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**Making Patagonia an “Australian Argentina” and making the Amazon tightly Brazilian: depictions and political projects in Roberto Payró’s and Euclides da Cunha’s travel writings (1898, 1904-1905)**

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by

**JOSÉ BENTO DE OLIVEIRA CAMASSA**

## ABSTRACT

The Patagonia and Acre territories were not part of Argentina and Brazil respectively by the time of their independences in the early nineteenth century. Instead, they were annexed during the Latin American Belle Époque, when both countries ascended economically and geopolitically and bore frontier impulses. Therefore, the incorporation of these territories was founded upon broader endeavors of national expansion and development. With these aspirations in their luggage, the Argentine journalist Roberto Payró traveled to Patagonia in 1898, while the Brazilian essayist Euclides da Cunha journeyed to Acre and the West Amazon in 1904-1905. Using a comparative history approach, this article shows how their travel writings debated modernizing and territorial integration projects and echoed similar plans, as both regions faced resemblant challenges. It also demonstrates how Payró’s and Cunha’s beliefs about race and national identity contrasted, a point that is linked to different mainstream ideas in Argentine and Brazilian intellectual debates, entailing dissonant points of view over which groups of people should ultimately populate Patagonia and Acre.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

José Bento de Oliveira Camassa received a Bachelor of Arts in History (2016) and a Master’s degree in Social History (2021) from the University of São Paulo in São Paulo, Brazil. For his master’s thesis, he researched Latin American Intellectual History (nineteenth and twentieth centuries). He looks forward to becoming a PhD candidate and developing his investigations on that field of study. Currently, he is also an undergraduate student at the University of São Paulo’s Faculty of Law.

## INTRODUCTION

In the Latin American Belle Époque, many capital cities, including Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, witnessed immense changes, from the outset of industrialization to the execution of urban reforms inspired by Baron Haussmann’s Paris. One of these transformations was the blossoming of new spaces for intellectual sociability, including cafés, theaters, bookstores, and publishing houses. Many newspapers and magazines were established, and the press experienced a modernizing effort, as well as an incipient professionalization.<sup>1</sup> New opportunities for journalists and writers emerged, notably in the 1890s and the 1900s.

One of those possibilities consisted in the publishing of travel writings in the press. Many Latin American intellectuals of that period seized the opportunity and wrote about places they had travelled to, communicating points of view

about local cultures and political or economic issues. Travel writing was established as a journalistic genre, which was mastered, among several others, by two remarkable South American essayists: the Argentine journalist, dramatist, and novelist Roberto Jorge Payró (1867-1928) and the Brazilian engineer and writer Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909). Considering the importance of both authors in their countries’ Belle Époque press and literature, this research article aims to analyze and to compare two pieces of travel writing composed by Payró and Euclides<sup>2</sup> about Patagonia and the Amazon respectively.

Initially, the article scrutinizes the similarities concerning the (geo) political and intellectual contexts of their journeys. Then, it investigates the depictions and policy propositions each author embraced in their travel writing. In doing so, the affinity of both authors’ general modernizing aspirations is highlighted. Finally, as a counterpoint, this paper verifies and explains the discrepancies between the way Euclides da Cunha conceived

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1 Two important works about the series of transformations mentioned in the paragraph are, regarding Brazil and Argentina respectively: Nicolau Sevcenko, *Literatura como Missão: Tensões sociais e criação cultural na Primeira República* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003); Alejandra Laera, “Cronistas, novelistas: la prensa periódica como espacio de profesionalización en la Argentina (1880-1910),” in *Historia de los intelectuales en América Latina I. La ciudad letrada, de la conquista al modernismo*, ed. Carlos Altamirano (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2008).

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2 Since his tragic murder in 1909, Euclides da Cunha has been so well-known and revered among Brazilian scholars that he is usually referred to by his first name. This article follows that convention, referring to him by his forename, which has already been done in English. See: Barbara Celarent [pseud.], review of *Rebellion in the Backlands* by Euclides da Cunha, trans. Samuel Putnam, *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 2 (September 2012): 536-542, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/668402>.

of the settlement of the West Amazon and how Payró imagined the same process in southern Argentina. Ultimately, this paper explores how Payró’s and Euclides’s points of view about the regions they visited were related to their personal, national, professional, and political identities.

In close years, both writers traveled to peripheral regions in their countries, areas that faced social conditions vastly different from the metropolises. Payró went to Argentina’s Patagonian Coast in 1898 as a reporter from *La Nación*, one of the largest newspapers in Buenos Aires. In the same year, he published *La Australia argentina (The Argentine Australia)*,<sup>3</sup> a compilation of his Patagonian reports and narratives. Between 1904 and 1905, Euclides made a journey to the territory of Acre in the Brazilian West Amazon. He wrote several essays about the Amazon, most of them posthumously collected in *À margem da História (The Amazon: land without history)* (1909),<sup>4</sup> a book that includes texts

about diverse subjects.

Working for the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Baron of Rio Branco’s tenure as Minister (1902-1912), Euclides was the head of a commission in charge of the geographical exploration of the Amazonian area of Upper Purús, as a part of border negotiations with Peru. He had been celebrated as one of Brazil’s great essayists since his *Os Sertões (Rebellion in the Backlands)* (1902),<sup>5</sup> a book that recounted the War of Canudos (1896-1897) in the Brazilian Northeastern backlands (more precisely in the state of Bahia’s countryside), which described its environment and reflected on its people. In 1904, the conflict with Peru seemed to escalate. After writing about it in the press, the then-unemployed Euclides was invited to join the team of the above-mentioned commission.<sup>6</sup>

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the second book: Euclides da Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido: reunião de ensaios amazônicos*, ed. Hildon Rocha (Brasília: Conselho Editorial do Senado Federal, 2000). Euclides’s Amazonian essays were translated to English in 2006: Euclides da Cunha, *The Amazon: land without history*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa and Lúcia Sá (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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3 Roberto Jorge Payró, *La Australia argentina: excursión periodística a las costas patagónicas, Tierra del Fuego e Isla de los Estados* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta La Nación, 1898).

4 Euclides da Cunha, *À margem da História*, ed. Leopoldo M. Bernucci, Francisco Foot Hardman and Felipe Pereira Rissato (São Paulo: Editora da Unesp, 2019). The essays published in *À margem da História* have been republished in *Um Paraíso Perdido [A Paradise Lost]*, a book that includes more articles and letters Euclides wrote about the Amazon. In this article, I will quote

5 Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões* (São Paulo: Ubu Editora; São Paulo: Edições Sesc São Paulo, 2016). The book has been translated into several languages, including English. See: Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, trans. Samuel Putnam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

6 Susanna B. Hecht, *The scramble for*

Although Payró was not directly involved with his own country’s diplomatic issues, they were a crucial background that influenced his decision to travel to Patagonia. The region was at the center of an old litigation between Argentina and Chile that resurged in 1896-1898,<sup>7</sup> which drove *La Nación* to publish news and stories about the area’s social and economic conditions, as well as about its people and their everyday life. As a correspondent reporter who had already travelled to Chile in 1895 and to different Argentine provinces (such as Santiago del Estero, Corrientes, Córdoba, and Santa Fe), Payró took the job.<sup>8</sup>

The unstable national border situation was not the only similarity between the two regions. Acre and Patagonia were annexed by their countries in a similar context of national ascent and territorial consolidation. Likewise, both areas embodied analogous social and geographical challenges to Brazil and Argentina in the years following their conquest.

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*the Amazon and the “Lost Paradise” of Euclides da Cunha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 199.

- 7 Susana Bandieri, *Historia de la Patagonia* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2014), 146, 266.
- 8 Martín Servelli, “A través de la República: La emergencia del reportero viajero en la prensa porteña de entresiglos (XIX-XX)” (PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2014), 52, <http://repositorio.filo.uba.ar/handle/filodigital/6156>.

By defining this scope of analysis, this article uses both comparative and global history approaches that extend beyond the national framework of the two countries. The two selected cases involve the extremities of South America, encompassing huge distances and deeply differing geographies. The global historian Sebastian Conrad reminds us that global history does not necessarily imply worldwide coverage; the fact that the regions are in the same subcontinent cannot be disregarded as a global scale for historical research.<sup>9</sup> In addition to examining wider South American intellectual debates, this text also discusses how Euclides da Cunha and Roberto Payró interpreted the global affairs of their time, connecting events occurring in India, Australia, and the United States to their South American homelands.

The authors investigated by this text also shared resonant enthusiasm for the development of the Amazon and Patagonia. Both writers fashioned themselves as experts and political thinkers, as opposed to mere tourists that travelled for leisure. Still, there remain substantial distinctions between the political perspectives in their travel writing. It is a purpose of this paper to try to explain how these differences echoed disparities in ideas about race and national identity

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- 9 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 8-10.

in Brazilian and Argentine intellectual circles during the Belle Époque, despite sharing the same Eurocentric common ground.

### THE ROLE OF TRAVEL WRITING AS ESSAY IN THE LATIN AMERICAN BELLE ÉPOQUE

In the late nineteenth century, the growth of the hotel market and major international events such as the Universal Exhibitions gave way to the rise of tourism as a way of traveling.<sup>10</sup> The embryonic popularization of tourism challenged Latin American economic and intellectual elites, insofar as traveling to Europe was an old symbol of power and high culture. Authors with literary pretense tried to distinguish their travelogues or travel books from simple travel guides for middle-class tourists.<sup>11</sup> The French-Argentine writer Paul Groussac (1848-1929), for example, made the appeal that traveling should be a stimulus for intellectual reflection. On this kind of travel, which he called *viaje intelectual* (intellectual travel), Groussac advised that travel writing

should be understood as essays, which were meant to open new paths of thinking.<sup>12</sup>

As the Argentine literary critic Beatriz Colombi argues, this type of travel enjoyed great prestige in Hispanic-American literary networks between the decades of 1890-1910. It conferred considerable discursive authority on the figure of the traveling intellectual, who came to occupy a prominent place in the Hispanic-American press.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1919) and Guatemalan Enrique Gómez Carillo (1873-1927) worked as foreign correspondents in Europe and received big highlight features in Argentine papers, and as a result, their texts seized larger readership and generated frequent intellectual debates.<sup>14</sup> Travel essays were among the few signed articles in Latin American newspapers, an indication of their authors' renown.<sup>15</sup> As can be gleaned from Darío's examination of local cultures, Groussac's sociological approach, and Manuel Ugarte's (1875-1951) anti-imperialist overtures, travel writing became a journalistic genre and was frequently used for voicing different concerns.<sup>16</sup>

Euclides da Cunha and Roberto Payró were travelers of this genre. Subscribing to Groussac's

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10 Cristobal Pera, “De viajeros y turistas: reflexiones sobre el turismo en la literatura hispanoamericana,” *Revista Iberoamericana* 64, no. 184-185 (July-December 1998): 512, <https://doi.org/10.5195/reviberoamer.1998.6124>.

11 Graciela Montaldo, “Prólogo,” in Rubén Darío, *Viajes de um cosmopolita extremo*, ed. Graciela Montaldo (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013), 22.

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12 Beatriz Colombi, *Viaje intelectual: migraciones y desplazamientos en América Latina, 1880-1915* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2004), 72.

13 Colombi, *Viaje intelectual*, 13-17.

14 Ibid, 13-17.

15 Servelli, “A través,” 6-8.

16 Colombi, *Viaje intelectual*, 13-17.

aforesaid conception of travel writing as an intellectual and political tool, both strove to influence public opinion by debating certain issues related to the Amazon and Patagonia.<sup>17</sup> To better understand what these issues were, a further historicization of the settings of these regions between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries is needed.

### PATAGONIA AND ACRE AS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BATTLEFIELDS

In the late nineteenth century, both Patagonia and Acre were what Mary Louise Pratt visualized as *contact zones*, or “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”<sup>18</sup> These regions were focuses of what Walter Nugent conceived as a frontier impulse,<sup>19</sup> that is, a national expansionist drive towards “extensive ‘free’ lands within their own borders”<sup>20</sup>, aiming to combat native peoples and to colonize the

interior. Despite not constituting empires, then-recently emancipated countries such as Brazil and Argentina also sought to enlarge their territories in the age of the Second Industrial Revolution, marked by a progressively integrated global economy.<sup>21</sup> As they were massive world commodity suppliers, broader territories meant the possibility of deeper wealth. That condition was not exclusive for Brazil and Argentina in South America. In fact, it was the main issue in the Pacific War (1879-1884), in which Chile (another South American power) managed to defeat Peru and Bolivia to annex areas like Antofagasta, rich in guano and saltpeter that provided nitrates, a valuable product at the time.<sup>22</sup>

The Argentine impulse towards Patagonia was related to the desire to expand its areas for agriculture and livestock, its major export for international markets in the late nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Brazil, Acre was enticing because of its rubber tree areas. Before the introduction of rubber species to Britain’s South Asian colonies in the 1910s, the Amazon and the Congo were the most important world suppliers of rubber, as its vegetal

17 Ibid, 16.

18 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.

19 Walter Nugent, “Frontiers and Empires in Late Nineteenth Century,” in *The American West: the reader*, ed. Walter Nugent and Martin Ridge (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 40.

20 Nugent, “Frontiers and Empires”, 45.

21 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *A era dos Impérios, 1875-1914*, trans. Sieni Maria Campos and Yolanda Steidel de Toledo (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988), 95.

22 Hobsbawm, *A era dos Impérios*, 113.

23 Ibid, 65, 79, 111; David Rock, *El radicalismo argentino, 1890-1930*, trans. Leandro Wolfson (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu editores, 2001), 13.



sources were rare, available only in certain equatorial zones.<sup>24</sup>

By the time of Payró’s and Euclides’s travels, Patagonia and Acre had just been annexed by Argentina and Brazil respectively. Emerging as victors of the Paraguayan War (1864-1870, also known as the War of the Triple Alliance), these two South American powers used their military and geopolitical strength to annex the aforementioned areas.<sup>25</sup> Even so, the means for these accomplishments were different in each case.

The incorporation of the far southern territories by Argentina was a martial enterprise. The southernmost region of the Americas had theoretically belonged to the Spanish Empire in previous centuries. Nevertheless, from the beginning of Hispanic-American national independence movements in the 1810s to the end of the nineteenth century, the area had not yet been formally incorporated by Chile on the Pacific side, nor by Argentina on the Atlantic side. According to international law, the area was *terra nullius*,<sup>26</sup> even though it was the homeland of many Amerindian

peoples, some of them Trans-Andean, such as the Mapuche. The Argentine authorities and landowners’ experience shifted between varying degrees of negotiation and bellicosity with the Indigenous groups on its border.<sup>27</sup>

Argentine elites, however, also claimed that geographical zone (which included a part of the Pampas) as their legitimate territory inherited from Spain, longing to attack its Indigenous societies and occupy the area. This plan became viable and was launched in 1878, under the presidency of Nicolás Avellaneda and Julio Argentino Roca’s administration in the Ministry of War. The ensuing military offensives—the so-called “Conquest of Desert”—lasted until 1885, when Roca served as President. The consequence of that process was the murder of more than 12,000 Indigenous individuals, the breakdown of their societies, and the beginning of Argentine rule over the region.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the incorporation of Acre by the Brazilian government was a result of insurgencies upheld by Brazilian *seringueiros* (tappers that extracted latex from *Hevea brasiliensis*, a tree known as *seringueira*) in the area and subsequent diplomatic

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24 Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon rubber boom, 1850-1920* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983).

25 David Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 1982), 16.

26 Ana Carolina Gutierrez Pompeu, “A construção da Patagônia argentina” (master’s thesis, Universidade de Brasília, 2012), 111, <https://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/10816>.

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27 Gabriel Passetti, *Indígenas e criollos: política, guerra e traição nas lutas no sul da Argentina (1852-1885)* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2012).

28 Carlos Martínez Sarasola, *Nuestros Paisanos los indios* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2005).

negotiations. Until 1903, Acre had been a peripheral part of Bolivian territory and was mostly inhabited by Brazilian migrants.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1870s, there was an ongoing migratory wave of Brazilian people to the Amazon. The migrants were mostly escaping draughts in the Brazilian Northeastern backlands (especially from the state of Ceará).<sup>30</sup> Simultaneously, as Susanna Hecht writes, “by the 1880s, Acre was becoming one of the most commercially desirable areas on earth”: rubber held the promise of material wealth or, at the very least, survival.<sup>31</sup>

The Bolivian government had not yet occupied Acre until the arrival of Brazilian immigrants. The country tried to recover its sovereignty over the area in April 1899. As the attempt failed, the country discussed a deal with the United States to receive American diplomatic and military support to exercise Bolivian rights over Acre. When the news of the forthcoming deal circulated, Brazilian settlers rebelled and declared the Acre Independent State, which was not recognized by Brazilian authorities. Later, in 1901, Bolivia signed a contract that would lease most of the Acre territory to the Bolivian Trading Company (an

American chartered company also known as the “Bolivian Syndicate”) for a period of thirty years.<sup>32</sup> Tensions quickly escalated, and although the United States Department of State denied it, the lease posed a clear risk of future American interference in the Brazilian Amazon.<sup>33</sup>

In 1902, Acre witnessed a new uprising of Brazilian settlers led by Plácido de Castro (1873-1908) against Bolivia, backed by the government of the Brazilian state of Amazonas.<sup>34</sup> This time Brazil formally supported the movement, as the government believed that the “Bolivian Syndicate” would pose a threat to its hegemony in the Amazon. A war was about to explode in the beginning of 1903 but eventually, Castro’s military success made Bolivia give up the plan of recovering Acre. The Baron of Rio Branco, who had taken office at the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December of the previous year, managed to conciliate with Bolivia and incorporate Acre with Brazil through the Treaty of Petrópolis (1903). The Treaty stipulated the payment of 2 million pounds for Bolivia and the pledge of constructing a railway (which would be called Madeira-Mamoré) to improve the transportation of Bolivian products through the Amazon Basin.<sup>35</sup>

With this agreement, Acre

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29 Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira, “O Barão de Rothschild e a questão do Acre,” *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 43, no. 2 (December 2000): 150-169, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-73292000000200007>.

30 Hecht, *The scramble*, 181.

31 *Ibid.*, 96.

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32 *Ibid.*, 172-173.

33 Bandeira, “O Barão de Rothschild,” 155.

34 *Ibid.*, 155.

35 Hecht, *The scramble*, 181.

was finally a part of Brazilian territory. But another international dispute was impending, this time with Peru. Brazil and Peru had not signed a border treaty since the respective independences of both countries. Lima also had not recognized Acre as legitimate Bolivian territory, arguing that during Spanish colonization it had belonged to the Viceroyalty of Peru. Besides this, the Peruvian government wanted to annex Acre due to the presence of Peruvian *caucheros* (who extracted latex from *Castilla ulei*, known as *caucho*) in the region.<sup>36</sup> Another war seemed imminent, but the conflict was solved by diplomatic means, leading to the formation of the Joint Commission for the Reconnaissance of the Upper Purús, integrated by Peruvian and Brazilian members to cooperate on the demarcation of borders. Euclides da Cunha was nominated head of the Brazilian delegation.<sup>37</sup>

Acre and Argentine Patagonia were thus outcomes of different national endeavors. These areas were key pieces in the puzzle of expanding territories, which made nations feel more powerful. Nonetheless, Patagonia and the West Amazon were still too far from their national capital cities. Their environments were so divergent that they were often considered foreign territories within their own countries.<sup>38</sup>

36 Hecht, *The scramble*, 187-195.

37 Ibid, 216.

38 Claudia Torre, *Literatura en tránsito. La narrativa expedicionaria de la conquista del desierto* (Buenos Aires:

They had not yet been integrated into Brazilian and Argentine national imagined communities,<sup>39</sup> popularized by literature and widespread civic symbols throughout the nineteenth century. Patagonia and Acre were products of a “territorial fiction that sought to legitimize the expansion of the Republics.”<sup>40</sup> The immediacy of their incorporation demonstrates the artifice of the concept of national territory as a supposed traditionally shared geographic land by one people.

In short, as Alberto Harambour-Ross stated about Patagonia, “Patagonia as a national frontier refers to its paradoxical location as ideologically central and materially marginal at the same time.”<sup>41</sup> According to Leopoldo M. Bernucci, Acre typified an identical ambiguity for Brazil in the 1900s.<sup>42</sup> These conditions entailed the problems Euclides and Payró tackled in their writings.

Prometeo Libros, 2010).

39 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

40 Alberto Harambour-Ross, “Borderland Sovereignties. Postcolonial Colonialism and State Making in Patagonia. Argentina and Chile, 1840s-1922” (PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2012), 79, <http://hdl.handle.net/1951/59684>.

41 Harambour-Ross, “Borderland Sovereignties,” 78.

42 Leopoldo M. Bernucci, “Imagens utópicas e distópicas do deserto e da floresta em Euclides da Cunha,” *Signótica* 23, no. 1 (2011): 114, <https://doi.org/10.5216/sig.v23i1.16148>.

## DEPICTING PATAGONIA AND THE AMAZON: DENYING NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

The portrayals of Patagonia in Payró’s writings and of Acre in those of Euclides’s have two dimensions. Payró and Euclides indeed described the regions’ faults, such as a shortage of transportation infrastructure, an absence of public facilities, poverty, abysmal economic inequality, and weak enforcement of the rule of law. Nevertheless, both authors remained hopeful about the future of the Amazon and Patagonia. How was that possible?

These writers did not view these problems as inherent in both areas. Unlike previous authors, they tried to disconnect the regions’ problems from their natural features. Of course, as metropolitan men, Euclides and Payró were astonished by their peculiar landscapes and perceived them as indomitable at first glance. Still, as their writings illustrated, this depiction of the zones as ill-fated wild places was not solidified.

In *La Australia argentina*, Payró intended to relativize the coldness imputed to the Argentine South Coast. Presenting statistics, he related Tierra del Fuego’s weather to Dublin’s, an important European city.<sup>43</sup> By making that comparison, the author argued that Patagonian climate was not an obstacle to develop both settlements and the

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43 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 311.

economy. Moreover, upon arriving in Buenos Aires, Payró said that he had not caught a cold on his trip, contrary to what was expected.<sup>44</sup> He also reported no tribulation in his boat on the Magellan Strait, famous for its harsh conditions for navigation.<sup>45</sup> The icebergs, alpine snow slides on the seashore, and channels of Tierra del Fuego did not seem quite so frightening to Payró as much as beautiful. The journalist even suggested that the region became a tourist destination for summer vacations.<sup>46</sup> He characterized its landscape as “spectacular”: “We were astounded by the spectacle of a snow mountain [...] whose snow almost reached the sea, with bluish smooth shades, really delicate, that highlighted the nearly absolute whiteness of the snow in the top, contrasting with the leaden sky.”<sup>47</sup> Another negative stereotype minimized by Payró was the Patagonian “curse of sterility” mentioned in Charles Darwin’s *Beagle diary*.<sup>48</sup> Payró

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44 Ibid, 418.

45 Ibid, 117.

46 Ibid, 168-169.

47 Own translation. Original quotation: “[N]os sorprendió el espectáculo de uno de los ventisqueros [...] cuya nieve llegaba hasta el mar, con tonos azulados suaves y tenues, muy finos, que hacían resaltar más la blancura casi absoluta de la nieve en la cima, destacada á su vez sobre el fondo plomizo del cielo.” Ibid, 172

48 Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin’s Beagle diary*, ed. R. D. Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 253.

argued that shortages of drinkable water could be easily prevented through the creation of cisterns. But most Patagonian areas did not face this issue; they were suitable for agriculture and cattle grazing, which made Payró optimistic about the region’s future.

In Euclides’s writings, there was also a refutation of some prejudices about the Amazon. He refused to see affluents of the Amazon River as eternal natural obstacles for navigation. For him, the navigational difficulties were not predetermined by nature, but by the absence of relatively simple improvements to riverbeds.<sup>49</sup> As an engineer, Euclides believed that water engineering could easily cope with the complexities in fluvial transportation in the Amazon Basin.

Euclides also refuted preconceptions about Acre in particular. He strongly opposed the idea that the territory had an unhealthy climate: “The exaggeration is clear. Territory of Acre and generally the Amazonian plains perhaps have that absolutely common mortality in every new settlement area. But it is substantially narrow.”<sup>50</sup>

Mentioning “every new settlement area,” Euclides

49 Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 140.

50 Own translation. Original quotation: “O exagero é palmar. O Acre, ou, em geral, as planuras amazônicas [...] tem talvez a letalidade vulgaríssima em todos os lugares recém-abertos ao povoamento. Mas consideravelmente reduzida.” Ibid, 145.

accentuated that the strains with Acre and the Amazon were derived from the recent process of integration of these regions into Brazilian, more central and developed areas. Euclides also asserted that all Amazonian problems would disappear “as soon as that kidnapped society [*the Amazon*] is incorporated to its country [*Brazil*].”<sup>51</sup>

Euclides and Payró made an argument for the fitness of the Amazon and Patagonia for Western modern and scientific social patterns, which they believed were paradigms of civilization. The alleged shortcomings which both essayists noticed in those areas had more to do with political and social matters. Payró and Euclides were among the authors that first wrote about Patagonia and the Amazon from a political and social approach rather than the naturalistic, traditional one that characterized early European colonization. Thus, in their point of view, political, social, and economic solutions were available for developing both regions and installing a “civilizing routine” onto them.<sup>52</sup>

51 Own translation. Original quotation: “desde que se incorpore a sociedade seqüestrada ao resto do país.” Euclides da Cunha, *Obra completa*, ed. Afrânio Coutinho (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1995), 802.

52 Jens Andermann, “Reporters en la frontera Periodismo de viaje e imaginación progresista en Payró y Arlt,” *El Rodaballo* 10 (Summer 2000): 76.

## IMAGINING PATAGONIA AND THE AMAZON: STRESSING POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

As demonstrated, both authors presented many possibilities of modernizing and deepening the exploitation of the regions they wrote about. As a priority, better transportation networks were absolute necessities. Payró noted that the complaint about transportation was unanimous among Patagonian settlers, an ineffectiveness that undermined trade and supply networks.<sup>53</sup>

In 1898 only Transporte Nacional Villarino, a steam cargo ship from the Argentine Navy, connected the region with Buenos Aires by sea. As much as it reached some of the main points of the Argentine South Coast, Villarino still did not stop in Camarones, Puerto Deseado, Puerto San Julián, and the entire east coast of Tierra del Fuego.<sup>54</sup> Villarino’s conditions for transporting people were far from ideal, as stated by Payró, himself one of its passengers: “And some people even dare to say that this shipping line, that makes its route once a month, really pursues the Patagonian development!”<sup>55</sup> Payró envied the plentiful nature

of shipping transportation in Punta Arenas, in the Chilean Patagonia.<sup>56</sup> The reporter proposed that the Argentine state should offer aid to private sea routes to integrate its national Patagonian territories.<sup>57</sup>

Payró also stressed the importance of the creation of railways and the installation of telegraphs for the Argentine South Coast. Telegraph lines were being installed by the Army, and there was a prospect of a new railroad in the Patagonian Territory of Chubut to be constructed by a private company.<sup>58</sup> That territory was already served by the Ferrocarril Central del Chubut railway since 1888.<sup>59</sup> The railroad was a typical emblem of the nineteenth-century aspiration for technology and progress.<sup>60</sup> It also appeared in Euclides’s propositions for Acre. Apart from his ideas of improving navigation in Amazonian rivers, Euclides planned a Trans-Acrean railway, which was his greatest

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53 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 256.

54 *Ibid.*, 10-11.

55 Own translation. Original quotation: “¡Y dicen que esta línea de transportes que hace un viaje al mes, tiene por objeto el desarrollo de aquellas regiones!” *Ibid.*, 9.

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56 Payró regarded Punta Arenas as an example to be followed by Argentina, considering that the Chilean government had allegedly often executed public works projects to upgrade the harbor and urban infrastructure in the town. See: *Ibid.*, 134, 144.

57 *Ibid.*, 11.

58 *Ibid.*, 28.

59 Colin M. Lewis, *British Railways in Argentina 1857-1914: A Case Study of Foreign Investment* (London: Athlone Press, 1983).

60 Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 18, 74, 92, 194.



project for the Amazon.<sup>61</sup> This initiative would have been associated with the grand Madeira-Mamoré railway project, whose construction would start in 1907. The connection between the two railroads would have allowed Acre to have a greater connection with the current Brazilian state of Rondônia.

Euclides da Cunha had a positivistic and evolutionist background, which made him a devotee to the sciences and technology. He also carefully observed international political happenings, particularly the imperial policies of European powers. Having in mind the British Empire and its technological feats in Asia, Euclides said that “Here, as in India, there were a plenty of professionals frightened of geographic and climate difficulties – professionals that forgot that Engineering precisely exists for overcoming them.”<sup>62</sup>

Euclides knew about American infrastructure successes as well. Evoking a railway that integrated the First Transcontinental Railroad, completed in 1869, he idealized that “just as the Union Pacific Railway did, the Trans-Acrean railroad will not suit a present traffic once it does not yet exist. Instead, it will create that traffic.”<sup>63</sup>

61 Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 195-208.

62 Own translation. Original quotation: “[n]a Índia, como entre nós, não faltaram profissionais apavorados ante as dificuldades naturais – esquecidos de que a engenharia existe precisamente para vencê-las.” Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 201.

63 Own translation. Original quotation:

This quotation reveals a core belief Euclides and Payró had: increasing the population in the Amazon and in Patagonia was not only a way to maximize the economic exploitation of the regions, but was part of a process of creating fairer, new societies in them. Both authors’ political plans regarding the regions envisioned the promotion of settlement not just as a demographic issue, but as a tactic to establish certain social conditions and to overcome deprivation.

Payró considered that a main source for the plights of Patagonia was its unequal landowning policies. The largest part of rural area belonged to absentee landlords, interested in country estate speculation. This had two effects: first, it decreased the chance of settlers, peasants, and shepherds having their own lands or renting a small rural estate. Second, it also contributed to keeping Argentine Patagonia uncultivated and underdeveloped. Most of the Patagonian National Territory of Chubut was unoccupied and, in the fraction that was indeed occupied, the sheep population prevailed over the human one, something Harambour-Ross conceived as a sheep sovereignty.<sup>64</sup> According to Payró, this was due to legal

“a linha acriana, a exemplo da Union Pacific Railway, não vai satisfazer um tráfego, que não existe, senão criar o que deve existir.” Ibid, 201-202.

64 Harambour-Ross, “Borderland Sovereignities,” 133-143.

proceedings that filibustered small land renting, which he deemed “disgusting.”<sup>65</sup>

Payró fashioned himself as an ally of Patagonian pioneers, characterizing them as self-made men harmed by the Argentine government and its corrupt favoring bias towards the *terrateniente* (landholder) elite. The writer regretted how that scenario undermined the possibility of development, framing country land speculation as a parasitism that blocked development.<sup>66</sup>

Those ideas were linked to Payró’s political positions beyond Patagonia. He was a political rival of *roquistas* gathered in PAN, or the *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (National Autonomous Party), the group that had governed Argentina’s federal government since 1874 until 1916 and had Julio Roca as its longstanding leader. As a young journalist in Bahía Blanca, Payró supported the *Revolución del Parque* (Revolution of the Park) (1890), a civic-military movement led by the opposition group *Unión Cívica* (Civic Union) against President Miguel Juárez Celman (1886-1890). The movement criticized the corruption and the electoral fraud under PAN’s political hegemony.<sup>67</sup>

The political mobilization

caused Celman’s resignation, a remarkable achievement, despite PAN remaining the ruling party. A prominent leader of *Unión Cívica* was Bartolomé Mitre, former Argentine President (1861-1868) and owner of *La Nación*, the political pamphlet of that movement. Because of their convergence in *antirroquismo* (opposition to Roca and his followers), Mitre and Payró became close and the latter started to write in *La Nación* in the mid-1890s. Mitre would even sign the foreword of Payró’s *La Australia argentina*.<sup>68</sup> Hence, Payró’s criticism towards the Argentine government’s policy on Patagonian issues was a political weapon against PAN and its administration.

The fact that the journalist represented himself as a passionate Patagonian spokesperson against that government and the landowner elites is also affined to his links with early Argentine socialism. Payró founded the Socialist Party in Argentina in 1896 with writers and compatriots,<sup>69</sup> such as José Ingenieros (1877-1925) and Juan B. Justo (1865-1928). Passages of *La Australia argentina* indicate a concern about the harsh life conditions of the urban working class in Buenos Aires. Payró mentions that jobless men from the capital city migrated to Patagonia and tried to make a living through high-risk and illegal work, such as gold panning

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65 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 40-41.

66 Ibid, 68.

67 Natalio R. Botana, *El orden conservador: la política argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires: Hyspamérica, 1986), 164-174.

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68 Botana, *El orden conservador*, v-viii.

69 Eduardo González Lanuza, *Genio y figura de Roberto J. Payró* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1965), 54.



and wolf hunting.<sup>70</sup> As opposed to that, agriculture and livestock in Patagonia were highly attractive alternatives for subsistence, insofar as they were safer and more profitable activities.

These elements may have been what lured Payró to the region. In 1894, the first edition of *La Vanguardia* (a Socialist paper based in Buenos Aires) stated that in modern Argentina, impoverished people’s possibility of subsistence became increasingly constrained to selling their labor and being exploited for their surplus value.<sup>71</sup> The newspaper nostalgically remembered a past in which the production of the means of subsistence was freer in the country, something Payró thought rural Patagonia could offer in the future.

Small farming was an ongoing possibility of subsistence in Patagonia that could be invigorated, but it had practically not yet begun in Euclides’s Acre. Acre’s settlers were almost exclusively occupied as rubber extractors, as that was the sole extractive economic activity in the region. This had catastrophic consequences for the *seringueiros*’ work conditions. Euclides was horrified by what he witnessed in Upper Purús’s *seringais* (rubber

tree plantations). He described that form of work as a cruel, unfree labor: “the most villainous division of labor, which also created the most shameless selfishness [...] Tappers perform a terrific anomaly: they work to slave themselves.”<sup>72</sup> This economic bondage involved a series of ruthless contracts imposed on tappers and made them endlessly indebted to *seringalistas* (owners of *seringais*), which Euclides compared to feudalism.<sup>73</sup> The denunciation of these horrors resembled the tone of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), a book that described how European colonizers, just as its ignominious character Kurtz, tyrannized people on the African continent. Conrad’s classic novella was inspired by the Belgian colonization of the Congo Free State.<sup>74</sup> Euclides’s approach also

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72 Own translation. Original quotation: “a mais criminosa organização do trabalho que ainda engenhou o mais desacomodado egoísmo. [...] [O] seringueiro realiza uma tremenda anomalia: é o homem que trabalha para escravizar-se.” Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 127.

73 Ibid, 128.

74 There is a long literary and academic debate about Conrad’s relationship with imperialism. In a public lecture, the Nigerian novelist and professor Chinua Achebe argued that Conrad’s racist representation of African peoples contributed decisively to the imperial project. On the other hand, the Palestinian literary critic Edward Said reasoned that Conrad should be regarded both as an imperialist (due to his refutation of the idea that Africa and South America could

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70 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 310.

71 Gonzalo Adrián Rojas, “Os socialistas na Argentina (1880-1980) – um século de ação política” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2006), 275, <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.8.2006.tde-25052007-151218>.

resembles José Eustasio Rivera’s *La Vorágine (The Vortex)* (1924), a novel about exploitation in the Colombian Amazon, and Roger Casement’s *Blue Book on the Putumayo* (1912), a work that investigated the enslavement and extermination of Native people by the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company, a British corporation.

Euclides thought the dependence on latex extraction was poor for the economy in the long term as well. As a predatory activity, it did not deliver foundations for further development. This intuition was dreadfully confirmed in the early 1910s,<sup>75</sup> not long after Euclides’s writings were published and the author’s death in 1909, as the Brazilian rubber boom did not manage to endure. Though it had been a source of tremendous wealth for Brazilian Northern oligarchies (as evidenced by Manaus’s sumptuous Belle Époque architecture), it did not leave a legacy of welfare in Amazonian inlands such as Acre. As Euclides warned, due to the lack of alternative activities, rubber tapping was producing a poor and nomadic society. It suppressed population growth and geographic occupation, which remained stuck to

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have independent cultures and histories) and as an anti-imperialist (he criticized the “corruption of overseas domination”). See: Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa,” *Research in African Literatures* 9, no. 2 (1978), 11-15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3818468>; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xviii.

75 Weinstein, *The Amazon rubber boom*.

the river margins in Acre, especially in Upper Purús and Upper Juruá.

Euclides da Cunha’s Trans-Acrean railway project devised to transform that situation, insofar as it intended to disperse the population throughout the whole of Acre. The engineer claimed that unoccupied areas in that territory could afford colonizers the possibility of having small farms and properties and being released from the fate of oppression they suffered as *seringueiros*. In the regions to be populated, a less unequal society could emerge, which could facilitate the presence of public institutions, absent where *seringalistas* ruled.

Payró and Euclides were unsuccessful in their propositions because they were not embraced and enabled by national administrations. In the years following *La Australia argentina*, PAN’s government attempted to advance some improvements in Patagonian infrastructure, but continued to favor big landowners and country estate speculation, contrary to Payró’s anti-oligarchic position.<sup>76</sup> Euclides’s Trans-Acrean railroad, meanwhile, inspired some projects and plans in the National Congress of Brazil in the 1910s. However, none of them were approved and they were gradually forgotten as time passed.<sup>77</sup>

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76 Pedro Navarro-Floria, “La mirada del reformismo liberal sobre los Territorios del Sur argentino, 1898-1916,” *Quinto Sol* 13 (2009): 78, <https://doi.org/10.19137/qs.v13i0.3>.

77 André Vasques Vital, “Política e

Beyond this common defeat, both writers clearly shared expectations and held many similar propositions for Patagonia and the Amazon. Nevertheless, one topic on which they had quite contrasting views was the racial and national identity that should reign in the region each one visited.

### PAYRÓ’S PATAGONIAN UTOPIA: EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION AND ANGLOPHILIA

Payró strongly advocated for Patagonia to be populated mainly by European immigrants, particularly of Anglo-Saxon descent. Although the writer did not want to expel Argentine people from their own freshly conquered national territory, he believed that British colonists were the most capable of developing the South Argentine Coast and positively influencing the native Argentines in the process. This Anglophile opinion was derived from several factors.

First, Payró’s views stemmed from a repudiation of the Spanish colonization and its heritage. Payró not only thought that the colonial past was a burden for Argentine development, but he understood that Patagonia’s late integration in Argentina was due to Spanish

neglect across centuries. That is, having inherited from Spain a lack of colonizing abilities, Argentina lingered to seize Patagonia while England was sending its own explorers there.<sup>78</sup> Since the mid-nineteenth-century, there had been British settlers in Patagonia and its surroundings, most notably in the Falkland Islands. Anglican missionaries had been in Tierra del Fuego since the 1830s, and Welsh farmers had been in Chubut since 1865.<sup>79</sup> For Payró, the British could take credit for all the trade, towns, and livestock the region had already achieved. Thus, in order to grow, Payró believed Patagonia should not expel the British community, but instrumentalize it.

Additionally, during most of the nineteenth century, Argentine pundits were almost consensually fascinated by European immigration as an alleged path to civilization. This point of view was shared both by PAN and its rivals, even though each administration had its own policy for attracting European settlers.<sup>80</sup> Article

78 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 287.

79 Bandieri, *História de la Patagonia*, 158-165.

80 Alejandro Fernández, “La inmigración subsidiada en la Argentina y la crisis económica de 1890,” *História Unisinos* 22, no. 2 (2018): 158-162, 167-169, <https://doi.org/10.4013/htu.2018.222.01>. According to Fernández, until 1886, Argentine national and provincial governments promoted immigration by providing European settlers with provisional accommodation, job offer information, and favorable land renting and

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Saúde Pública no cativoiro dos rios: a integração nacional do território federal do Acre (Alto Purus, 1904-1920)” (PhD diss., Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, 2016), 203-212, <https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/handle/icict/16345>.

25 of the Argentine Constitution of 1853 established the official promotion of European immigration as an essential state responsibility.<sup>81</sup> Since the generation of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) and Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884), Argentine intellectuals and politicians had hoped that European immigrants would bring a better workforce and a superior culture.<sup>82</sup> Reverberating those ideas in 1898, Payró stood within an Argentine mainstream intellectual tradition. He described male and female Anglo-Saxon

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acquisition conditions. Nevertheless, the state had not yet subsidized transatlantic tickets for immigrants. In 1887-1890, despite the fact that rates of immigration to Argentina were already consistently growing, Juárez Celman’s government started a program to subsidize immigrants’ transportation and advertise Argentina as an immigrant destination in Europe. This policy was too expensive, however, and ultimately failed. In addition to the political and economic crisis, this resulted in a sudden retreat of European immigration to Argentina in the early 1890s. That conjuncture probably influenced Payró’s criticism towards PAN’s immigration policies in Patagonia, which he called inefficient.

81 Fernández, “La inmigración subsidiada en la Argentina y la crisis económica de 1890,” 158.

82 Tulio Halperín Donghi, “Para qué la inmigración. Ideología y política inmigratoria y aceleración del proceso modernizador: el caso argentino (1810-1914),” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 13 (1976): 437, <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jbla.1976.13.issue-1/issue-files/jbla.1976.13.issue-1.xml>.

Patagonian settlers (like Charles Ross and “Mary X”, characters of *La Australia argentina*) as prototypes of virtues supposedly associated with Protestantism, like willpower, abnegation, and industriousness.<sup>83</sup> Evoking racial evolutionism, Payró even wished for miscegenation between British settlers and Argentines, which he saw as a way of purportedly improving the latter.<sup>84</sup>

Another reason for Payró’s Patagonian Anglophilia was his admiration towards the British Empire’s power<sup>85</sup> and to the astonishing economic ascent of Anglo-Saxon countries and colonies like the United States and Australia. Payró repeatedly mentioned national and colonial Anglo-Saxon frontier spaces like the American West,<sup>86</sup> South Africa, and Australia as models for Patagonian administration and development. He yearned for Patagonia to imitate the ethnic

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83 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 80-91.

84 *Ibid*, 82; Harambour-Ross, “Borderland Sovereignities,” 85.

85 Alan Knight, “Britain and Latin America,” in Andrew Porter and Alaine Low, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. 3, *The nineteenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122-142.

86 Before Payró, Argentine essayists, such as Groussac, had already compared their country’s territorial expansion process to the American Western experience in the form of manifest destiny. Groussac himself had visited California and Utah in the early 1890s. See: Paul Groussac, *Del Plata al Niágara* (Buenos Aires: Administración de la Biblioteca, 1897).

melting pot and civil and economic freedoms of white pioneers in the American Far West.<sup>87</sup> Payró also desired for Patagonia to become as affluent as Australia,<sup>88</sup> especially since one of its key products, cattle, was also an important Argentine commodity, whose production could be increased with Patagonian lands. Similarly, Payró exalted the prosperity the Falkland Islands had attained and claimed that if Patagonia were under British colonization, it would have a better administration.<sup>89</sup>

The fact that Payró titled his Patagonian book *La Australia argentina* not only referred to the southern, *austral*, location of the region, but also glorified the Oceanian colony, which served as a synecdoche of the Anglophone world. It is curious that Payró gave such praise to Anglo-Saxons in a moment when great Hispanic-American writers like Paul Groussac, Rubén Darío, and José Enrique Rodó (1872-1917) defended the alignment of Hispanic-American nations and celebrated their Latin cultural ties

given by Spanish colonization.<sup>90</sup> This point of view was a reaction to the Spanish-American War (1898), in which the United States defeated the Spanish Empire.<sup>91</sup> While some essayists were afraid of the United States’ power in the Americas, Payró realized that the future of the continent was Anglo-Saxon. As a result of that supposition, Payró assumed that, in order to keep rising, Argentina should uproot its Iberian legacy and, in its place, implant Anglo-Saxon features. Patagonia, in his view, could be a vital part in that process.

#### ASSURING THE AMAZON WOULD REMAIN BRAZILIAN: EUCLIDES’S PROJECT FOR THE BRAZILIAN WEST AMAZON

On the other hand, Euclides undoubtedly thought Acre should be populated by national people rather than immigrants. For him, the process of demographic densification of these spaces had to be an *endogenous* process, whereas Payró conceived of populating Patagonia as an

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87 Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” [First published in 1893] in John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Other Essays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 31-60.

88 Robert Vincent Jackson, *Australian economic development in the nineteenth century* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), 4-11.

89 Payró, *La Australia argentina*, 447.

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90 José Luis Bendicho Beired, “Hispanismo e latinismo no debate intelectual ibero-americano,” *Varia Historia* 30, no. 54 (2014): 637-639, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-87752014000300003>.

91 Mónica Quijada, “Latinos y anglosajones: el 98 en el fin de siglo sudamericano,” *Hispania* 57, no. 196 (1997): 596-604, <https://doi.org/10.3989/hispania.1997.v57.i196.687>.

exogenous phenomenon, with Anglo-Saxons at its center. Why, then, was there such a difference in approach?

To argue that it was due to a lack of late nineteenth-century European immigration to the Amazon is a mistake. By the time of Euclides’s journey to Acre, there were already many European and Middle Eastern immigrants in the regions of Purús and Juruá,<sup>92</sup> which Euclides certainly noticed.<sup>93</sup> During the 1890s, Pará, a Brazilian Amazonian state, became a destination for significant waves of Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian immigrants.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, if Euclides perceived immigration as the best alternative for the Amazon, he could have plainly championed it. Instead, Euclides argued that the people from Ceará who had been living in Acre since the 1870s had already done a great job, even if they were not assisted by any government aid. Euclides rebuked the fact that the Brazilian state subsidized Italian migrants to settle in the opulent state of São Paulo<sup>95</sup> whereas it

disregarded its own national people, who, despite degrading conditions, were vigorously developing a brand-new Brazilian territory.<sup>96</sup>

Euclides da Cunha’s position can be properly contextualized by a set of personal and intellectual factors. Euclides traveled as a state worker of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations, so he had a nationalist civic duty, unlike Payró’s rivalry with PAN in the Argentine Presidency. In private reports and letters to the Baron of Rio Branco, he displayed a sharp national pride and registered his disguised distrust towards the Peruvian authorities he had to work with in the Joint Commission.<sup>97</sup> Beyond that, since his pre-Commission articles, Euclides had always been a champion of retaining Acre in Brazil.

That concern was linked to the ambition of maintaining and reinforcing Brazilian hegemony over the Amazon region. Euclides followed an intellectual tradition that was preached since the times of the national monarchy (1822-1889): a celebration of Brazil’s hegemony

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92 Márcio Souza, *História da Amazônia: do período pré-colombiano aos desafios do século XXI* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2019), 259-260.

93 Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 156.

94 Marília Ferreira Emmi, *Um século de imigrações internacionais na Amazônia brasileira (1850-1950)* (Belém: Editora do Núcleo de Altos Estudos Amazônicos da Universidade Federal do Pará, 2013).

95 Similar to their Argentine counterparts, Brazilian elites favored European immigration, which they conceived as the path to supposed civilization. In 1870-1900, the country

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received approximately 1,850,000 immigrants (mainly concentrated in the state of São Paulo), a considerable figure even though it was a smaller quantity than immigration to Argentina in the same time (nearly 2.5 million people). See: Thomas Skidmore, *Preto no branco: raça e nacionalidade no pensamento brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1976), 154-162.

96 Cunha, *Um paraíso perdido*, 152-153.

97 Euclides da Cunha, *Obras completas*, 1: 583.



and exceptionalism over the other South American countries due to its great territory and supposed political stability.<sup>98</sup> The West Amazon interested Euclides not so much because of its precious natural resources, but as a means of bolstering Brazilian territorial dominion. Brazilian settlers were indispensable for making Brazil’s sovereignty over the region more legitimate and ensuring Acre would not be dominated by neighboring or imperial countries. Promoting systematic European immigration to Acre would symbolically loosen Brazilian rule there, which could be perilous.

Euclides recognized the consolidation and the occupation of the national territory as a main national priority, more important than increasing GDP. He conceived of it as the natural conclusion of a historic mission initiated by *bandeirantes* (adventurers and slavers who explored remote Brazilian inlands, including the Amazon) in the sixteenth century.<sup>99</sup>

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98 Leonardo Vieira de Oliveira, “Da ‘planta exótica’ ao excepcionalismo brasileiro: a missão Carneiro Leão ao Prata e a identidade internacional saquarema (1851-1852)” (master’s thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2018), 31, <https://www.historia.uff.br/stricto/td/2213.pdf>.

99 Danilo José Zioni Ferretti, “Euclides da Cunha historiador: a reinvenção do bandeirante em *Os sertões*,” *Revista de História* 160 (2009): 270-282, <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9141.v0i160p261-284>.

For Euclides, this Brazilian manifest destiny would be materialized by the constitution of a professedly ethnically fit people, masters of environments that were different from Europe. Notwithstanding his early theoretical reservations towards miscegenation, in his view, this people had to be a racially mixed one, with both Amerindian and Portuguese ancestry.<sup>100</sup> As he praised Amazonian *seringueiros*, Euclides had already lauded *sertanejos* (people that lived in the backlands such as cowboys) in *Rebellion in the Backlands* for their courage and resilient adaptation to inhospitable biomes like the dry Caatinga in Brazil’s Northeast. *Sertanejos* did not have exclusive European ancestry: they had accentuated Indigenous roots, so their ethnic profile was far away from European-descended elites.

Euclides was among the national writers that proclaimed miscegenation as the most distinctive feature of Brazil. Sílvio Romero (1851-1914) and Capistrano de Abreu (1853-1927), both authors of the influential 1870 Brazilian intellectual generation, advocated that idea through their sociological and historical works. Though Euclides, Romero, and Abreu supported Eurocentric and racist worldviews, they denied any possibility that Brazil could become homogeneously and predominantly white anytime soon. In fact, Romero believed that Brazil would ultimately

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100 Thomas Skidmore, *Preto no branco*, 126.

go through a deep whitening process, albeit he emphasized that it would be a dilatory one, lasting for centuries.<sup>101</sup> In the meantime, the writer thought that Brazil should embrace miscegenation (which could even favor whitening) and recognize itself as *mestiço* (*mestizo*). In light of that assumption, the great literary critic Antonio Candido (1918-2017) said that Romero annihilated the Brazilian “illusion of whiteness.”<sup>102</sup>

Nineteenth-century Argentine essayists, on the other hand, seemed to nurture that illusion for their nation. Argentina’s government had managed to spread the conception that it was already an all-white country. This belief relied on the Amerindian ethnocide, economic and cultural marginalization of African Argentines, and the enormous waves of European immigration into the country.<sup>103</sup> Argentine late nineteenth-century censuses were symbolic mechanisms that reinforced that notion. Not only did they register a real and huge decrease of the proportion of Indigenous and African Argentines in the total population, but, as historian George Reid Andrews argued, they also probably

heavily overstated it.<sup>104</sup> In 1887, only 1.8 percent of Buenos Aires’ population were Afro-Argentine, according to the city’s municipal census.<sup>105</sup> The national census of 1895 estimated that the Indigenous population declined from 93,138 in 1869 to about thirty thousand in 1895, which represented less than 1 percent of the country’s population.<sup>106</sup> This background allowed Payró to dream of not just a white Argentine Patagonia, but rather a British Patagonia—that is, an even more “Europeanized” region.

Euclides did not, nor could he, project a similar horizon for the Amazon or for Brazil. After all, the official census conducted in 1890 indicated that 44% of Brazilians were white,<sup>107</sup> which (in spite of being 6% more than registered in the national census of 1872),<sup>108</sup> was

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101 Ibid, 86.

102 Antonio Candido, *Sílvio Romero: Teoria, crítica e história literária* (Rio de Janeiro: LTC; São Paulo: Edusp, 1978), xxi.

103 George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires (1800-1900)* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 4-9.

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104 Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines*, 106-112.

105 Ibid, 66.

106 Comisión Directiva, *Segundo censo de la República Argentina: Mayo 10 de 1895*, 3 vols. (Buenos Aires: Taller tipográfico de la penitenciaría nacional 1898), 2: I, <http://www.estadistica.ec.gba.gov.ar/dpe/Estadistica/censos/C1895-T2.pdf>.

107 República dos Estados Unidos do Brazil (Ministerio da Industria, viação e Obras Públicas. Directoria Geral de Estatistica), *Sexo, raça e estado civil, nacionalidade, filiação culto e analfabetismo da população recenseada em 31 de dezembro de 1890* (Rio de Janeiro: Officina da Estatistica, 1898), 2, <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv25487.pdf>.

108 Núcleo de Pesquisa em História



still not the majority. Euclides and his colleagues had to cope with the certainty that Brazilian national and racial identities were in some way original and dissimilar from European ones. This clarifies why Euclides’s settler heroes were racially mixed *sertanejos* and *caboclos* (Amazonian backwoodsmen), while Payró’s heroes were British.

### CONCLUSION: *HERMANOS, PERO NO MUCHO*

This article examined how Roberto Payró’s and Euclides da Cunha’s travel writings had deep underlying geopolitical and economic roots. Brazilians tend to think of Acre only as a specific chapter of their national history<sup>109</sup> and presumably Argentines do the same when it comes to Patagonia. A comparative approach to history writing demonstrates that this traditional point of view may not be as encompassing as an historical perspective concerned with connections and similarities between countries.<sup>110</sup> Euclides and Payró may

have never heard of one another, but the reasons why they made their journeys to their countries’ furthest regions are ultimately connected. They were bonded to the same global context of territorial expansion that South American leading countries such as Brazil and Argentina attempted to join.

Because of their condition as brand-new territories, Acre and Patagonia faced similar problems during the Belle Époque. Thus, Euclides and Payró championed similar plans for infrastructure and territorial integration based on technological integration and settlement. Reflecting on Acre’s future, Euclides resorted to examples such as important railroads in the United States and the British Empire’s technological achievements in India. Imagining a forthcoming Patagonia, Payró appealed to the example of Chilean Punta Arenas’s infrastructure and the cases of economic development in Australia and the Falkland Islands. Studying each writer’s propositions alone might give them the appearance of exoticism or brilliance. On the other hand, this comparative study suggests they shared a fairly widespread modernizing international repertoire, which characterized the late long nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup>

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Econômica e Demográfica, *Publicação crítica do Recenseamento Geral do Império do Brasil de 1872* (Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2012), 40.

109 Leandro Tocantins, *Formação histórica do Acre* (Brasília: Senado Federal, 2001).

110 Marc Bloch, “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” *Revue de synthèse historique* 46 (1928): 17-19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3590801>.

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[gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k101615j](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k101615j); Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and beyond,” *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 2003): 43-44, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3590801>.

111 Hobsbawm, *A era dos Impérios*, 96.

Stating that Payró and Euclides were just the same, however, would also be unsatisfying. The relations each writer had with their governments were decisively different. That justifies why the Argentine wished to develop Patagonia without relying much on the state, while the Brazilian considered the national state as the leading actor in improving Acre. Euclides and Payró were also on different sides regarding ethnic and national identity matters, which illustrates the state of divergence of racial theory in nineteenth-century South America. In popular culture, Brazil and Argentina are usually referred to as *hermanos* in Spanish and *irmãos* in Portuguese, both meaning “brothers.” One can say Payró and Euclides were somewhat brothers...*pero no mucho* (but not that much).

The Amazon and Patagonia are perhaps the most contrasting natural landscapes on Earth. If they came together...well, maybe there would be a crack because of the thermal shock. But another result would surely be a better historical understanding of South American history: not only the parallels between nations, but also the discrepancies between them. It is a strong hope that examining the global or continental contexts of different cases of travel writing can henceforth lead in that direction.