Gilberto Freyre in the press: an Iberian idea of the city, from 1920s Recife to 1950s Lisbon

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to investigate the work of Gilberto Freyre about a specific topic, that is, the narration of cities through the lens of the press, an object of study that is not detached from the most fundamental pillars of his work, marked by an empathetic look at the past and by the defense of the Iberian heritage, considered hybrid and plastic. The theme of cities was present in Freyre's books, such as the *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife* (1934) but was also subject of pages and pages in the press, a theme understudied by the specialized critic. The sensitivity to the urban aspect in his journalistic activity – with emphasis on Recife in the 1920s and Lisbon in the early 1950s – constitute the analytical focus of this contribution.
Keywords: Gilberto Freyre; City; Press.

Gilberto Freyre na imprensa: uma ideia ibérica de cidade, do Recife (na década de 1920) a Lisboa (na década de 1950)

Resumo: O objetivo desse artigo é investigar a obra de Gilberto Freyre em torno de um tema específico, as cidades narradas em suas colaborações na imprensa, cujo objeto de estudo não se desvincula dos pilares mais fundamentais de sua obra, marcada por um olhar empático ao passado e pela defesa da herança ibérica, considerada híbrida e plástica. O tema das cidades em Freyre esteve presente em livros – como o *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife* (1934) – mas também foi tema de páginas e páginas na imprensa, assunto pouco estudado pela crítica especializada. A sensibilidade para o urbano na atividade jornalística de Freyre – com ênfase ao Recife da década de 1920 e a Lisboa no início da década de 1950 – constitui o foco analítico desta contribuição.
Palavras-chave: Gilberto Freyre; cidade; imprensa.

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The proposal of this article is to investigate the construction of Gilberto Freyre's (1900-1987) long-term view of cities, notably Recife in the 1920s and Lisbon in the 1950s. It is interesting to document the construction of an understanding of cities within Freyre's intellectual project, which is not dissociated from the most fundamental pillars of his work, marked by an empathic perspective towards the past and the defense of the legitimacy of Iberian and mestizo culture.

The community of researchers interested in the intellectual production of Gilberto Freyre has prioritized his books as support for his ideas, partly because of facility of access. However, Freyre's press publications were important and research about this area remains unsatisfactory. Sensitivity to the urban occupies great space in his journalistic activities during his intellectual life: this is one of the motors of this contribution.

However, it is interesting to deepen the understanding of Iberism in relation to cities – present in Bastos (2012), but not in the rich articles of Lira (2005) and Peixoto (2005) – as well as documenting the recurrence of the theme during Freyre's intellectual life, with an emphasis on periodicals. Also because in the limits of this article, it will not be possible to detail the analysis of *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife* (Practical, Historical, and Sentimental Guide to the City of Recife - 1934) or of *Olinda: segundo guia prático, histórico e sentimental de cidade brasileira* (Olinda: Second Practical, Historical, and Sentimental Guide to the Brazilian City - 1939), books well studied by the above mentioned authors.

In the 1920s there is a series of articles by Freyre in *Diário de Pernambuco* in which the theme of cities appears, with criticisms of the urban reforms of Recife and Rio de Janeiro. In the 1950s, the sensitivity to urban phenomena reappears in an already mature Freyre, when he constructed a large part of his *Lusotropical* production. As a columnist of *O Cruzeiro* newspaper, with a large national circulation, Freyre made frequent observations on Lisbon and other cities. This is another fundamental axis of this article.

Freyre's city in the press in the 1920s

In a trajectory that was not usual for the time, Gilberto Freyre studied in the United States between 1917 and 1922 – first in Baylor, Texas; afterwards in Columbia, New York. Before returning to Recife at the end of 1923, he made a long journey through Europe, spending time in England (Oxford) and going to France, Germany, Spain, and Portugal. During these years abroad, Freyre was already actively collaborating with the Pernambuco press. Returning to Recife, he continued to write in the newspaper in an even more intense manner (Rezende, 1997, p. 148).

A well-traveled polyglot – going against the dominant discourse of the period, still marked to various degrees by climatic and ethnical determinisms – Freyre defended the

tropics and traditions, including urban ones. In "Gardens for the tropics" – an article originally published in *Diário de Pernambuco* in 1923 and republished in *Retalhos de Jornais Velhos* (1964) –, the young Freyre sought to valorize tropical trees in warm cities in the northeast of Brazil. It was an incisive critique of the imitation of Europe and the United States by the *nouveaux riche*, interested in appearing modern and up to date, including through imported trees and gardens:

> Under our sun and our still somewhat savage nature, gardens like those of the Swiss; or the French of the Loire; or the English of Holland House – stylized, the tufts trimmed into cubes, the flowerbeds in a hard symmetry, the almost non-ending grass – assume a melancholic and at the same time almost ridiculous air.
>
> The Portuguese tradition is undoubtedly what should be developed here (Freyre, 1964a, p. 6-7).

After living in or spending time in cities such as New York, London, and Paris, we can see a young man far from any enchantment with modern metropoles, the speed of automobiles, or the wide avenues and skyscrapers. In an April 1924 letter, Freyre wrote to Monteiro Lobato, in which he praised the tropics and hinted at a type of criticism of the modern concept of the city:

> I have just arrived in Pernambuco where I have not put foot for five years. I am filling myself with coconut water and sugarcane juice – to satisfy my anxious longing for the tropical landscape [...]. In addition to a small fat and grotesque tree, my room is surrounded by sugarcane, banana trees, and young palm trees [...]. After five years of bungalows, skyscrapers, Fifth Avenue, and Piccadilly, this is enchanting my dear author of *Urupês*. What is positively a horror is what is new here: the new buildings, the new gardens, naked, without trees, the new residences, without characters, without taste (Freyre, Apr. 1924, as cited in Larreta and Giucci, 2007, p. 220).

Unlike what frequently happened with young people from the Brazilian and Latin American elite, who returned from Europe and the United States enchanted with the lights, with the velocity of modernity, and their cities in transformation, Freyre returned from his long period abroad, hungry for a profound Brazil, the Recife of his infancy, as he reaffirmed in an article published in *Diário de Pernambuco*, on 20 April 1924: "for me, I already feel a little foreign in Recife now. My Recife was something else" (Freyre, Apr. 20 1924, p. 3).

The defense of the tropics and the rural environment was added to the criticism of modern cities. On 11 November 1924, in the Salesian College in Recife, Freyre gave a long

talk called "Recife and the trees," published in full in *Diário de Pernambuco* two days later. In the text, he praised the neighboring Olinda and "all the tropical flora":

> It is opportune to restore the wood in Olinda, since in Recife it appears as difficult to dedicate a few hectares to a wood which could combine the decorative values of our flora and all of tropical flora, such as those Hindu and African trees related to ours; and it would serve as a great lung for the city. A tropical city without a large park – can you understand a greater absurdity? (Freyre, Nov. 13 1924, p. 4).

In addressing the "Hindu and African trees related to ours," Freyre makes an allusion to a certain past in which the Portuguese, through the discoveries and the "conquests," trafficked in plants and animals (as well as men, women, and children, it should be noted in passing). Freyre praised Portuguese colonization in the tropics for legating Brazil – and thus Recife – with eastern and African plants, adapted to the Atlantic coast of South America.

The valorization of the tropics and mestizaje was nurtured by the reading of the essayist Lafcadio Hearn, author of *Two Years in the French West Indies*, the original 1903 edition of which is often cited by Freyre, as Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke notes (2005, p. 345-350). Sensitivity to the tropics would later lead to what Freyre would call *Lusotropicalism*, a type of Portuguese tendency of cultural accommodation, contemporization, compromise, and adjustment to populations and warm climates.

Cities not born in bourgeois modernity were contained in this passage. Freyre wanted to preserve them from the modernizing hurricane threatening Brazilian cities of a colonial origin. For him, Rio de Janeiro had been victimized by the urban reforms of Mayor Pereira Passos – the remodeling of the city, which had begun in 1903, was an object of constant criticism by Freyre.

In 1925, Gilberto Freyre organized *Livro do Nordeste*, a collective work aimed at commemorating the centenary of *Diário de Pernambuco*, of which he was an active collaborator. In the book, he strongly defended Pernambuco and Northeastern traditions, which he perceived were threatened by the "falsely modernizing temptations of Americanisms" (Freyre, 1979, [Informar página da citação]).

According to Freyre: "the sugar mills of the commercial companies brought the sugar industry the mechanism of bourgeois factories," impersonal, destroying the "subservience which the former workers had to sugar mill owners – types of a rustic *fidalguia*/nobility" (Freyre, 1979, p. 80). In a clearly patriarchal tone, he defended tradition, and what was aristocratic and Iberian in it, whose perception was integrated with the defense of northeastern regionalism and gave rise to a critique of the modern, Haussmanian city.

The work of Gilberto Freyre, including texts in the press in the 1920s, cannot be under-

stood without understanding the profound Iberian trait of their intellectual production. It is a production marked by the perception that the historical and cultural formation of Catholic Iberia, mestizo since the Middle Ages, is distinct from the modern Protestant, liberal, and industrial West (Bastos, 2003; Schneider, 2012, 2020; Silva, 2016; González-Velasco, 2021).

The young Gilberto Freyre did not invent Iberism – here understood as the defense of the Iberian legacy – but removed it from Portuguese and Spanish intellectuals concerned with debating conditions in the peninsula before the modernization at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Among them can be noted the Spaniards Ángel Ganivet (1865-1898) and Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) and the Portuguese Fidelino de Figueiredo (1888-1967) and António Sardinha (1887-1925).

Criticism of the modern city in Freyre is inseparable from this debate. It is useful to insist on the intellectual passion of the young Pernambuco author for the Andalusian Ángel Ganivet. The actual Freyrean conception of the bi-continentality of Portugal and Espanha (Araújo, 1994) – which came to be so dear to *Casa-grande & senzala* – was already in *Idearium Español* (1898), have Ganivet's magnus opus, an author who Freyre admired, as well as possessing a large part of his books, as his biographers confirmed (Larreta, Giucci, 2007, p. 398). Reading Ganivet exercised a powerful impact on Freyre's intellectual formation (Bastos, 2003). According to Ganivet, the Iberian peoples were not decadent in relation to Northern Europe. Different, yes; inferior, never, since they had been marked by an entire history of mixing with Mediterranean and Eastern people, Muslims and Jews (Ganivet, 1898, p. 108).

Pablo González-Velasco (2021) shows that Freyre found in a series of Spanish authors, among them Ganivet, the perception of an ancient Iberia, marked by Muslim, Berber, and Mediterranean culture, in which mestizaje, patriarchalism, polygamy, and ecumenism were read as positive (González-Velasco, 2021, p. 28).

In press articles in the 1920s, the defense which Gilberto Freyre makes of a more traditional and more Iberian Northeast, in light of the modernization in process in Rio and São Paulo (Schneider, 2020), is evident. Through Iberism, Freyre constructed a critical repertoire of modern and Western values, leading him to develop a conservationist and preservationist perspective, whether of the non-geometric conformations of the old colonial cities, with their old churches and convents, or the tropical trees which needed to survive the modernizing fever, or the old sweets of Pernambuco cuisine.

At the invitation of Freyre, the modernist poet Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968) wrote in 1925, one of his most famous poems, "Evocation of Recife," published in *Livro do Nordeste* (1925), a volume organized by Gilberto Freyre for the commemoration of the centenary of *Diário de Pernambuco*. Bandeira's poem echoes the dialogues with his friend Freyre (Dias,

2017, p. 196-201), in which old Recife is a living character, in reaction to the new modernizing city. Let us look at a decisive part:

> Rua da União...
> How they were beautiful the street names of my infancy
> Rua do Sol
> (I am afraid that now it is called Dr. So-and-So)
> Behind the house was Rua da Saudade...
> ...where you could smoke unseen
> On that side was the pier of Rua da Aurora...
> ...where you fish unseen
>
> Novenas
> Riding
> And I would lie in the lap of that girl and she began
> to run her hand through my hair
> Capiberibe
> — Capiberibe
> Rua da União where every afternoon the black lady with the bananas would pass
> With Costa's flashy cloth shawl
> (...)
> Recife...
> Rua da União...
> My grandfather's house...
> I never thought that it would end!
> Everything there seemed impregnated with eternity
> Recife...
> My dead grandfather.
> Dead Recife, good Recife, Brazilian Recife
> such as the house of my grandfather (Original, Bandeira, 1979, p. 214).

Preserving old Recife was a profoundly Freyrean idea, "impregnated with eternity," Brazilian Recife, with its colonial streets and with its names from old times; the Recife of the time of "our grandparents." It should be noted that in those years, the city of Recife – like many other Brazilian cities – was going through a process of transformation ranging from sanitation to the expansion of streets, with the modernization of the port and the center of the city, which implied expropriations and demolitions, as well as the construction of new urban facilities, such as new avenues and new landscaping (Lira, 1999).

Freyre was opposed to a certain type of internationalism, which he understood as af-

fected and false. The reforms were to be consistent with a tropical city and its Luso-Iberian inheritance: "Recife, abandon the mania of the French or English flowerbeds with the flat surface of extensive grass," a landscape he considered unsuited to the "burning sun" of the tropics (Freyre, Nov. 13 1924, p. 4).

The young Freyre was committed to the rehabilitation of the Portuguese past, hence the opposition to the modern city, with its straight lines, geometrics, and symmetry. He preferred reconciliation with the colonial city, with its windy streets, its old buildings, its tropical nature, its trees, its rivers, its habits, and ways of living traditionally, including the *mocambos*. In an article in *Diário de Pernambuco* on 25 February 1926, Freyre directly criticized the idea of the modern city:

> Another day someone from Recife spoke of his dream of a new Recife. This new Recife would be a straight line. A delight of symmetry. A delight of regularity. A geometric Recife such as the Gardens of the Loire (Freyre, Feb. 25 1926, p. 3).

In a journey to Rio de Janeiro, also in 1926, Freyre sent various articles to *Diário de Pernambuco*, including, "The city of grey fever." In it, he stated that in Rio, worse than "yellow fever" was the "grey fever," in allusion to the urban reforms, which he held responsible for the excess of heat in the Summer. Avenida Central, wide with few trees and distant buildings, without shadows, made the heat more powerful – thus it was inappropriate for the tropics:

> The fever of Rio is no longer yellow. It is grey. It is the sun which beats strong on the asphalt and the asphalt rises, terribly. Except for the narrow streets so good and friendly to people in a tropical city, it is almost impossible to walk on foot in Rio, in these days of sun, without being aware of the painful effort (Freyre, Nov. 17 1926, p. 4).

The 1920s Freyre showed no enthusiasm for automobiles and was bothered by their speed and noise. His early thought contained clear romantic traces, to a certain extent "anti-enlightenment," which certainly fed the critique of Western modernism, conferring importance on certain obscure dimensions in the world and life, such as "sexuality, death, the symbolism of power, irrationalism. In the general tone of his writings at this time there is a radical critique of some of the central values of liberalism" (Larreta, Giucci, 2007, p. 255). It is in this set of perceptions and sensitivities that Freyre read the modern city.

In 1927, when he was a type of chief of staff to the governor of Pernambuco, Estácio Coimbra, Gilberto Freyre accompanied the French architect and urbanist Donat Alfred Agache (1875-1959) in a boat trip along the Capibaribe Rover. Agache – who had considerable influence in Brazil, with projects in various cities in the country – had come to Rio de Janeiro to study urban interventions in the federal capital. Taking advantage of the oppor-

tunity, the governor, very probably at the suggestion of Freyre, invited the "French master" to give some talks in Recife on the modern concept of urbanism.

Freyre published an article about "Mestre Agache," referring to him as a "Don Juan of cities." In the text, he defined Recife as "the most Arab of [cities] which the Portuguese created in Brazil," the idea which recalled his Andalusian master Ganivet, who liked to proclaim Andalusia as a region enriched by Arab, Oriental, and Muslim traits. There were non-photogenic beauties in Recife, since, as Freyre notes, "the capital of Pernambuco had characteristic values, whose enchantment no camera lens or cinema could do justice to" (Freyre, 1964b, p. 117).

Recife's enchantment was something else, instead of buildings and scenery, it was culture and the experience of people. The idea that the Pernambuco capital was not photogenic, like Rio and Salvador, reappeared in the 1934 *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife*.

Freyre's contributions in the press, in conceptual and analytical terms, cannot be separated from his books. The support and narrative strategies change, but the interpretative pillars of this thought remain.

The city in the 1930s books

The 1930s changed the life of Gilberto Freyre, but his thought was still connected with his early texts, even though his work was in construction, receiving new influxes.

With the 1930 Revolution, Freyre had to flee quickly to Portugal, since he was an aide to the governor of Pernambuco, Estácio Coimbra, linked to the old order. From Lisbon, Freyre went to California in 1931, where he obtained an important position as a temporary professor in the history of Brazil in Stanford University. In the United States, Freyre did not forget the Iberian world, nor its writers and debates.

In this aspect, it is worth noting a letter, dated 25 April 1931, sent to the Portuguese writer Fidelino de Figueiredo, in which he exhibits an intellectual and emotional adhesion to the work of Ganivet:

> I am not dying of love for Unamuno, but Ganivet is one of my great, my profound, enthusiasms, and for six or seven years, when I was still writing on the sand in my provincial beach, I wrote some notes about this great Spanish soul. I was very interested in encouraging among my people a local, regionalist spirit, a creative provincialism, without harming a broader, Brazilian and even Hispanic feeling, and when I discovered Ganivet for myself, since I had never seen any reference to him in Portuguese, it was a great joy. [...] In exile, my Ganivetism became even more acute (Dimas, 2011, p. 144).

While in *Casa-grande & senzala*, a 1933 book dedicated to the rural and colonial world, the theme of cities does not appear, in *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife* the theme appears throughout the entire work. Published in Recife in July 1934, with a print run of only 105 copies, the work was illustrated by Luís Jardim, an artist who composed with Freyre, Cícero Dias, José Lins do Rego, and Lula Cardoso Ayres, amongst other names from the Northeast regionalist movement.

The *Guia* is only apparently a small book. More than a conventional guide – since as well as streets, alleys, buildings, and churches, it also portrays legends, myths, and hauntings –, the work describes a heterogenous city in many senses, as it is diverse in terms of classes, races, colors, and ethos. In other words, a city which symbolizes what Freyre understood as Luso-Afro-mestizo, and hence Brazilian and Iberian.

Similar to a large part of Freyre's work, the *Guia* is inseparable from a more general context of the regionalist movement. It is worth noting that the idea of the region – also important for Ángel Ganivet – is transected by culture, history, ecology, in other words, a way of being in the world.

For a man used to the legitimacy of Iberian traditions and the concept of region, such as Freyre, the dangers of dissolving modernization and the very course of accelerated historical time were felt as loss and threats. Not by coincidence, Freyre was an assiduous reader of Marcel Proust (1871-1922), a writer sensitive to memory and loss: "The study of the intimate history of a people has something of Proustian introspection," he says in *Casa-grande* (Freyre, 1933, p. 23).

Both in the lighter texts of the periodical press as in the more elaborate books, there predominates a vibrant, evocative, and sinuous prose (Peixoto, 2005). The taste for the Iberian past, mestizo and Catholic, appears when the narrator looks at baroque art and colonial architecture in the center of Recife and Olinda and the popular festivities with mestizo origins, some was a strong African inheritance, such as the *maracatus* and the *xangôs*.

The Freyrean view of the overlapping alterities does not prevent an active search for identity, since Freyre's city, although multiple, is indelibly marked by the tropics, by mestizaje and by the Iberian inheritance. Questions which had already appeared in his contributions to the press, before the guides to Recife and Olinda, would continue to appear.

Sensitive to tradition and culture – including the popular one, with all the mestizo, indigenous, and African elements – Freyre pays little attention to poverty, which he notes, but is not the fruit of criticism or indignation. Above all, he is a *flâneur* of a city enrooted in the colonial period, Iberian, with its baroque churches "in the shadow of the large *gamelleiras* or among coconut trees" (Freyre, 1934, p. 28). Ultimately, it is the identity which Freyre sought, both in the Guides and in press articles – whether in the 1920s or in the 1950s –, to

narrate a city in defense of the Iberian, mestizo, traditional, and singular, threatened by bourgeois modernity, standardized and American.

Within this article it is not possible to deepen the understanding of the guides to Recife and Olinda, already well studied by specialized criticism (Lira, 2005; Peixoto, 2005). However, it is worth noting that in 1936, Freyre published *Sobrados e mucambos*, a type of continuation of *Casa-grande & senzala*, in which the reflection proposed by the author went through the changes which nineteenth century Brazilian society underwent, including in cities, the household, private life, and mestizaje. In the book, Freyre narrates the decline of patriarchalism and the rise of certain standards which approximate the bourgeois and Western way of life and domination, at a moment of decadence of rural patriarchalism, always in Brazilian conditions of negotiation and reconciliation.

The press as a place of Freyre in the public debate

Unlike other essayists, sociologists, and historians in the 1940s and 1950s, Gilberto Freyre lived basically from writing. Although he was a descendent of old patriarchal families, he lacked any inheritance. The Argentine intellectual Norberto Frontini, a collaborator of the publisher Daniel Cosío Villegas, director of the Mexican Fund of Economic Culture, states that in 1943 "Freyre is the only writer who lives from his intellectual work" (Faria Filho, 2021, p. 166). As well as royalties from his books, in Brazil and abroad, collaboration with the press was also vital in financial terms.

In 1948, elected a federal deputy by UDN as a representative for the state of Pernambuco in the first post-*Estado Novo* legislature, Gilberto Freyre began to write a section in *O Cruzeiro* magazine, entitled "People, Things, and Animals," which would last until 1967. It was a moment of his international establishment, but also an increasing critique led by leftwing intellectuals in universities which began to take root.

Freyre became a columnist in one of the most important illustrated magazines in the country. It had a large circulation and belonged to *Diários Associados*, a group owned by the journalist and businessman Assis Chateaubriand (1892-1968). Gilberto Freyre and Chateaubriand, from Paraiba, were longstanding and went back to Recife, when the latter graduated in Law and worked at the beginning of the 1920s in *Diário de Pernambuco*, where the young Gilberto also worked.

Between 1931 and 1934, the old newspaper came to belong to *Diários Associados*, owned by an already powerful Chateaubriand (Morais, 1994). Freyre's column was published at the time of the greatest influence of the magazine, whose peak was in the 1950s, when *O Cruzeiro* reached a circulation of 550,000 copies per week (Barbosa, 2000). Being a regular collaborator of the largest magazine in the country – and a very close friend of Assis

Chateaubriand – guaranteed Freyre not only remuneration, but an audience in the public debate.

In his columns, Freyre gave great emphasis to Portuguese or Luso-Brazilian subjects, which was coherent with the ensemble of his work. However, after travelling to the "overseas provinces" of Portugal between August 1951 and February 1952, he exponentially increased the presence of Portuguese themes, including a relative defense of the dictatorship led by António de Oliveira Salazar.

As is well known, the voyage was carefully organized by the Salazar regime, in such a way that the Brazilian intellectual saw in Portugal and above all in the "Portuguese *ultramar*," (overseas Portugal) what the regime wanted, although Freyre was not submitted to formal or explicit prohibitions or censorship (Castelo, 1999).

In addition to a lot of material for his columns, the voyage would result in two new books: *Aventura e rotina* and *Um brasileiro em terras portuguesas*, both published in 1953 by José Olympio (Freyre, 1953a, 1953b), from Rio de Janeiro, at that moment the most prestigious publisher in the country. The first book, a diary written in the heat of the moment, is the most significant, since in it Freyre narrates the impressions of the voyage, always in favor of his arguments.

Within these columns it is possible to catch a glimpse of Gilberto Freyre marked by Luso-tropicalism,[1] whose discourse, although it responds to an agenda of that period (the immediate post-war period), is deeply permeated by his intellectual past. These are perspectives and sensitivities which had dawned in the Recife press in the 1920s, matured in the books of the 1930s, and continued to appear in the 1950s. As can be seen, the theme of cities is recurrent in Freyre, from the young aspiring mature intellectual, although the historicity of his work should not be minimized.

It is worth noting that in Brazil in the 1950s, historical and sociological studies were institutionalized in universities, above all in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In the University of São Paulo, Florestan Fernandes' group, Freyre's work came to be scientifically considered "backward," since it was "outside sociologically legitimate discursive standards" (Meucci, 2006, p. 253).

Exactly at this moment, Freyre deepened his collaboration with the periodical press, aimed at the general public, for which his style (the essay as a genre) was better suited, since it brought together research in history, sociology, and anthropology with art criticism, memory, and other knowledge, often leaked in a literary tone.

[1] Luso-tropicalism can be read as a new phase in Gilberto Freyre's intellectual production. Although its roots preceded this, it was consolidated after the 1951 and 1952 voyages. See Castelo (1999); Leonard (2001); Schneider (2012, 2020); Anderson, Roque, Santos (2019).

A comparison with Sérgio Buarque is tempting. The São Paulo historian, a contemporary of Freyre, became a university professor in the second half of his intellectual life, abandoning essayism. In studying the texts of Sérgio Buarque and Gilberto Freyre in the literary supplement of *Diário de Notícia*s, between 1948 and 1950, Venancio and Wegner (2018) demonstrate that intellectuals were aware of their options and defended them. Buarque assumed university type research while Freyre remained loyal to essayism. The growing adhesion to the press, in this context, appears to have been a conscious choice of Freyre, interested in intervening in the public debate, with a greater audience and discursive freedom.

It is also worth noting that in the post-war period after the dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945), Brazil went through a growing developmentalist appeal, marked by a deepening of capitalism and democracy, whose symbol was the construction of Brasília in the Juscelino Kubitschek administration (1956-1960). It was a time of a strong reliance on urbanization and industrialization, with the rapid growth of the large Brazilian cities, above all those from the south-central region – São Paulo in particular.

Important Brazilian intellectuals, such as Sérgio Buarque and Florestan Fernandes, amongst many others, mobilized against archaicism and the rural past, or perhaps better against the Iberian past. In the lexicon of these authors and the new institutions which emerged – such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comissão Econômica para a América Latina e Caribe, Cepal), in 1949, and the Superior Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, Iseb), in 1955 –, terms such as a development, urbanization, industrialization, backward, scientific rationalization, social classes, social changes, capitalism, and democracy were the order of the day (Meucci, 2006, p. 281-285). It is in this context that Gilberto Freyre would write different columns in *O Cruzeiro* with criticisms of urban modernization.

Lisbon in the perspective of Freyre in the 1950s

Gilberto Freyre published "Lisbon, city of order" in the 15 December 1951 issue of *O Cruzeiro*. The column was written in the Portuguese capital and sent to the newsroom of the publication in Rio de Janeiro, while Freyre travelled through Portugal and its overseas provinces.

Initially the text is surprising. At that moment, the relative proximity of the Brazilian intellectual to the Salazar regime was increasingly clear. The Portuguese government would not have invited Freyre for a long visit to the country and its colonies if they did not have any expectations of political gain.

The title "Lisbon, city of order" appears to suggest praise, if we think of the context

marked by the emergence of Luso-tropicalism. However, this is not what appears in the first paragraph:

> Lisbon is today so orderly that I miss the slightly disorderly Lisbon that I encountered in 1923, when I was in Portugal for the first time. Organizing itself in the almost clerical sense of having ceased to be part "of the world," the old city has lost some of its romantic grace, its bohemia, its Neapolitan carelessness, its happy air of a worldly town, celebrated by many theatres, the suppers with the Spanish, the nocturnal festive life. It has also lost something of its oriental picturesque which for those who came from the north of Europe oriental was already a festival (Freyre, Dec. 15 1951, p. 14).

The use of expressions such as "romantic grace," "Neapolitan carelessness" and "oriental picturesque" – as well as constructing an idyllic Lisbon in the eyes of Freyre – leads to a critique of the disciplined, bourgeois, electric, and automotive modern city.

Freyre, not fond of automobiles, made various criticisms of them on 25 December 1948, in the column entitled "The sultans of the streets in Rio de Janeiro":

> In the city of Rio de Janeiro the kings, the pachas, the sultans of the streets are now the automobiles [...]. Against these the man who walks on foot has to resign himself to the sad role of the creature that is only tolerated by the charity of these absolute lords the Brazilian metropole: its squares, its avenues, and its central streets (Freyre, Dec. 25 1948, p. 10).

In "Lisbon, city in order," we can also see a Freyre a little disenchanted with the Europeanized city which he was seeing: "in the Lisbon of today there is the impression of being in a southern city which had suffered a Swiss reform." A reform with a "touch of Protestant, the Puritan, and even the Calvinist in the sense of order, method, cleanliness, hygiene, the so-called good customs." This somewhat disenchanted city was even "monotonous and even insipid," although he admits a certain "compensation," such as the "efficiency of public services which becomes exemplary, didactic, pedagogical." He also positively cites the "well policed city" but criticized "what is bad policing in the Lisbon of today," which seems to find "communism and contraband in those arriving in Portugal." In relation to this aspect, "Lisbon acquired nothing from the Swiss but continues at times brutal and grossly oriental"[2] (Freyre, Dec. 15 1951, p. 14).

The critique of a Lisbon which appears ever more European is also a critique of bour-

[2] The perception of the Orient in Gilberto Freyre corresponds to some extent to what Edward Said (2007) calls "orientalism". The subject is relevant, but there is no space to advance it within the limits of this article. In relation to the topic of orientalism in Freyre, see Souza (2020).

geois modernization. This perspective would continue in a series of other columns, such as the one of 22 December 1951, entitled "Lisbon almost without *varinas*." In this, Freyre criticized the city of those days, since "the *varinas*," in other words, the women who sold fish in the market, "are now rare." They "continued to go found in the city's streets, but without forming those happy groups of before, the time when they seemed the real owners of the streets." Still referring to the *varinas*, he laments that the "color of their dresses more oriental than European" which was no longer in harmony "with the discrete blues and greys of the dominant clothing in an orthodox European city" (Freyre, Dec. 22 1951, p. 14).

Iberians were not and would never be pure Europeans, since they were mestizos of Moors, Arabs, Berbers, Muslims, and Sephardic Jews. Making Lisbon an "orthodox Europe" city sounded to him like treason to the pre-bourgeois past which Freyre regarded as positive (Freyre, Dec. 22 1951, p. 14). The *varinas* were dying as a historical phenomenon, but "fortunately there is no violent police repression against them. If they had begun to die, it was an almost natural death." This unpretentious phrase lightened the critique of the regime. It also attenuated the critique of the "Swiss" bourgeoisification of Lisbon:

> The *sobrados* characteristic of Lisbon continued to be constructed, new and triumphant, with all the glory of the old reds and yellows, blues and greens, shining in the sun. In this regard, the Swiss reform of Lisbon did not manage to defeat the festively oriental tradition of the city (Freyre, Dec. 22 1951, p. 14).

The passage relativizes the critical sense of the Europeanization of the city. In concluding the column, Freyre asks if the *varinas* could at least survive "for some time," since they were "to Lisbon what the *Baianas* with decorated trays and bright shawls are still to the old city of Salvador da Bahia." The praise of the old Iberian tradition, to some extent mestizo, is clear (Freyre, Dec. 22 1951, p. 14).

In the column, "Lisbon misses its priests," dated 5 January 1952, Freyre maintained the tone of lament towards the bourgeoisification of the "old two." He laments that "Lisbon of today gives us the impression" of suffering "a Swiss reform of its habits and its ways of life." A transformation which seemed "Protestant," since "the number of Catholic priests was falling on the streets, after the closure of the streets and the end of friars and nun." According to Freyre, there was a lack of "thin priests and fat friars peacefully going down steep streets, gently leaving churches [...]. Priests and friars are missing in Lisbon today: the secularized convents and the borgeoisified streets" (Freyre, Jan. 5 1952, p. 10).

The beauty of the *varinas* or the friars resided in what Freyre considered authentic, old, and regional. He assumed a manifest sympathy for the survivals of the past, or better an Iberian past. In the Lisbon of "today" there was a "deformed" city, since there did not exist "picturesquely clerical note which the landscape asks for and its Catholic tradition de-

mands," whose clothing are no longer the "traditional full length habits, replaced by simple frockcoats or even very bourgeois coats" (Freyre, Jan. 5 1952, p. 10).

As in the three previous columns, Freyre showed his taste for the Iberian past, read positively. This differentiated him from the dominant theses in Brazil – on the left and the right, from Marxism to liberalism –, which tended to see in a determined Iberian past the reasons for Brazilian and Latin American backwardness.

Six months later, when he had returned to Recife, Freyre returned to the subject in a new column: "Once again, Lisbon," published on 14 June 1952.[3] The first paragraph of the text is highly significant, not just because of his perception of the Portuguese capital, but also their engagement in the present:

> Being solely European, Lisbon would be a banal city. Its enchantment comes from the fact that both its past and its character, are so penetrated by colors, flavors, aromas, and traits of the Orient and the Africas, America, and the islands of the Atlantic, which being in Europe are not just from Europe. Portuguese from the *Ultramar*, coming to Europe for the first time, find in Lisbon something of the province left behind in Asia or Africa: and not a purely European corner of Europe (Freyre, Jun. 14 1952, p. 10).

The argument of the bi-continentality of the Iberian Peninsula, which Freyre worked on in *Casa-grande & senzala* (1933), reappears here in an even clearer manner. By emphasizing that the "enchantment of Lisbon" came from "its past" and "its character," permeated by "colors, flavors, aromas, and traces of the Orient and the Africas, America, and the islands of the Atlantic," he demonstrates his more than European understanding of Portugal and consequently its capital. Clearly this discourse sounds sympathetic to the efforts of the Portuguese regime in maintaining colonialism.

Freyre paints a picture of a Lisbon which, due to its five centuries of experience in the "*Ultramar*," had acquired an ethos that was not just European. These are not new perceptions: they can be found in *O mundo que o português criou* (1940) and in various other texts. Portugal, Brazil, the Atlantic islands (Madeira, Azores, and Cape Verde), "Portuguese Africa" (Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique), as well as Goa and Macau in Asia, formed "a unity of sentiments and culture" (Freyre, 1947, p. 189-190), whose nexus with the post-war Salazar regime are clear (Schneider, 2012).

At that moment, Portuguese colonialism began to be increasingly questioned, including by the United Nations. The abolition of the "Colonial Act," eliminating colonies from the judicial and rhetorical sphere and their replacement with "*ultramarine* provinces," coin-

[3] It is worth noting that at this exact moment Freyre had written *Aventura e rotina* and *Um brasileiro em terras portuguesas*, which José Olympio would publish in 1953.

cides with the adhesion of the discourse of the "assimilation" so dear to Freyre (Castelo, 1999). The 1951 Constitution can be read as a reply of the Portuguese dictatorship to the progressive international isolation of the country, which insisted on a new rhetoric, the thesis of a "one, pluricontinental, and multiracial" nation, a formulation designed for the "patria" and "empire" to identify with each other.

In the above cited columns, Freyre uses the expression "*ultramar*" or overseas, and not "colony," in an evident concession to Salazarism. However, it is the positive register of a living past, which has not ended: "The Lisbon of today still has something of the Manueline period. And we know what the Manueline period was. The capital of an empire which ran around half the world and not the base of a European kingdom" (Freyre, Jun. 14 1952, p. 10).

In Freyre's view Lisbon was not, nor should it be a fully Western and contemporary city. It had to be a city full of Asias, Africas, and Americas, pregnant with the valiant pre-bourgeois and non-European past. Freyre employs the expression "Lusitanian citizenship" as a metaphor of a city supposedly open to and welcoming of the *ultramar*. The argument finds a clear kinship with the new policies of state developed for the "*ultramarino* provinces." According to Freyre, in Lisbon both "European values" and "*ultramarino* values" were contained:

> No European city has gathered and assimilated so much diversity of *ultramarino* values, adding them to traditional ones. Lisbon did with things the same it did with people and the animals. To all it extended the protection of Lusitanian citizenship. All were considered Portuguese (Freyre, Jun. 14 1952, p. 10).

In Lisbon, there were a series "of adaptation of the uses of West, the values brought by the Portuguese from the East; a whole series of harmonizations of Western and Eastern styles of life." The capital – "at the same time so Western and so Eastern in its way of being a city" – was the messenger of a "sociological, obviously, and not judicial" amplitude of its citizenship (Freyre, Jun. 14 1952, p. 10). It is as if Freyre wanted to say that the only thing missing for integration to be full was political citizenship, since the "sociological" had already occurred. Although Gilberto Freyre cannot be reduced to a mere spokesperson of the Portuguese dictatorship, here we can find him strongly flirting with Salazarism and its new projects of modernization of colonialism, exactly when the "arrogant" western empires faltered.

In the column published on 21 June 1952, entitled "The lesson of *Jardim do Ultramar*," Freyre did not hide his relations with the Portuguese regime, in stating that he had been invited by "Minister for the *Ultramar* of Portugal" (Manuel Maria Sarmento Rodrigues), "a Navy officer for whom the Orient and Portuguese Africa did not exist as colonies, but as

other Portugals" (Freyre, Jun. 21 1952, p. 10). In the text, Freyre states that the "Minister for the *Ultramar*" had suggested that he visit "in Lisbon, the *Jardim do Ultramar*." He confessed that he was sociologically surprised with the visit:

> *Jardim do Ultramar* in Lisbon gives the visitor, in terms of the sociology of vegetal life, the impression of unity in the diversity that the world created by the Portuguese in the set of lives that it covers: the vegetal, the animal, the human (Freyre, Jun 21 1952, p. 10).

For Freyre, "*Jardim do Ultramar* in Lisbon" harmonizes diversity and unity, in clear praise not only of the past of Portuguese colonialism, but also of a discursive construction in defense of a policy of continuity of the Portuguese colonial presence.

In "The rhythm of Lisbon," a column from 5 June 1952, Freyre presents a determined urban perception: he had the impression "of never reaching the center of the city." No matter how long a person walks for, he will "always be on the outskirts or in the suburbs of a city; and not its center." The "old town" did not have a center like the large modern cities of the West, since Lisbon was distant "from the urbanistic conventions of centralism." This is praise of the conservation of "something healthily suburban in conventionally urban areas," so that streets and neighbors had "an unmistakable charm." Freyre sought singularity, which he employed with a romantic twist:

> Lisbon has its own rhythm and not that of the large modern cities of the West. It is an urban rhythm with something suburban not in the pejorative sense of suburban but in the good and healthy: the one in which the suburb corrects the excesses of national de-characterization of the urban (Freyre, Jul 5 1952, p. 10).

Here we see the Iberism of the author in full, in which the past is positive, but bourgeois modernity is destructive of old and "healthy" permanencies. This perspective reappears on 5 November 1955, in a column entitled "A threatened avenue," in which Freyre criticizes the modernizing urban reforms of Lisbon:

> I can see in *Diário Popular*, in Lisbon, that a 'remodeling' of Avenida da Liberdade has been projected. Alarming news. Alarming news for those who – as the editorial states in the excellent *Diário* – 'they love Lisbon and they want a large city but with character' (Freyre, Nov. 5 1955, p. 68).

The nature of the criticism is similar to those of the 1920s, when Freyre saw the urban reforms being carried out by "engineers" the destruction of singularity in the name of a

modern standardization. In his column, Freyre presents a mixture of criticisms and praise of Salazar, and censures the Portuguese government for modernizing works in Coimbra:

> I feel Portugal of today protected against outrages of this time by the fact that it is governed by men not only intelligent but also good. But I cannot forget the catastrophe which in the middle of the Salazar administration affected Coimbra a short while ago, whose appearance as a city, unique among the old academic cities of Europe, was altered in a brutal manner; and the old houses, the characteristic of its highest point, replaced by an architecture with pretensions to functionality, but without any character. Without a character and without the least connection with the environment. Intrusive and also an upstart (Freyre, Nov. 5 1955, p. 68).

Another "mischaracterizing" reform was underway in Lisbon – even under the "Salazar administration," an administration of "men not only intelligent but also good." This limited modernizing effort displeased Freyre, who saw in urban interventions attacks against what he considered legitimate historical and cultural forms. The remodeling of Avenida da Liberdade should not be the exclusive concern "of some Engineering specialists," since

> sociologists, artists, historians, public health specialists, psychologists have to be heard before the solution of problems which engineers simply being engineers, public health specialists being public health specialist, traffic specialists only understanding traffic questions (Freyre, Nov. 5 1955, p. 68).

On 10 August 1957, the column called "The Island of Madeira" reflected on a long journey to various European countries in 1956, including Portugal. Freyre states:

> I do not believe that there exists in the world today an island with the set of seduction which Madeira has. Landscape, climate, people, popular art, folklore, church and residence architecture, wine, sweets, tradition, modern comfort in hotels, cleanliness in streets and the market, picturesque, public health – these are some of the apparent antagonisms which the Portuguese island brings together in a delightful way. Of course, it lacks a modern pier. But that is already being built (Freyre, Aug. 10 1957, p. 34).

Freyre is not exactly an enemy of modernization, but rather a fierce critic of what he considers the "picturesque" de-characterization of the place. The observations on Madeira are profoundly Freyrean, since they propose a reconciliation between modernity and tradition. Defendable modernization was contained in the terms "comfort," "cleanliness," "hygiene," and "modern pier." These characteristics would not prevent the maintenance of the inheritance of the past, nature, and popular culture, manifest in the terms "landscape,"

"people," "popular art," "church," "wine," "sweets," and "tradition." Freyre directly and explicitly outlines his discomfort with modernization:

> My fear, every time I visit Madeira, is that here, like in Lisbon, with the good and necessary modernity, it will introduce itself among the most characteristic and expressive values of the island, disfiguring them, flattening them, annulling them, bad and reckless modernism. So reckless that it has already revealed this disoriented modernism, which is capable of all the outrages to nature and tradition as in Rio de Janeiro since 1930; and as in Lisbon in these last two or three years. Let no one be illuded: Lisbon now runs the risk of imitating the bad example of Rio. It runs the risk of losing its character, making it, due to inept modernism, equal to one hundred other cities of its size. Madeira is perhaps defending itself or safeguarding itself better than the maternal Lisbon or the fraternal Rio de Janeiro, from this danger or this risk (Freyre, Aug. 10 1957, p. 34).

Final considerations

Although he reflects on Lisbon or Madeira, the Brazilian context is vital for understanding the work of Freyre. In the 1950s, in the press and in written or rewritten books he sought to establish a counterpoint to the industrializing and urbanizing developmentalism expressed in the JK years – returning to and updating Iberism in a new context. Through this, Freyre valued the past, the rural inheritance, and the pre-bourgeois Iberian city. It was not a mere defense of tradition but sought a respectful modernization in face of a past perceived as legitimate, profound, and creative, which should not be extinguished on the altar of modernity.

Freyre was committed to affirming the singularity and the positivity of Iberian and, by extension, Brazilian culture, including the anti-bourgeois aspect of it. Culture for him was threatened by the dissolving effects of triumphant western modernity, industrial and urban, as was presented in the 1950s, with a vigorous commitment to bourgeois modernity, of which Brasília is a synthesis. The value of the Iberian inheritance was precisely in the formation of a personal, domestic, and affective culture, which did not let itself be dominated by bourgeois rationality, impersonality, and universality.

In a column entitled "The new and the old in the cities," from 11 October 1958, Freyre himself appears to summarize his perception of cities, marked by his positive view of Iberian tradition, as well as confirming his long-lasting interest in the subject:

> There are two guides to Brazilian cities – guides in the style of what I wrote about Recife, and what I later published on Olinda – which I have not lost hope of writing: one

> on Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos, and another on Santa Maria de Belém do Pará (Freyre, Oct. 11 1958, p. 46).

However, he did not want to write the guide to Rio de Janeiro: "If I gave up the idea of writing what I intended to publish on Rio de Janeiro," it was due to

> my disenchantment with what is called the modern Rio. Not because it is modern, of course, but because in it can be seen affirmed the triumph over the tradition, the ecology, the genius of the city, not of a modernity which sweetly assimilates these values, but of a modernity which has been stupidly disfiguring them (Freyre, Oct. 11 1958, p. 46).

His desire to write about Salvador and Belém was based on an opposite reason. In these cities Freyre thought, the "new has been harmonizing with the old in such an intelligent way that brings to mind Lisbon: the current expansion of Lisbon, which is operating without sacrificing the character, the tradition, and the ecology of the city to its modernization" (Freyre, Oct. 11 1958, p. 46).

In 1958, Freyre appeared to have overcome the fear that Lisbon would be disfigured like Rio de Janeiro, since the old town "is modernizing," but "without disfiguring itself." In defense of a Lisbon which was reconciled with the past, he evokes no one less than Oscar Niemeyer, the architect of Brasília, then being built:

> Just a little while ago, the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer confessed honestly to us, to me and the painter Cardoso Ayres, his enchantment with Lisbon: due to the way it has been modernizing, without disfiguring itself (Freyre, Oct. 11 1958, p. 46).

Evoking the agreement of the modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer during the construction of Brasília was a relevant rhetorical expedient. When even Niemeyer was "enchanted" with the "reconciliation" of Lisbon, he was legitimating his relative defense of tradition. Freyre was a critic of obsessive urban planning, the city with wide avenues, and the very idea of the modern city. Up to a certain point, he was a critic of modernism itself, contesting the works of Le Corbusier and the Brazilian architect. Freyre, however, liked the tropicalization of the modern style created by Lucio Costa and Niemeyer, with citations of the tradition of colonial architecture, introducing curves and sinuosities which "happily gave the excesses of the Swiss rationalist a Brazilian adaptation" (Freyre, 1978, p. 178).

Somewhat surprisingly, Freyre ends up approving, though not without strong objections, the construction of Brasília, a theme appearing in the columns of *O Cruzeiro*, but also in the little known book *Brasis, Brasil e Brasília* (1960). However, this is another subject,

with does not fit in here, although it serves to show Freyre's immense and continued interest in the theme of cities, one of the motives of this article. Recife and Lisbon were certainly at the center of his urban concerns, which however went further.

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