Flora Sussekind (1990). She argues that the fictional prose of the nineteenth century's thirties and forties could be understood as expression of the narrator's travel to a distant foundation assumed as natural. That is, these fictionists drew on travelers' chronicles about the national territory not motivated by a revolutionary pulsion in search of a more authentic and free social experience, but as an attempt of setting the national identity as if this were something ever present in our trajectory. In other words, if the travel, as conceived in the European romanticism, presupposed a radical transformation of the narrator after a journey marked by self-reflection and questioning, the journeys of the first Brazilian prosaists seemed to be a sort of retrogression towards a stable and timeless origin. Not even the incorporation of a historiographic style, which characterized the Brazilian romantic prose of the second half of the nineteenth century would imply a destabilization of such procedure. The elaboration of maps and chronologies establishing a steady scenario adverse to temporal corrosion assured the dominium of the narrator over the theme of

national identity. According to the author, “In an almost pragmatic way, a direct line with the nature was affirmed, an unconscious primacy of the observation of local peculiarities – with the purpose of producing ‘Brazilian’ and ‘original’ works -, but, at the same time, it was necessary ‘not to see’ the landscape. Because its reason and design were given beforehand” (*idem*: 33, emphasis in the original).

Incorporating Sussekind’s interpretation to the perspective of this text, one senses the predominance of the association between nature and origin in the Brazilian romantic tradition, configuring a powerful interpretative matrix of our spatial imagination, based upon an essentialist idea. In a work on a correlate matter, Manoel Guimarães (1988) argues that the main agency in charge of this task of civilizing the country, the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* – IHGB, was extremely concerned with the definition of a *physical* identity for Brazil, what would explain the imperial historians’ obsession with the Amerindian populations. In this sense, the imperial historiography would be, from then on, characterized by the intertwining between history and geography.

One senses, therefore, the resilience of the association between space and permanence in Brazilian social imaginary. In the set of interpretations here presented, *foundation* and origin are the prominent themes, strengthening the dichotomy between time and space introduced at the beginning of this text. I argue, however, that the spatial theme can be subjected to another formulation, closer to the notion of *invention* and distant from the traditional reading of our territorialism, configuring an important analytical key for issues that will be discussed later.

In the work of Rubem Barboza Filho (2000), the Baroque is analyzed as the great code which allowed that the Iberian colonial venture to be operated by a civilizatory matrix alternative to the one which oriented the civilization of the Western Europe. While the later was grounded on individualism and the rationalization of the world, Iberia was based on centralizing and communitarian forms which allowed the survival of its society as an ordered expression of a sovereign will. Thus, the rationalist economy of the protestant individual had a counterpart in the Iberian Baroque with its succession of rituals that preserved different *social places* under the control of a State with its own will. The Baroque State was not a mere contractual expression guided by the logic of private interests. In this cultural complex, America would be the territory where the Baroque intertwined with native traditions and transformed itself.

To Barboza Filho (*idem*), the spatial theme in Brazilian imagination owes much to this Iberian civilizatory code, thanks to the peninsular taste for the marvelous and the incognoscible. Baroque culture depicted nature as the magnificent personage that engulfs men. As a civilization opposed to the temporal voracity of the Western rational capitalism, Iberia would have bequeathed to the

Americans the esteem for the *places*. Therefore, it rejected the vision of nature as a mere emptiness to be shaped by human action. According to the author,

“Sarmiento will not fail to notice, in sociological terms, and regret this efficacy of nature, depicting the inhabitants of the Argentinean *pampas* as products of a nature that invited them to leisure and asiatism, that is, to unproductiveness and the absence of history. In another key, Euclides da Cunha will reveal to the astonished Brazilians of an apparently civilized coastal region the profound and baroque bonds of the man of the hinterland with his *habitat*. Thematic similar to that of Gallegos with his *Canaima*, where the American nature emerges as a space indomitable by the European utopias, its transformation having to be sought in time, in history, a commandment emphasized by Carpentier when affirming the need of the American for wining the space – monster of pure immensity – and creating his time, his history [...]. The Baroque made of nature, stepmother or generous mother, an active element in the American formation” (*idem*: 405, emphasis in the original).

Barboza Filho argues that the American narrative on space is associated to a transplantation of the baroque matrix, which reaffirms the Iberian logic of the hierarchical preservation of distinct spaces, but radicalizes the political potential related to the exercise of the sovereign power. That is, the persistence of wonderful narratives about the immensity and the mysteries of the American nature would be the evidence of a particular Baroque that transcends the merely reproductive function of tradition – inexistent in the colonial case – in order to configure itself as a modern code propitious to the production of new social identities.

Barboza Filho’s version on the relation between Baroque and spatiality in America shows correspondence with Werneck Vianna’s (1997) interpretation on the dynamics of Brazilian territorialism. In highlighting the characteristics of the passive revolution, the later points to the importance of the territorialist reason in the formation of Brazil, which would have accomplished its political formula in the precedence of the State over the society. In his words,

“To the political elites of the new Nation-State, the primacy of the political reason over other rationalities translates itself into other goals: preservation and expansion of the territory and control over the population. Iberia, in its singularity, would better emerge in the Portuguese than in the Spanish America, where liberalism had a more dissolvent power for having been the ideology that informed the national-liberation revolutions against colonial domination. And Iberia is territorialist, as will be the Brazilian State – what makes it entirely distant from the other countries of its continental region -, predominantly turned to the expansion of its domains and of its population over them –

the economy would be conceived as an instrumental dimension in view of its political purposes” (Werneck Vianna, 1997: 14-15).

Werneck Vianna’s interpretation (*idem*) seems to follow the path delineated by Moraes (2002), but differentiates itself from the later by arguing that the American Iberian logic is not restricted to the systematic reiteration of tradition. Vianna draws on the Gramscian concept of “passive revolution” in order to point to the sluggish path followed by Brazilian modernization, a process directed by elites wary of national unity and the predominance of the reason of State. Thus, while Moraes (*idem*) highlights how the authoritarian action of the State engendered hierarquical social places, identifying space and permanence, Werneck Vianna (1997) and Barboza Filho (2000) compose a more nuanced interpretation, presenting a version of the American liberalism that associates territory and invention.

For a better understanding of the Brazilian case, I resort to a brief compared intellectual sociology. My goal is to exam the signification of the spatial imagination in other societies as a mean for characterizing an alternative civilizatory matrix. Therefore, in the following pages, I present in continuation two cases that significantly illustrate the spatial theme in the periphery: United States and Russia. I suggest that these alternative spatial images are different from the Eurocentric canon.

## **AMERICA AND RUSSIA**

Max Weber (1958), in a text about the penetration of capitalism into the German rural world, offers an interpretation for the problem of land in societies of recent modernization. Weber states that the temporal dynamics proper of capitalism had different effects in new societies open to the expansion of their frontiers, due to the lack of strong traditions in the agrarian world. Old societies, in their turn, were based on a hierarchized and regulated space. In the German world, the *junkers*’ hegemony was grounded on a stable control the territory and averse to the transforming logic of the market. That is, in a society in which the traditional classes still occupied positions of prestige, the agrarian world would not be thought under the logic of productivity and free mercantile relations, but as reserve of power and mechanism of hierarchical ordainment, implying a *closure* of the territory. It is interesting to notice how this weberian diagnostic finds resonance in the study of Norbert Elias (1997). The later asserts that the compromise between the king and the Prussian nobility would have served to the operation of the bureaucratic machine as guarantor of privileges, hardly opening itself to the bourgeois interests. The North-American case, in its turn, would represent another form of relation between power, social classes, and capital. Thus, if the German space was regulated in base of *pre-modern* mechanisms of prestige, the land in the New World was subordinated to the pure dynamics of the market and to the free activism of the producers. Emphasizing the difference between these two logics, the German sociologist says:



“The old economic logic asked: How can I extract, from this piece of land, work and sustenance for the greatest possible number of men? Capitalism asks: From this piece of land, how can I produce the greatest possible number of harvests for the market, using the smallest number of men?” (Weber, 1958: 367, author’s translation).

In Weber’s perspective, the United States represents the image of a new society, in which the land is not guided by tradition or space fixity. In his words, “The United States do not know these problems yet. Probably, that nation will never experience some of them. It has not an old aristocracy; therefore, the tensions caused by the contrast between an authoritarian tradition and the purely commercial character of modern economic conditions do not exist” (*idem*: 385, author’s translation).

It is worth noticing that the theme of the space holds a relevant position in the very foundational mythology of the United States. In the view of Robert Bellah (1992), the categories of *wilderness* and *paradise* were dialectically interchanged by Protestants who saw in the colony the possibility of moral and spiritual purification. Therefore, the empty space would not necessarily be a frightening vastitude, but rather a promised garden. In his words, “Under the circumstances, the wild space definitely was not a negative concept. It was a place of danger and temptation, but the ‘enclosed garden’ that the saints were requested to build in the center of the wild space was itself a sample of paradise” (*idem*: 12, author’s translation).

This religious vision of the American nature is also underlined by Schama (1996), who depicts the so-called great American trees (sequoias and oaks) as symbolic documents that provide an analogy between the vegetal cycle and the theology of sacrifice. The forest would thus represent a kind of divine gift, an incarnation of an inventive and new civilization. Therefore, nature, divinity, and freedom were associated in a narrative that related exceptionality with those typical trees of the country. As Schama asserts, “The forests, therefore, proclaimed the natural constitution of the free America, in face of which a document elaborated by man was no more than a small tree produced by philosophical invention” (*idem*: 208).

If nature and forests were always strong references of the foundational myth of the United States, it has been the frontier – as a symbol of free land – that occupied a relevant position in the American imagination since the end of the nineteenth century until a significant part of the twentieth century. Since the publication, in 1893, of the classic book of Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, such space became an obligatory theme for understanding that society. Those debates highlighted the association between open space, enterprising activism, capitalism, and democracy, as if the experience of the frontier synthesized the democratic character of

the pioneers. In this view, the United States represent the geographical society *par excellence*. In the words of Oliveira, who tracks the history of that discussion,

“So that, to Turner, the democracy was born without theoretical dreams. The American space was as a virgin land, a direct manifestation of the state of nature, in opposition to history [...]. It would not have been the Constitution, but the free land the necessary basis for the construction of the democratic type of society in America” (Oliveira, 2000: 133).

Robert Wegner (2000) affirms that the core of Turner’s thesis is the role of free lands in the American cultural formation, and not a pre-formed Anglo-Saxon set of ideas. In this perspective, the encounter with the *wilderness* (that, according to the author, can mean either desert or wild) would represent the process of constitution of a new nation.

“Therefore, the north-American values are generated ensemble – and, here, one senses how the thesis is permeated by that double sense that the word frontier acquires in the United States (and, also, the term wilderness itself) – by the new opportunities offered by the free lands and the constant re-encounter with the nature and the primitive world” (*idem*: 98).

Obviously, such powerful spatial imagination would have to deal with the exhaustion of the frontiers. Would the end of the pioneering behavior mean the exhaustion of the American democratic energies? How to conciliate the image of a Jacksonian agrarian democracy with the emergence of a complex industrial life? In Oliveira’s views (2000), the frontier has been re-qualified in the twentieth century by the imperialist discourse of Theodore Roosevelt, who found in the expansion over the Americas the possibility of continuous enlargement of a process domestically closed. In a broader theoretical perspective, Negri (2002), argues that this problem has been a structuring element of the American republicanism, so that it only could find a solution in the institutionalization of power. That is, the continuous colonization that ordered the American space and identified ownership and freedom found its antithesis in the constitutional regulation of that radical energy. In these terms, the established power has been be the final frontier of the endless energy of Thomas Jefferson’s time. It is impossible, therefore, to support a temporal dynamics nourished by the myth of a democracy of small owners. In Negri’s words,

“The Jeffersonian democracy experiences a no less perverse fate. In its expansive concept of a freedom that projects itself over the frontier, the great echoes of a continent to be conquered resonate. The history of the first times of the Jeffersonianism

is the history of the liberation of an immense multitude of men and women, an original saga of heroic appropriation of the spaces. Here too, however, the contradiction is manifested: it stands in the discovery of the finitude of that space which was thought to be endless” (*idem*: 273).

As one can notice, the metaphysics of the American land bears an opposite sense to that of the German case. If the later situates in the space a projection of what Weber calls *backwardness*, the former sees the land as originally a free space, destined to be conquered by the pioneers. Even Negri, a critic of the constitutional building that moderated the American revolutionary impetus, sees in the narrative associating space and freedom one of the pillars of the Americanism.

The Russian case is, perhaps until today, one of the more striking examples of construction of a modern society from a cultural matrix in ceaseless contention about its own affiliation to the West. In the nineteenth century, the revolutionary possibilities opened in the thirties and forties in Europe seduced a significant fraction of the Russian intellectuality. To the Occidentalists, the path for the affirmation of modernity in Russia had to pass through a civilizatory chock under the influx of a program of Westernization. In their view, therefore, it necessary to consolidate reforms that constitutionalized the country and abolished serfdom, putting Russia out of the feudal path which insisted in entangling it. The defeat of the European journeys of 1848 destabilized and isolated this group, which turned back to the internal Russian issues and, under intense repression, sought to build a powerful moral and political will. According to Isaiah Berlin (1988), the birth of Russian populism can be dated from the great effervescence that followed the death of the tsar Nicholas I and the defeat in the Crimean war. Differently from the Slavophiles - a political orientation stuck to the Russian tradition as a haven for a quietist and even reactionary position -, the populists saw, in this same tradition, elements that could nourish a strategy for the construction of an alternative path to modernity. At the root of this problem stand the Russian peasant issue and the theme of the land.

The problem of serfdom in Russia was considered by all (even the members of the tsarist bureaucracy) as crucial for the country’s economic development (Venturi, 1981). Many were the doubts about how to deal with this problem, since the land, in Russian peasant culture, was not dissociable from those who cultivated it. Should the peasants be set free and transformed into salaried workers? Or should the possession of land be preserved in the form of small rural properties? How should the emancipation be done? This practical problem denoted a political issue of greater scope that nourished much of the reflection that became known as populist. More and more stuck to socialism, the populists were averse to the classical path experienced by the European proletariat, and rejected the consequences of the industrial capitalist organization. To them, Russia seemed to offer the possibility of constructing a more humane socialist alternative, allowing for a less traumatic access

to the kingdom of freedom and equality. The *obshina*, an institution of the rural world that organized labor and social relations among workers, took an ambiguous position. Although linked to the feudal world in the organization of master-servant relations, it seemed to maintain the seed of peasant solidarity with much resemblance to the original socialist preachments. Populism is born of a certain disenchantment with the Western revolutionary strategy, whose vitality seemed to be crushed between the liberal representative institutions and the complex world of class relations in an industrial order.

Clearly, the legacy of that intellectual group has been a resolute will of coming to the West through a path dynamized by a tradition situated in the agrarian world. Land would not be an empty space, but rather the expression of a profound relationship of the peasants with their traditional forms of life. This relationship should not be opposed to modernity, but enhanced in its potentiality by the idea and the political will. Therefore, the Russian spatial imagination did not oppose space and modernization, rather seeing in the former a radical and inventive idea able to shape a civilizatory matrix alternative to the classical paths of the European development. Despite the fact that the outcome of 1917 did not exactly follow that way, this has been the cultural and intellectual environment in which the Russian theme flourished and captured the imagination of the West, especially through the literary production.

I would like to emphasize two points that, to me, seem to be central in the comparative panorama outlined in the precedent paragraphs: the relation between spatial images and modernization, and the possibility of outlining an argument associating land, creativity, and periphery. In the first case, the two societies entered modernity drawing on the land universe under contrastant forms. Far from being a mere resistance, the space in those societies nourished modernizing narratives and practices. The Russian and American examples present significant differences, but they also point to shared elements. After all, in those two social formations, land has been the main image of narratives about a new civilizatory process, one that did not replicate the traditional codes of the Old World. In the American case, the construction of a society based on the movement of its free men was the main issue, while in Russia the crucial theme was the articulation of traditional forms of life to a non-European socialism.

The idea that Russia and America are part of the same peripheral world finds echo in certain suggestions encountered in Brazilian thought. The work of Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo (1994) has pointed how the expression “American Russia” – appearing in the first sections of *Casa Grande & Senzala* – was the fundamental key for deciphering the “antagonisms in equilibrium” that characterized Gilberto Freyre’s interpretation of our civilizatory process. In the imagination of Brazilian republican *intelligentsia* there was already the perception of a new cartography in the margins of the classical Occident, which inspired the production of new politico-affective maps. The theme of the Americanness of Brazilian formation, for instance, is constantly reinforced by

contemporary interpreters as a central concern of those men who, in the first decades of the twentieth century, were dealing with the problem of the modernity in Brazil. If we consider the already mentioned comparison made by Oliveira about the construction of national identities in Brazil and the United States, we will notice that the centrality of the spatial theme does not necessarily leads either to the authoritarian spatiality or the Iberian territorialism. Following such hypothesis, the author shows the importance of the theme of the frontier in the American experience and the translation of such theme into our intellectual imagination, pointing to the different configurations of Brazilian Americanism. The point is exactly the presence of geographical narratives which shaped the national identities of both countries. In this approach, the spatial theme seems to be proper of new colonial societies – a theme of the New World.

In a similar perspective, Lima (1999) seeks to analyze the geographic opposition centered on the poles of the hinterland and the coast, an opposition which constitutes a crucial feature of social thought in Brazil. In so doing, she argues that the hinterland is associated to a sort of American experience characterizing the authentic Brazilian society, while the coast expresses our European frontier. In this sense, the hinterland would be an ambiguous term, oscillating between a place of despair and abandonment that needs to be incorporated, and an expression of our authenticity.

On the other hand, Russia seems to exert as well a fascination on our intellectuals, as shows Bruno Gomide's research (2004; 2005). In analyzing the reception of the Russian novels in Brazil, the critic shows how Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Turgeniev, and others, provided a vision of a new civilizatory form in their fiction, which was related to a hermeneutical process of national formation. Intellectuals as Otávio Faria, Everardo Backheuser, and others, showed enthusiasm with the aesthetical vigor of this process, although fearing the possibility of a similar political outcome. The perception that Brazil and Russia beared the same threatening spatiality - marked by the weight of the rural geography and the unknown character of the hinterland - lead to the idea that the steppes and the backlands shared a same peripheral setting.

My purpose is to investigate with more detail this strange cartography that approximates Russia and America on the basis of the theme of spatiality. If these ideas were diffusely found in the formulations of our intellectuals, what it is about here is to offer a systematization of this composite. Such purpose requires resorting to the comparative framework formerly outlined, following the hypothesis suggested in the initial pages of this text: the association between space, periphery, and invention. I shall focus on some writings of Euclides da Cunha and Vicente Licínio Cardoso in order to carry out this argument.

Euclides da Cunha is considered one of the main authors of this spatial canon. His masterwork, *Os Sertões*, considerably enlarged the scope of national regionalism, while consolidating an intellectual framework that attracted a number of intellectuals. In Abreu's interpretation (1998), it represented a sort of foundational novel which experienced a notable reception and shaped a critical vision about the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. In this perspective, Euclide's description of the mestizo of the hinterland, in spite of its ambivalences and ambiguities, contributed to consolidate the inlander as the essential type of our real historical formation. At the same time, the immense section named "A Terra" [The Land] contributed to consolidate the use of geographical argumentation as a form of cognition of the Brazilian social world. According to Santana (2001), the inaccuracies and errors verified in Euclide's geological interpretations should be explained by the author's metaphorical bent. As it is well known, the discussions about the fictional character of the work are foundational issues of the *Euclidianism* itself as an interpretative field, and gave rise to a vast literature that is not the case of resuming here. Few, however, would be those who would disagree with the association between hinterland, mestizo, and nationality, an essentialist interpretation that would soon become an integral part of the national self-understanding itself.

One of the most important critics of that essentialist narrative is Costa Lima. In his study on *Os Sertões*, he maintains that there is an evident tension between the postulation of the mestizo as the living rock of the nationality and the adoption of scientific tools marked by evolutionism. This tension would dilacerate Euclide's work, split between the celebration of an ethnic essence giving Brazil its meaning and the scientific verification of the inevitability of the civilizatory evolution, a process that would fatally annihilate that authentic substratum.<sup>5</sup> How, then, to solve the tension between space, essentialized authenticity, and theorization? Costa Lima concludes his essay by suggesting that Euclides' Amazonian writings could offer interesting clues. I follow this suggestion in order to give sequence to the argument presented at the beginning of this text, on the existence of a version of space as a symbol of a civilizatory process marked by inventiveness and pragmatism, and not by a primordial essence. My idea is not to eliminate the ambiguity, which is a constant characteristic of the Euclidean reflection, but to explore positively the dialectics between Brazil and civilization, pointing to a possibly more flexible interpretation for this dilemma.

In his writings assembled under the title "*Terra sem história*" [Land without history] (1995b), Euclides deals with the investigation of the Amazonian scenario and the personages roaming through the region, especially northern inlanders and other Brazilian migrants venturing through that space and trying to tame the green desert.<sup>6</sup> In *Os Sertões*, Da Cunha's scientific discourse obliterated the historical narrative. In "*Terra sem História*", although still strongly resorting to scientific studies and researches, the Euclidean imagination was open to the unexpected. According to Santana (2000), the engineer's look over the region was formed by reading the works of travelers and naturalists, which

functioned as mediators for the author's vision on the region. Da Cunha's account, marked by a strong literary component, has been analyzed by a number of interpreters who highlighted the stylistic transfiguration of the physical referents analyzed by the writer, a procedure which is common to the entire Euclidean works (Bernucci, 1995; Ventura, 2003). The uncompleted Amazonian writings, however, radicalize this perspective, as notices Costa Lima (1997). The first part of the text describes the amazing movement of the rivers and the constant mutation the Amazonian land itself was undergoing. Far from being a stable scenario, a steady and homogeneous picture, the Amazonia would be a region in movement. In Euclides da Cunha's words,

“[...] The land abandons man. It goes in search of other latitudes. And the Amazon, in constructing its true delta in so remote zones of the other hemisphere, effectively translates the unknown journey of a territory in motion, moving ahead throughout the times, without stopping even for a second, and making each time smaller, in an uninterrupted erosion, the large surfaces through which it passes” (1995b: 254).

In the section “*Um Clima Caluniado*” [A Slandered Weather], the immeasurable and still hardly controlled Amazonian geography is associated to a “new land”, *ainda em ser* [yet in process of being], or, as the author says: “The land is naturally ungraceful and sad because it is a new land. It is *ainda em ser*. The vestment of forests lacks the artistic cutting marks of labor” (*idem*: 272). Euclides then traces an almost literary picture of this space, highlighting its mysterious qualities. Therefore, the relation of men with this floating land is marked by the idea of a rough adaptation, characterized by the expression “taming the desert”. The engineer-writer opposes the practices characterizing the colonization in Acre, assembled under the formula of a “transfigured barbarism”, to the classical procedures of the civilization advancing through colonial spaces – the simple transplantation of forms of life and codes of behavior -. Initially, Da Cunha's sees the human beings wandering through this space in a negative key, for they are subjected to a torturing and exhaustive labor regime, besides being characterized by a Dostoyevskian fatalism. Slowly, however, the author's tone changes, and he sees the qualities of this human venture and the colonizer's struggle. The evolutionist argument, typical of Euclides, combines with the sociological analysis. Thus, the oppressive weather would select the strongest individuals, but at the same time these would develop pragmatic forms of dealing with the infernal space of the Amazonia.

The characters of this civilizatory process are in constant transit, they are not isolated men settled on an immutable scenario. If in *Os Sertões* the mestizos would be the product of the geographic isolation and a forgotten scenario, therefore representative of our more *authentic* origin, the Acre's latex extractors were individuals of diversified ethnical origins, who shared capacity for a persistent labor activity. In this perspective, they are practically the American men, selected by a rough geography in

movement. Men adapted to a land without *history* - therefore not able to function as an authentic region of our nationality -, but in constant mutation, as if symbolizing the national civilizatory process itself, marked not by the repetition of a mythical origin, but rather by the invention of a society without *history*.

Along the text, the men of the North, the *nortistas*, (from the more diversified ethnic origins) are counterposed to the Peruvian *caucheiros* [gatherers of wild rubber]. The later are seen as nomad adventurers and greedy figures, always prone to wander about in search of fortune. They would be a sort of *decayed* specimen of the gallant and adventurous Iberian, a personage hardly used to the rationalization of social life and guided by desires and instincts. Their opposites were the nomad Brazilians who colonized the region. In describing these *seringueiros* [Brazilian gatherers of wild rubber], Euclides is ambiguous in face of their accomplishments. If sometimes they are described as fatalist, taciturn, rude, and not solidary, in other moments they are seen as the strong men who *won the desert*. Adapting themselves to the instable physical structure of the region, they succeeded in building a minimal civil life, exactly because of their adaptative capacity and persistence.

One notices, therefore, that the land in movement requires a new sociability, simultaneously barbaric – Euclides compares the *seringueiros* to Dostoyevskian personages – and inventive. At the end, the civilizatory process described in the text finds a different path from that of *Os Sertões*. In the later the land is the symbol of a rude and brave sociability, although inadequate to the Western civilization, and therefore an essence “condemned to civilization”. In the former, the fluid territory in movement houses different people, whose characteristic would not be the preservation of some primitive community of values, but an adaptative form of action open to a civil life. After all, the survivors of the Amazonian venture were the spearhead of civilization itself in that land *without history*.

The recourse to the space in the Euclidean theorization is more relevant than makes suppose the argument of geographic determinism. After all, the characterization of a landscape is not a simple description of the scenario, but rather fulfills a symbolic function. A *land without history* is a peculiar geography of the periphery, alien to the refined cultivation of nature which characterizes civil life in central Western imagination. In such geography, where classical colonial regulations failed, only a new experience, open to movement and creativity, could prosper.

This idea bears relation with the American spatial imagination, especially the problem of the frontier. Certainly, there are elements for an approximation: the *seringueiros* as *pioneers*; the vastness of an unexplored land requiring adaptation and movement; labor as a defining activity of men. However, the experience of the *land* in the United States has come together with a religious and cohesive moral code, and a strong exhilaration produced by the mercantile interest and the liberal matrix that



organized that society. In the peripheral American land of the Amazonia, capital and interest were not the great motivating forces. The fatalism and quietism of the people make us closer to the Russian land. Would then the land fictionalized by Euclides be destined to function as a space of resistance to modernity? The answer lays in a small text written under the impact of the Russian-Japanese war of 1905, entitled “*A Missão da Rússia*” [The Russia’s Mission]. In it, Euclides (Cunha, 1995a) suggests that the Russian society is a modern society exactly because it has found a modern form of regulating its barbarian and Slavic sociability, characteristic of a space enormously extended throughout Europe and Asia. Its condition of a latecomer – Russia emerged in the historical scenario when the European Renaissance was at its zenith – did not imply the settlement of retarded forms of life, but the possibility of a singular and contemporary development that found its direction in the expansion towards the Pacific. In this sense, I add, Russia belongs to the same geography as the Amazonian, a land where Dostoyevskian northerners got to organize forms of civil life resorting to a barbarian, but productive, energy.

Notice, however, that this Russian matrix, when transplanted to the Brazilian case, bears some negative components. After all, the Amazonian world is not simply the place of adaptative creation, but also the geography of backwardness and precarious labor. Francisco Foot Hardman (1988), for instance, maintains that the Euclidean text on the Amazonia presents itself as a critical vision of the consequences produced by the progressive incorporation of territories into the dynamics of commodities and capital circulation. In an ulterior text, the same author (Hardman, 1996) suggests that the theme of the *ruins*, a romantic motif present in all the works of Euclides, leads to a disenchanted vision on our civilizatory process, as if the errancy and the tumult of the Amazonian lands were evidences of a History of failures and impossibilities. In fact, the texts analyzed do not lack passages attesting this negative vision, but I believe that such ambiguity is intrinsic to a peripheral form of imagination that seeks not only to think Brazil critically, but also to constitute it as a modern nation and overcome its hindrances.

The idea of approximating Brazil, Russia, and America through the concept of land is better developed in the works of Vicente Licínio Cardoso. This intellectual was a well know figure in the 1920s due to the organization of the celebrated collective work *À Margem da História da República* [In Margin of the History of the Republic]. In it, an ensemble of writers, poets, and thinkers established a critical account of the Republic of 1891 as well as some suggestions for the realistic reorganization of republican Brazil. Most of the texts framed Brazil into a comparative framework that opposed *Latinity* and *Americanness*, and Licínio chosed the American side.

In 1922, he gave a lecture dedicated to the Sao Francisco River and its role in the integration of the Brazilian nation. Published later, in 1933, – as “*O Rio São Francisco: Base Física da Unidade do*

*Império*” [The Sao Francisco River: Physical Basis for the Unity of the Empire] – the text encompasses a style of sociological analysis that makes use of geographical arguments, which were common to a significant part of the interpreters of the time. Thus, instead of highlighting the virtuous actions of the great political leaders of the Second Reign, Licínio stresses the land as a central personage of the Brazilian civilizational process, as if geography shaped history. That methodological profession of faith can be understood from the following quotation, which opens the mentioned essay: “The land is the skeleton of the social organisms, this is the greatest and harmonious sociological discovery of the last century, which has only been achieved, with sacrifice, after isolated statements or prejudicial exaggerations about races, climates, and human foods” (Cardoso, 1979a: 37).

The entire essay explores this point, emphasizing how the country’s national building has been anchored on a territorial logic that favored centralization. This argument is enriched in other essays, in which Vicente Licínio associates the theme of the land to a sort of *American* potentiality. In writings of the same book, dedicated to the analysis of the party experience of the Empire, the author interprets the evolution of the United States through the category of a *new land*. Let us see this long quotation:

“The sociological influence of the physical environment is indeed interesting [...] I do not mean the studies of social geography, which became classical. I mean the observations of the social changeability of a same people in contact with new lands. Malthus, astonished with the exaggerated proportions he himself created, feared the effect of the old lands that became overpopulated. The nineteenth century would discover the “opposite phenomenon”: the betterment of the old races in new lands, the rejuvenescence of the stirps, the reinvigoration of the peoples’ vitality under the stimulation of propitious cosmic conditions. The United States provide a notably clear example” (*idem*: 98, emphasis in the original).

As an *American and tropical* nation, Brazil to a certain extent share such potentiality. In another essay, entitled “*À Margem do 7 de Setembro*” [In the Margin of the September, 7], Vicente Licínio (Cardoso, 1924d) departs from the idea of the *power of the land* in order to analyze the migratory movement produced by the arriving of D. João VI’s court. In his account, the new Brazilian land would have engendered new men, in a process similar to that of the American expansion towards the west. It is interesting noticing how the author associates this spatial image to key elements of the modernist imagination. In August 1925, invited by the *Grêmio Euclides da Cunha* [The Euclidean Society], Licínio pronounced a speech next to the grave of the author of *Os Sertões*. Published with the title of “*In Memoriam*”, the text outlines a parallel between Euclides and the formation of the Brazilian people itself. However, instead of emphasizing the intercrossing of races, an usual theme at

the time, Licínio focuses an argument associating the *virgin land* to a practical intelligence typical of peoples like the Brazilian. As the author says,

“And, if various are our deficiencies in this unconscious tumultuation of the intercrossings, if serious are our shortcomings and dangerous our hiatuses, we indeed have a wonderful quality, of which we do not yet make use as it would be desirable: we possess, in fact, ‘the virginity of the intelligence, cerebral plaques’ which were not subjected to the heritage of spiritual impressions wrought by former generations; we assimilate, many times, I want to say here, the fecund and unconscious intelligence of the land itself” (Cardoso, 1979b: 140, emphasis in the original).

The text continues with Licínio’s praising of the Brazilian technical men, able to deal with elements and features of modern life in a pragmatic way. As one notices, this spatial image is associated to an American civilizatory quality, characterizing Brazil as an inventive society where there is no deeply rooted moral codes. In such perspective, the category *power of the land* expresses an experience not regulated by the classical political forms of the European world.

America, however, is not the only society which Licínio associates to the theme of land. In his essay “*O Ambiente do Romance Russo*” [The Environment of Russian Novel] 91924a), Licínio approximates Brazil and Russia as societies in which the relationship between individual and space is characterized by solitude and the absence of an organic social life. Russians would live within a civilization characterized by a separation between the social worlds, the absence of middle classes, the disordered and artificial growth of the cities and European institutional forms. It would be similar, therefore, to the inorganic Brazilian society. In such perspective, the land represents the classical image of the uncivilized desert. In Licínio’s words,

“And, well considered, it is impossible to deny that the diverse, and even antagonistic, conditions of those cosmic environments here invoked have all them determined a same common outcome: man’s resignation caused by the feeling of lack of power in face of the aggressiveness of nature, either [in the case of] the *sertanejo* stiffened in life in the adust backlands of our Northeast, or the moujik prostrated by the extremely severe septentrional winter or, finally, the emigrant discouraged and beaten by the luxuriant nature of the Amazonia” (*idem*: 37).

However, Licínio does not see the Russian land merely in a negative perspective. After all, the *power of the land*, an expression that describes a creative civilization, is invoked by Licínio as integral part of the literary universe of that country. In an essay dedicated to Dostoyevsky (Cardoso, 1924b), he

sees Russia as a new society symbolically translated by the energetic and vibrant prose of sincere and passionate men. Just like Euclides, who saw in the Russian case a beautiful example of modern regulation of singular energies and social forces, Licínio sees in Russia the potential to rejuvenate civilization. Thus, in such form, the link between Brazil, Russia and America is accomplished through the metaphysics of the land. Licínio believes that the sociological relationship between man and environment – a scientific argument peculiar to the geographical determinism of the nineteenth century – acquired new meaning in those societies, especially in Brazilian society. According to Vicente Licínio in the already mentioned essay on the Sao Francisco river, “The relations of reciprocal conditioning between man and environment acquire, in Brazil, an intensity or decay unknown to Western Europe, land in which for the first time the authors have spoken about these most interesting relations inventoried by sociology” (Cardoso, 1979a: 158).

This category, far from being restricted to the agrarian and rural universe of these societies, explains modernizing processes that did not follow the same patterns that characterized central modernity. Whereas the land is the great framework of all social organisms, in countries like Brazil, Russia, and America it acquires more strength and intensity, symbolizing an alternative modernity which is neither restricted to the European moral code nor to the classical political forms of that continent. After all, the *power of the land* describes geographies combining pragmatism, non-classical forms of sociability, and yet incomplete processes of nation building. As Licínio says, in another essay about Euclides da Cunha,

“During their social and historical evolution in the past century, the Russians created an admirable expression – the power of the land – which not any people could more properly understand than ours, as a nationality yet in process of being within the imposing life trajectory of the nations inhabiting the planet. Power of the land...creative energy without a defined consciousness, outlined power without an oriented direction, unconscious energy of the race in chaotic formation, emergent power of the land itself in search of the wise consciousness of its mental guides, of its social leaders, of the robust laborers of the incipient nationality” (Cardoso, 1924c: 111).

## CONCLUSION

What could be considered productive in the idea of thinking Brazil articulating Russia and America through the image of land? In a study about the characteristics of the Brazilian frontier, Otávio Velho (1976) builds on the Russian populist debate and the historiography dedicated to the theme of the frontier in the United States in order to support the hypothesis that Brazilian agrarian world was encapsulated by the logic of the authoritarian capitalism. Velho rejects the idea that the Brazilian

historical experience could mimic the free activism of the free activism of the American landowners due to the authoritarian political control that characterized the capitalist expansion throughout Brazilian rural spaces. Thus, relating Brazil to those two experiences would necessarily lead to the theme of the rupture. In a perspective close to the Gramscian and Leninist political sociology, Carlos Nelson Coutinho (1984) points to the similarity between Brazilian capitalism and the Prussian way, given the autocratic control of bourgeois modernization and the preservation of the traditional sources of power of the agrarian elites. In these two versions, the theme of the land does not lead to a positive interpretation of the Brazilian historical experience, but to narratives that emphasize the intimate relationship between authoritarianism and peripheral modernization. The “American Russia”, therefore, would not fit into Brazilian political sociology. Notwithstanding, another interpretation for the theme can be noticed as long as one keeps in scene the *metaphysical* quality of the narrative analyzed in this text, which is not restricted to a discussion about our rural world, but unveils a certain relationship between spaces and social experience that transcends the idea of *rural*. Let us see.

In a text about the relation between the democratic theory and the Brazilian historical experience, Barboza Filho (2003) criticizes the theory of deliberative politics outlined by Jürgen Habermas, suggesting that such alternative does not describe properly the political languages that characterized Brazil. According to the author, the Baroque, the romanticism, and the modernism shaped a repertoire of practices and beliefs based on the ideas of self-creation and invention. Barboza Filho’s perspective does not associate democracy either to a specific moral code or to a formal set of procedures of discourse, outlining a positive vision of the relationship between periphery and modernity. This suggestion is well matched with the argument developed in this text. After all, the production of spatial images is a recurrent procedure in Brazilian imagination, engendering identities and narratives about the country. I suggested that these images render an interpretation of Brazil that stresses invention processes and avoids fixed identities.

Werneck Vianna’s discussion about the character of Brazilian modernization offers as well a somewhat similar starting point. After all, to that author, the constataion of the *passive* dimension of Brazilian revolution does not mean that there would be an inevitable combination between authoritarianism and modernity. In fact, the concept of passive revolution highlights the processual dynamics of Brazilian modernization. That is, the fact that the world of the land has always been under permanent control of the oligarchical elites does not mean that the binomial conservation-change cannot have a positive and progressive outcome. The spatial image of land outlines a peripheral modernity in which native forms of life fit well into a civilizatory process. This adjustment between tradition and modernity does not rely on a cohesive moral code akin to that of the European societies.

As much in Euclides as in Licínio, one observes a certain interpretation of the *land* problem: they both read this image not as the sign of an essentialist origin, but instead as the symbol of a mobile society, capable of self-invention even in the absence of foundational narratives. This feature is common to Brazil, Russia, and America, mainly because these societies share certain characteristics: a recent modern construction, a moral economy distant from the urban-liberal model that shaped the European experiences, and a capacity for articulating the social energy of its personages to the themes of modernity. In these terms, the idea of “American Russia” is an interpretation of Brazil that articulates two points which are crucial in our civilizatory process: pragmatism and our incomplete condition of modernity.

In the philosophical tradition of the United States, pragmatism expresses a democratic vision which does not rely upon inflexible institutions and codes of values, but is based on concrete strategies oriented to public problems. John Dewey’s conception of *experience*, that rejects the idea of an external truth existing apart from human beliefs, leads to a creative philosophical attitude. Reflexivity is a characteristic of subjects in action, an operation guided by the logic of the practice of investigation. Knowledge is thus an act undissociable from the active experience of a subject oriented towards a problem and its practical solution. Both the machine operators described by Licínio and the *seringueiros* presented by Euclides would share this specific form of intelligence. All these personages, detached from previous traditions and codes of reference, organized their social activities through the practical confrontation with the imperatives of modern life: machine, colonization, regular work activity, etc.

Finally, both Euclides’ characterization of the mobile Amazonian land and Licínio’s assumption that Brazil was a *nationality in process of being* strengthen the perception that there is a processual dimension in Brazil’s historical formation. That is, instead of interpreting our national construction as an attempt to organize the native forms of sociability into a modern whole subjected to experimentation. It is not by chance that Euclides’ interpretation of Brazilian nineteenth century – “*Da Independência à República*” [From Independence to Republic] – seems to be an analysis of our long revolution that stresses the construction of the national order in the context of a fragmented geography. The structural problem to be confronted by the great leaderships of the Empire is the dialectics between liberal political will and an environment of deserts and places alien to that logic. If Brazil was a single case of a “nationality made by a political theory” (Cunha, 1995c: 374), one can say that our “passive revolution” would only be successful if equating the revolutionary impetus with a course suitable to our continued construction. I believe, therefore, that the dilemma between the State and the localisms, which is central in Euclides’ reflection, gets a key for its understanding when compared to the reading of the land here suggested.

That is why the idea of an “American Russia” is not restricted to a sociology of Brazilian rural world, but is also related to a historical experience in which the spatial theme played an essential role (which can be situated in several typical places of the Brazilian experience: *favelas* [shantytowns], urban settlements, and backlands exposed to contemporary global culture). The description of Brazil as a mobile society detached from an originary foundational narrative leads to the central point of a good deal of *interpretations of Brazil*: the country is constructed through the constant process of knowing it. That is the reason for the centrality of the spatial images in such process. That is the reason for the contemporariness of both our tradition of thought and the necessity of investigating it. A task, as it is well known, not yet entirely accomplished in the agenda of our social sciences. Let us, then, get to it.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This peripheral course has several referents in the history of the Western thought, such as the work of Frantz Fanon, intellectual of the African decolonization. In Brazil, the *ISEBian* thought (particularly Guerreiro Ramos and Vieira Pinto) consecrated this form of imagination. What I call here, broadly speaking, *peripheral imagination* comprehend theoretical matrices postulating an alternative place of speech resistant to certain classic values of the European modernity (such as the liberal individualism and the organization of society as a contractual market), but not oriented towards a nationalistic affirmation of the difference. The idea is to think the modern project from other paths and not of simply reject it. Ultimately, the peripheral imagination does not merely speak *about* the periphery, but speaks about the world *from* the periphery.

<sup>2</sup> Euclides da Cunha entered the Military Academy in 1866 and was expelled from it in 1888, after an incident in which he would have thrown out his saber to the floor in face of the Defense Minister, councilor Tomás Coelho. After the proclamation of the Republic, he succeeds in resuming the military career, entering the *Escola Superior de Guerra* [Superior Military College] in 1890. Despite the short period, he developed a strong identification with the so-called *mocidade militar* [military youth] of Praia Vermelha, described by Celso Castro (1995). In his turn, Vicente Licínio Cardoso, son of the positivist mathematician Licínio Athanásio Cardoso, graduated at the *Escola Politécnica* [Polytechnic College] in 1912.

<sup>3</sup> The association of the United States to a *peripheral* imagination is justifiable because, in this text, one is not working with the *periphery* in economic terms, as in the theories of dependence or imperialism. But, rather, with geographies that emerged as *novelties* at the beginning of the twentieth century, as indicating alternative paths to the affirmation of modernity. The American theme, by the way, attracted even Marxist intellectuals in the period prior to the Second World War, as is the case of Antonio Gramsci, for whom the Americanism configured an innovative possibility for the organization of the capitalist world. That is, the point to be highlighted is the form how the cognitive maps of certain sectors of the intellectuality perceived that region of the world as a constituent part of a *new world*.

<sup>4</sup> Arrighi also avoids identifying territorialism with an intrinsically authoritarian logic, as seems to be the case in Moraes’ argumentation. According to Arrighi, the antinomy between territorialism and capitalism does not say anything about the intensity of state coercion. As an example, he chooses the Venetian republic which, in his view, “[...] in the apogee of its power was, at the same time, the clearest incarnation of a capitalist logic of power and of a state formation intensely coercive” (Arrighi, 1996:34).

<sup>5</sup> Notice that Costa Lima’s critique is extended to the Euclidean writing itself, constantly guided by a look trained in the European scientific canons, which would prove incapable of apprehending, in a

creative way, the *terra ignota* that manifested itself in the Bahian hinterland. In this sense, the creative potentiality of the space he observed - the *sertões* – was constantly thrown *behind* the literary scene, given the control exerted by the scientific discourse over the *indomitable* expressive material.

<sup>6</sup> Euclides had long desired to explore the region and the opportunity appeared with the invitation by the baron of Rio Branco, em 1904, who wanted him as head of the Brazilian reconnaissance commission of the upper Purus, addressed to explore the course of the river and definitely establish the fluvial borders between Brazil and Peru. The expedition took place in 1905, departing from Belém. The writer planed to produce a vast study about the Amazonian hinterland, to be titled “*O Paraíso Perdido*” [Lost Paradise]. The project, however, remained incomplete.



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- ABREU, Regina. (1998), *O Enigma de Os Sertões*. Rio de Janeiro, Funarte/Rocco.
- ARAÚJO, Ricardo Benzaquen de. (1994), *Guerra e Paz. Casa Grande & Senzala e a Obra de Gilberto Freyre nos Anos 30*. Rio de Janeiro, Editora 34.
- ARRIGHI, Giovanni. (1996), *O Longo Século XX – Dinheiro, Poder e as Origens de Nosso Tempo*. São Paulo, Editora da Unesp.
- BARBOZA FILHO, Rubem. (2000), *Tradição e Artifício. Iberismo e Barroco na Formação Americana*. Belo Horizonte/Rio de Janeiro, Editora UFMG/IUPERJ.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2003), “Sentimento de Democracia”. *Lua Nova*, nº 59, pp. 5-49.
- BELLAH, Robert N. (1992), *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- BERLIN, Isaiah. (1988), *Pensadores Russos*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- BERNUCCI, Leopoldo. (1995), *A Imitação dos Sentidos: Prólogos, Contemporâneos e Epígonos de Euclides da Cunha*. São Paulo, EDUSP.
- CARDOSO, Vicente Licínio. (1924a), “O Ambiente do Romance Russo”, in *Vultos e Idéias*. Rio de Janeiro, Anuario do Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1924b), “Dostoievski”, in *Vultos e Idéias*. Rio de Janeiro, Anuario do Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1924c), “Euclides da Cunha”, in *Figuras e Conceitos*. Rio de Janeiro, Anuario do Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1924d), “À Margem do 7 de Setembro”, in *Figuras e Conceitos*. Rio de Janeiro, Anuario do Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1979a)[1933], “Rio São Francisco: Base Física da Unidade do Império”, in *À Margem da História do Brasil*. São Paulo, Nacional.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1979b)[1933], “In Memoriam”, in *À Margem da História do Brasil*. São Paulo, Nacional.
- CASTRO, Celso. (1995), *Militares e a República: Um Estudo sobre Cultura e a Ação Política*. Rio de Janeiro, Zahar.

- COSTA LIMA, Luiz. (1997), *Terra Ignota. A Construção de Os Sertões*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira.
- COUTINHO, Carlos Nelson. (1984), “A Democracia como Valor Universal”, in *A Democracia como Valor Universal e Outros Ensaio*s. Rio de Janeiro, Salamandra.
- CUNHA, Euclides da. (1995a), “A Missão da Rússia”, in A. Coutinho (org.), *Obras Completas*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 2 vols.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1995b), “Terra sem História”, in A. Coutinho (org.), *Obras Completas*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 2 vols.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1995c), “Da Independência à República”, in A. Coutinho (org.), *Obras Completas*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 2 vols.
- ELIAS, Norbert. (1997), *Os Alemães: A Luta pelo Poder e a Evolução do Habitus nos Séculos XIX e XX*. Rio de Janeiro, Zahar.
- GOMIDE, Bruno. (2004), *Da Estepe à Caatinga: O Romance Russo no Brasil*. Tese de doutoramento, Departamento de Teoria Literária, Unicamp.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2005), “A ‘Vasta Poeira Humana’ e o ‘Simum da Desordem’: Paralelos Brasil-Rússia nos Anos 1920 e 1930”. *Estudos Históricos*, nº 35, pp. 121-138.
- GUIMARÃES, Manoel L. S. (1998), “Nação e Civilização nos Trópicos: O Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro e o Projeto de uma História Nacional”. *Estudos Históricos*, nº 1, pp. 5-27.
- HARDMAN, Francisco Foot. (1996), “Brutalidade Antiga: Sobre História e Ruínas em Euclides”. *Estudos Avançados*, vol. 10, nº 26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1988), *Trem Fantasma: A Modernidade na Selva*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- LIMA, Nísia Trindade. (1999), *Um Sertão Chamado Brasil. Intelectuais e Representação Geográfica da Identidade Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro, Revan.
- MORAES, Antonio Carlos Robert. (2002), *Território e História no Brasil*. São Paulo, Hucitec.
- NEGRI, Antonio. (2002), *O Poder Constituinte. Ensaio sobre as Alternativas da Modernidade*. Rio de Janeiro, DP&A Editores.
- OLIVEIRA, Lúcia Lippi. (2000), *Americanos: Representações da Identidade Nacional no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos*. Belo Horizonte, Editora UFMG.

- PRADO, Paulo. (1981)[1929], *Retrato do Brasil. Ensaio sobre a Tristeza Brasileira* (2ª ed.). São Paulo/Brasília, Ibrasa/INL.
- SANTANA, José Carlos Barreto. (2000), “Euclides da Cunha e a Amazônia: Visão Mediada pela Ciência”. *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, vol. 6, suplemento especial.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2001). *Ciência e Arte: Euclides da Cunha e as Ciências Naturais*. São Paulo/Feira de Santana, Hucitec/UEFS.
- SCHAMA, Simon. (1996), *Paisagem e Memória*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- SOUZA, Candice Vidal e. (1997), *A Pátria Geográfica: Sertão e Litoral no Pensamento Social Brasileiro*. Goiânia, Editora UFG.
- SUSSEKIND, Flora. (1990), *O Brasil Não é Longe Daqui: O Narrador, a Viagem*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- VELHO, Otávio Guilherme. (1976), *Capitalismo Autoritário e Campesinato: Um Estudo Comparativo a Partir da Fronteira em Movimento*. São Paulo, Difel.
- VENTURA, Roberto. (2003), *Retrato Interrompido da Vida de Euclides da Cunha*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.
- VENTURI, Franco. (1981), *El Populismo Ruso*. Madri, Alianza Editorial.
- WEBER, Max. (1958), “Capitalism and Rural Society in Germany”, in H. H. Gerth e C. W. Mills (orgs.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- WEGNER, Robert. (2000), *A Conquista do Oeste: A Fronteira na Obra de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda*. Belo Horizonte, Editora UFMG.
- WERNECK VIANNA, Luiz. (1997), *A Revolução Passiva*. Rio de Janeiro, Revan.

Translated by André Villalobos

Translated from **Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais**, vol. 50, n. 1, pp. 83-115, 2007.