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## **Pedagogy in literary 'postcards' João do Rio in São Paulo (1905-1915)**

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## Epilogue

In March 2016, Rio de Janeiro inaugurated a light rail system (*VLT - veículo leve sobre trilhos* in Portuguese). This inauguration was part of the new developments in the city in preparation to host the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics. On the occasion, the then-mayor Eduardo Paes declared that the vehicle represented the “future of the city” and was “everything we want from the most modern for Rio de Janeiro” while talking to reporters before boarding the tram named after the writer João do Rio at the *Utopia AquaRio* tram stop.<sup>468</sup> It is perhaps safe to say that for Paes’ contemporaries, the writer’s name did not ring any (particular) bells and certainly was not the focus of the news. It was a name unknown to the majority of the population of the city, even though he carried the name of the metropolis in his pseudonym. However, for those who know his trajectory, it is curious that João do Rio was somehow associated with the modernization of the city in the 21st century. I find a *VLT* named after him symbolic: once again, almost one hundred years after his death, the pseudonym is crossing the city center and the ports as an emblem of the modern Rio de Janeiro. The inauguration was also a moment in which displaying a modern and an embellished city to the world was one of the main concerns. This effort included the removal of poor families from areas considered important for the preparatory work for the Olympics.<sup>469</sup> In this sense, the *utopia* tram stop is somewhat ironic once we remember Rio de Janeiro’s (and Brazil’s) persistent social and economic problems, some of which go back to Do Rio’s time.

If Do Rio’s connection to his home city is somehow forgotten, his link to São Paulo is even more ignored. However, as I aimed to demonstrate in this thesis, the writer’s lesser-known work in São Paulo shows that his contribution to the Brazilian literary canon was larger and broader than

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<sup>468</sup> “No Dia Mundial do Meio Ambiente, esse é um veículo que representa o futuro da cidade: não poluente, silencioso, que retira carros das ruas, ou seja, é tudo o que a gente quer de mais moderno para o Rio de Janeiro”, disse o prefeito Eduardo Paes, em entrevista à imprensa antes de embarcar no trem batizado com o nome do escritor João do Rio (1881-1921) na parada Utopia AquaRio. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2016-06/meio-seculo-depois-o-bonde-volta-ao-centro-do-rio-na-moderna-versao-do-vlt> See also: <https://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2016/03/ministro-das-cidades-aprova-o-vlt-e-diz-que-repasse-federal-esta-em-dia.html> Accessed in March 9, 2021.

<sup>469</sup> See, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/apr/26/rio-de-janeiro-favela-change-vila-autodromo-favela-olympics> and <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2020/07/06/inside-troubling-legacy-displacing-poor-communities-olympic-games-one-villages-resistance-brazil/>.

previously imagined and that its pedagogical character differentiates him from some of his colleagues. In the *Correio Paulistano's* pages, Do Rio complained about some of these colleagues: “Novelists and poets increasingly denationalize themselves. The whole society mimics the foreign. Journalism is a reflection of society. There is an infinite cowardice to affirm our customs, our habits.”<sup>470</sup> His statement is fraught with contradictions, since Do Rio himself took inspiration from foreign writers, especially at the beginning of his career. Nonetheless, he points to the necessity of representing Brazilian society in its entirety. Further into the text, Do Rio affirms that “Small facts are the cause of big explosions. Our de-individualization happens daily in the upper layers of society. The special qualities of our race disappear in the desperation to look like others. Nothing less national than a carioca salon; nothing less Brazilian than a Brazilian newspaper.”<sup>471</sup> Do Rio criticizes something that he profoundly knew. Since he was 18 years old, the newsrooms were his habitat. When a heart attack took his life in 1921, he was on the way to the *A Pátria* newspaper, which he had founded months before. His was a life dedicated to writing in the ephemeral, challenging but far-reaching pages of the daily press.

His complex and even contradictory positions within his texts pose a challenge to the understanding of his oeuvre. However, I consider this obstacle an invitation to understand João do Rio’s role and position in this context. Amid a confusing and turbulent environment, Do Rio becomes a writer *in-between*: between two projects of a nation, two centuries, two literary movements, between the street and the newsrooms, and between two cities. This “middle” gives rise to many contradictions and even prejudices of a young writer trying to apprehend, make sense of and, at the same time, transmit a new reality. However, from this “middle”, there also comes a literary production that anticipates many trends and themes which prevailed in the years after his death,

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<sup>470</sup> In the original: “Os romancistas e os poetas cada vez mais se desnacionalizam mais. A sociedade toda macaqueia o estrangeiro. O jornalismo é um reflexo da sociedade. Há uma covardia infinita de afirmar os nossos costumes, os nossos hábitos.” João do Rio, “Os dois adidos e o patriotismo.” *Correio Paulistano*, Nov. 13, 1907, I.

<sup>471</sup> In the original: “Os pequenos fatos são a causa das grandes explosões. A nossa desindividualização é diária nas camadas superiores. As qualidades especiais da nossa raça desaparecem no desespero de parecer com os outros. Nada menos nacional que um salão carioca; nada menos brasileiro que um jornal brasileiro.” João do Rio, “Os dois adidos,” I.

under the denomination *Modernismo* in Brazil: the acceleration of everyday life, the overwhelming storm of stimuli in the streets, the ever-changing urban environment, the idea of “digesting” foreign influences and cultural products, and the necessity of publicizing his works and to be seen. In “A pressa de acabar,” he commented on the “rush to finish” but got caught – voluntarily or by necessity – in the *rush to succeed*. In my opinion, this explains his “adventure” in São Paulo, the city that was emerging as a powerful and influent player in the national scene, a contender for Rio de Janeiro’s primacy.

João do Rio is well-known as a prolific writer.<sup>472</sup> Yet, the extent of his literary production has

not been fully studied. Archival research done for this thesis into newspapers of other states in the 1910s shows that his texts, also not mentioned in any other studies about the author, were being published in at least 10 of the 18 federative units in Brazil: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Alagoas, Amazonas, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Maranhão, Pará, Pernambuco, and Rio Grande do Sul (see Fig. 6.1).

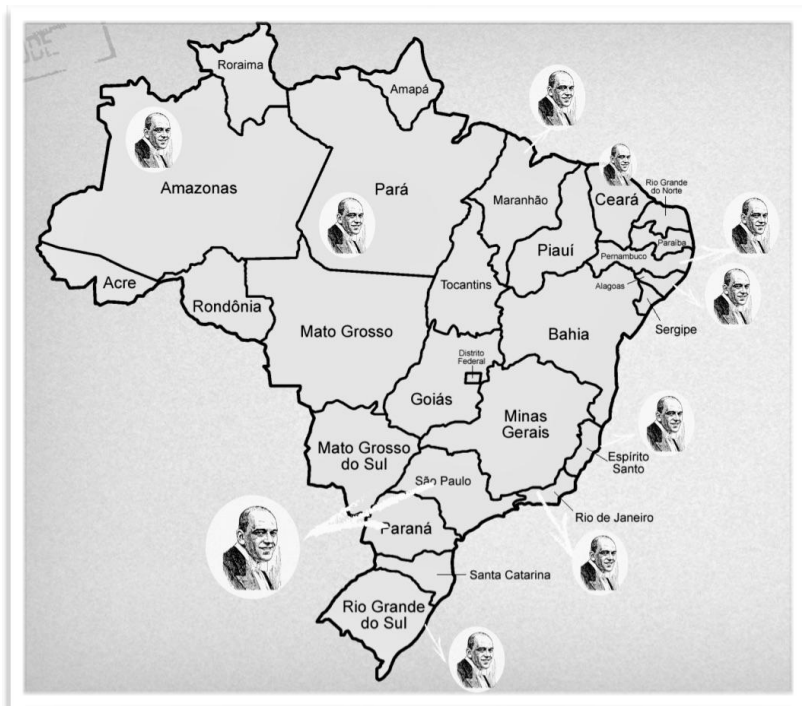


Fig. 6.1 - Map showing the states in which João do Rio's work was being (re)published in the 1910s.

This phase came just after his successful work in the *Correio*. São Paulo seemed to be a necessary step

<sup>472</sup> For example, it is known that in November 1907 he starts yet another collaboration, this time with the newspaper *A Notícia*, in Rio de Janeiro (Rodrigues, *João do Rio: Catálogo Bibliográfico*), in addition to his work for the *Correio* and the *Gazeta*. During at least three years, his texts were regularly published in three different newspapers, sometimes all in the same day.

for success on a national level, that Do Rio always searched for.<sup>473</sup> More and more, “João from Rio” was becoming “João from Brazil.”

After gaining national renown, João do Rio was ready to explore territories overseas, and his work in São Paulo had been a strategic move in this direction. The endeavor culminated in the creation of the *Atlântida* magazine, which circulated in both Brazil and Portugal between 1915 and 1920. It was directed by Do Rio and the Portuguese poet João de Barros (D’Avila 2013), starting in the same year as he left his stable position in the main newspapers to create his own media outlet, *A Pátria*. This newspaper was his main focus until his premature death in June 1921, only seven months before the *Semana de Arte Moderna* in São Paulo.

I stated that João do Rio was a writer in the middle, but it is important to understand that from this position he also tried to build bridges. First between states and later between continents. His ambitious endeavor was cut short in a night in 1921, inside a taxi, when his heart suddenly stopped. His intense routine of work, combined with the constant attacks he received during his career, proved to be too much even for one of the most dedicated writers in Brazil. The oblivion into which his name fell after his death and which persisted for decades was certainly unfair. This thesis contributed to the rescuing of the paulista aspect of his work, an aspect that is key for the full appreciation of the pedagogical elements of his prose. While fighting his way to professional success, “João from Brazil” tried to teach his contemporaries how to be modern without losing the qualities that made them Brazilian. Despite his many contradictions, his oeuvre deserves to be remembered in its entirety.

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<sup>473</sup> Another fact that supports the idea of his attempt to consolidate his name is João do Rio’s insistence in becoming a member of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* during the time he was part of the *Correio*’s staff. He applied three times — 1905, 1907 and 1910 —, being successful in the same year that his regular collaboration for that newspaper ceased.