7 Flying down to a cosmopolitan-tropical paradise

Bianca Freire-Medeiros

Introduction

Over the centuries, Rio de Janeiro has attracted a polyglot collection of visitors responsible for creating narratives about its peoples and landscapes. If, right up to the first decades of the 19th century, these travellers came mostly from the Old World, from the second half on, the European imagination began to be disputed as travellers from the United States “discovered” their “best neighbour from the south”.

For US travellers who were reaffirming their national identities, Brazil seemed to be a particularly interesting counterpoint. Both countries had gone through conquest and colonization, both shared experiences of slavery and immigration, both had a continental-sized land to turn into a nation. And yet each country responded to these common experiences in very different ways. It is Robert Stam (1997: 1) who best summarizes it: “Brazil and the United States are deeply interconnected in a specular play of sameness and difference, identity and alterity. The two countries offer distorting images of each other. Although in no way identical, the two countries are eminently *comparable*”.

This specular game produced, throughout history, tensions between not only sameness and difference but also what could be labelled *topophilia* and *topophobia* (see the Introduction to this volume) regarding the physical and human landscape of Rio. In the mid-1920s, while the elites dreamed of Rio as the “Paris of the Tropics” (Benchimol, 1992; Fischer, 2014), Sylvio Gurgel do Amaral, Brazilian ambassador to Washington DC, bemoaned that the US press presented the largest nation in South America as “one vast hospital” with “all the deadly terrors of the jungle,” inhabited by dangerous fish, snakes, and insects (Lawrence (1976) quoted in Smith, 1991: 136). Equally upset was the Brazilian audience of *The Girl from Rio* (1927), for the local residents went by Spanish names, and the capital city was presented as a “squalid Spanish town” (Lawrence (1976) quoted in Smith, 1991: 137). A few years later, the Brazilian government requested the withdrawal from circulation of another Hollywood movie, *Rio’s Road to Hell* (1931). In short, early 20th-century US narratives about Brazil mostly presented the country

as an undifferentiated, if romantic, Latin hinterland (Amancio, 2000; Woll, 1977; Augusto, 1995; Mendonça, 1999).

A vast literature demonstrates that this overtly prejudicial attitude towards Brazil slowly began to change in the late 1920s and gained momentum with the so-called Good Neighbour Policy (cf. Fishlow, 1984; Pike, 1992). Under Franklin Roosevelt's command and within the context of rise of totalitarian regimes worldwide, this policy clamoured for the cultural industry to help create, at the domestic level, an environment of appreciation and respect for Latin Americans, while mobilizing their public opinion on behalf of the United States' war-related objectives. The Office of Inter-American Affairs used Hollywood within this broader diplomatic machinery to garner support for a political project that also opened business opportunities throughout the region. Meanwhile in Brazil, the so-called "Revolução de 30" (1930s Revolution) imposed a definite identity policy on the nation in a clear attempt to find a new balance between tradition and modernity (cf. Cândido, 1984). Capitalizing on the longing for a new civic and economic order, Getulio Vargas effected a *coup d'état* which lead to a 15-year Populist regime (cf. Fausto, 1994). He put in motion a program of development which not only doubled Brazil's production of manufactured goods in ten years but also established a national tourist industry.

In the following pages, inspired by the invitation that the editors of this volume pose to identify how fictional imagination intertwines with tourism (see Introduction), I focus on how US narratives produced within the context of an emerging tourism industry placed Rio de Janeiro in an ambiguous location between nature and culture, exoticism and cosmopolitanism. I attempt to understand how the cityscape of Rio, framed for both viewing and visiting, was presented as a "place of the imagination" (Reijnders, 2011). In order to examine this imbrication between imaginative and corporeal mobilities (cf. Urry, 2007), I focus on two narratives that exemplify the launching of Rio de Janeiro as a cinematic tourist destination (see Tzanelli, 2007): *Flying Down to Rio* (RKO, 1933), a "musical comedy with a tourism related plot" (Schwartz, 2004: 7) and the first Hollywood film which portrayed the city in a positive light, and Hugh Gibson's *Rio*, the first travel book about Brazil's one-time capital ever written by a US citizen.

Assuming that cinema gives to the audience's imagination a way of mapping the city, offering what Bruno (1997) calls a "modern cartography" and what John Urry (2007) identifies as "the tourist gaze", I am particularly interested to examine how those two cultural products create a cognitive framework that recurrently contrasts both the physical and human landscape of Rio vis-à-vis that of the United States. In a rather influential article on methodological principles for critically examining ethnic images in films, Cortés (1984) advocates in favour of merging different methodologies due to the complexity of the task at hand. Following his steps, I combine both sociological and content analysis in order to understand "not only how

characters are depicted, but also how they fit into the social structure of the film and how they are involved in various relationships” (ibid: 75).

The travelling city

Departing from the United States, tourists and travellers, film crews, and fictional characters have travelled to Rio and, in so doing, helped to transform it into a mobile entity, a “traveling city” – a geographic, cultural, and spatial icon that has travelled around the world (Freire-Medeiros, 2002). It was a city where new airports, hotels, and a series of tourism landmarks were created, aiming to position it in the global stage as a desirable destination. In this sense, the Rio that US imagination helped to invent was a “place to play” and also a “place in play” – to use Sheller and Urry’s phrase (2004: 1–10).

A decolonial approach enables us to better understand the spatiality and historicity of mobility regimes which constitute those “places to play” and are still characteristic of postcolonial metropolises such as Rio de Janeiro. A large amount of Rio’s identity has been built on the interconnections between the imagery of modernity, colonization, and coloniality. On the one hand, the “Marvelous City” is trapped into the idea of “Tropicality” (Gerbi, 1973/1996; Arnold, 1996/2000; Livingstone, 2000; Freire-Medeiros & Castro, 2013), a singular combination of space, “race”, nature, and climate, whose significance is deeply ambivalent: a fascinating and opulent landscape but also a strange world of illness and incivility. Coloniality thus defines Rio de Janeiro as the Other that only exists as a mental juxtaposition to the “normality” of the temperate lands.

The manufacturing of Rio as a travelling city has always counted on the sustained complicity of successive Brazilian elites. As happens in other tourist cities, the representations of Rio from the outside have influenced the ways Cariocas themselves have come to understand the city. Engagement in the course of modernity has always been required from this tropical city. Guided by the principles of order and progress, white local elites with European aspirations adhered to aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political values which paradoxically reify their subaltern position *vis-à-vis* the Metropole.

The Tourist and Entertainment Service, created in 1930, instituted an official tourist season for Rio de Janeiro that started with Carnival and went through the end of September. It was aimed at attracting local as well as international visitors, for whom, by this time, clear rules for entry and stay had finally been adopted. In the following years, the federal government also created the Department of Cultural Publicity and Diffusion, which was responsible for studying and giving guidance on the use of the motion picture projector and other technical devices that served as instruments of cultural diffusion. The Press and Propaganda Department (DIP), which included a division dealing exclusively with tourism, was established, aiming to control and coordinate tourist activities all over the country, to lay down standards

for spas and mountain resorts, and to coordinate administrative organs connected with those various activities.

In 1932, even before the inauguration of Brazil's first airport (Santos Dumont Airport in Rio de Janeiro in 1936), a PanAm airline route from Miami to Rio was launched. In the following year, RKO's film *Flying Down to Rio* (from now on *FDR*) was released, not only promoting the new airline route and the telegraphic services of RKO to South America but mainly inaugurating a long list of Hollywood musicals that acted as thinly disguised travel maps for Rio de Janeiro.

The musical as a map of the tourist city

*Send a radio to Rio de Janeiro
With a big hello just so they'll know
and stand by there;
We'll fly there
Hey Rio
Everything will be okay
We're singing and winging our way to you*

("Flying Down to Rio" composed by Kahn, Eliseu,
and Youmans; performed by Fred Astaire)

The premiere of *FDR* was met by high expectations from Brazilian audiences. They saw the new RKO film as Hollywood's final chance to make amends for its earlier cultural gaffes with its South American neighbours. *Cinearte*, one of the most important Brazilian film magazines at the time and the main thermometer for measuring a film's reception, anticipated with optimism that the film would have "Rio's wonderful scenario rather than alligators, forests, Indians. There will be no castanets, *gay caballero*, *bad man*" (quoted in Freire-Medeiros, 2005: 22).

Cinearte readers were not disappointed. On board the plane, flown by the blonde, light-eyed American pilot and maestro, Roger (Gene Raymond), we follow a succession of postcard images. After each shot, the frame slides laterally away to uncover the next image, as though mimicking the motion of actual postcards being fingered by an avid (US) tourist: Guanabara Bay, Copacabana and downtown, the Municipal Theatre, Jockey Club, Sugar Loaf, and Botanical Garden. The seductive attraction of the ocean and the mountains is cleverly blended with fast-paced shots of well-dressed city dwellers in upmarket neighbourhoods, and a dolly shot makes a point of following the hectic sidewalk crowd from left to right while heavy traffic of smart cars traverses in the other direction.

These scenes reveal a clear concern with presenting, in a positive way, the imagery of both a naturally exuberant city as well as an up-to-date, contemporary, civilized metropolis – a challenge that the Municipality of Rio as well as private organizations took rather seriously. The reader should keep in

mind that it was precisely in 1933 that the mayor, Pedro Ernesto Batista, created the Advisory Council of Tourism, whose main task was to convince the international tourist that Rio was the Paris of the Tropics. By the end of that year, the then-vice president of the Touring Club, Cerqueira Lima, affirmed that over ten years, the organization had struggle “to create something that today is perfectly clear and secure: a tourist mentality in Brazil” (as quoted in Freire-Medeiros & Castro, 2013: 36). In these efforts to turn tourism into a carefully planned, marketed, and government-promoted business, RKO’s musical was to play a fundamental role.

The film tells of a love triangle involving a seductive Brazilian woman, Belinha; the well-intentioned but ineffectual Júlio Ribeiro; and the American hero, Roger. Roger, free-spirited and adventurous, epitomizes what was expected from American men at a time when a combination of business creativity and technological expertise were seen as the only way to surpass the national economic crisis. Júlio, although richer and more educated than Roger, lacks his American’s friend restless inventiveness. In this sense, it is possible to see Júlio as representing the old Brazilian oligarchy: highly sophisticated, boasting French manners, but unable to keep up with the new capitalists’ way of “doing business”, that is, of conquering the world. A conquest that can no longer be based on a big-stick policy, and the producers behind *FDR* knew that. The film’s production team was composed of C.V. Whitney, J.H. Whitney, and M.C. Cooper. Historian Henderson (1982: 4–5) describes them as “aviators, explorers, sportsmen, warriors” who invested in “high-risk, high-profit fields such as high-technology enterprises, aviation, and movies”.

Within the new goodwill atmosphere that so enthusiastically celebrated the amicable acquaintance between the two hemispheres, Roger, the self-made-American capitalist, and Júlio, the aristocratic Brazilian, complemented one another. Even when disputing their object of desire, they find no need for fighting or disrespect. Júlio, in honour of his friendship with Roger, simply breaks off his engagement to Belinha, allowing her to marry the American hero. *FDR* is indeed one of the few films of the 1930s to propose a “legal” outcome to a romance between a white American male and a Latin American woman.¹ Of course, Del Río’s light skin was critical in making her more “acceptable”, but one should keep in mind that, just a year before, her portrayal had been much more stereotypically negative: in *Bird of Paradise* (1932), her role as the savage princess Luana had required that she give up her love for a white man and be burnt to death for transgressing a racial taboo.

Belinha, like the city she lives in, is not only “modern” and “cosmopolitan” but also “hot” and “mysterious”. The connections between the colonial city and its women have become so commonplace as to seem to be almost clichéd (Mills, 1991; Pratt, 1992). Colonies, like women, must be both fathered and husbanded. The establishment of a colonial domain, which passes through the founding of *the* colonial city, is often naturalized through the comparison that equates it with an amorous “conquest”. And yet the familiarity of

the metaphor does not reduce its efficacy. Belinha is so irresistible to men that one of her American girlfriends asks: “What do these South American girls have below the Equator that we haven’t?” *FDR* overtly links Belinha’s physical attributes with the cityscape, drawing parallels between the roles that her body plays, via romance and potential procreation, in the foundation of a “new” Rio, one that is the result of the combination between Brazilian femininity and tradition and US virility and technological skills.

Belinha’s father plans to launch a new and sophisticated hotel in Copacabana. It should come as no surprise that the Copacabana Palace Hotel, inaugurated in 1923 and an icon to this day of seaside elegance and cosmopolitanism, serves as the setting (O’Donnell & Freire-Medeiros, 2018: 32). Nevertheless, Belinha’s father finds himself the victim of dishonest politicians – another standard US trope to be explored in more recent films – from whom only the intervention of his brave American friends will be able to extricate him. She wants to break off the promises made to her family and fiancé, but only Roger can make her follow her desires. The first kiss between the pair is followed by a dialogue which is heavy with meaning:

“My life has long been arranged”, laments Belinha.

“Don’t tell me anything so eighteenth century like family arrangements”, answers Roger, less skeptical than ironic.

“Would you think so – in my country?”

“Then, I’m going to institute some radical changes in your country”, says Roger, threateningly.

“But my fiancé has even built me a beautiful home in Rio Bay”, Belinha argues with weak conviction.

“But you love *me*!”

“You’re taking a lot for granted!”

“And I love *you*!”

“You don’t even know my name!” replies the Brazilian seductress. “You must forget tonight!”

“Now *you*’re taking a lot for granted!” ridicules Roger.

“I’m determined that you’ll never see me again”, insists Belinha.

“If I have to turn the country upside down, I’ll see you!” replies an overconfident Roger.

“I won’t permit you”.

“We’ll see about that”.

“You’ll do just as I say!”

“Oh, will I?”

“You will!”

“I will not! Your family, your fiancé, the Army, the Navy, all of South America can’t stop me! And if you are silly enough . . .”

Belinha slaps him on the face. Without hesitation, Roger demonstrates his American masculinity: turns her over on his lap, and slaps her behind.

It is not surprising that this scene happens before the couple's – and the audience's – actual arrival in Rio, for its main function is precisely to provide the audiences with all the basic elements needed to understand what “Brazil is all about”, that is, what meanings – social, sexual, emotional – to invest in the city. The audience is ready to “travel” to Rio knowing it is a city where women are both sensuous and, simultaneously, conscious of their traditional roles; have “undomesticated” personalities, but can always be “tamed” by a powerful male, especially one who is above family traditions, the state, and the law.

The film ends with its most famous scene, the aerial ballet over the city which intercuts shot-on-location images of Rio's landmarks with scenes taken on Malibu Beach, California. While several planes, carrying girls dancing on their wings, write in the sky, “Hotel Atlantico Presents Yankee Clippers”, Fred and the band play “Flying Down to Rio” from the hotel's balcony. In the skies of Brazil, Cariocas and Americans unite and save the day. It is interesting to observe that, although the ballet group was supposedly formed by Brazilian and American women alike, there is no way of telling them apart, that is to say, they are equally dressed (and undressed, for when their parachutes open up they are left only with their underwear) and display the same features (light skin, either blondes or brunettes). They are easily interchangeable, reinforcing an idea that permeates the movie as a whole: trade between North and South Americans can be settled based on simple exchange, with no regard to the differentiation of products. Americans offer their creativity; Brazilians offer them job opportunities.

Belinha and Roger's wedding, not by chance, happens on a plane, a neutral territory above the city and its social constraints. Their union celebrates the capacity of the modern white Euro-American male to impose modifications on a traditional social structure. But it also implies that Rio and Miami (where the film begins) are not that far apart, that Brazilians can also be as sophisticated and well educated as their American neighbours to the North.

Both in the United States and in Brazil, *Flying Down to Rio* was a great hit at the time of its release (Schwartz, 2004; Moura, 1995). American audiences were pleased with the opportunity to fly down to Brazil in a vacation package that included romance, escapism, special effects, and extravagant musical numbers.

From swamp to paradise

Your first surprise is to find that although their background is exclusively Latin, and they have no antipathy to any race, they are definitely and instinctively friendly toward the United States and toward Americans. When you cast about for an explanation, all sort of reasons are given.

(Gibson, *Rio*, 1937: 14–15)

Hugh Gibson arrived in Brazil the same year as the film *Flying Down to Rio* (1933). Although the US ambassador himself did not use the recently inaugurated PanAm aerial services (Gibson and his wife and son came aboard

the US ship *Foreign Legion*),² he found a way of welcoming his readers to Rio with an equally privileged view of its scenic landscape: Guanabara Bay is captured in two photographs taken from the top of the hills which have the Sugar Loaf as their focal point.

The opening and recurrent theme of *Rio* is the seductive, almost mystical, powers of the city's natural landscape. In its very first paragraph, the book advises the reader that the city "is beyond comparison in the strange beauty of its setting" (Gibson, 1937: ii). It is a beauty so "strange" that the recounting of the natural settings had to be left to a whole collection of photographs (31 in all) "in conviction that pictures give a better idea of the beauties of Rio than any amount of written description" (ibid: iii-iv). The final product, more than 260 pages long, is divided into 15 chapters, covering everything from sight-seeing to cultural idiosyncrasies, from fishing to history. Incorporating both a description of the physical aspects of the city (landmarks and climate) and a definition of its social landscape, the book is a guide to the Cariocas' mores and social conduct.

Just like the audiences of the RKO film, Gibson's readers were introduced to the city from the skies, getting a bird's-eye view of its shores. In both cases, the cityscape is reduced to a postcard image and laid at the visitor's feet. Gibson's (1937: 4) description of his first view of Rio's bay could very well be a line from Fred Astaire's character:

As we drew near the harbour for the first time we were . . . resigned to disappointment, because, as experienced travellers, we knew the reality could not be up to the standard of the descriptions we had read and heard. And then the haze lifted and a scene met our eyes which made all the written descriptions seem trivial and absurd. It was so much more wonderful than our bravest imagination.

Gibson calls himself an "experienced traveller". But what kind of traveller was he exactly? A career diplomat and writer,³ hunter and photographer in his spare time, Gibson started a mobile life quite early in life. Born in Los Angeles in 1883, a still-young Gibson made the transatlantic crossing and joined the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* in Paris in the early 20th century. He graduated *cum laude* in 1907 and joined the US Foreign Service the following year. Part of a new generation of young diplomats whose professional rise had more to do with their personal merits than the influence of their families, he was labelled by the US Foreign Service "America's first real diplomat".

His close friendship with President Hoover would cost him dearly at the end of the Republican president's mandate. Soon after taking office, Franklin D. Roosevelt questioned Gibson's fidelity to the new government and considered his dismissal. Thanks to the intervention of influential friends, Roosevelt agreed to retain Gibson's services, offering him a post in Brazil. After a string of far more prestigious assignments in Europe, Rio seemed an even

crueller fate than forced retirement. One of his Foreign Service colleagues sent a note of congratulations, reassuring him it would be a “most enjoyable assignment”. “I haven’t replied to him”, Gibson wrote to his friend, Hugh Wilson, “but when I see him I think I’ll say that when he has done five years in Central America . . ., I’ll be glad to receive his congratulations on going back to the swamps. Hu-hu!” (1937, April 14, in *Gibson Papers*, box 30).

If the ambassador arrived in Rio feeling something of an outcast, in a short time, he would find life in Brazil’s capital no less than “enchanting” (1935, September 24, in letter to Wesley Frost). His first impression of the American Embassy as “a hopeless dump”, where a night of sleep was denied by noisy crowds on the streets (1933, October 10, in letter to Mrs. Hugh Wilson), was promptly changed with a move to the small and bucolic town of Petrópolis. The American Embassy was mainly kept for the many social events that Gibson would promote during the years he spent in Brazil. In fact, shortly after arriving in Rio, he opened the embassy to the colony of his fellow citizens at the first public reception ever given and patronized by an American ambassador. The event had ample coverage in Brazil’s most important newspapers at the time. *A Nação*, for example, quoted part of Gibson’s speech for the 100 people who gathered at the luncheon in his honour: “Although I have never been in Brazil before, I have had many years’ experience in dealing with representatives of the Brazilian government, experience which has brought me here with a wholesome respect for their ability, their frank dealing, their high standard of courtesy, and their friendliness for our country” (1937, in *Gibson Papers*, box 137).

Courtesy, frankness, friendliness – more than mere words demagogically used to praise an audience, these adjectives are either the stock in trade of a seasoned diplomat or reflect Gibson’s genuine opinion regarding his new partners. In his first memorandum addressed to FDR, he would state that, although “procrastinating”, Brazilians were “gentle, and rather ceremonious” (1933, October 11). Used to the cold distance of the Europeans, Brazilians’ warm friendship many times seemed to him “more than one can handle”: “This strange people really seem to like us” (1933, September 25, in letter to J. Philip Groves). Surprised by the good manners and culture boasted by the Cariocas (1934, February 27, in letter to Joseph Grew), Gibson wound up creating an image of Brazil and her leaders as unquestionable allies against the might of the Axis. Such understanding, as well as the acritical reception of any data passed on to him by the Itamaraty, many times incapacitated Gibson to assess the manoeuvres and true intentions of the Brazilian government (Hilton, 1975).

Rio was commissioned by the Brazilian Foreign Office of the Vargas government. This fact, no doubt, speaks loudly of the bonds Gibson ended up forming with Brazil’s political elite. The book was received with great enthusiasm by the Brazilian media and civic organizations (Swerczek, 1972),⁴ and for the whole period that Gibson was living in Rio, he had always been the object of positive notes from the local press. Community associations such

as the Association for Christian Youth and the Touring Club paid him high homage due to his constant financial support.

Being emotionally attached to that “strange people”, how did Gibson manage to describe them in *Rio*? Unsurprisingly, Cariocas, once more, are described as “good-tempered” and “friendly” (Gibson, 1940: 17–18). Through a metonymic procedure, they are taken as the “typical Brazilians” and, although Gibson advises the reader that it is not his intention to provide “an exhaustive analysis of Brazilian character, manners and customs” (ibid: 13), he does attempt to contradict some stereotypes he believes had misinformed US perceptions of Rio and Brazilians in general. On one hand, most Americans think “a Brazilian is a multimillionaire who made his money in coffee and spends it in Paris” (ibid: 14); on the other, when visiting Rio for the first time, they expect to land “in a noisy slum” and to have to make their way “over dirty docks and through dirtier streets” (ibid: 7). His fellow citizens will be pleasantly surprised when landing on “a spacious quay” and being conducted through “an airy marble pavilion” (ibid: 7) to meet “the average Brazilian”, who has always the well-being of its family in first place and who is always ready to overlook bureaucratic matters in the name of friendship.

Gibson’s descriptions match perfectly the images of Rio and the Cariocas displayed in *FDR*. Both make a point of presenting the city as a sophisticated place where family traditions were strong and smiles were highly valued. What Gibson as well as those involved in the production of *FDR* obviously did not realize was that they were also building an image of Rio (and Brazil, for that matter) which was equally stereotypical. In the case of both Gibson’s book and the RKO film, what is most striking is that the stereotypes displayed by them are based *less* upon the differences between Americans and Brazilians than they are on what would supposedly be the common traces shared by the two cultures.

Different from other travel narratives of the period, Gibson does not give explicit managerial advice nor discuss any ideological matters. If he reveals a desire to bring some US customs to Brazil, it is limited to generalities such as hunting or gardening practices. In Gibson’s own words, his book is a response to both the “insatiable curiosity of travellers” and to “the dearth of published material on Rio” (ibid: vii). The ambassador sees it as a work that could be enjoyed by tourists and general readers alike, presenting knowledge not only of the city but also of its people: “The work . . . will be richly repaid if it helps others to share appreciation of the beauties of the place and the charm of the people – either in Rio, or in an armchair before the fire at home” (ibid: xi). Still, “if you want to know what Rio is like you cannot learn it from a book. There is only one way – come and see for yourself” (ibid: 4).

Faced with the limitations of language in his endeavours to grasp and reproduce “the real city” and “the true character” of its inhabitants, Gibson counts on what he considered a more “dependable” form of representation, namely

photography. As in *FDR*, a succession of iconic images pass before the reader's eyes: Guanabara Bay, Jockey Club, Botanic Garden, Sugar Loaf, Corcovado, oceans, and mountains. But differently from the spectator of the RKO musical, Gibson's travelling companion has the chance to get a more detailed picture of the city, to visit a fish market, to admire a wood sculpture in the Sacristy of São Bento Church, to gaze at some Carnival merry-makers. It is interesting to note that each time the reader goes a page further, the photographs change from a totally impersonal point of view (the obvious tourist landmarks seen from a distance) to a particular and impressionist frame. Little by little, Gibson unveils the city to those who follow him along the way, giving them mementos of his own experience as a traveller.

In the last chapter, concerned with a panorama of Brazilian history, Gibson (1937) quotes several sources and recommends a list of books. But his narrative is mainly informed by "settled", "agreed" representations of the city constructed by the inhabitants themselves. The description, therefore, obeys a folded logic: it is a representation of a place, but it also creates a new spatiality. The narrative structure basically follows two complementary principles: on one hand, it approaches the city "objectively", offering historical data on Rio's buildings as well as natural landmarks; on the other, it appeals to an "impressionist" depiction, recounting the effects provoked by his contact with colonial churches of "exquisite" architecture, "profuse" markets, the "marvellous" Botanic Garden. In so doing, Gibson assumes he is giving the reader nothing more, nothing less, than "the real Rio", one that "the foreigner rarely gets to know" (ibid: ix). While others offered a partial image of the city, limiting themselves to the description of tourist spots, he is committed to revealing a unique place in between nature and culture, tradition and modernity: "[E]ven modern Rio is a curious mixture of a great metropolis and a summer resort, with odd vestiges of the past. At one extreme you have Cinelandia, with a choice of all the latest productions of Hollywood, Vienna and Berlin; and a few miles away, if you know how to arrange the matters, you can witness a *macumba* of strange voodoo rites" (ibid: 43).

America, Europe, and Africa: Rio, as perceived by Gibson, is a time map. The presence of cultural elements from the three continents points to a balanced acquaintance between tradition and modernity. Metonymically, this feature of the city is extended to the whole population of the country. There is no conflict between the young and the old: although "up-to-date in most things", the young people "have old-fashioned manners" (ibid: 22). Like the city itself, Brazilians are "a curious mixture of formality and matter-of-fact simplicity" (ibid: 16) and for them, symbolic values and traditional institutions such as family "are more important than money" (ibid: 23).

As in *FDR*, Gibson's Rio is a spatial form which condenses two apparently irreconcilable principles: the city as a civilized/modern space and city as a primitive/traditional dominion. Although representing Rio as a cosmopolitan city, offering enthusiastic comments on its "modern" side, Gibson is clearly more attracted by its "traditional", "natural" elements, usually rejecting its

contemporary features and aspiring to discover whatever might be considered vestiges of a “primitive” Brazil. As he summarizes it: Rio is “a great modern city it” with “its boulevards, its skyscrapers and its night clubs,” but “when you have the possibilities of a moonlight night on the bay of Rio, who wants to go to an airless night club and listen to airless jazz?” (ibid: 37).

The city, for sure, has distinguished itself from nature; however, it is not its opposite but its complement. Not by chance, Gibson’s book has chapters titled “Modern Rio” and “Jungles Way in Town”, perhaps in an attempt to reproduce in his narrative the same kind of symmetry he believes present in the city. After reading the whole book – and watching the film – one gets the feeling, though, that both narratives ended up prisoners of the same logic employed by most narratives to these days, which transform the city into an exotic good for the “civilized” US consumption.

Conclusion

It would be no exaggeration to say that a large amount of Rio’s history has been built on the real, as well as imaginary, interconnections between the mobilities of colonization, voyaging, and tourism. Both films and travel guides, as I attempted to demonstrated here through two particular cases, are forms of representation which anticipate the cityscape to an audience; they bring a sense of materiality that does not presuppose actual physical mobilities but rather the mobilities of discourse and imagination.

If a fascination between the United States and Brazil had been present, if only informally, the Good Neighbour Policy brought that fascination to the centre of the state’s agenda. Under its auspices, Brazilians were increasingly exposed to the full force of the United States’ powerful economic, political, and cultural influence. Meanwhile, US investors, leisure travellers, and potential settlers looked southward with mixed hopes of both financial success and sensory delights. Carmen Miranda, the “Brazilian Bombshell”, became the highest-paid entertainer in Hollywood in 1942; Hollywood productions accounted for over 70 percent of the films released in Brazil in that same year (Barsante, 1994).

As Tunico Amancio (2000) accurately states, although committed to an exposition of “positive images” of the city, cultural products that were produced under the auspices of the Good Neighbour Policy – *FDR* included – make use of an extensive repertoire of cultural stereotypes and visual clichés. For what I have demonstrated here, the same argument could be made in regard to Gibson’s book. It is important to note, though, that the rhetorical tropes that both narratives present can be read as the discursive outcome of a set of specific anxieties about North and South Americans which were in dialogue with the very self-images which Brazilians were attempting to construct of themselves.

For both national and international audiences, Rio was a place in which the presence of cultural elements from Europe, Africa, and America

pointed to a balanced acquaintance between tradition and modernity, between black rhythms and white bodies. It was, thus, a spatial form that condensed two apparently irreconcilable principles: the city as a civilized/modern space and the city as a primitive/traditional dominion. Those cities where the power of nature transformed it into a landscape which has overcome man's actions tend to have their geography eroticized and to be considered feminine (Todorov, 1993). In this sense, Rio was seen as conjuring up an ideal balance between a male civilizing power and a female attractive abundance, the symmetry between a domestication of the space by local as well as by foreign males and the preservation of natural landscapes, beautiful and exuberant as its women. While signs of modernity and civilization are brought into the cityscape, Cariocas are shown as having access to the benefits of Western technology (airplanes, radios, and so on), and social rules are posed as being definitely linked to a traditional logic. Exterior time may progress, but the Rio invented by the two narratives examined here always offers a reprieve, an atemporal escape hatch whereby readers and audiences elude modernity and enter an exotic theatrical stage of (male) quest.

Notes

- 1 In *The Girl of the Rio* (RKO, 1932b), del Río's character was fought over by a decent white American male and a greasy Mexican bandit. She finished up with the American, but no marriage was mentioned.
- 2 The low quality of the ships offering services between the United States and Brazil was a recurrent issue in Gibson's private as well as official letters. The ambassador would even blame the unreliability of those ships for the small number of Brazilians choosing the US as their vacation destination in the 1930s.
- 3 In 1933, Gibson had written one other book, *A Journal from Our Legation in Belgium* (1917). He subsequently produced *Belgium, The Country and Its People* (1939); and *The Road to Foreign Policy* (1944). With former President Hoover, he wrote *The Problem of Lasting Peace* (1947), a book that was severely criticized. For an interesting analysis of this, see Harrison Thomson's review (1943).
- 4 Unfortunately, *Rio* has never been translated into Portuguese, and today few Brazilians have any knowledge of it.

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