
“Not a village, not a metropolis”: Ponta Grossa and representations of modernity by the intellectuals of the Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (cultural center) (CCEC – 1947/1985)

“Nem aldeia, nem metrópole”: Ponta Grossa e as representações sobre a modernidade entre os intelectuais do Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (CCEC – 1947/1985)

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the representations constructed by the intellectuals of the Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (CCEC), regarding the city of Ponta Grossa/PR, between 1947 and 1985, on the concept of modernity and its implications for the daily life of the city and its residents. During the aforementioned time frame, through correspondence exchanged between its members and the CCEC-Tapejara newspaper – we observed that modernity generated a dual feeling in the group: on the one hand, the optimistic view of the economic and material development brought about by it; on the other hand, the critical view of the morality and sociability of a “modern” way of life, in this second point, the members of the CCEC created a discourse that starting from the intellectuals and their cultural and educational projects for Ponta Grossa and for the country this reality could be transformed. Therefore, we problematize the representations of the CCEC members and their interlocutors in dialogue with the country’s historical context, linking the regional to the national.

Keywords: Intellectuals; Modernity; Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha.

Resumo

O presente artigo objetiva analisar as representações construídas pelos intelectuais do Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (CCEC), sediado na cidade de Ponta Grossa/PR, entre 1947 à 1985, sobre o conceito de modernidade e suas implicações para o cotidiano da cidade e de seus moradores. Durante o citado recorte temporal, por meio das correspondências trocadas entre seus membros e o jornal do CCEC- *Tapejara* – observamos que a modernidade gerava no grupo

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um sentimento dual: por um lado, a visão otimista sobre o desenvolvimento econômico e material trazido por ela; por outro lado, a visão crítica sobre a moral e as sociabilidades de um modo de vida “moderno”, nesse segundo ponto, os membros do CCEC imprimiam um discurso de que a partir dos intelectuais e de seus projetos culturais e educacionais para Ponta Grossa e para o país essa realidade poderia ser transformada. Desse modo, problematizamos as representações do CCEC e de seus interlocutores em diálogo com o contexto histórico do país, atrelando o regional ao nacional.

Palavras chave: Intelectuais; Modernidade; Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha.

Initial Considerations

In 1947, some independent professionals of the city of Ponta Grossa/PR founded the Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (CCEC)¹ (cultural center) and according to that institution’s president at the time, Faris Michael², as published in the *Jornal do Paraná* newspaper of October 1947: “the Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha, an old dream of several intellectuals from Ponta Grossa has just been founded in our city, and has finally come true”³. From the CCEC action, his article critically addresses the narratives of modernity in Ponta Grossa/PR, as inserted in the discussions of an intellectual field that was being constructed, and aims to analyze the discourse contradictions between the moral decadence resulting from modernity and its urban development.

The CCEC, in its foundation meeting minutes, introduced its objectives as follows: a) to boost intellectual activities, to promote scientific lectures and conferences; to publish a quarterly newsletter, and to discuss topics related

¹The Centro Cultural was located at Rua XV de Novembro, in the central region of Ponta Grossa, and was kept with funds granted by the Federal, State, and Municipal governments (WANKE, Eno T. Faris Michael, o Tapejara: uma biografia. Rio de Janeiro: Plaque, 1999). In her Master’s dissertation, Carmencita Ditzel (1998) analyzed the CCEC and explained that its members were medical doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc. The CCEC ended its activities in 1985, and the main cause was lack of sponsorship and adhesion of new members that could continue its project. Its first Board of Directors included the following positions: President: Dr. Faris A. S. Michael; Vice-president: Zenor Ribas; General Secretary: José Haynor Rodrigues; 1st Secretary: Lieutenant Carlos Gomes Vilela; 2nd Secretary: Jorge Saad; 1st Treasurer: Walter Machado de Oliveira; 2nd Treasurer: Hamilton Lima Ribas; Librarian: Clóvis Carnacali; and 2nd Librarian: Olavo Vidal Correia. (ATA DE FUNDAÇÃO DO CENTRO CULTURAL EUCLIDES DA CUNHA *apud* WANKE, 1999).

²He was born in Mococa- SP and moved to Ponta Grossa with his parents, when he was around four years old. He graduated in Law at the Faculdade de Direito do Paraná, but never worked as a lawyer. He was a teacher at the Regente Feijó school, and later on became a professor at the Faculdade de Ponta Grossa. He was a CCEC president and the editor of the CCEC’s newspaper, o *Tapejara*. (WANKE, 1999).

³JORNAL DO PARANÁ, 1947, p. 5.

to Brazil and the American continent, and finally, pay homage to Euclides da Cunha⁴, admired by Faris and considered by him as “the greatest Brazilian writer of all times”⁵, so that the Euclides’ admirers called themselves the “*Jaquãos do Pitanguí*”⁶, in a clear reference to the best known work by Euclides, namely, *Os Sertões*.

The Euclides da Cunha Cultural Center was founded based on the perspective of the Euclidian Movement and, regionally, worked with a modernizing view and organized the cultural scenery of Ponta Grossa. It introduced projects such as the construction of a specific building for the Public Library, the creation of a college in town, among others that marked the group’s action and trajectory⁷. In this sense and by surveying the documents elaborated by the CCEC⁸, we will focus more specifically on the way its members and partners with whom the institution exchanged letters understood the modernity and the way such modernity altered the population’s pace of life in the first half of the 20th century.

The national intellectuals of the time⁹, in both capital cities and the interior of the country, focused their actions and discussions on working with

⁴The CCEC was inserted in a broader movement, the *Movimento Euclídiano* (Euclidian Movement), created in São José do Rio Pardo and that keeps its activities until these days, and every year they celebrate Euclides da Cunha’s life and work. The annual celebrations that pay homage to Euclides (*Semana Euclidiana*/Euclidian Week) grew visibly throughout the 1930s and 1940s. They were organized pompously and gathered participants from all over the country. It was not a coincidence that Getúlio Vargas’s nationalist and normative policy incentivized even more this type of celebrations, since on the one hand, Euclides’s was admired as a personality and, on the other hand, they were an example of civic and patriotic feast held in São José do Rio Pardo. Such “initiation ritual” according to Trovatto (2002) gained new followers that went to Rio Pardo for being members of the Euclidian Cultural Centers spread throughout the country, such as in Natal/RN, Rio de Janeiro/RJ, and Ponta Grossa/PR. The Cultural Centers that were named after Euclides worked to advertise the writer’s image and incentivized the study of themes linked to the Brazilian culture.

⁵TAPEJARA, 1950, p. 1;

⁶Pitanguí is one of the rivers that cross the city of Ponta Grossa.

⁷The CECC members founded or helped to found the following institutions: Centro Cultural Euclides da Cunha (CCEC), *Tapejara* newspaper, Centro Cultural Brasil – Estados Unidos (Brazil-United States Cultural Center), Campos Gerais Museum, Astronomy Observatory, Instituto Histórico-Geográfico de Ponta Grossa (Historical-Geographic Institute of Ponta Grossa), Public Library own building, and the Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras (Philosophy, Sciences, and Language College) (WANKE, 1999).

⁸The documents are available for research and are found at the Centro de Documentação e Pesquisa em História (History Document and Research Center) of the History course at the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG).

⁹In this study, we understand the intellectuals as individuals who are sometimes linked to culture, other times to power, and sometimes to both simultaneously, they take part actively in society. Depending on the view employed by subjects and groups, intellectuals might be administrators, professors, community leaders, etc. Regarding intellectuals, Vieira contributes to the discussion as follows: “What is essential in this concept is that there is no prior need of level of education and/or institutional position to define

an imaginary in which modernity was the keyword for the construction of the progress ideal, so that those groups took over the task of guiding Brazil towards development, as the national culture's spokespersons. Such mark was observed in the Euclidian members of CCEC, in their projects and the representations of themselves that they built up¹⁰.

The CCEC members opposed the appreciation of economic acceleration and intensification of urban spaces to the moral and cultural decadence promoted by the same modernity, since while exposing the huge gap between the population's material and moral aspects, it created a space for them to appear as guardians and agents that could balance such relation.

To achieve its objectives, this article was divided into three parts, in the first part, we problematize the notion of modernity in its historical trajectory. The second part contextualizes historically the city of Ponta Grossa as the place from where the Euclidians spoke, while the third part presents an analysis supported by the sources surveyed of the understanding of modernity by the CCEC intellectuals and how that notion was the means and justification of their attempt to insert the group's project in academic circles and society as a whole.

Modernity in a historical perspective

One of the most recurrent themes along the historical itinerary is the modernity phenomenon and its derivations – modern, modernization – and mainly, its correlations with other emblematic terms such as progress, civilization, and development. As pointed out by Berman¹¹:

The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology(...) immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them half-way across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth (...) increasingly powerful national

the intellectual. It is a task for the investigator interested in the theme to analyze the nature of the ongoing formative processes, the protagonists' actions, and mainly, to assess the contexts and social consequences of such projects" (VIEIRA, Carlos E. O movimento pela Escola Nova no Paraná: trajetórias e idéias educativas de Erasmo Pilotto. *Educar em Revista*. Curitiba, n.18, 2001, p. 57).

¹⁰ Id. *Ibidem*.

¹¹ BERMAN, Marshall. *Tudo que é sólido desmancha no ar*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1986, p. 16.

states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, and peoples challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. In the twentieth century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called “modernization”.

However, depending on the field the historian investigates and the specific context of a country or a group, we can still observe practices and ideals that do not correspond to the ideal of modernity coined by the Modern European “Court Society”. This fact was evidenced in the study put forward by Thompson (1998)¹² addressing the sale of wives, a typical phenomenon of the English communal culture that was still in force in the early 20th century.

According to Berman, the European society started to establish more intense links with modernity during the Enlightenment movement, even if marked by highs and lows, the pace set by the newly installed capitalism in England, which started to spread to other countries and the germ of a bourgeois liberalism already had effects on both the representation (imaginary) and the everyday life in Europe. For example, in 1761, Rousseau launched the novel *La Nueva Heloise*, whose characters already felt a new lifestyle, which was at the same time fascinating and scary, according to one of the characters¹³:

I’m beginning to feel the drunkenness that this agitated, tumultuous life plunges you into. With such a multitude of objects passing before my eyes, I’m getting dizzy. Of all the things that strike me, there is none that holds my heart, yet all of them together disturb my feelings, so that I forget what I am and who I belong to.

¹²Thompson reveals to the reader that selling wives corresponded to a popular type of divorce included in the field of the peasants’ tradition, in which for the divorce to be formalized, the wife was sold in a public square by her husband. The journalistic and legal discourses of the time considered that practice wild and old dated, thus not matching modern standards. Therefore, these contradictions are introduced to the subject when considering what is the modern that interests us, whose construction is linked to a series of events and institutions that appeared after the 15th century. (THOMPSON, Edward. P. *Costumes em comum*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998).

¹³ROUSSEAU *apud* BERMAN, 1986, p. 17.

Figures of speech and the city's geography that were well used by Baudelaire in the late 19th century started to permeate the imaginary of men and women centuries ago: the night, the drunkenness, the pain, and chaos gradually started to be associated with this new life structure. From 1789, that is, the French Revolution onwards, the contradictions posed by modernity appeared even more, since on the one hand the bourgeois "liberty, fraternity, and equality" overthrew the monarchy from the political center and disseminated a new era of development, on the other hand, the liberal economic and political system raised social inequalities to unimaginable levels.

Baudelaire wrote poems addressing the street environment, the beggars who crowded the sidewalks during the day and the prostitutes who used them at night, among other themes related to the poor urban everyday life in Paris at the time. The Modern upsurge was considered "transitory, fast, contingent"¹⁴. According to Berman, Baudelaire's view in the late 19th century, constitutes the tonic of modernity in the 20th century¹⁵

Their twentieth century successors have lurched far more toward rigid polarities and flat totalizations. Modernity is either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm, or else condemned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt; in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith, incapable of being shaped or changed by modern men. Open visions of modern life have been supplanted by closed ones, Both/And by Either/Or.

In this sense, according to Anthony Giddens¹⁶, the 20th century XX imploded some aspects of the optimism found in the 19th century thinkers about a better future since two world wars, the increased social inequalities, and the economic crises reinforced such implosion. In agreement with Giddens's remarks, when analyzing the arts field, Gumbrecht considered the early 20th century as a moment that marked the "subversive spirit" of poets and painters – dadaist, futurist, among others – highlighting the discrepancy between the historical time and the modern historical subjects¹⁷:

¹⁴ BAUDELAIRE, Charles. O pintor da vida moderna. In: COELHO, Teixeira. (Org.). A modernidade de Baudelaire. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988, p. 176.

¹⁵ BERMAN, 1986, p. 27.

¹⁶ GIDDENS, Anthony. As consequências da modernidade. 2.ed. São Paulo: UNESP, 1991.

¹⁷ GUMBRECHT, Hans U. Modernização dos sentidos. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 1998, p. 19.

What cultural historians have even labelled ‘high modernity’, the moment called by the ‘historical vanguards’ (for us) the first decade and the 20s of this century, is the most radical level of this loss of balance between signifier and signified (...).

Going beyond such complex contradictions, we sought to analyze how a group of intellectuals gathered in a Cultural Center and dialoguing with other centers, groups, and subjects felt and recreated that modernity in Ponta Grossa, a city in the interior of the state of Paraná. Considering modernity a constant phenomenon, the way of feeling it is variable, in both time and space.

In this sense, how did a group of intellectuals from Ponta Grossa feel and represent modernity in their city? A city that up to the end of the 19th century had a population below ten thousand inhabitants¹⁸. In other words, how did the process of understanding and constructing the modernity contradictions occur in a certain space-time? This is what we sought to unveil.

On the one hand, those 20th century men and women witnessed world wars and the social, cultural, political, and economic contradictions of the 20th century modernity; on the other hand, the same modernity left Europe and became the consumption dream of great part of the American countries. In Brazil, that dream was not restricted to the capitals such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, or Curitiba, small cities in the interior were also inserted in that process.

Ponta Grossa: a historical context and the modernity meanings

The Euclidian chronist from Ponta Grossa, Daily Luiz Wambier¹⁹, in one of his texts written for the *Jornal da Manhã* newspaper in the 1950s, discussed the modern atmosphere felt in Ponta Grossa, and at a certain point in the text used the expression “Ponta Grossa is neither a village nor a metropolis”. Certainly, this sentence smartly reveals the routine of the city and its representations at the intellectual and imaginary levels, placing it in a transition between “a village and a metropolis”.

Although such representations, as we will see below, were frequent in the intellectual circles of Ponta Grossa in the first decades of the 20th century,

¹⁸DITZEL, Carmencita. H. M. O arraial e fogo da cultura:os euclidianos ponta-grossenses. Dissertação de Mestrado. Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa (UEPG), Ponta Grossa, 1998.

¹⁹He was a journalist, chronist, and politician (councilman) in the city of Ponta Grossa. He worked actively in the CCEC, being the only treasurer in the history of the institution and was also the first secretary of the Philosophy College of Ponta Grossa (WANKE, 1999).

we cannot ignore that the constitution of such image occurred in a process. This was one of the typical characteristics of the national intellectuality in the early 20th century, since the chronists that visited Ponta Grossa (which belonged to the state of São Paulo at the time) during the 19th century represented it differently, depicting it as a village rather than a metropolis.

Historically, Ponta Grossa emancipated from the city of Castro in 1862 and its main economic activities were agriculture and cattle driving, due to its geographical position that favored the traffic of animals from Rio Grande do Sul to Sorocaba-SP, on the road known for centuries as the *Caminho de Viamão* (Viamão Way). Even with these activities, Ponta Grossa before and after emancipation did not show a rhythm of intense economic or social diversification in its everyday life.

In the last decades of the 19th century, three factors gave a fresh impetus to the city of Ponta Grossa in its socioeconomic planning, namely, the immigration wave, the mate production, and the construction of railways. The immigrants arriving in the *Campos Gerais* region were attracted by the government incentive and private businesses aiming to populate the area and work in the state agriculture, waves of immigrants arrived following the harsh economic situation they faced in some European nations²⁰.

The government incentive caused a series of problems to the immigrants, since poor agricultural soil associated with the distant contact with immigrants and local society made many of them leave the state of Paraná and migrate to other regions of the country or the so-called América Platina, that is, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay²¹. Those who remained in Paraná, and those coming from private initiatives, made up the state immigration, in which part of the newcomers settled in the rural areas and another part in the cities.

Therefore, the rural and urban environments were mainly linked by the mate production, which was transported on donkey back to the cities and ports or in immigrants' and small farmers' wagons. However, immigrants who did not dedicate to the mate activity started their own businesses in the city – trading small items and textiles, among others.

²⁰ ZULIAN, Rosângela W. Entre o aggiornamento e a solidão: práticas discursivas de D. Antônio Mazzarotto, primeiro bispo diocesano de Ponta Grossa-PR (1930-1965). Tese de Doutorado em História. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis, 2009.

²¹ MOLAR, Jonathan de O. A representação da imigração polonesa nas imagens da Gazeta Polaca no Brasil. Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso. Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa (UEPG), Ponta Grossa, 2007.

Some of those immigrants founded traditional industries and commercial enterprises in the city of Ponta Grossa. Henrique Tielen founded the *Adriática* Brewery (1896), Theodoro Klüppel (1900) set up a lumber, Jacob Holzmann founded the *O Progresso* newspaper in 1907 (in 1913 it was renamed *Diário dos Campos*) and the *Renascença Cinema* (1911), the first sound cinema of the state, among other immigrant families who were also linked to commercial activities. According to Carmencita Ditzel: “Therefore, immigrants and their descendants contributed effectively to the increased population and the urbanization rate inversion in Ponta Grossa. In addition, they were vital for the social, cultural, and political dynamization process in the city”²².

The opening of economic and cultural facilities was accompanied by other factors that entered the urban routine such as automobiles, sanitation, and electrical power. In the minutes of a 1905 meeting of the Municipal Council about the inauguration of the electrical power station, the representations of that time about the event and what it meant were recorded²³:

The President announced that the session aimed to record in the proceedings of that Council the date of inauguration of the arrival of the electrical power in the city. (...)...Sen. Teixeira Coelho used the tribune, representing the Recreational Literary, Lyra dos Campos Musical Group, and the Leon Tolstoi Socialist Circle and gave an inspired speech referring to the main theme of the session. He said that in addition to the electrical lighting, the material light, it is also necessary to address another light, even more powerful and fruitful: - the education light;

According to these findings, immigrants and the local population gradually intensified not only the economic sphere, but also the cultural and social agendas. The urban development interest permeated the streets and houses in Ponta Grossa. In addition, in the last decade of the 19th century, Ponta Grossa became geographically centered in the state due to the construction of the Curitiba – Paranaguá railway (1894) and, later on, the São Paulo – Rio Grande railway (1896), giving the city the nickname “crossroad city”²⁴.

²² DITZEL, 2004, p. 76.

²³ ATA A CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE PONTA GROSSA *apud* ZULIAN, 2009, p. 43.

²⁴ SILVA, Edson Armando. *Energia elétrica e desenvolvimento industrial em Ponta Grossa (1904-1973)*. Universidade Federal do Paraná. Dissertação de Mestrado em História. Curitiba, 1993, p. 19.

Such development “wave” that started in the big centers of the country, gradually spread to the inner cities. According to José Murilo de Carvalho (1990), modernization became an obsessive idea for the formation of a nation – white, polite, and aligned with capitalism and the good manners imported from Europe. According to Rosângela Zulian²⁵:

The continuous mentions to urban dressing habits and the sophistication of some in their lifestyle and the appreciation of the European culture, confirmed the idea of a regulated and progressist city, shading local problems and structural poverty. These representations of modernity were related to the construction of an ideology of progress, which in the moments of consolidation of the republican regime, started to be disseminated throughout the country. Order, progress, urbanization, and modernization were the feelings, aspirations, and values found in the writings of the intellectuals of that time, and that integrated a nation project.

The opening of commercial facilities, entertainment spaces, and new products were factors that boosted the city development. Therefore, we noticed in the first half of the 20th century political, journalistic, and legal discourses that emphasized such growth.

Between 1920 and 1945, Ponta Grossa, according to the census of that period, became the second largest city in the state, with 38,417 inhabitants, and approximately 75% of the population living in the urban area²⁶. In 1952, according to Ditzel²⁷, the city had 6 journals, 3 cinemas, 13 literary associations, 60 elementary schools, 12 secondary schools, and higher education institutions. The discourse created about a modern, civilized, and organized Ponta Grossa emphasized the positive aspects and events that denoted its urban development and economic growth. On the other hand, in some moments, and mainly through the journalistic discourse, which echoed the residents’ voices, we observed claims of a city that, in some aspects was closer to the village than to the metropolis cited by Wambier.

²⁵ ZULIAN, 2009, p. 118.

²⁶ The data recorded by the Census can be questioned, considering that it was a state indicator. One example of this is the research developed by Fabiana Andréa Vaz entitled ‘Teachers’ education in Paraná: the Teaching School in Ponta Grossa (1924-1940)’, whose data revealed a literacy rate far below the one informed by the Census. According to that author, in 1920, out of a population of around thirty thousand people, twenty-three thousand were illiterate. (VAZ, 2005, p.115).

²⁷ DITZEL, 2004.

One example of the existing problems of the growing city were the dirty streets that were covered in mud whenever rained and dust on dry days, bothering housewives and business owners. A Syrian Lebanese immigrant who came to Ponta Grossa and was interviewed by Eno Wanke (1999) while he was writing Faris Michaelé's biography, reported that when he arrived in the city in the 1920s, he did not believe that the well-advertised city was not more than a few dirty streets with horses tied to trees. According to that immigrant²⁸:

When I arrived in Brazil, my brother came to meet me in Santos. I was looking forward to come to Ponta Grossa since I thought it was a big city (...) Then, when we arrived here at the train station, when the train stopped, I asked my brother: 'where is Ponta Grossa? This is not possible! Is this Ponta Grossa?' There was nothing more than three, four, or five wooden houses! The Vicente Machado avenue was divided into two lanes by trees, and so was the Balduíno Taques avenue. The peasants would arrive on their wagons pulled by horses that were tied to the trees

The planned streets, squares, and tree shaded sidewalks were restricted to the larger and more centrally located streets – those farther from the center still kept the aspect of a provincial Ponta Grossa. The city presented contradictions between modern and traditional, civilized, and provincial, which were revealed in the journalistic discourses, in political events, and in the population's reports. Pesavento contributed to the discussion by pointing out that²⁹

(...) In fact, a metropolis provides its inhabitants with contradictory representations of the spaces and amenities it offers. On the one hand, it is light (...) civilization, and a synonym to progress. However, on the other hand, it can be represented as threatening (...) These are, surely, contradictory views of attraction and rejection (...) which paradoxically might coexist in the same bearer (...) the posture of celebration and combat when facing the new, which is partly fascinating and partly frightening.

²⁸ WANKE, 1999, p. 18.

²⁹ PESAVENTO, Sandra Jatáhy. A Cidade Maldita. In: PESAVENTO, Sandra Jatáhy; SOUZA, Célia Ferraz de. *Imagens Urbanas: os diversos olhares na formação do imaginário urbano*. Rio Grande do Sul: UFRGS, 1997, p. 70.

We found some chronicles in the Ponta Grossa newspapers, which revealed the dual aspects expressed by Pesavento when depicting the fascination and fear provided by the city, whose pace of life was in a changing process. Wambier also reported in one of his chronicles³⁰:

The city remains the stage of offender gangs of youngsters, who by mistake, many people tend to call playboys (...) the behavior shown by these authentic criminal projects, who are usually spoiled by wealthy parents (...)

We do not know how long Ponta Grossa can put up with this people, but it is certain that these undesirable young men have gradually made our city infamous (...)

In another chronicle, Wambier called the readers' attention to the fact that the modernity insertion in Ponta Grossa also changed the way young people related with each other, and this fact was condemned by that author³¹:

It is quite weird, in all aspects, the way modern young men and women treat each other. They look like partners of any sort rather than people who have no previous family links. It is all like 'hooray' all the time! Dating these days looks interesting when compared to the way it was done before. Nowadays, young lads must be careful about the girls they relate with. They make advancements without any decency. They allow such a liberal behavior as if they were married couples. And if the lad does not refrain himself and is careless, oh my! things happen (...).

Wambier's critique in his chronicles largely pointed out the behavior that "was unusual" and differed from the representations of Ponta Grossa, a city that should modernize in an orderly and civilized manner. We cannot forget that the transformations that occurred in the urban environment caused impact on the inhabitants, intellectuals included – as we could observe in Wambier's reactions – however, the emphasis on the cultural and social degradation opened some space for them to pose as organizers of those spheres. From the larger centers to the interior towns, the impact brought by that modernity ideal interacted with the intellectuals' minds and hearts³².

³⁰ JORNAL DA MANHÃ, 1955, p. 7.

³¹ JORNAL DA MANHÃ, 1957, p. 6.

³² The modernity representation that lured the intellectuals from Rio de Janeiro, as explained by Carvalho (1990), or those from São Paulo, investigated by Maria Izilda de Matos (2007), revealed a quite interesting closeness with the discourses produced in Ponta Grossa.

In Ponta Grossa, the CCEC members recorded their impressions about the transformations occurred in the city and saw them as positive for the economic and structural development of the urban space. On the other hand, they also emphasized the moral decadence inherent in it regarding social relations and the cultural poverty of its inhabitants. The discourse, as we will see below, of “modernity guardian” was not produced in a dedicated and selfless manner since behind that defense there was a set of interests that ranged from the desire of intellectual ascension to the project of gathering political and social support to their proposals.

The intellectuals’ discourse construction, in general, was aligned with the modern aura, and found coherence in the media representations, in politics, and in the events that gathered them, such projects created distinct roles for the social groups. Modernity should reach everybody; however, not in the same way or with the same interests. Wambier’s report of the youngsters’ behavior evidences this issue: that authors’ critique did not focus on the young men, but rather the young women, who did not stick to the paternalist/patriarchal position historically ascribed to them.

Thus, modernizing, according to the CCEC views, did not mean to seek a rupture with a behavioral and cultural order historically set in the country. Problematizing terms such as patriarchy and social inequality was not in the agenda of their discourses. Conversely, there was a clear delimitation of fixed roles who agreed with the moral historically established by the Brazilian colonization of a catholic basis, and the typical nationalist emphasis of the Euclidian movement³³.

The image that the CCEC sought to build up was close to the discourse of one of its corresponding members, *Ciro Silva*³⁴, who stated that “I am proud to accept such a noble investiture, which, therefore, allowed me to enter this remarkable intellectual organization that has continuously contributed to the cultural progress of the state and the country”³⁵. Even if we consider this treatment and compliment from one intellectual to another or to an institution simply as a form of usual treatment – as the usual language – rather than a sincere praise, the CCEC used this rhetoric that intellectuals were familiar with to build up representations of the institution and its members.

³³ TROVATTO, Cármen. *A Tradição Euclidianana: uma ponte entre a história e a memória*. São Paulo: UNIRIO, 2002.

³⁴ He was born in Curitiba, and became a poet, typographer, and professor.

³⁵ SILVA, 1949.

Emphasize the CCEC role in the discursive plan as men prepared to organize the culture corresponded to consider them better than other groups – either belonging to the intellectual field or outside it – in which, some win and impose their views on others, while the latter are unauthorized, thus remaining in subaltern or opposing positions. Therefore, in the next subtopic we problematize in a more detailed way, how the Euclidians understood modernity and their projects for the urban life of Ponta Grossa and Brazil.

Modernity in the perspective of Euclidian members of the CCEC

We observed that the city of Ponta Grossa was immersed in a national atmosphere whose notion of modernity became emblematic for the development process in the late 19th century. On the other hand, as pointed out by Berman³⁶, the 20th century men expressed diverse ideas and positionings, which were many times contradictory, as a result of positive and negative factors brought about by modernity and the institutions supporting it. Considering this scenery, how did Euclidians behave?

Observing the everyday life of the residents of Ponta Grossa and Brazil provided the Euclidians with impressions about the meaning of such modernity in the urban space and the impact caused on the inhabitants, synthetically represented by them through the contradiction between economic development and sociocultural poverty. Such impressions resulted in texts and discourses delivered to the audience via their means of communication. However, within the group relations and even by means of silence, or what was omitted in those texts, we analyzed that it was not about the observation of facts only, but as a result of it, the Euclidians used the modernity concept as a space where they could move to make their projects reach other intellectual circles and the broader audience. For this reason, they should self-represent as guides to provide balance between the positive and negative aspects observed.

Their writings based on the observation of everyday life, mainly recorded in the *Tapejara*³⁷ newspaper and in letters, provided the readers with

³⁶BERMAN, 1986.

³⁷ In 1950, from the CCEC, the “Jaguços do Pitangui” created the “Tapejara” newspaper, in the Tupi language it meant “Lord of the Way”. From that point onwards, the Euclidians created an independent means of communication and expression of their ideas. The first issue of the *Tapejara* was published on 3rd September 1950 and it was divided into several sections – cultural news of Ponta Grossa, feature articles about indigenous tribes, Pan-Americanism, homages to Euclides da Cunha etc., the authors of those sections were intellectuals from Paraná and collaborators from other places in the country and

the public representation of a group of dedicated intellectuals who selflessly worked in favor of the culture as a way of preventing social and cultural vices intensified by modernity. Their way of presenting their actions was free from evidence that could reveal their personal interests or their desire for social ascension. In that case, the Euclidian's critique and effort focused on the cultural and moral poverty of the Brazilian people, the need to create institutions, for example, the library, to cater for the population's intellectual reorganization.

The Euclidian's representations of the more intense traffic, increased urban violence, and other forms of relationships outside the marriage institution, the frailty of principles such as honesty and seriousness, were themes constantly addressed in their texts, when referring to the sociocultural aspect of the life in the city. According to them, the everyday life was negatively transformed from the new interactions occurred in the urban environment that was becoming industrialized, expanded, and boosted diverse ambitions among its inhabitants. In this sense, Sótero Angelo³⁸ recorded in a letter sent to the CCEC³⁹:

Modern youngsters are concerned with football and running for the municipal council – this is one of the reasons for this chaotic phase of human feelings (...) which are reinforced in this hectic rhythm of spiritual decadence.

On the other hand, the material field was represented in a positive way by the Euclidian's: the increased urban population, industrialization, asphalt on the streets, the construction of small buildings, and the novelty of goods and services were considered by them as an undeniable mark of the progress in the city.

The overview that the Euclidian's offered of the everyday life in Ponta Grossa and, in Brazil in general, in which the paradox between sociocultural and material aspects they understood as modernity, did not make them repudiate it. It was their critique of the sociocultural field in the city that marked in their discourse the public posture that made them represent themselves as “potential guides” of the population towards the recovery of the existing relations between the population's material progress and moral

in the American continent.

³⁸No information/data was found of Sótero Angelo.

³⁹ANGELO, 1951.

and cultural poverty. For this reason, the CCEC president, Faris Michael, wrote in the *Tapejara* journal⁴⁰:

When instead of the needed and fruitful functional synergism – that is, the complete interaction and consonance between the two faces of the human nature – what we observe is the most hypertrophic of the progress aberrations, the anomaly of soulless cities, in an imitation of the characters of extraordinary novels.

Unfortunately, despite the good will of few enlightened minds and even the dedication of others, the cultural efforts, that is, those that sought culture for its own sake, would never find a proper refuge, and therefore, would be dismantled in their first attempt of realization.

It seems that we are fated to the eternal and annoying negativism of the ill-born peoples. Libraries, we never had a decent one, the same regards to cultural centers, newspapers, or other serious cultural enterprises. We grew up here and formed our spirits within self-learning and lack of means of all sorts.

Little by little, however, we noticed the common inclination and the need to gather efforts to react against this never-ending stagnation. Then, we gathered some individuals linked to the press, education, and other independent professionals, and decided to start this center (...) The scope of our cherished institution is, undoubtedly, a broad one, since the meaning of the word culture embraces the most varied sectors of human knowledge.

The projects and discussions developed by the CCEC, either regarding Ponta Grossa or Brazil, targeted other intellectuals and the ruling elite since it became clear that their considerations about the cultural poverty and the lack of moral principles were ascribed to the remaining population. In other words, those adjectives did not describe the intellectuals since they were responsible individuals able to carry out the cultural and behavioral reorganization of society.

Even when observing the transformations occurred in the urban environment, they questioned the modernity that reached the center of Ponta Grossa, the urban and industrial growth, and more generally, the behaviors observed in those spaces. However, they did not approach issues involving

⁴⁰ TAPEJARA, 1954, p. 1.

social inequalities or structural problems found in the neighborhoods that were outside the central space.

The future modernity intended by the CCEC was the intellectual one, in which that intellectualized elite had to be built up in Ponta Grossa and, for this reason, the Euclidians put so much effort to support the foundation of the college, museums, etc., aiming to transform the city’s culture in two ways, namely, by forming its leaders – political and intellectual rulers – and instructing the population regarding their behavior. In a letter to the CCEC, an unknown author stated⁴¹:

Modernists who named themselves the iconoclasts of a heritage of honored traditions shall pass as hurricanes pass. However, many things shall remain as a statement of the sublimity expressed in the language, the genius, the race, and the monuments that shall survive the catastrophe.
(...) Culture shall be the spirits’ award in the moderate competition of each man’s desires. Our dear Brazil, Ponta Grossa included, shall enjoy the benefits of tranquility and progress, so that the city can confirm its predicament as the Queen of the Hinterland.

Undoubtedly, the public representation created by the CCEC denoted civilizing meanings and that the belief of the intellectual as a central being motivated the Euclidian’s actions. Therefore, the construction of a modernity that would “rediscover Brazil” by means of culture, in the intellectuals’ view, started by the construction of those Cultural Centers, which were seen as strongholds and catalysts of ideas and actions. The Cultural Centers, as the name suggests, gathered intellectuals that held theoretical discussions and actions on society, and meant to boost intellectual activities in their cities.

In a letter sent to Faris, Serafim França⁴² elaborated a long text in which he explained the importance of Cultural Centers in the Brazilian moral context in society⁴³:

⁴¹ AUTOR DESCONHECIDO, 1951.

⁴² He was born in Curitiba, graduated in Law at the *Escola Livre do Rio de Janeiro*. After his graduation, he occupied several public positions, such as public prosecutor of the 1st Court of Curitiba and General Curator of the Child and Youth Court of the capital of Paraná. He also recorded in writing the debates of the Assembly. As a journalist, he collaborated with several periodicals in Curitiba and founded several literary magazines, among them, the *Revista Olho da Rua* (Street’s eye Magazine) (WANKE, 1999).

⁴³ FRANÇA, 1951.

I was profoundly touched by the honorable gesture by this Center and it made really proud of belonging to it (...)
Only the spirit's actions shall secure us all a better life, in the hectic world we have lived.
Few men still look for heaven. Everywhere a low selfishness battle has been fought, it is a land to land view, destroying virtues and hampering the happiness ways.
A gross materialism has invaded us, destroying our civilization principles (...)
I thought is more powerful than the sword.
It is a noble mission of the light warriors against the shady enemies.
We shall be able to affirm our Country with the inspiration harvested from the beating of its grandness rather than the intruder negativism that lowers and destroys spirits.
Each Cultural Center is a tower of dream and defense. It does not matter that there are few legions in this fight. The cause is the sacred truth, which has invincible energy. (...)
I am a modest worker, by diligent. I will do whatever I can.
I am sending to the Center library two of my books, the one called Barra Velha got an award by the Brazilian Academy of Letters in the 1938 Contest of Short Stories and Novels.

França did not clearly state, but we can assume that the announced fight was not only about the cultural and moral issues demanding the reorganization of the country, but rather about the field from where they spoke, and interlocutions were established. As a CCEC member, and producing a discourse close to that of Faris, he understood that to put their projects in the agenda they had to fight other projects, establish some hierarchy and the order of priorities among the proposals. The civilizing face of França's argumentation can also be observed in Wambier's text in the *Tapejara*⁴⁴:

Some say that I use strong paint and overreact when trying to sketch the current Brazilian context regarding its society, public administration, family, religion, and education, among others. They suggest that I face life and the current world with pessimism, or from darker angles. (...)
Nobody believes in Antônio's religious sincerity since he attends the cults of his belief with his thoughts fully occupied with the reasons that could lead him to deceive his partner, to rob others, or to disrespect his "best and dearest" friend's home (...)

⁴⁴ TAPEJARA, 1953, p. 1.

The worst scenario is that nobody has any perspective of better days. Nothing is seen in the near or even distant future suggesting that the situation could be changed before everything is swollen by the abyss of all decadence (...).

For Wambier, the population “felt lost”, in other words, the way of life seen as a novelty by the citizens – both in large centers and in the interior – created some fascination with modernity, but also provoked disbelief in some of their everyday practices. When Wambier evoked the idea of a messy daily routine, he automatically, raised the idea that it was necessary to find the way, and again, we observed the notion of cause and effect present in the CCEC members’ discourse, in which social and cultural confusion would be transformed in something ordered by means of the Euclidian projects.

The CCEC conservative project sought insertion from the Euclidian’s view regarding the aspects or the groups that had to be reorganized, from children’s education to adults’ correction. They permanently tried to guide society since as pointed out by Ortiz (1994), from the 1930s to the 1960s, the country went through a series of transformations, which were strongly incentivized by the radio popularization followed by the television, the North-American cinema influence, among other issues, enabling the Brazilian audience to question behaviors that were rooted in the past centuries, such as patriarchalism and religion as the organizer of social conducts.

By means of the television screen or the North-American films, for example, Brazilians watched stories in which women tried to emancipate from the male dominance, and themes like sexual liberation were discussed. Thus, we noticed the production of more and more intense behavioral and social postures that invaded the country’s everyday life and were understood by the Euclidians as decadence and immorality factors, which became the justification for the CCEC project insertion. Those projects were supposed to lead society from the disorder to the order of things.

In their understanding, as exemplified by Wambier in his chronicle, if Antônio goes to church, but in his everyday life he does not follow Christian principles, the intellectuals would have to show him the right way. The same responsibility was undertaken regarding love relationships or women, who had timidly started to fight paternalism. Wambier was specially bothered when reporting love relationships in his chronicles.

In this sense, Antoine Compagnon, in his work *Os antimodernos* (The Antimoderns), referred to some French intellectuals of the 19th and 20th

centuries (Jacques Maritain, Julien Benda, Roland Barthes, among others), and called them “antimoderns” in an attempt to understand the pessimism and moral decadence identified by those intellectuals in French society, using the fall of the monarchy after the 1789 French Revolution as a mark for the explosion of such sensations. In addition, he also reported those intellectuals’ characteristics, which included anti-enlightenment trends, the original sin idea, and the rebuke notion, among others. According to Compagnon⁴⁵:

Maritain called *Antimoderne* a work published in 1922: “which I call *antimoderno*”, the preface read, “it could also be called ultramodern” (...) Such motivation, in itself, does not look modern, and probably corresponds to a universal concept. It might have always existed everywhere, it might be associated with the known duality between tradition and innovation, permanence and change, action and reaction (...) However, a capital difference separates the eternal prejudice against change and the modern antimodern sensitiveness. The latter is historically situated, it has a date of birth that is clear, namely, the French Revolution as the decisive rupture and fatal twist. There were traditionalists before 1789, they always existed, but not antimoderns in the relevant, modern sense of the word.

What Compagnon called “antimodern” had a close meaning to that reported by Berman (1986) when he emphasized the contradictions and the fascination and awe feelings expressed by men and women that lived the advent of modernity. Compagnon stated that being “antimodern” was what made them modern, that is, the pessimism and the feeling of decadence put them into the discussions and symptoms provoked by the transformations promoted by modernity.

It is not our intention to include the Euclidians in such terminology of “antimoderns”, even because the historical contexts are distinct, and they did not show anti-enlightenment features nor defended the monarchic system in Brazil. Introducing Compagnon’s discussion aims at contributing to situating the Euclidians amidst those spiritual and material conflicts, reflecting upon modernity as an itinerary of conflicts, that is, considering that it was not linear and did not occur only in Ponta Grossa.

Resuming the discussion developed by the CCEC intellectuals, when some Euclidians approached the city of Ponta Grossa, they tended to soften

⁴⁵ COMPAGNON, Antoine. Os antimodernos. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2011, p. 13.

the emblematic discourse that opposed material to spiritual, emphasizing more the positive than the negative aspects. Rolando Guzzoni⁴⁶ in *Tapejara* expressed⁴⁷:

Our city shows a modern face, some tree-lined avenues, and few old buildings, which tend to disappear gradually. I believe that our city has some defects. All of them have. But we shall not point them out. We love it and cannot talk bad about it. However, there are some that were born and brought up here, but sought at all costs to leave it, since they were attracted as moths by the deceiving lights of big cities (...)

Therefore, the Euclidians narrated the growth of the city, the new buildings built and the architectural beauty of streets and squares. These aspects were considered positive by the Euclidians when considering the modernity notion that they adopted. According to Guzzoni: “our city shows a modern face, some tree-lined avenues and few old buildings, which tend to disappear”. On the other hand, we see some of the negative factors of the city’s everyday life being hidden, as expressed in the excerpt: “But we shall not point them [defects] out”. Thus, Guzzoni revealed the regionalist view of the CCEC showing attachment and defense of the city where those intellectuals resided or were born, at the end of the excerpt above, he even criticized those that were brought up in Ponta Grossa, but decided to move to larger cities.

Likewise, Wambier, in a speech given at the City Council when celebrating the city’s anniversary in which he was chosen as the Euclidians’ spokesperson, stated that in Ponta Grossa, the spiritual/moral weakness was low, which disagreed with some of the issues he had raised as degrading in his daily chronicles for the local newspaper. Undoubtedly, for being an official and political speech, he would not like to list the negative aspects of the city, putting proud in his words, he tried to demonstrate the solid education of the Ponta Grossa population and their growing interest in cultural issues.

According to Wambier⁴⁸,

In Ponta Grossa dates are not important in the ardor of the fights promoted for the society wellbeing; dates disappear in face of the intelligent work of its population; dates are erased when considering the creating force of its people; dates are silenced by

⁴⁶ Natural de Ponta Grossa, foi articulista, redator do *Tapejara* do número seis ao último (WANKE,1999).

⁴⁷ TAPEJARA, 1950, p. 9.

⁴⁸ TAPEJARA, 1952, p. 1.

the noise of the machines of progress in its streets, workshops, and offices, in the great work of promoting community prosperity. (...)

Its prosperity has not grown “overnight” like that of the cities in the north of the state. (...) the contribution of the Ponta Grossa inhabitants, has been the most useful to the prosperity of the state.

I refer to the moral and spiritual aspects that the city imprinted in its acts and attitudes, despite having a cosmopolitan population, which seems to make problems of this nature seem to be of more difficult solution.

Effectively, it is not only now that Ponta Grossa has reacted against marginality and indecency in their multiple manifestations (...) its position in the defense of the good is notorious. Its firm Christian principles are like the structure of the granites that decorate the green fields of the *Campos Gerais do Paraná*.

We have lived days of unrest and anguish. Confusion and restlessness grew everywhere, and the world is misled and disorientated, as if it were going through the vast darkness of unknown oceans (...) peoples are in conflict, separated and confused, crossing the muddy terrain of such immense ocean of altercation and violence (...)

When Wambier described Ponta Grossa, he called it modern, addressing its growth and the cosmopolitan environment, at the same time vanguardist, when he cited its inhabitants’ moral and spiritual convictions. Therefore, Ponta Grossa, unlike the cities of the north of the state, which “grew overnight”, knew how to balance in their modern routine the material growth and moral tradition. The playboys, who vandalized the urban environment or the girls that behaved in a reproachable way were not evidenced in Wambier’s speech. This also happened because in Ponta Grossa, the Euclidians sought to find suitable ways through their actions in museums, schools, universities, etc. – to correct immoral behaviors that could hamper the city’s progress.

The everyday practices in the city where the CCEC was located, would at the same time be used to disseminate the city name throughout the country and abroad, and also to provide an overview of the city to the other intellectual circles and the region. Therefore, since the Euclidian project was being successfully transported from the interior to the larger cities, it could be expanded to the whole country.

Final Considerations

The city transformation, as stated by Faris in his writings, into a “cultural Mecca” depended on actions that could be implemented in other regions in Brazil and in the American continent. The strengthening of the image of Ponta Grossa meant the strengthening of the CCEC project. We consider this conflicting relation between spiritual and material interesting when emphasizing exactly this coming and going in the representations that the Euclidians had of modernity and as a strategy to place themselves in evidence. Therefore, the CCEC orderly and civilizing project was not less modern.

In agreement with what we reported here, there were relations between regional and national in the Euclidians’ discourse, which got closer when the topic approached the positive aspects of modernization, its institutions, its assets, and objects. Even if, in some of them, we noticed the differentiation between national and regional when the issue approached belonged to the moral/behavioral axis, thus protecting the city of Ponta Grossa from the discourse of cultural/moral decadence, and valuing the Cultural Center action in the construction of such relation.

We sought to avoid a historiographic writing which approached modernity in Ponta Grossa as a linear process that did not suffer any drawbacks, as if all the discourses problematizing modernity had to be linked to a rupture of paradigms and innovation. The contradictions found in the Euclidians’ discourses revealed exactly the kind of project they continuously presented to Ponta Grossa and the country since addressing modernity as fascination and fear expanded the intellectual’s image as a central being in society.

In the same way the antimoderns of Compagnon used pessimism and the decadence view as weapons to criticize the French liberalism, the Euclidians also made use, just from another context, of the negative and positive aspects of modernity to evidence the importance of institutions and values considered suitable to the country, in detriment of other possible projects.

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Article received for publication on 08/09/2023.

Approved on 04/04/2024.