

Postgraduate (master's degree)

The carioca beach and the column "The Girls of Alceu": identities in formation (1938-1964)

Key-words

"The Girls of Alceu" - beaches - Rio de Janeiro - tan – identity

Abstract

This work intends to argue the relation between the Brazilian column "The Girls of Alceu" (1938-1964) and the Rio de Janeiro beaches, placing in analysis how the tanned skin starts to delineate a characteristic identity of the inhabitants of the city. The "golden" body starts to delineate an identity connected to Rio de Janeiro. The white skin of "The Girls", but, at some moments, tanned, illustrate the habits and a standard of beauty of the Rio's women.

1. "The Girls of Alceu" and The Cruzeiro: a meeting

The illustrated column called "The Girls of Alceu", appeared in 1938 in the greatest Brazilian magazine of that time - The Cruzeiro. The first issue has reached the newsstand on 05 December 1928.

It was known at the time as the Brazilian family's magazine. According to Accioly Netto (1998, p. 123), the editor in chief of the publication, '[w]hen The Cruzeiro reached its greatest period of success, it was essentially an eclectic magazine, intended to be read by a diverse audience, from all social classes, including men and women.' (Fig. 01)

The work of Alceu Penna reached an unparalleled visibility in 1938, with the creation of the "The Girls of Alceu" in The Cruzeiro. They were meant to be the first Brazilians pin ups and were modeled on the Gibson Girls of The Saturday Evening Post, created by the North American Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944).

The column had influenced many ladies of the season and achieved a great popularity during the years of its run. "The Girls of Alceu" became a reference in beauty and behavior.

The column survived until 1964 in The Cruzeiro. It inspired for 26 years, girls and boys from all Brazil. More than just drawings, they collaborated to idealize a certain lifestyle, well anchored on the image of the carioca's golden body. These illustrations also, symbolized a female figure that began to experience more freedom and independence in their daily lives, especially in view of their bodies and fashion.

2. "The Girls" and the beaches: a particularly lifestyle

The main scenario of the column "The Girls", Rio de Janeiro, becomes, slowly, the great cultural model for all Brazil:

[t]he Rio de Janeiro becomes editing the new fashions and behaviors, but most of all the systems of values, lifestyles, the sensitivity, the state of mind and provisions that articulate the modernity as an existential and intimate experience. (Sevcenko, 1998: 522)

During the period of the column, Rio de Janeiro had improved its urban swank, making the approximation of people even more frequent, reflecting not just a modern city, but with modern habits too:

Copacabana was known nationally and internationally as one of the best places to live, praised by the advertising company and transport – A nice and refreshing walk - Copacabana: Streetcar until two in the morning (Veríssimo, F. & Bittar, W., 2001: 58)

Following the Rio de Janeiro's model, Alceu Penna drew his 'Girls' as Cariocas, despite the national circulation of the magazine. He was inspired by the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

Pierre Bourdieu (2003, p. 74) understands by lifestyle, 'a joint unit of different preferences that express in the individual logic of each symbolic subspace (furniture, clothing, body language or Hexis) the same expressive intention'.

This particularly lifestyle was organized by an important element of the city: the beaches, well illustrated in the column. Carioca women had some distinct preferences from others around Brazil, shown by their clothes, body, habits and language. (Fig. 03)

It's important, however, to realize that wasn't all the beaches of Rio that created this lifestyle. The neighborhood of Copacabana and Ipanema had the most important beaches.

The *Cruzeiro* (29 May 1943, p.) point out by a report of Copacabana, how the beach organized and valued the urban space of Rio de Janeiro, as well as created a new form of behavior, distinguish from other areas of the city: (Fig. 08):

The truth is that all there is depending on the beach. It was the beach that valued the floor, the beach that was erected the skyscrapers. It was the beach that created that tanned little girl wearing a sunglasses, which speaks a language that you of the neighborhood of Tijuca or Madureira, will not understand.

The beach was an element so characteristic of Rio de Janeiro and therefore of the column, that the first edition on November 19, 1938 received the title of 'Beach Girls'. This section showed how these girls dressed and behaved, providing, in that time, an image to the readers of this recent leisure space.

Some of the favorite programs of the illustrations were bicycle tours, footings on sidewalks of beaches. The sports were associated with the beaches in the column. It's

interesting to see, how these two elements together will approach men and women, breaking the rigid morality of the society:

If Brazil followed the international trend of modernization and emancipation of women - driven with the participation of women in the war effort and reinforced by economic development - was also influenced by foreign campaigns that with the end of the war, began to preach the return of women to household and the traditional values of society. (Bassanezi, C., 1997: 608)

This movement will put the sport, as a moment of pleasure rather than suffering, an advent of post-war, which connects the well-being to physical activity. Less a therapeutic ritual, as experienced in the past, visit the beach in Rio was, increasingly, a connotation of freedom and fun:

(...) the glorification of well-being - now translated in terms of pleasure, sometimes understood as synonymous of personal satisfaction and harmony between body and mind - parallel to the denaturalization of suffering. (Sant'Anna, D., 1993: 256)

The beach associated with sports will make possible the illustrations and other carioca girls to show their curves, a nice tan and, beyond this, flirt with the boys. The beach was a place of release, both in terms of clothing – the swimming wear showed body parts normally hidden - as well as the possibility of being in contact with the opposite sex.

On 05 August 1927 the column came with the title 'Girls and Bicycles'. In this edition the 'Girl' comments that a certain boy used to watch her on bicycle's tours on the beach just to appreciate her curves.

In the midst of these changes, the patriarchal society still governed, closely, the life of an unmarried girl. Even with this climate of releases, there were also restrictions and the fear that the proximity of the boys could destroy the reputation of the girl. In the face of intense modernization, the growing externalization women, the most common question was how far to allow the approaches?

On April 10, 1948, the column came with the title 'Stop Girls!'. In this edition, the 'Girl' is obliged to interrupt the trajectory of a kiss, much desired, proving the idea that she couldn't give herself into the carnal pleasures, with no consequences to her reputation.

In the same way, the uncertainty of displaying the body in swimwear, also curtailed the climate of freedom. The desire to please the eyes of the opposite sex becomes a restriction which, like the suffocating elastic straps, shaped the body in a given pattern.

Thus, while the women won the outside world, she, too, contracted expectations and fears that accompanied that freedom. That fear was in part, related to the pudency and a lack of knowledge of women regarding their bodies, a proof of their little freedom in society. Gilma Rios (2007, p. 02) argues that '[t]he strength of representations of femininity reveals itself in permanence of this pudency, this brand of silence surrounding women and that weighs primarily on their bodies'

In the column, the bodies in movement and more evidenced, pointed to a consequent exploration of sensuality. The beach was the perfect backdrop for this body,

increasingly healthy and tanned. The sun brought with it the modernity and characterized a new woman, increasingly, active and exposed. This woman was reflected by Rio, model of beauty and behavior for the whole Brazil. (Fig.05)

However, given the growing appreciation of the tan and frequency of the beaches, there is a deadlock on its developments in Brazil. From that lifestyle, two different kinds of bodies emerged: the tanned and mestizo. In which measure, the recovery of golden body will be confused with the redemption of the real Brazilian people's roots, once renegade in a recent past? Which body appeared in the column as the symbol of the Rio de Janeiro people?

3. The body golden Carioca: identities in formation

The period of the column "The Girls" will witness, increasingly, the cultivation of tanned skin, especially between cariocas girls.

On October 22, 1955, the column came with the title 'The sun is crazy for the Girls'. This section showed tanned 'Girls' wearing maillots lying down on the beach. The illustrations were pointed out as regular visitors of the place. In the column, the white skin, in some moments, remarkably tanned, will illustrate the habits and standard of beauty among citizen of Rio. (Fig. 06).

The recovery of the tanned skin, as an indication of wealthy people was the result of a movement in the early twentieth century, especially in Europe. According to

Wilson (1985), the tan was previously the sign of the worker and rejected by the most exquisite, and around 20's it become associated with modernity.

At the same time, that tanned skin begins to be desired, there is an appreciation of the care of the body, which is reflected in hygienist's speeches. For the first time, the concept of health was linked to the concept of beauty. Thus, the beautiful body should be slim, vigorous.

Advertising collaborated for the dissemination of body's care, emphasizing images increasingly juveniles:

The advertising showed these girls as lovers of the sun and the beach, fans of an innovative sex-appeal and more concerned than the previous generation with the freedom body, with procedures that promised not only to maintain the body, but the daily construction of a good body shape. (Sant'Anna, D. B, 2000: 118)

This slim and healthy body was aligned with an appreciation of youth, started, also in Europe and embraced by national elites, particularly during the two governments of President Getúlio Vargas. According to Accioly, A. R & Marinho, I. P. (1956, p.174) on April 18 of 1931, during his first government, the president regulates the teaching of Physical Education throughout the national territory.

There was a necessity to keep the body healthy and delay all minimums signs of aging. Schpun (1999, p.31) argues that '[t]he great trauma of war and a desire to overcome it, causes, especially in the old continent, a combination of images of youth and renewal, opposite the old age and decadence.'

Along with these young images and the explosion of advertising products, a new concept of woman was being created, especially since 1920's in the EUA – the modern. That woman should be updated on news of the cosmetics' industries and, also, transform her body into a beautiful and healthy one, with a distinct touch of a nice tan. Nancy Cott (1991, p.95) discuss that '[a]round the 20's, committed agents of modernity had to take into account the desires and symbols of freedom and individuality of women'.

The increasing invasion of industrialized foreign products in Brazilian market has been legitimized by the American cinema, which reinforced images of perfection and dream. The beauty is now in the reach of all, turning it into a product, ready to be consumed. In the column 'Girls', beauty brands such as Pond's was even mentioned when the subject was a different one, like culinary.

Even seemed to be liberating, the concept of modern woman should serve in the same time the conservative society of the period, as well as the aspirations of modernity, which manufactured avid consumers. Nancy Cott (1991, p. 95) points out to consumerist independence:

(...) The competitive challenge that the model of the modern American woman laid, both the old way of life as the new patriarchal style of collective life, had less to do with the flag than their representation in products with a Fashion, on the news and in the cinema.

Associated with the image of the modern woman, the tanned skin was valued in Europe, following the example of the success of Josephine Baker. Still, unlike this

movement, in Brazil, the elite, for some time, will link the white skin to a high social status, putting other races into isolation.

As an influence of the Whitening Theory, only a very light tan, just to give a healthy appearance, was ambioned:

‘During the decade of 1920, despite the intellectual movement that try to rehabilitate the black roots of the nation, or value the cultural miscegenation as a characteristic of Brazilians, the ideology of the whitening persists, well anchored in the thinking of elites’. (Schpun, 1999: 116)

This recovery of the white skin was present in the whitening theory of the nineteenth century, where its greatest exponent was Oliveira Vianna. This theory aimed to erase all the traces of colonization marked by miscegenation. It said that, over time, successive miscegenation would lead to a whitening of the Brazil’s populations. Skidmore (1989, p.60) implies that ‘the Brazilians generally considered the white skin as the best, which led, of course, an ideal of whitening, that was documented in both elitist and in popular folklore’.

The column "The Girls" was invented, in a particular period of Brazil history called The Estado Novo (1937-1945). The totalitarian government intended to achieve high levels of development and realized that the lack of unity of the country was a serious obstacle to achieve that goal.

Thus, the protection of the country to foreign influences and the construction of a united nation would be the first steps towards overcoming the delay. The president implemented a nationalist policy which, according to Edgar Carone (1988) was focused

on the recovery of the Brazilian product, rejecting the foreign influence that threatened the sovereignty of the country.

This political-economic nationalism gained strength and has expanded to the cultural sector. With the help of the elites, the government decided to create a Brazilian culture that was "appropriate" for development. Thus, was forged a cultural identity to the country, expressed by the transformation of certain Brazilian elements into icons, such as the samba, the carnival and mestizo people. This last category was raised to the maximum level of what was essentially Brazilian.

It is interesting to see, even in this period, that the white skin was still the dominant ideal. According to Regina Abreu (2000) the mestizo race becomes more a cultural category than a race one. At that point, the concept of race was replaced by the culture. The particularly characteristic of Brazilians, the mestizo race, will serve more to the unifying purpose of the government than to the acceptance of the Brazilian's ethnic roots for its own people.

In the column "The Girls" this movement was noticed. The environment of the beaches, the sun and the presence of the golden body, couldn't be mistaken to the real exaltation of the mixed race roots. The column clearly distinguishes the tanned white skin from the mestizo skin. What was cultivated among Rio's middle class, at that time, as "The Girls" example, was a skin color created by the sun and beaches, well away from the slaves and indigenous roots. (Fig.09)

Thus, at the same time that the column connects to Rio's lifestyle absorbing the culture of the tanned body, it propagates the elite's white profile, which is evidenced by

the absence of "Girls" from other races, such as black, mulatto and others, not reflecting the reality of miscegenation of the country.

Actually, moreover, the mixing of races will be placed as one of the most unique characteristics of Brazilian. Schwarcz (1997, p. 178) highlights that '(...) many of those who proposed to establish a national specificity selected the 'racial conformation' found in the country, highlighting the particularity of miscegenation'.

That makes a perfect sense, when we realized that the column's beauty model was inspired by foreign models like those from Hollywood movies. On August 29, 1942, the title was "what kind of Girls?", For example, The "Girl" with dark hair was temperamental and imitated the North-American actress Heddy Lammar.

The influence of American cinema dates from the 1920s in Brazil. According to Susan Besse (1999), in the 1920s, go to the movies was among the most popular pastimes for young and old, men and women, rich and poor .

Similarly, Europe influenced the column, mainly in relation to fashion and customs. On 27 may 1950, the column featured the "The Girls" watching the night of 'Comédie Française' in the Municipal Theater, wearing the New Look silhouette of Christian Dior.

The column "The Girls" showed that the foreign news was revolutionizing the daily lives of Brazilians, more and more. Have a sundae in American Stores and buy the latest France's fashion in the traditional Canada House was a must for the girls. At the same time, that Brazilians were experiencing a foreign penetration, there was an effort, showed by the column, to adapt these practices to the country.

This movement was perceived on the bodies. It is a fact, that the body desired by the Brazilian and showed by the column, was the tanned one, not the mestizo. Even so, we must understand that even not reflecting the race reality of the country, 'The Girls' reflected a woman, which was trying to find herself as an individual and as a Brazilian. In the midst of questions about the true identity of the country, the female body, especially, was the scene of many ethnic and gender struggles, translated by passages in the column.

In general, it is interesting to realize, that even among these foreign influences, the tan was well embraced by the Brazilians, especially the Cariocas, becoming part of a particular style of life. In a time, when all Brazil would like to fit in the space of Rio, the column transformed the golden body into a national reality. This was a sign of awareness of the Brazilians in relation to their bodies and habits.

Gilberto Freyre (1986, p. 35) discussed that there were an increase of identification among Brazilians with their topicality and skin color, which emphasized the multiracial aspect of the country.

Conclusion

The first half of the twentieth century in Brazil was marked by deep questions about the true identity of the Brazilians. In the middle of this questioning, we found not only the Rio de Janeiro as a cultural model for the whole country, but also the golden bodies of its inhabitants in the beaches. The tanned skin begins to shape an identity linked Rio de Janeiro.

Less a therapeutic ritual, as experienced in the past, visit the beaches in Rio had, increasingly, a connotation of freedom and, above all, fun. The column will illustrate tanned bodies in bathing suits, as well as the creation of a particular lifestyle in Rio, which spread out to the rest of the country.

"The Girls" reflected the Brazilian society, but not any: the Rio. Its creator, Alceu Penna, was able to capture an imaginary and expressed it in the column, through pleasant passages. With a sensitivity of a careful spectator, the illustrator prints a new model for Brazilian woman, the one shaped by a particularly lifestyle, focused on the beaches and tanned body.

Alceu Penna drew their pictures almost as they were real, closely to daily life in Brazil at that time. The country was concerned about the development and at the same time with his identity. The column didn't defended stereotypes or spread out only foreigner's tendencies, but proved to be possible to like Dior, milk-shake, samba, Carnival and a nice tan on the beach of Copacabana or Ipanema. "The Girls" proved that the women didn't have to choose between any of this these things to be considered Brazilians.

Thus, without intention to create a specific habit, the column showed an identity in formation, facing often ethnic and cultural tensions.

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Illustration credits

Figure 01 – The Cruzeiro (1938), cover, 24 December 1938, n.p

Figure 02 – The Cruzeiro (1942), 'The beauty of the Girls', 01 August, n.p

Figure 03 – The Cruzeiro (1941), 'Girls in Copacabana', 04 January, n.p

Figure 04 – The Cruzeiro (1942), 'Girls in Municipal Theater', 25 July, n.p

Figure 05 – The Cruzeiro (1938), 'Beach Girls', 19 November, n.p

Figure 06 – The Cruzeiro (1955). 'The sun is crazy for the Girls', 22 October, n.p

Figure 07 – The Cruzeiro (1944) 'Guaruja in the winter', 27 May, n.p

Figure 08 – The Cruzeiro (1943), 'Copacabana the window to the sea', 29 May, n.p

Figure 09 – The Cruzeiro (1945), 'Girls in the sand's beach', 10 November, n.p

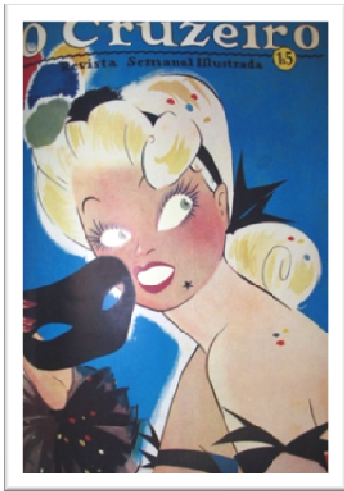


Fig. 01



Fig.02



Fig.03



Fig. 04



Fig.05



Fig.06



Fig. 07



Fig.08



Fig. 09

