



# Malaria as a disease and as a cultural perspective in Carlos Chagas' and Mário de Andrade's travels to the Amazon

*Nísia Trindade Lima*

Researcher at the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz and professor with the Graduate Program in the History of Science and Health/Fundação Oswaldo Cruz.  
Avenida Brasil, 4036, sala 400  
21040-361 – Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brazil  
lima@fiocruz.br

*André Botelho*

Professor with the Department of Sociology, Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences/ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.  
Largo de São Francisco de Paula, 1, sala 420  
20051-070 – Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brazil  
andrebotelho@digirotas.com.br

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## Abstract

Two journeys have had an important bearing on social thought regarding the Amazon: Carlos Chagas', from 1912 to 1913, and Mário de Andrade's, in 1927. The article examines how their travel experiences influenced these two men's views and interpretations of the relation between malaria and the project to bring civilization to the tropics. In Chagas' texts, wonderment is the category that organizes his perception of the Amazon region, evinced in the idea that the pathology of the tropics challenges established knowledge of the disease. Empathy, on the other hand, is the explanatory key to understanding Mário de Andrade's critical outlook, which entails the valorization of forms of sociability, beliefs, and popular manifestations in the region, including those related to malaria.

Keywords: Amazon; Carlos Chagas (1878-1934); Mário de Andrade (1893-1945); malaria; modernism.

The voyages that were taken to the Amazon and the accounts that this region inspired in centuries past invite complex discussions about the prospects, impasses, and meanings that are unique to the construction of civilization in the tropics. Written not only by foreign scientists and intellectuals but also by Brazilian ones, the records of these travelers helped shape persuasive representations that served as a point of departure for broader discussions about Brazilian society. These journeys became the stage for an exchange of ideas, interpretations, and impressions about nature, culture, local populations, and relations between region and nation and even between Brazil and the world, and as such, these travels and their corresponding accounts were of crucial importance during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

One emblematic case was the Brazilian Commission for the Reconnaissance of the Alto Purus (Comissão Brasileira de Reconhecimento do Alto Purus), led by Euclides da Cunha, and the texts that this author wrote about the Amazon, which established a veritable paradigm for the topic. Yet other accounts also made an impact during this same period, albeit directly or indirectly challenged by Cunha's. The two accounts that are the focus of this article were of special import to Brazilian and Amazonian social thought: Carlos Chagas' (1912 to 1913) and Mário de Andrade's (1927).

From October 1912 through April 1913, the commission of the Oswaldo Cruz Institute (Instituto Oswaldo Cruz/IOC) led by Carlos Chagas (1878-1934) surveyed the sanitary conditions of Brazil's main rubber production centers, acting at the behest of the Superintendence for the Defense of Rubber (Superintendência da Defesa da Borracha). The descriptions and analyses found in the commission's travel account formed an image of the Amazon region that was distinguished by tension over the category 'tropical pathology' and by the defense of the role that hygiene should play in making the Amazon an integral part of a civilizing project for Brazil (Cruz, Chagas, Peixoto, 1972).

In the 1920s, modernist authors in Brazil engaged in a dialogue with these accounts and interpretations. One of these was Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), who examined the stigmatized traits of the tropics – like backwardness and disease – from new perspectives, often relying on satire and irony to do so. His trip to the Amazon, from May 8 to August 15, 1927; his resulting account; and a number of other, related texts all stand as an effort to transfigure tropical civilization in positive terms, inspired by a project aimed at the cultural 'disrepression' (*desrecalque*) of the Brazilian. While this was a collective project taken up by Brazil's modernist movement, it acquired its own special meaning in Mário de Andrade's interpretation of Brazil.

Despite the differences between Carlos Chagas' and Mário de Andrade's travel experiences in the Amazon and the specific meanings that each man attached to them, the relation between malaria and the real potential for building a civilization in the tropics emerges as a central element in both men's narratives and analyses. Still, their assessments of the disease give birth to markedly distinct visions of the very meaning of the civilizing process in Brazilian society. This is precisely what spurred us to appreciate them jointly.

## Medicine and the settlement of the tropics

In April 1913, the newspaper *A Noite* published an article that synthesizes some of the main elements of the intellectual and scientific context of the journey to the Amazon Basin taken by physicians Carlos Chagas, Antônio Pacheco Leão, and João Pedroso de Albuquerque:

Scientific expedition to a green hell

New Malady?

Oswaldo Cruz Institute to examine findings

Mr. Pacheco Leão arrived in this capital [Rio de Janeiro] today, returning from his scientific mission to the Amazon Valley. As we know, he left in the company of other scientists on October 24, 1912 (some seven months ago) in order to study the maladies prevalent in the Amazon Valley. It would be of great interest now to hear from him about the extraordinary things that the commission detected in those far-off regions of the Amazon 'where all is great, all is awe-inspiring'. What did they discover in the mysterious folds of this great setting, where there is only one actor who wastes away and dies: man?! (A expedição..., 25 abr. 1913; emphasis in the original) <sup>1</sup>

The idea of nature as a challenging force and man as a feeble being marks our human imagination about the Amazon and is reiterated in the *A Noite* article, which includes a paraphrase of a text by Euclides da Cunha. Here was another way of looking at the paradox originally posed by Henry Thomas Buckle, who believed that man would reveal himself in all his fragility in the Amazon as he faced its lush and extravagant nature. In relation to this counterpoint, Euclides da Cunha observed that man had reached the land of the Amazon before it was ready to receive him. According to Cunha, he had initially been disappointed by the Amazon, starting with the river. He had imagined a stupendous watercourse but instead found a small, shrunken version of the sea, but dispossessed of its waves, depth, and mystery. In Cunha's words, he was only to reconsider this disillusionment after he visited the Pará Museum (Museu do Pará, now the Emilio Goeldi Museum) and read a monograph by the botanist Jacques Huber, in which the latter describes the geologic formation and recent age of the Amazon. It was this text that inspired Cunha to borrow an image found on the last page of Genesis for use in the conference he gave at his induction into the Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian Academy of Letters) (Cunha, 2009b; Lima, 2009; Santana, 2000).

This topic was taken up again in Cunha's preface to Alberto Rangel's book *Inferno verde* (Green hell), published in 1908 (Cunha, 2001). This work stands as one of the most dramatic portrayals of Amazon nature as impenetrable to man and dominated by disease. Through his character Souto, an engineer who is struck by malaria and who succumbs to the jungle, Rangel embodies the obstacles endured by these champions of progress. The doctors, engineers, and members of the military who were engaged in projects to expand the national state's material infrastructure and communications networks were privileged actors in the narratives about what was perceived as the veritable epopee of the incorporation of Brazil's Northeastern hinterlands.

Against this monumental backdrop, man was small and defenseless, whether he was the *sertanejo* (Northeastern) migrant who had experienced the adversities of rubber exploitation – as dramatically described by Euclides da Cunha (2009a) – or the character created by Rangel

(2001), engineer Souto. Whether nature and disease were envisaged as depicted on the final page of Genesis or as a “green hell,” they put all those who traveled the lands of the Amazon on the same footing. It is to these strong images that the article in *A Noite* refers.

Some eight years after Euclides da Cunha’s journey to the Amazon, Carlos Chagas endeavored to find a way to build a civilization in the tropics through medicine, and he too ran into these images. Between paradise and inferno, Chagas seemed to be pointing the way to progress, a task that would demand a battle against the disease that Oswaldo Cruz had called the hobgoblin of the Amazon: malaria.

The article in *A Noite* also made mention of the journalist’s attempt to unearth information about a new disease allegedly discovered in the region.<sup>2</sup> The existence of a novel pathological entity was a burning topic, fueled by research on the unusual clinical presentations of malaria observed among residents of the Acre River valley, led by Carlos Chagas. The press’ keen interest in this prospect can be explained by the impact that was caused by Carlos Chagas’ discovery of trypanosomiasis four years earlier in the hinterlands of Minas Gerais – a disease that now bears his name. To fully appreciate the weight of this discovery, which was at one and the same time a scientific and a social fact, we must examine the role of the scientific travels sponsored by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute.

The main journeys to Brazil’s interior were made after the IOC had established itself firmly as a center of experimental research. These travels expanded the borders of the scientific institution, both in terms of the roll of research studies and activities conducted by its own scientists and in terms of the IOC’s geographic expansion, made possible not only by these scientific journeys but also, in some places, by the establishment of permanent posts<sup>3</sup> (Benchimol, Teixeira, 1993). The first of these trips initially focused on prophylactic work related to the needs of the export sector – then the foundation of the Brazilian economy – like building railways and sanitizing ports. In the 1910s, major trips were undertaken at the request of the Inspectorate for Works against Drought (Inspetoria de Obras contra as Secas/ Iocs) and the Superintendence for the Defense of Rubber, the latter of greater interest to the present article (Thielen et al., 2002; Lima, 1999).

These scientific expeditions can also be situated within the tradition of tropical medicine. Recent historiography has underscored the relevance of this field of studies to the analysis both of relations between empires and colonies and of images and prejudices pertaining to the tropics, constituting a field of knowledge and of practices where it is hard to disassociate science from politics (Kropf, 2009a, 2009b; Farley, 1992; Worboys, 1996, 1997; Caponi, 2002; Moulin, 1996; Stepan, 2001; Arnold, 1996a, 1996b, 1997).

In the case of Brazil, as shown in a study by Simone Kropf (2009a, 2009b), the development of tropical medicine gained substantial force on the heels of scientific journeys made under the auspices of the IOC, especially the trip during which Chagas disease was discovered. Tropical medicine was not associated with an imperialist project but with an enterprise of modernization and the construction of a national project, where scientific knowledge – and knowledge of public health in particular – would play a key role. This project demanded an alliance between the laboratory and fieldwork, that is, an encounter between microbiology and the *in loco* study of the vectors of the sicknesses that were labeled “tropical diseases.” According to Kropf:

The prospect of bringing a blend of biological knowledge, medical knowledge, and sanitary initiatives to bear on concrete topics in Brazilian pathology lent social legitimacy to studies on the manifold aspects of relations between microorganisms, insects, and diseases and to the possibility of integrating these. We can thus affirm that the inspiration that the Manguinhos Institute drew from the Pasteur Institute model acquired a much broader sense in 1908 than the straightforward association between research, teaching, and production to which historians have traditionally pointed; here was a movement to adapt microbiology to the paths of tropical medicine. And in this case, likewise analogous with what transpired at the Pasteur Institute, the act of going into the field – a venture motivated by the association between science, politics, and social and economic needs – ensured that our Pasteurians found their way on the path of tropical medicine (Kropf, 2009a, p.95).

In their contacts with rural Brazil, the scientists from Manguinhos were guided by the paradigm of tropical medicine, while they also followed in the footsteps of other social actors, like the engineers who led construction of the railways. Physicians were generally at the fore in this kind of work, notably in the prevention of malaria, which was a frequent problem and the backdrop to all the accounts of the missions to “know the hinterlands and integrate” them into Brazil.<sup>4</sup> In the specific case of the IOC, the sanitary actions made necessary by the construction of the railways were accompanied by intense scientific work, which encompassed studies on the transmission of major diseases and especially on the presence and behavior of their vectors.

The malaria prevention initiatives that were implemented during the effort to build the railroads represented an important chapter in the history of scientific knowledge of this disease and in the process of the institutionalization of tropical medicine in Brazil. As Jaime Benchimol and André Felipe Silva (2008) have pointed out, despite advances from the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, malaria was still the object of scientific controversies. Moreover, the challenges of applying preventive rules to the conditions found in each country – either because their ecosystems or their economic and political interests differed – became starkly evident in the experience of scientists from the IOC, as they accompanied the march of the rail network farther into Brazilian territory.

The challenges of malaria prevention prompted the Madeira-Mamoré Railway Company to hire Oswaldo Cruz in 1909. The project earned the nickname “devil’s railroad,” as thousands of workers were to die during its construction (Hardman, 1991). Oswaldo Cruz’ report, entitled “Considerações gerais sobre as condições sanitárias do rio Madeira” (General considerations on the sanitary conditions of the Madeira River), presented striking descriptions of the scenario of disease and abandonment encountered along the way – descriptions in great measure similar to those offered by the Rondon Commission. During the time of the expedition, the scientist from Manguinhos also visited Santo Antônio do Madeira and the region along the Jaci-Paraná River; like the explorer Rondon, Chagas painted a picture of the inhabitants’ plight of abandonment and of how they were haunted by the specter of death.

The positive self-image that was shared by these doctors is apparent in the reports we analyzed and also in a report by Carl Lovelace, one of the physicians on the Madeira-Mamoré Railway technical staff:

Should our work here have in any way shown that the horrifying specter of these reigning epidemics can be vanquished once and for all, then the members of this venture will be pleased to know that they have had the honor of making a small contribution to the universal evolution of the twentieth century, upon which, in the future, historians shall bestow the title 'Settlement of the Tropics' (cited in Hardman, 1991, p.153).

As a result of the IOC's second scientific expedition to the Amazon, a series of measures aimed at the sanitation of the region, and at malaria prevention in particular, were prescribed. Texts by Carlos Chagas that grew out of this experience indicate that Brazilian medical thought had subscribed to the ideal of settling the tropics. A few years earlier, in 1909, during work to extend the Central do Brasil railway to Pirapora, Minas Gerais, Chagas had discovered trypanosomiasis in the town of Laussance, thereby guaranteeing his place as the successor of Oswaldo Cruz and as one of Brazil's most eminent scientists.<sup>5</sup>

From October 1912 through April 1913, the IOC commission that comprised Carlos Chagas, João Pedroso, and Pacheco Leão assessed the sanitary and living conditions in Brazil's main rubber production centers (Cruz, 1972). The Superintendence for the Defense of Rubber wanted them to do reconnaissance of the region and to draft a plan that would permit rational exploitation of the area's resources while protecting rubber tappers from the risks of disease, notably malaria (Cruz, 1972, p.50).

In its approach, the commission adopted an array of procedures for collecting information, and its member scientists took part in manifold activities, including caring for the ill, doing microscopic examinations, administering medicine (such as emetic tartar for the treatment of leishmaniasis), keeping photographic records, observing parasites, performing autopsies, and interviewing local leaders to learn about social organization and gather epidemiological data (Schweickardt, Lima, 2007, 2010; Schweickardt, 2011).

Because the report on medical and sanitary conditions in the Amazon Basin was an official document addressed to the minister of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade (Agricultura, Indústria e Comércio), it was signed by Oswaldo Cruz. However, in the document's introduction, Cruz states that Carlos Chagas wrote the second and third parts, which, respectively, describe the route through the entire area visited by the expedition and present an epidemiological analysis. As this statement documents the fact that Chagas was the author of these two sections, we can use the texts to explore his ideas about the Amazon and about the prospects of settling the tropics.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of the present analysis, we will also take into account the text of a conference given by the scientist in 1913 at Monroe Palace in Rio de Janeiro, entitled "Notas sobre a epidemiologia do Amazonas" (Notes on the epidemiology of the Amazon); this lecture includes Chagas' central theses on the disease and his outlook for the development of the Amazon.

Chagas' records on the expedition's observations and research leave it apparent that certain unanticipated circumstances hampered the observation of morbid cases. For one thing, the rainy season had begun and thus the usual epidemics were at their low. Furthermore, the rubber tappers were deep in the jungle and far away from the river banks, which substantially narrowed the field of observation. Nevertheless, the epidemiological importance of malaria is clear, as summarized by Oswaldo Cruz (1972, p.50) in the introduction to the report: "The hobgoblin of the Amazon is malaria. Walking alongside, lending a strong helping hand,

killing little but incapacitating tremendously, is leishmaniasis in its various presentations: the savage wound of the rubber tappers.”

Throughout his report on the journey as well as in the more informal text from his conference, two categories occupy a fundamental place in Carlos Chagas' thoughts about the Amazon: the anarchized pathology of the tropics (with the surprises it holds for the scientist) and the idea of settling the territory through migration (with migrants to the Amazon replacing the native population). The role of the scientist, particularly in the medical field, would be to ascertain the health conditions that would allow for the social and economic occupation of this territory.

The really big surprise that came with the journey was a new modality of malaria, characterized by the symptomology (pretibial edema, i.e., an appreciable edema of the lower limbs) and morphology of the malaria parasite (genus *Plasmodium*), which acted as the pathogenic agent. The article published in the newspaper *A Noite* was a reference to the reverberations of this apparent finding. Chagas offered the following observation in regard to the journey along the Acre River and especially to research at the Bom Destino rubber tree plantation: “in regard to experimental research in cases of this nature, the only apparently worthwhile finding so far is the tremendous frequency of a parasite that is quite similar if not identical to the parasite of quartan fever. The Commission designated this parasite Pt.X, because it does not yet feel justified in identifying it definitively as the parasite of quartan fever” (Cruz, 1972, p.81). In another excerpt, he says: “Is this perhaps a new variety of hematozoan, similar to the quartan parasite and displaying the production of edema as its prime biological trait in its pathogenic action?” (Cruz, 1972, p.81).

It is interesting to note that Carlos Chagas' first research studies were focused on malaria, the topic of his medical thesis, which he defended in 1903. In it, he had postulated that climate conditions influenced the cycle of the disease; in later work, however, he modified this argument, since he often asserted that the characteristics of a disease had to be stable or, better put, constant; hence his discourse about the “anarchized pathology of the tropics.” We can glean this from the text of the conference mentioned earlier, where the following excerpt provides a fine illustration:

It can be called an anarchized pathology. Morbid facts that were familiar to us in our observations in the south came cloaked in strange forms and often evaded our diagnostic judgment. Well-studied diseases whose etiological causes, pathogenic processes, and full clinical physiognomy were known to us appeared in a modified form, presenting either in a more extreme form or with features previously unknown to us. And this was so roundly the case that one had to acknowledge that here lay an exception to the general law of pathology, of the constancy of morbid entities, which should always guide the physician in his interpretation of obscure clinical cases (Chagas, 1913, p.450).

The eye-opener in relation to the epidemiology of the Amazon (as mentioned earlier) had to do with the ways in which malaria manifested itself. Once again Chagas is quite emphatic in his conference text, this time in its conclusions:

In the Amazon, the pathology of the tropics displays its true traits, which are not rarely altered by the more temperate climate in intertropical zones. Malaria was the first and finest example of what caused us surprise. We were familiar with this malady

from lengthy observations during anti-malarial campaigns, which afforded us an opportunity to appreciate all variants of the infection caused by Laveran's parasite. We did not believe that anything else could be found in the clinical presentation of this malady, and in this regard we expected to encounter in the Amazon nothing more than a vaster scenario, which reproduced the same facts that today are common knowledge in studies of tropical medicine. But this is not how things went. The symptomology of malaria itself is often altered there, either presenting a new and unusual syndrome or entirely disguised in the form of clinical modalities of which we have no knowledge in the case of this malady (Chagas, 1913, p.450).

From the perspective of how Carlos Chagas' texts influenced the construction of lasting images of the Amazon region and of its settlement, the second relevant category is the concern that migration take place under healthy conditions, which formed a cornerstone of the project for the region. The report reflects a lack of empathy towards local indigenous societies, although it does pay heed to some of the diseases that afflicted them. Certain passages mention the enslavement of indigenes and their exploitation under the '*barracão*' system<sup>7</sup> but are accompanied by statements that reveal a lack of empathy on the part of Chagas. Here is his description of conditions at the Providência rubber tree plantation, on the Negro River:

The rubber workers at this *barracão* are almost all Indians, from various tribes. True to reality all along the Negro River, theirs are the most wretched of physical and moral conditions; the men are short in stature, their constitution is not of a hearty nature, and their overall appearance is not very attractive. The women are extremely ugly and prematurely aged – better put, they carry the stigma of old age from their youth on. The most extreme sloth is prevalent in both sexes.

Given the inferiority of the individuals of this race, they are fiercely exploited by the white man; one has a precise picture of this slavery on the Negro River more than on any other (Cruz, 1972, p.106).

Although Chagas does condemn the *barracão* system in some spots in the report, he sees migration from the hinterlands of northern Brazil – and especially migration from the state of Ceará – as the solution to the challenge of settling the region. Malaria is presented as the migrant's ultimate misfortune within the scope of exploitation on rubber plantations. Although Chagas does not directly cite Euclides da Cunha, we can detect clear similarities with the discursive construction of this author, whose indictment of the social conditions to which the rubber tapper is subjected is conspicuous in the pages of *Contrastes e confrontos* (Contrasts and conflicts) and *À margem da história* (At the margins of history) (Lima, 2009). In the first part of the latter work, evocatively entitled *Terra sem história* (Land without history), one of the most dramatic chapters is dedicated to the ritual mockery of Judas. The narrative reaches its climax when Cunha dramatizes a scene he witnessed while preparing the book: a *sertanejo*, after applying himself to his task as if he were producing a fine work of art, places his own hat on the straw effigy: "It is a painful victory. The *sertanejo* had sculpted the damned in his own image. He was taking revenge on himself; deep down, he was punishing himself for the accursed ambition that had taken him to that land" (Cunha, 2009a, p.178).

For Carlos Chagas, it was the *sertanejo*, strong yet beaten down by malaria, who would be the great personage in the settlement of the tropics – so long as the horrific health conditions

prevalent throughout the Amazon Basin were surmounted. The text from the conference at Monroe Palace is quite plain in this regard:

When man reaches the Amazon, having come from the extremely healthy hinterlands of northern Brazil and bringing to his labor the utmost vitality of a strong race and the highest aspirations for economic prosperity (albeit to be attained through a Homeric struggle), he quite soon regrets his own daring, as he sees all of his accumulated energies destroyed. Whole waves of Northeasterners from Ceará – intrepid people who exemplify Brazilian resistance and tenacity – are decimated by malaria in a short space of time! Those who do not perish, those whose uncertain fate is less brutal, these return, bearing with them the remains of their malady in the form of permanent organic lesions (Chagas, 1913, p.455).

### **Mário de Andrade and malaria as a cultural perspective**

Mário de Andrade's journey to the Amazon was the third in a series of four major trips that were decisive in shaping his sensibility and his interpretation of Brazil (Botelho, 2012). The first two, in 1919 and 1924, took him to the now historic cities of Minas Gerais; the fourth, to the Northeast, between December 1928 and March 1929. (This of course excludes his many visits to Rio de Janeiro, then federal capital, and to the interior of São Paulo, where he had family and friends.) He left invaluable accounts of the third and fourth of these, published only in 1976 in *O turista aprendiz* (The apprentice tourist), edited by Telê Ancona Lopez. The book encompasses his accounts of his trip to the Amazon, revised by the author and with a preface in his own pen dated December 30, 1943, and also of his trip to the Northeast, which Andrade called an ethnographic journey. Both had been released simultaneously in the form of a series of short pieces entitled "O turista aprendiz," published in *Diário Nacional*. His account of the trip to the Amazon is a type of fictionalized travel diary, later revised and given the full title of "O turista aprendiz: viagens pelo Amazonas até o Peru pelo Madeira até a Bolívia e por Marajó até dizer chega!" (The apprentice tourist: travels along the Amazon River to Peru, along the Madeira River to Bolivia, and via Marajó Island to enough already!); the title was a parody of a travel book by his maternal grandfather, Joaquim Leite Moraes, which was written when he left São Paulo to assume the post of president of the province of Goiás.<sup>8</sup>

Right from the first entry in Andrade's Amazon travel diary – dated May 7, 1927, before he had even left São Paulo – we find the declaration that "reminiscences of reading drove [me] more than truth" (Andrade, 1976a, p.51), a statement that has significant bearing on how one understands the topic of travel in Mário de Andrade and that has been addressed in other texts (Botelho, 2011a, 2011b). It was under the inspiration of his readings that Andrade traveled to the Amazon, a region with which he had longstanding sentimental and intellectual ties, dating back to his youth. These ties forged a veritable "Amazon utopia," as Telê Ancona Lopez (1976, 1996) has so aptly referred to Mário de Andrade's meditation on tropical civilization. We should remember that at the time of his trip, in 1927, a draft of *Macunaíma* was already underway, constructed from an assortment of materials and an array of other writings (Souza, 2003). Among these, the best known are the myths and legends that Koch-Grünberg gathered among the Taulipang and Arecunás in far northern Brazil, the

Guianas, and Venezuela and then compiled in *Von Roraima zum Orinoco*, the book where Andrade would find the protagonist for his epos (Lopez, 2005). Although Andrade did not specifically identify all of his interlocutors, he also dialogued with representations of the Amazon produced by naturalist travelers since the eighteenth century and appropriated and translated at different moments by scientists and writers like Euclides da Cunha.

Andrade's trip lasted three months. It began on a frustrating note for him, as he was expecting a replay of the 1924 modernist caravan to Minas Gerais, which entered the chronology of modernism as a journey of "discovery of Brazil" (Eulálio, 2001). After spending Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Andrade had made the trip in the company of other artists and writers from São Paulo and of their Maecenas, including Tarsila do Amaral, Oswald de Andrade, Paulo Prado, Olívia Guedes Penteadado, René Thiollier, and, among others, the French-Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars. They voyaged through historical Minas Gerais, which has such strong ties to São Paulo's *bandeirante* past; there they delighted in its small towns, baroque architecture, religious imagination, and music. But the fundamental discovery was that aesthetic primitivism – then held in such high esteem by the European vanguards that served as Brazil's reference point – was not found in some far-off, exotic place in our case but within our own sensibility. This discovery had crucial consequences for modernism in general and also had a profound impact on the painting of Tarsila do Amaral and the poetry of both Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade, particularly the latter's *Clã do jabuti* (1927) and on the overall direction of his work as a writer and a critic. It also proved crucial to the construction of his notion of malaria (or, as he preferred to call it, *maleita*), based on his trip to the Amazon – a notion that was rife with provocations, irony, and criticism.

It was, however, only after Mário de Andrade had boarded the Rio de Janeiro that he discovered that the previous journey's blend of discovery-of-Brazil and modernist irreverence would not be replicated in the waters or lands of the Amazon. He traveled without his closest friends, accompanied instead by Dona Olívia Guedes Penteadado, a lady of the São Paulo coffee aristocracy and Maecenas of the modernists, plus her niece Margarida Guedes Nogueira (Mag, in the account) and Dulce do Amaral Pinto (Dolur), Tarsila do Amaral's daughter. Since the group was carrying letters of introduction addressed to the presidents of the states they were to visit and to other officials, all signed by Washington Luiz – a friend of Dona Olívia's – they had to endure sessions of protocol in port after port until they reached Iquitos, Peru, and from station to station along the Madeira-Mamoré railway until their destination in Bolivia. Needless to say, this was much to the displeasure and irritation of Andrade, who was the only male on the expedition; moreover, Dona Olívia assigned him to deliver the thank-you speeches for the hospitality they received, in name of the entire group. It was only on the return trip to São Paulo, aboard the Baependi, that they met up with Oswald and Tarsila, who were on their way back from Europe.

All of this aside, his trip to the Amazon put Mário de Andrade in direct contact with a part of Brazil about which the rest of the country knew very little but that for some time had sparked its imagination and sentiments. Above all, it set before him, under new circumstances, the challenge of experiencing the feeling of empathy that had been transfiguring his contact with 'regular folk' since the days of his strict Catholic upbringing and that would prove central to his modernist project, in aesthetic, intellectual, and ethical terms. Thus it was that the

journey raised a constant series of questions about subjects related to Brazilian civilization, tradition and modernity, authenticity, and cultural translation, in addition to questions about Andrade's own presuppositions, which were reflexively and constantly contested by the world he came across (Lira, 2005, p.147).

In Andrade's Amazonian utopia, the stigmas that had long tarnished tropical civilization, as encapsulated by the Amazon, are transfigured in a positive light. This was a modernist operation related to the discovery of the 'primitive', a primitive that was actually familiar because it was bereft of exoticism; the operation was also related to the collective modernist project of Brazilian cultural disrepression. This undoubtedly derived from Andrade's broader worldview and his perception of the radical transformations to which his own São Paulo society was then subject. As industrial capitalism advanced and Andrade witnessed the rapid substitution of standards of temporality, sociability, social practices, and values, he suffered a good deal of angst and ultimately became a critic of the process (Berriel, 1987). This is the case with 'sloth', which in Andrade's pen is transformed into a tool for contesting the rationalization and mechanization of time and social relations. For him, sloth is valued as a form of creative idleness. This idea – which dates to texts from Andrade's youth, like "A divina preguiça" (Divine sloth), of 1918 – demands that the problem of ecology be taken into account when discussing civilization, that is, man's suitability to his environment, including climate. In this sense, Andrade's trip to the Amazon "reinforces his conviction that sloth is a legitimate form of creative idleness, a notion he had been absorbing since his readings of the Greek classics in his youth, of Virgil and of Horatio" (Lopez, 1972, p.51). *Macunaíma* (1928) completes Andrade's identification of material progress with a society of machines and with a kind of civilization that awaits the opportunity to complete itself. He thus articulates an opposition between a 'false' civilization – that of material progress – and a 'true' utopian civilization – that of the primitive (Lopez, 1972, p.112).

This was likewise the case with malaria (among other diseases). In the later stages of prostration caused by the paroxysms of the disease, Andrade imagined that he detected certain physiological and psychic states that could suspend curiosity – which he saw as associated with progress in a negative way, as a basic principle of industrial civilization – and produce relative indifference, which he valued as a means of contemplation and reflective spirit. Andrade branded this unusual reflection on the disease – better put, on the cultural relation between the men of the Amazon and the disease – the "philosophy of malaria." This philosophy would stand in opposition, for example, to what we read in the reports by Carlos Chagas that are explored in these pages. In them we note that malaria is deemed 'the' evil of the region. Above all, the way the disease was incorporated into the very lives of the population is portrayed as unacceptable. Viewed from this medical and scientific angle, the situation would of course seem unacceptable since the malady could be avoided through preventive measures. Here is one of Andrade's observations on the topic:

And I wanted malaria, but malaria in a way that would do away with the curiosities of body and spirit. This is how it happened: we had just barely boarded when along came Trombeta, all excited, telling us that a stupendously handsome boy was in the bar ... We went to see the fellow, and he really had an extraordinarily beautiful face, and looked something like Richard Barthelmess. But he had been completely devoured by

malaria, and his skin, so absurdly smooth, was a joyless soiled brown. The girls became wildly flirtatious, and as everyone ended up staring at them and lusting after them, they began doing everything they could to make the boy at least turn his head and take a gander. But he would not. With all the commotion we were making, nothing drew his interest, not even for a glimpse; he did not look. He paid for his drink and left without looking ... So I decided I wanted to suffer from malaria like that – nothing else of interest to me in this world, where everything interests me too much (Andrade, 1976a, p.107).

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast with the stigmas that had long differentiated the tropical civilization encapsulated by the Amazon. Here we have an empathy that transfigures the signs of tropical backwardness and whose ultimate purpose is to restore dignity to its people, such as those stricken by malaria. Another situation quite similar to the one described in the quotation from *O turista aprendiz* appears in one of Andrade's pieces in the *Diário Nacional* series: "Maleita II" (Malaria II), dated November 15, 1931. Here Andrade returns to the malaria sufferer who approached him on the steamboat in the Amazon and whose indifferent attitude spoke to him of beauty and dignity: "It was not long before I realized that [here was an] image of a sublime magnificence, I swear to it, and one that was created wholly by malaria" (Andrade, 1976b, p.459). In this piece he also returns to what he sees as the main side-effect of malaria: the neutralization of curiosity as a principle of progress. Andrade says:

Curiosity is the prime element of progress; it is the evil of life and its punishment; it made Greece grow and then it killed Greece; it killed Rome; it killed whatever; it caused and causes suffering. Above all, it un-deifies man. Curiosity is accursed. And in the lands of vast heat, it is simply 'made in Germany', Camelot, importation, the lack of culture. This is why I dream of malaria, which will wipe out my curiosity and denounce my wretchedly vain need to be someone in this contest here in the South (Andrade, 1976b, p.459).

This excerpt shows how Andrade uses his positive transfiguration of malaria to criticize the homogenization of social experience that ensues from adopting a single model of civilization. The issue is synthesized in the idea of progress, which for some societies requires the import of exogenous civilizing models, to the detriment of the recognition of other cultural possibilities considered unique to each society. But before we frame this question more precisely, we would be remiss if we failed to explain that, in Andrade's various accounts, his valorization of malaria and all that it implies did not lead him to ignore the social inequality and extreme destitution that he witnessed among simple people in the Amazon.<sup>9</sup>

We refer once again to the writings of Andrade published in the *Diário Nacional*, which represent only some of the texts where intertextuality with his account of his Amazon trip is essential to a deeper examination of this point. In "Maleita I" (Malaria I), dated November 8, 1931 – that is, one week before "Maleita II," mentioned above – Andrade is quick to acknowledge that he is well aware of the specific social place of "our" viewpoints (his and, by inference, of the reader as well), which he labels "coastal-European." Andrade says:

I know that what I'm saying is horrifying, from our coastal-European standpoint. I also know that anyone who has trembled one day in bed, forcing the house to tremble, will call me a 'futurist' or a madman. I also know that the facile counter-argument is that if I want to come down with malaria, all I have to do is go to the edge of the Moji River and ... catch malaria. All of this is disingenuous (Andrade, 1976b, p.453-454; emphasis in the original).

With the prejudices of that day (and, in part, still of ours) evidently engendering a complicity between Andrade and his reader, he then goes on to lay these prejudices before the same reader, and this time they are the opposite of empathy:

I know that in our very idiotic imported civilization, a person is not ashamed of ruining his liver with the aid of whiskey and cocktails, or ashamed of losing a leg in a car accident, or of breaking his nose while twirling about on roller-skates, but he abhors the intense sensual pleasure of the delightful chigoe flea, which draws one so firmly to mysticism. A pleasure which we deem impolite. He isn't bothered by sleeping in a hotel room or in an overnight train where tuberculosis sleeps; he licks a stamp with a smile, even when it is so aesthetically repugnant as the yellow and red stamp of the Second Republic! So he licks a stamp like this and yet will say I am depraved because I want to come down with malaria! (Andrade, 1976b, p.454).

This is a crafty exercise in cultural relativization, in which, through a series of parallels between a defense of malaria and condemnations of this view in the name of civilization, Andrade ultimately exposes the ethnocentrism reigning in his (and, in part, still in our) society, with didactical clarity.

Andrade also has something to say to the doctors and sanitarians of his day who were determined to hold a monopoly on authoritative knowledge about malaria, as part of the scientific discourse then being constructed, or who sought to persuade the lay public and the State of this monopoly:

By singing the praises of Hygiene (I have no argument with hygiene and do recognize its value), applauding surgery, and making money for newspapers – through advertisements of medicine that we ingest with our lethal mouths – we delude ourselves with pseudo-knowledge, imagining that our resources are greater, and that the comfort of an armchair is greater than that of the hard floor. When it all boils down to a simple matter of mentality and habit (Andrade, 1976b, p.454).

Lastly, in response to the somewhat humanist argument that “the paroxysms of shivering chills in malaria are an accursed suffering,” Andrade declares: “I don't argue with this. It must be, as every malaria sufferer says so.” But, as he further explains:

The obsession of my life is not the paroxysms of fever. Nor can the philosophy (if you'll pardon the expression) of malaria be summed up in paroxysms of fever. Of course my desire is loftier. I want and ardently wish to suffer from malaria not here, with work to do, with the latest magazine, the next soccer game, the next book to finish. I want to have the disease in all its scope and expression, on a narrow branch of the Madeira River teeming with alligators, or on Tambaú Beach covered with coconut palms, in silence, surrounded by gods, by questions, by endurance. By sporadic work with no deadlines or, all at once, without any work whatsoever.

As to the suffering caused by these periodic paroxysms, this is not what I want; rather, I want the subsequent prostration, the astonishing annihilation; I want to be filled with fear without cowardice, I want indifference, I want egalitarian semi-death (Andrade, 1976b, p.454).

Turning yet again to comparison as an exercise in cultural relativization, he names a series of habits that are common in our society and therefore seen as civilized but that may serve the same purpose as malaria does for him, albeit in disguised fashion:

As to the paroxysms, they come to an end. And in our civilization, doesn't the cocaine addict who seeks potential pleasure gallantly tolerate the sniffing and twitches inflicted by the powder? No one, not even a morphine addict, would say that an injection is pleasant. Let us go further: the vast majority of cocktails, the vast majority of hard liquors, are supremely disagreeable. And yet we drink them anyway, driven by boundless proclivities and aspirations, by curiosity and vanity – impossible to wholly analyze. And in order to feel our pleasures satisfied, or reach subsequent physio-psychic states, we subject ourselves to all of these horrors, and to paying visits, announcing our wedding, attending a funeral, reading newspapers, feigning happiness, along with other torments and hardships that are even greater and more commonplace than paroxysms of shivering chills. So, you want to be 'civilized'! Go ahead! But I have a fervent attraction to malaria (Andrade, 1976b, p.454-455; emphasis in the original).

This "attraction to malaria" has something in common with the quest to ascend to a state that modernist artists and writers have sought since Baudelaire, a state open to the sensorial perception of the world; it also has something in common with the many methods they have relied on over the years to achieve this end. This quest became even more impassioned in light of the perceived narrowing of the bourgeois order, the discovery of the subconscious, the symbolic and supra-realist language adopted by the European vanguards, and their valorization of Orientalism and of the primitive, which so greatly inspired our modernism. Contemporary literature, one critic suggests, "waivers between intoxication by the senses and the benefits of mystical ecstasy. The religious asceticism that is a necessary part of esoteric initiations scares the self-indulgent away. The vast majority turn to drugs, which provide an enlightenment that dispenses with the need for the strict discipline of will demanded by Oriental sects" (Queiroz, 1990, p.27).

However, since the most important modernist discovery in Brazil was that the primitive is part of us, rather than something exotic as it was for the European vanguards, Andrade could dedicate himself to positively transfiguring the stigmas that had so long characterized tropical civilization. By celebrating malaria, he hoped to incite cultural disrepression, within an unprecedented environment of Brazilian sensibility and expression. His clear purpose was to pose a critique that was coherent with the irreverent, non-conformist spirit that animated the best of our modernism.

### **Civilization, civilizations**

Wonderment: this is the basic category that organizes Carlos Chagas' perception of the Amazon region. It finds expression in his surprise before nature, before the various manifestations of disease that he encounters, and before local society. The notion of a pathology of the tropics that contests established knowledge, especially in regard to malaria, pervades the narrative of his journey and is repeated in later texts (Chagas, 1913, 1935). Along with criticisms of the conditions to which rubber laborers were subjected, his writings also

contain pejorative descriptions of the local population, most notably of indigenes. In the view presented by Chagas, the actor in the settling and civilizing of the tropics should be the migrant, particularly the Northeasterner from Ceará, whose description greatly resembles that of the character created by Euclides da Cunha.

As an advocate of a civilizing project, when Chagas, from the perspective of his experience in the Amazon, reflected on the new knowledge available on hygiene and tropical medicine, he detected a tension between the affirmation that science had a positive role to play, on the one hand, and the challenges represented by the region's unstable epidemiological profile, on the other. This instability resulted primarily from the fact that malaria was found to manifest itself in surprising new ways as it struck riverside populations in the Amazon. In short, some former certainties were relativized, although the potential for dispelling fantasies and advancing civilization in the tropics was reinforced as well. Joint efforts by scientists and the government to enforce sanitation initiatives along with measures to stimulate migration and settlement would foster the progress of civilization.

As part of this endeavor, we observe a shift away from medical discourse to a broader interpretation of society. In the years following the discovery of Chagas disease, the scientist's trip to the Amazon, and Arthur Neiva and Belisário Penna's expedition to places in the São Francisco and Tocantins river valleys, an even greater emphasis came to be placed on endemic diseases as the main roadblock to civilization. This notion would grow stronger during the late 1910s sanitation campaign (Santos, 2004; Kropf, 2009a; Hochman, 1998; Lima, 1999). The texts of physicians Carlos Chagas, Arthur Neiva, and Belisário Penna, among others, would be complemented by articles from writers like Monteiro Lobato, who was then embarking on his literary career and undertaking the well-known revision of his character Jeca Tatu. It was no longer an evil linked to race; however, it was still an evil, which evinced the persistence of the stigma of backwardness, as Antonio Candido would point out years later in his study of the São Paulo *caipira* (Candido, 1971).

If we are to understand the perspective not only of Mário de Andrade the traveler but also of Mário de Andrade the intellectual and man, then empathy is the key category. This empathy was shaped through a complex game not just of shifts but of approach and retreat as well, not just of identification but of wonderment and recognition too. Andrade manifests this empathy chiefly towards common men and women and their forms of sociability, their beliefs, and their expressions of folk art, and this can help problematize certain hasty readings of his intellectual and sentimental relationships with the popular universe. In contrast, the contacts that Andrade was forced into having with the well-to-do and with local leaders during his trip to the Amazon are marked by subversive impatience and irreverence, as suggested by the ironic and even comic tone that he almost always uses in reporting on them.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, he voices his unhappiness about the urban reforms implemented in the big cities that they pass by, especially Manaus, as these strike him as artificially Parisian, manifestations within the realm of the local oligarchic bovarist elite, born in the belle époque of latex (Dias, 1999; Lira, 2005).

These particular aspects of Mário de Andrade's feelings of empathy, expressed towards people and their culture on his trips to northern Brazil, and to Northeastern Brazil the following year, are steadfast throughout his work and career, and they occupy a permanent

place in his interpretation of Brazil. Andrade's journey through the Amazon is also a kind of meditation on society that solidifies his communion with the culture of the people and his effort to promote the recognition of their dignity. Such was the case with his "philosophy of malaria," examined in these pages, whose provocative, ironic, and critical senses are only fully illuminated when they are considered as part of his empathetic relation to the other and the impact it has on his own world of origin. After all, as Bakhtin (2010, p.23) has put it so well:

I should engage in an empathetic relationship with this other individual, in axiological terms I should see the world inside him just as he sees it, put myself in his place, and, after returning to my own place, complete his experience with the surplus of vision which, from inside this place of mine, is revealed outside of it, converting him and creating for him a finalizing environment with my surplus of vision, my knowledge, my will, and my feelings.

Malaria over here, civilization over there. Given how the disease manifested itself in the Amazon, Carlos Chagas saw it as the principal explanatory key to what he categorized as backwardness and a roadblock to civilization. On the sanitary and social levels, his civilizing project thus assigned the central role in overcoming this perceived backwardness to science and especially to hygiene. When he stated that scientific methods should vanquish the disease and thus eliminate the constraints it placed on productive human activity, Chagas was at the same time articulating a univocal conception of civilization.

For Mário de Andrade, however, the civilization that stigmatized the Amazon had been "imported"; it was an "idiotic imported civilization" whose exclusivist viewpoint was restrictively "coastal-European."<sup>11</sup> Hence, his desire to "come down with malaria" nourishes his utopian idea of a less-alienated and less-alienating society that codifies a critique of the broader social dynamic and of the highly uncreative, very subaltern way in which the civilizing process was being pressed forward in Brazilian society. What bothered Andrade was this unilateral, one-way relationship, where foreign practices and values were imported, at the cost of a critical translation based on the valorization of what was being shaped right inside Brazil as well. This accounts for his irony-suffused dialogue, focused on certain of the ideas that were essential to the First Republic's sanitation campaign and also on pinpointing the ills of Brazil, as exemplified in one of the clamorous outcries of his character Macunaíma: "Pouca saúde, muita saúva: os males do Brasil são" (Not much health, lots of ants: these are the woes of Brazil) (Andrade, 1988, p.69). In Andrade, however, the celebration of the 'primitive' is not precisely to the detriment of 'civilization' (i.e., the Europe that we also carry in us and of which we are part), serving instead as a 'correction factor', that is, as a counterpoint to its homogenizing tendency.

Rather than representing a direct opposition to civilization, Andrade's valorization of what we could generically call 'popular culture' ('Brazilian-ally' transfigured through the vanguard's valorization of the primitive) is meant to contribute to a more pluralist conception of civilization, one that makes room for difference and for a more democratic coexistence among differences, including the kind that breed clashes. In other words: 'civilizations' in the plural rather than one single civilization. This is not a minor lesson if we stop to think about the old and new processes of homogenization and standardization of behavior, feelings, and imaginations and then contrast these with the fact that Andrade's work displays a more

pluralist, polyphonic character, where he provides counterpoints meant to show how essential it is that not everything be wrapped up in one tidy meaning.

Perhaps "imported civilization" is "very idiotic" not merely because it is imported; or, put another way, perhaps it is not exactly because Andrade seeks and believes in the possibility that Brazilian society can achieve a stable, self-centered identity, as he indicated in *Macunaíma*, which was heavily informed by his Amazon readings and his own trip to the region. It is "very idiotic," though, when it endeavors to confine social and cultural experiences as diverse as those found across the various regions of Brazil to a single civilizing model, which stigmatizes any practices or values that violate this model. This is a pivotal issue, one that merits a systematic review that could render the meanings of Mário Andrade's work and trajectory, as well as the meaning of his modernism, more penetrable to heuristics (Botelho, 2012). It is an issue that Andrade ironically labeled '*mal de Nabuco*' (Nabuco's malady), as he explained in a 1924 letter to his friend Carlos Drummond de Andrade, where he drew an explicit correlation with Carlos Chagas:

You [Drummond de Andrade] speak of "Nabuco's tragedy, from which all of us suffer." Funny! Some days ago, this is precisely what I wrote in a letter, except in the funnier way of someone who doesn't suffer from it. It went something like this: "Dr. [Carlos] Chagas discovered that a disease [that is transmitted by kissing bugs], which he called Chagas' malady, is raging across our country. I've discovered another, more serious disease, with which we all are infected: Nabuco's malady." We must take up the task of Brazilianizing Brazil (Andrade, 2002, p.70).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this and other citations of texts from Portuguese, a free translation has been provided.

<sup>2</sup> The journalist lamented the fact that it was impossible to obtain more precise information, since Oswaldo Cruz would have to submit the report to Pedro Toledo, minister of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade, before any information could be released.

<sup>3</sup> Of special note among these permanent posts are the ones at Bambuí and Lassance, in Minas Gerais, which were established for the purpose of studying Chagas' disease.

<sup>4</sup> This observation does not apply only to staff from the Oswaldo Cruz Institute but to the many Brazilian and foreign doctors who took part in this type of activity and who wrote invaluable texts about their activities and, in some cases, about local ecology and local populations. Missions like the Rondon Commission and the various attempts to build the Madeira-Mamoré railway resulted in important reports by these physicians. Indications of this can be found in Hardman (1991).

<sup>5</sup> The biography of reference on Carlos Chagas was written by his son, Carlos Chagas Filho (1993). For a historical analysis of the discovery and importance of Chagas disease in the history of health and social thought in Brazil, see Kropf (2009a).

<sup>6</sup> A more detailed analysis of the report, including the reading of preliminary drafts, can be found in Schweickardt, Lima (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Under the *barracão* system, workers or small independent producers were paid in the form of goods or credit at a company store (*barracão*). The system was tantamount to a form of indebted labor.

<sup>8</sup> The title of Leite Moraes' book is *Apontamentos de viagem de São Paulo à capital de Goiás, desta à do Pará, pelos rios Araguaia e Tocantins e do Pará à Corte: considerações administrativas e políticas* (Notes on a journey from São Paulo to the capital of Goiás, from there to the capital of Pará along the Araguaia and Tocantins rivers, and from Pará to Rio de Janeiro: administrative and political considerations).

<sup>9</sup> This is suggested in the entry dated June 15 (as well as elsewhere in the text), where Andrade narrates his conversation with an elderly, ailing gentleman from Remate de Males, who was traveling third class on the ship: “the only ones who really know anything are the ignorant ones in third class” (Andrade, 1976a, p.100).

<sup>10</sup> Such was the case with their arrival in Iquitos, Peru: “A tedious official reception, a hundred introductions. The president of the province arrives, a *pequetito* Peruvian dressed all in white; he goes into the hall, sits down, exchanges thirty or forty words with Dona Olívia, stands up sharply, military style, and leaves. Then his secretary, or whoever he was, informs me that he is expecting me to repay his visit by appearing at the palace in precisely two hours! Like kings in London or Italy, long live protocol! ... Man! I know I sat down on my bed dejected; I felt like weeping, like crying for my mother ... At the palace, an elegant reception, everything white. Once again I had to give the improvisational speech that I had given for the first time in Belém and then numerous times after that, whenever I found myself faced with a speech for Dona Olívia (Andrade, 1976a, p.113).

<sup>11</sup> Although this is not the place to address the question, one can sense the presence of Euclides da Cunha even in Mário de Andrade’s lexicon.

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