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Brazil: Modernity and Mobility

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The mass demonstrations and violent protests that have erupted in Brazilian urban centres over the past one hundred years demonstrate the importance of mobility to Brazil's traveling public. Several strikes by transport workers have occurred since 1903 and, over the past fifty years, there have been numerous passenger revolts too: in São Paulo in 1947, in Rio de Janeiro in 1974-5,¹ and most recently in 2013, when protests over a proposed twenty *centavos* (eight US cents) increase in the price of a bus ticket broke out in more than a dozen cities. While Brazilians care deeply about their public transport, they also like their cars. The nation has had a love affair with the car since the 1920s that shows no sign of diminishing.² The long traffic jams (sometimes measured in days rather than in distance) no longer make the headlines on the local television news in São Paulo.

This essay will examine the field of Brazilian mobility studies, concentrating mainly on recent (2010-2013) scholarship by Portuguese-speaking Brazilian academics published in English-language journals. It is important to recognise that so far there is no identifiable research agenda within this work, but rather a wide diversity of studies in a number of subject areas (in both the social and human sciences), which include and reflect the mobilities paradigm.³ A language barrier still hampers the development of some areas of study, as reported in the 2009 *T2M Yearbook*,⁴ however in the past two years a growing number of authors have presented their work in English-language journals. Urban mobilities and transport policies continue to be the major source of research, followed by studies of pedestrian and bicycle mobilities.⁵ Migration and tourism are established areas of study, with cargo transport, air transport and sustainable mobility being three developing sub-fields of analysis.⁶ While the topics are wide-ranging, one commentator has noted that in the field of transport studies, "...research initiatives in Brazil still seem to be individual and uncoordinated."⁷ This review regards such diversity as an opportunity to be celebrated, if and when

a forum is established where such wide-ranging topics can converge. One such opportunity for this convergence is the active academic and policy-maker conference circuit within Latin America where transport policy issues are presented and discussed, but the challenge is to broadcast the results of these conferences to scholars who do not speak Portuguese or Spanish.⁸ Meanwhile, the trend away from institutional and economic histories of transport operators and towards issues of mobility and publics (particularly in urban settings) has been building since 2010, and has been noted and welcomed.⁹ Despite these positive signs, much work remains to be done on Brazilian mobility history, though, evidenced by the fact that Adolpho Pinto's five-hundred page study of transport operators and modes in the state of São Paulo, published originally in 1903 and reprinted in 1977, was still being used by historians in the early twenty-first century as a core reference work, particularly for Brazilian railway history.¹⁰

Current Topics of Study by Brazilian Researchers

Migration remains a vital topic for Brazilian academics. Between the early 1700s and the late 1900s, Brazil saw millions of immigrants come from Europe and Asia. The country ranks third behind the USA and Argentina, but has until now been largely neglected by international scholars.¹¹ Indeed, the authors of an econometric historical analysis of data that combines some counter-factual observations suggests that the economic effects of the mass migrations (mostly from Europe) to Brazil between 1822 and 1926 could still be observed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.¹² There is also continued analysis of the effects of the slave trade in Brazil, with research suggesting that internal trading between sugar and coffee plantations might have resulted in as many as 200,000 people migrating internally as the country's export economy reacted to international demand fluctuations.¹³

The physical size of Brazil has meant that the tensions between rural and urban have long existed. Today, mobility in large urban centres such as São Paulo, Porto Alegre, and other Latin American cities continues to be a fruitful area of research and publication.¹⁴ As far as the rural

Amazon region is concerned, research was at its height two decades ago during the controversy of deforestation and rapid settlement in the region.¹⁵ However, mobility was not a major concern of that work, with issues about industrialisation, urbanisation, and the oral histories of migrants from the northeast of Brazil who were eking out livelihoods as river traders and rubber tappers, dominating most scholarship. Since 2010, though, work has concentrated on ethnographic studies of indigenous groups (and how their mobility is being restricted), the continuing long-lasting effects of road-building in forest areas, and discussions of land reform and mobility have grown in number.¹⁶ Indeed, Sauer identifies the decades of land disputes in Brazil (between settlers, miners, prospectors, indigenous people, and speculators) as a historical discourse 'towards modernity' in that the changes that have occurred have affected, "the conditions of life, production and the relationship with nature in the Brazilian countryside."¹⁷ Mobility to and within the Amazon region, at times a place of both 'the other' and paradoxically the cultural heart of Brazilianness, is an interesting seam for cultural historians.¹⁸ The north of Brazil and the Amazon region continue to be areas of research for academics interested in border studies, both in the physical and meta-physical sense.¹⁹ It is gratifying that such research is being published in the international (Anglophone) sphere to a worldwide audience.

Each new mode of transport has been greeted domestically as a modernising influence on Brazilian society: air travel in the 1940s; the automobile in the 1920s; and railways even earlier. The historiography of the latter has been particularly notable in the manner in which, for much of the twentieth century, it concentrated on the development of the institutions (private, governmental, domestic and/or foreign) who owned and built this technological ensemble.²⁰ Successive Brazilian governments, from the military regimes of the sixties and seventies, through the reawakening of democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, to the fully-fledged emerging BRIC²¹ nation of the 2000s and 2010s, have grappled with the idea of long-term strategic commitments to infrastructure. Writing in 1980, two Brazilian academics observed that, "Any effective improvement not only in public transport but to public services generally would require nothing less than the reformulation of the

government's economic priorities and this seems unlikely for the time being.”²² In the build-up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games there was growing concern from international consultants, academics, and journalists about the problems of inadequate road, railway, waterway, docks and airport systems, and the lack of actual effective investment being carried out.²³

Walking, Cycling, Motorbikes and Tourism

This is a diverse subject area, and one article of note makes a connection between the highway and walking by carrying out ethnographic research amongst ‘road wanderers,’ which it classifies as the poor, the unemployed, and the emotionally disturbed who leave home to walk alone along the highways of Brazil.²⁴ In doing so it rather neatly passes comment on how human mobility in the modern world can also represent a dislocation of emotional place. From the urban sphere, Patricia Acerbi takes a historical analysis of how walking was written about in columns for the *Gazeta de Notícias* and other newspapers of Rio de Janeiro between 1888 and 1920.²⁵ These reveal a growing city where the tram had recently been introduced, the railway was still new, and the daily means of transport remained walking or horses for the wealthy. In this space the street vendor was seen as an ambivalent character: on the one hand a part of the developing urban landscape, on the other a public nuisance.²⁶ This highlights a trend within research into Brazilian archival and literary texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where the flâneur (the urban pedestrian/onlooker/stroller) was seen as epitomising the turn to modernity, while also presenting new problems within urban development.²⁷ Unlike walking, cycling remains a niche area of academic research in Brazil. Today it remains a marginalised (and dangerous) form of transport used out of necessity by the poorer sections of society. However, with Brazil's transformation into a middle-class country²⁸ many are taking to bicycles as a form of both sustainable transport and recreation, and since 2000 there have been organised protests to improve safety in a small number of Brazilian cities.²⁹ Meanwhile, just as dangerous is motorcycling which, unlike Asian countries, is a mode of transport that has grown in Brazil only since the 1980s.³⁰ Published research in this area

has so far been confined to medical journals (in part due to the numbers of deaths and injuries),³¹ but it is hoped that studies into the use of motorbikes as legal and illegal taxis, as delivery services (the ‘motoboys’ of São Paulo), and by lower income households, will become a growing area of interest amongst sociologists and cultural historians.

Tourism has been a long-established field of study in Brazil, with numerous domestic universities offering courses in the subject. A Brazilian researcher, Gui Lohmann, who at the time of writing, is lecturing at an Australian university, has made a concerted attempt to bridge the language divide by co-editing a textbook which brings to English readers details of current research on tourism in Brazil. The issues range from transport issues, sustainability, backpacker tourism, “sensual tourism,” the problems of hosting mega-sport events, and recreations of “traditional” cultural displays for the tourist gaze.³² He explains that in editing the book he was driven by the “...need to expose to overseas audiences the depth and breadth of research about tourism in Brazil.”³³ One other separate example of research which highlights current concerns about the tourist gaze is Bianca Freire-Medeiros' discussion of foreign and domestic visitors to slum areas (favelas) of Rio de Janeiro and the internationalisation of such spaces through media representations.³⁴ Her work is a pioneering analysis of the controversial use of poverty to create a tourist destination, and has resonances in other locations around the world. Elsewhere, sex tourism is a developing area of analysis, with ethnographic studies of workers and foreign clients in Brazil.³⁵ Meanwhile, medical tourism is also a subject of recent research, firstly with an intriguing essay on individuals from Brazil and their involvement in a case of illegal organ trafficking for transplant in another country,³⁶ and secondly with research on the continuing business of plastic surgery tourism.³⁷ Brazil, with its affordable surgery prices and reputation for quality procedures is the biggest market, after the United States of America, for cosmetic surgery.³⁸

The Language of Research

One effect of the language difference can be that issues, topics and arguments tend to be repeated

for an English-speaking audience relatively unfamiliar with the research trends in Brazil. A useful illustration is the story of the city of Curitiba, which since 1968 has had an urban master plan. The city's approach to urban growth and managed transport systems are so well known that they are featured in the national geography curriculum for schools in England.³⁹ Even though mobility in Curitiba is taught to fifteen- and sixteen-year-old children in English schools, this same history of urban transportation planning is also repeated in numerous academic studies.⁴⁰ Now is the time for researchers to look for new ways to analyse the history of this city. At the same time, Brazilian academics note that English-language scholarship on Brazil's domestic transport is not widely engaged with by Brazilian researchers, a fact that must be corrected.⁴¹

Another problem can be the time-lag in translating texts between languages, and here two disparate examples can be mentioned: firstly, the forty-two years it took for a biography of Percival Farquhar, one of the leading North American entrepreneurs involved in early twentieth century railway building in Brazil, to be published in Portuguese translation.⁴² Secondly, the fifty-eight years before an English translation was completed of a delightful archival, ethnographical and anecdotal account of the impact of British trade and railway building in northeast Brazil by Gilberto Freyre. First published in 1948, his book uses the classified advertisements of old newspapers and local British consular reports to seek to understand how British culture, and the language of travel and the railways, inserted itself into Brazil.⁴³ In the opinion of this writer, Freyre's observational, conversational, and engaging discourse bears a similarity in its unconventional approach to its subject matter to that of Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Railway Journey*, particularly in the idiosyncratic way in which it explores cultural significances through textual readings.⁴⁴

Concluding Remarks

The field of mobility studies in Brazil remains a fragmented one yet, judging by the output of research across the domains of history (technological, social and cultural), urban planning, health policy and transport economics considered here, it is a particularly diverse one. What is gratifying is

that the overwhelming majority of the articles and books mentioned here are authored by researchers either based in Brazilian academic institutions or Brazilians working at universities abroad. The continuing challenge is to develop a suitable forum for collaboration and the exchange of ideas that can push against the language barrier.⁴⁵ This could aid the development of a common theme and unified research agenda. But, for the time being, the diversity across Brazilian mobility studies is something to be celebrated.

¹ José Alvaro Moisés and Verena Martinez-Alier, 'Urban Transport and Popular Violence: The Case of Brazil', *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), 174-192.

² Joel Wolfe, *Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge, 2007), 46-54;

Monika Büscher, John Urry, & Katian Witchger

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⁴ Rodrigo Booth and Melina Piglia, 'New Developments in a Neglected Field: Transport and Mobility in Latin American Recent Historiography', in Gijs Mom, Gordon Pirie, Laurent Tissot (eds.), *T2M Yearbook 2009: Mobility in History. The State of the Art in the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility*, 1 (2009), 159-165. Reference at 159-160.

⁵ Antônio Néelson Rodrigues da Silva, 'Transport Geography in Brazil', *Journal of Transport Geography*, 22 (2012), 324-326. Reference at p.324.

⁶ Cargo Transport:

Licínio da Silva Portugal, Andréa Vaz Morgado, & Orlando Lima Júnior

., 'Location of Cargo Terminals in Metropolitan Areas of Developing Countries: The Brazilian Case', *Journal of*

Transport Geography 19:4 (2011), 900-910; Air transport: Elton. Fernandes, and R.R. Pacheco, 'A Quality Approach to

Airport Management', *Quality and Quantity* 44:3 (2010), 551-564.; Marcial Marazzola, Rafael Scherreb, & Elton

Fernandes, 'Air Transport Demand and Economic Growth in Brazil: A Time Series Analysis', *Transportation Research.*

Part E, Logistics and Transportation Review, 46:2 (2010), 261-269.

⁷ Silva, 'Transport Geography in Brazil', 325.

⁸ Silva, 'Transport Geography in Brazil', 324.

⁹ Tomás Errázuriz, 'Looking for Latin American Urban Mobility History', in Gijs Mom (ed.), *T2M Yearbook 2011: Mobility in History. Themes in Transport*, 2 (2011), 191-196.

¹⁰ Adolpho Augusto Pinto, *Historia da Viação Pública de São Paulo (Brasil)* (São Paulo, SP, 1903). The first edition was printed by Vanorden & Cia., a private firm; the 1977 edition was published by the State of São Paulo authority; Martin Cooper, *Brazilian Railway Culture* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2011), 64.

¹¹ Yvonne Stolz, Joerg Baten and Tarcísio Botelho, 'Growth Effects of Nineteenth-century Mass Migrations: "Fome Zero" for Brazil?', *European Review of Economic History*, 17 (2013), 95-121.

¹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³ Kim D. Butler, 'Slavery in the Age of Emancipation: Victims and Rebels in Brazil's Late 19th-Century Domestic Trade', *Journal of Black Studies*, 42:6 (2011), 968-992.

¹⁴ Eduardo Marandola Jr., Gilvan Ramalho Guedes and Robson Bonifácio da Silva, 'Perfis de Mobilidade nas Regiões Metropolitanas do Interior de São Paulo', *Papeles de Población*, 16 (2010), 177-214; Luis Antonio Lindau, Luiz Afonso dos Santos Senna, Orlando Strambi and Wagner Colombini Martins, 'Alternative Financing for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT): The Case of Porto Alegre, Brazil', *Research in Transportation Economics*, 22 (2008), 54-60; Dario Hidalgo and Cornie Huizenga, 'Implementation of Sustainable Urban Transport in Latin America', *Research in Transportation Economics*, 40 (2013), 66-77.

¹⁵ For example: John O. Browder & Brian J. Godfrey, *Rainforest Cities: Urbanization, Development, and Globalization of the Brazilian Amazon* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Maurice Seiji Tomioka Nilsson & Philip Martin Fearnside, 'Yanomani Mobility and Its Effects on the Forest Landscape', *Human Ecology*, 39 (2011), 235-256; Almudena Hernando, 'Gender, Power, and Mobility Among the Aaá-

- Guajá (Maranhão, Brazil)', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 67:2 (2011), 189-211; Jeremy M. Campbell, 'Brazil's Deferred Highway: Mobility, Development, and Anticipating the State in Amazonia', *Boletín de Antropología*, 27:44 (2012), 102-126.
- ¹⁷ Sérgio Sauer, 'Land and Territory: Meanings of Land between Modernity and Tradition', *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 1:1 (2012), 85-103. Reference at 103.
- ¹⁸ Gustavo Procopio Furtado, 'The Borders of Sense: Revisiting *Iracema, uma Transa Amazônica* (1974)', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 22:4 (2013), 399-415.
- ¹⁹ Luciana Martins, 'Illusions of Power: Vision, Technology and the Geographical Exploration of the Amazon, 1924-1925', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 16:3 (2007), 285-307.
- ²⁰ Eduardo Oliveira, 'New Studies in the History of Railway Transportation in Brazil', in Peter Norton, Gijs Mom, Liz Millward, Tomás Errázuriz and Mathieu Flonneau (eds.), *T2M Yearbook 2014: Mobility in History*, 5 (2014), 96-104.
- ²¹ The acronym stands for 'Brazil, Russia, India and China': four nations predicted by economists in the early 2000s to have high GDP growth rates by 2020.
- ²² Moisés, and Martínez-Alier, 'Urban Transport', 192.
- ²³ Carlos Biedermann and Hazem Galal, 'Crunch Time for Brazilian Infrastructure', *Gridlines*, (PricewaterhouseCoopers, London, Spring 2013); Acácia C.M. Malhado, Lindemberg M. Araujo and Richard J. Ladle, 'Missed Opportunities: Sustainable Mobility and the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil', *Journal of Transport Geography*, 31 (2013), 207-208; Christopher Gaffney, 'Mega-events and socio-spatial dynamics in Rio de Janeiro, 1919–2016'. *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 9 (2010), 1–29.
- ²⁴ José Sterza Justo and Eurípedes Costa do Nascimento, 'Road Wanderers in Brazil: A Study on Modern Psychosocial Human Mobility', *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 4:5 (2012), 165-171.
- ²⁵ Patricia Acerbi, "'A Long Poem of Walking": Flâneurs, Vendors, and Chronicles of Post-abolition Rio de Janeiro', *Journal of Urban History* 40:1 (2014), 97-115.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 111.
- ²⁷ Marzena Grzegorzczuk, 'Agoraphobia and Modernity in *Fin de Siècle* Brazil: on *Dom Casmurro*', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 12:3 (2003), 307-327.
- ²⁸ Francisco H. G. Ferreira, Julian Messina, Jamele Rigolini, Luis-Felipe López-Calva, Maria Ana Lugo, and Renos Vakis, *Economic Mobility and the Rise of the Latin American Middle Class* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2013).
- ²⁹ Tim Jones and Laura Novo de Azevedo, 'Economic, Social and Cultural Transformation and the Role of the Bicycle in Brazil', *Journal of Transport Geography*, 30 (2013), 208-219.
- ³⁰ Eduardo Alcântara de Vasconcellos, 'Road Safety Impacts of the Motorcycle in Brazil', *International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion*, 20:2 (2013), 144-151.
- ³¹ Carlos Carrasco, Mauricio Godinho, Marilisa Berti de Azevedo Barros, Sandro Rizoli, and Gustavo Fraga, 'Fatal Motorcycle Crashes: A Serious Public Health Problem in Brazil', *World Journal of Emergency Surgery*, 7:Suppl 1 (2012), S5; Leticia Marín-León, Ana Paula Belon, Marilisa Berti de Azevedo Barros, Solange Duarte de Mattos Almeida & Maria Cristina Restitutti, 'Tendência dos Acidentes de Trânsito em Campinas, São Paulo, Brasil: Importância Crescente dos Motociclistas', *Cad. Saúde Pública*, Rio de Janeiro, 28:1 (2012), 39-51.
- ³² Gui Lohmann and Dianne Dredge, *Tourism in Brazil: Environment, Management and Segments* (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2012).
- ³³ Lohmann and Dredge, *Tourism in Brazil*, xxi
- ³⁴ Bianca Freire-Medeiros, *Touring Poverty* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013); See also: Bianca Freire-Medeiros, "'I Went to the City of God": Gringos, Guns and the Touristic Favela', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 20:1 (2011), 21-34.
- ³⁵ Marie-Eve Carrier-Moisan, 'Gringo Love: Affect, Power, and Mobility in Sex Tourism, Northeast Brazil', Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2012; Erica Lorraine Williams, 'Moral Panic: Sex Tourism, Trafficking, and the Limits of Transnational Mobility in Bahia', in Susan Dewey and Patty Kelly (eds.), *Policing Pleasure: Sex Work, Policy, and the State in Global Perspective* (New York NY: New York University Press, 2011), 189-200.
- ³⁶ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'Mr Tati's Holiday and João's Safari - Seeing the World through Transplant Tourism', *Body & Society*, 17:2&3 (2011), 55-92
- ³⁷ Alexander Edmonds, 'The Biological Subject of Aesthetic Medicine', *Feminist Theory*, 14:1 (2013), 65-82.
- ³⁸ Alexander Edmonds, "'Almost Invisible Scars": Medical Tourism in Brazil', *Signs* 36:2 (2011), 297-302.
- ³⁹ Anon., 'Geography, Urbanisation in LEDCs: Case study: managing rapid urban growth in a sustainable way in Curitiba', at http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/urban_environments/urbanisation_ledcs_rev4.shtml (2013), Accessed 23 Dec 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Examples include: Joseli Macedo, 'Planning a Sustainable City: The Making of Curitiba, Brazil', *Journal of*

Planning History, 12:4 (2013), 334-353; Hellem de Freitas Miranda and Antônio Néilson Rodrigues da Silva, 'Benchmarking Sustainable Urban Mobility: The Case of Curitiba, Brazil', *Transport Policy*, 21 (2012), 141-151.

⁴¹ Oliveira, 'New Studies', 98.

⁴² Charles Gauld (trans. Eliana Vale), *Farquhar - O Último Titã: Um Empreendedor Americano na America Latina* (Editora de Cultura, São Paulo SP, 2006 [original English, 1964]).

⁴³ Gilberto Freyre, (trans. Christopher J. Tribe) *The English in Brazil: aspects of British influence on the life, landscape and culture of Brazil* (Boulevard, Oxford, 2011 [original Portuguese, 1948]).

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1986 [1977])

⁴⁵ Two forums worth mentioning are: T2M, the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (founded in 2003), at <http://t2m.org/> accessed on 21 February 2014; and the Pan-American Mobilities Network (created in 2011), at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/pan-american-mobilities-network> accessed on 21 February 2014.